

Title of the Case Study

**Youth in Violent Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir:
A Comparative Analysis of Perceptions and Attitudes of Youth in
Jammu University and Kashmir University and Migrants' Camp**

By

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1. Background

Youth are uniquely affected by violence and threats to their security. They are vulnerable as both victims and perpetrators of violence. It is often remarked that war would not be possible without youth in any part of the world. However, there is the lack of attention to, and thorough documentation of, the positive contributions of youth in society (Rodgers, 1999). Youth should not be regarded as merely a negative force. Most of the analyses on youth and violent conflict are produced by working backwards – i.e. by analyzing the motivations of young people that are, or have been, fighting, and generalizing these motivations as if they were applicable to the whole ‘youth cohort’ in a particular context. But what about the majority of young people who do not fight? The remarkable thing is not why some of youth have embraced violence, but why so few of them have (Argenti, 2002). This is not meant to suggest that we should not try to reach a better understanding of the motivations of young combatants. However, we should also keep in mind that combatants are only a microcosm of the heterogeneous and multifaceted universe of youth.

Huntington (1996) argues that ‘youth bulges’ (i.e. an unusually high proportion of young people in the total population) lead to increasing insecurity and make such countries especially prone to conflict. Youth bulges are now a popular explanation for the recruitment of young people into terrorist networks. Zakaria (2001) argues that youth bulges combined with small economic and social change provided the fundament for Islamic resurgence in the Arab world. The literature on youth bulges considers migration to be a safety valve for youth discontent. The migration of Europe’s youth to the United States had contributed significantly to limiting youth-generated violence in Europe in the 19th century. Hence, Urdal (2004) argues that if migration opportunities are substantially restricted this result in a higher risk of violent conflict. Kaplan (1994) identifies an imminent security threat, directly connected to the presence of a large, unemployed and disaffected mass of youth.

According to coercion thesis, young people fight because they are forced to – either by physical abduction, or because of a lack of other alternatives for survival (McIntyre, 2004). On the other hand, Brett (2003) has observed that large numbers of young people volunteer for the armed forces, rather than being forced or coerced, however, the question remains: “How voluntary is voluntary?”. Richards (1996) attempts to analyze the reasons behind the involvement of youth in violent conflict and argues that conflicts in West Africa are but the violent manifestations of a rational expression of a youth crisis. The appalling, and apparently senseless, terror that accompanied the war in Sierra Leone has to be interpreted as a calculated, rational stratagem, employed by youth fighters in order to unsettle the victim (Richards, 1996). According to Keen (2003), youth violence has resulted from the alienation of young people because of failures in the educational system and a dearth of employment opportunities.

Abdullah (1998) and Bandura (1997) put a different spin on this issue in their analysis of the role of youth in the conflict and their argument is based on the centrality of a subaltern ‘lumpen’ youth culture that is anti-social and anti-establishment in orientation – a youth “in search of a radical alternative.” With the above backdrop, in the present study an attempt has been made to analyze the perceptions and attitudes of three groups of youth in Jammu University, Kashmir University, and Displaced Kashmiri Hindu Migrants’ Camp in Purkhoo (Jammu) regarding violent conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, which is one of the most critical issues facing Indian Sub-continent today, and is under researched area and thus the present study is a median attempt in this direction.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

The main objectives of the present case study are:

- i. To examine the perceptions and attitudes of the youth regarding the connections between youth and violent conflict and the role they play in on-going violent conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir;
- ii. To analyze the implications for the multiplicity of identities, needs, viewpoints, opinions and experiences in violent conflict situations in Jammu and Kashmir; and
- iii. To explore the perceptions and attitudes regarding possible role of the youth to improve collective understanding and capacity to work for peace and development

Besides above, the perceptions and attitudes of the youth on the following specific questions have also been probed during the course of the present case study:

- a. Why is the youth involved in violent conflict in Jammu and Kashmir?
- b. What are the effects of violent conflict on youth?
- c. What are the roles played by the youth in the construction of the society?
- d. What are their perceptions and attitudes regarding growing up in conflict situation?
- e. What is their level of participation in decentralized governance and development?
- f. How do the youth cope in societies under stress?

The present case study has been confined to the youth enrolled in Jammu University and Kashmir University and the Displaced Kashmiri Hindu youth living in Migrants’ camp in Purkhoo (Jammu). The interview method and focus group discussion (FGD) method have been used to collect primary data and information. In total 12 in-depth interviews have been conducted of the youth enrolled in Jammu University and Kashmir University, and Displaced Kashmiri Hindu youth living in migrants’ camp in Purkhoo (Jammu). While conducting interviews, respondents from both the sexes have been included. Besides, one focus group discussion has also been conducted in each of the selected sites consisting of 10-12 participants, keeping gender balance in mind. The

data has been analyzed in comparative perspective of the youth in selected universities and migrants' camp.

3. Findings of the Study

Youth responses to ongoing violent conflict in Jammu and Kashmir differ greatly and an increasing number of young people are rejecting violence and becoming involved in peace-building efforts. Most analyses of conflict have identified 'youth factor' as a key element in the generation or perpetuation of violence. This tendency often leads to overlooking the positive contribution of young people to society, including their potential role in sustaining the social fabric and promoting peace. Understanding the involvement of youth in violent conflict and their role in peace building in the context of Jammu and Kashmir is vital from the point of view of regional security and stability in the Indian sub-continent. The issue of 'youth in violent conflict' concerns more than youth. It is a reflection - and at the same time, a further aggravation - of a broader societal crisis and trying to understand the intersection between youth and violent conflict is a way of re-examining societies and development processes, which has been attempted in the following paragraphs on the basis of the case studies conducted among the youth of Kashmir University, Jammu University and Purkhoo Migrants' Camp.

3.1. Reasons for Involvement in Violent Conflict

FGDs with the youth of Kashmir University reveals that in the beginning high dominance of Kashmiri Hindu community and their control over local institutions and the economy has contributed to outbreak of violent conflict. Over the period the deliberate and systematic denial of civil liberties and political rights has increased the dissenting views and violent conflict. Besides, the glaring differences in level of regional development are perceived to have a cascading effect and increased the violent conflict and the consequent high incidence of youth unemployment has a critical bearing on violent conflict. Lack of jobs and opportunities has created frustration, making unemployed youth (especially young men) prime candidates for recruitment by militant organizations with funds and arms at their disposal. In the opinion of Kashmiri youth, regional imbalances especially unequal economic growth along geographical lines, economic divisions along local areas, unequal distribution of public and private investment, unequal access to social services, unequal access to relief and development assistance, and worsening polarization of the local communities and residences are responsible for ongoing conflict. The differential social opportunities (e.g. education), limited access to or exclusion in education and employment and increasing differential treatment with systematic biases in education and employment were also reported to be the reasons for violent conflict in the state. "We-they syndrome", politicizing ethnic/social issues by communities, delivering anti-minority/majority speeches, and limited intermixing and support for common goal have also reported as reasons for ongoing conflict.

Kashmiri youth reported that the poor governance and political institutions especially dominancy of one community in governance and administration, weak and

hurried political negotiations and transitions, restrictions on social and cultural practices, rigging of elections, widespread and escalating corruption have also been responsible for violent conflict. The deteriorating links between government and citizens, lack of accountability of political leaders and institutions, and increasingly disregarding certain groups in the political sphere, excluding them in consultations, and dismissing their opinions in decision-making have initiated conflict and over the period it sustained and becomes more violent. The media has increasingly politicized on ethnic/political lines (pro or anti government), which reinforced negative attitudes towards other groups. They opined that with the passage of time, there has been decline in status of human rights, particularly along ethnic/political lines. The development programmes in the past (inadvertently) favour one community, and ignored the rural poor, which has created a sense of hate and revenge among them and when they noticed an opportunity they joined the armed groups, which has resulted in escalation of violence conflict.

Youth of Jammu University reported that ongoing conflict has its history in India's Independence and aftermath. The violent conflict at the time of partition of the country has again reoccurred with a high possibility of persistence and recurrence of conflict. The people in rural areas are very poor and less educated and easily lured into unlawful activities by monetary and religious (jihad) baits. The economic base is mainly subsistence agriculture and they are facing severe hardships to sustained livelihoods. The political instability, poor law and order, and systematic denial of civil liberties and political rights have increased the dissenting views through violence, thus increasing the persistence of violent conflict. The unfair conduct of the last few elections has sent at frequent intervals signals of serious instability and the use of violence to bring about systemic changes. They opined that when the government is not able to maintain control or effective rule, the breakdown of law and order, and hence violence, is inevitable. The availability of arms and the existence of armed non-state actors have contributed significantly in escalating violent conflict. Youth unemployment (especially for males) has a critical bearing on the ongoing violent conflict in the state. Lack of jobs and opportunities has tended to create frustration, making unemployed youth the prime candidates for recruitment by militant organizations with funds and arms at their disposal. The increasing problems created by demonstration effect of ongoing conflict elsewhere have also produced rising aspirations and similar demands. The end of violent conflict in some neighbourhood countries breeds increasing violent conflict in neighbourhood, i.e. new havens for criminal activities, criminalization of conflict with flourishing drug and arms trade.

Kashmiri Hindu migrant youth in camps reported that the decline in traditional institutional structures that provided both an indigenous conflict-avoidance mechanism along ethnic and religious lines along with the combination of severe historical inequalities between Kashmiri Hindu and Muslim have created socio-economic discontent. The absence of local institutions capable of coping with and mediating conflict and lack of experience of productive conflict resolution at the local level has escalated the conflict. The economic distress among the communities has further intensified existing tensions, by increasing competition for economic resources between religious groups. The decentralization and the associated re-allocation of funding control to the local level have created greater financial incentives for corrupt local elites to gain

control of important positions. At the same time, the positions of power were gained by favour. In such circumstances, the incentive to mobilize along ethnic and religious lines was great. The partisanship of sections within the security and police forces was a key factor in driving the escalation of the conflicts, as some groups lost confidence in the security apparatus to protect them and thus formed militias. The partisan local publications inflamed sentiments, and even well-intentioned media activity had potentially negative repercussions. The cycles of revenge killing have also drove the escalation of conflict in some areas. Violence is a learned response to conflict. Through mass media (including television, videos, and the internet), young people are exposed to increasingly higher doses of aggressive images and viewing violent television programming has negative consequences for youth. The conflicts have had a serious impact on the access to health and educational facilities. Infant mortality, morbidity and general health problems have all increased after the conflicts. As a consequence, they have resorted to migrate to safer places like Jammu, Udhampur and other areas of the country and educational dropout rates have also increased, particularly among the displaced Kashmiri Hindu population.

3.2. Effects of Violent Conflict on Youth

Youth are at the forefront of violent conflict, often fighting without a choice. Youth of Kashmir University consistently reported that they continued to have serious psychological and social difficulties as a result of the ongoing violence and deprivation they had experienced during the last few years, such as feelings of hopelessness and profound social alienation. They stated that gaps in family and community support, as well as lack of education, food, clothing, shelter, health care and jobs have dramatically increased their vulnerability to a range of threats. They have also experienced more poverty and lack of education due to ongoing violent conflict. As young people constitute the majority of militia recruits, they suffer disproportionately most from the trauma and psychological effects of ongoing violent conflict. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security. However, direct and indirect violence has threatened the lives of many Kashmiri youth and their security. Violence undermines Kashmiri youth's right to a sustainable livelihood and to development by disrupting economic production and access to important services. Economic insecurity in turn contributes to their vulnerability to violence and its perpetration. They believed that the ongoing violence had fundamentally been about the marginalization and manipulation of youth. They said many young people took up arms to fight for the economic and social protection they had been denied, especially by those in government that exploited the positions for their personal gain, without concern for the rest of the population that lived in poverty. Some rival groups, terrorist organizations and others use violence as a tool to repress and silence Kashmiri youth's right to be heard. The ongoing violent conflict has increased the inability of administration to implement effective programmes to address outstanding social and economic issues, which is a potential source of future conflict. They reported that trust and interaction between communities is low and the desire for revenge remains strong, although often unclearly directed. The high levels of horizontal inequalities remain between the communities. As long as inequalities remain high, peace remains highly

vulnerable. As social cohesion and government capacity has remained low, the potential for renewed violence cannot be ignored.

Youth in Kashmiri Hindu Migrants' Camp reported that the upheaval and devastation of violent conflict has forced many young people to find the means to survive on their own as well as support others. Young people who became orphaned or separated from family have tremendous resourcefulness as they took on major economic and social responsibilities. Many of the Kashmiri Hindu migrants living in camps left for other parts of the country for getting better education and employment. Without support for their economic well-being, young people believed that their health would further deteriorate. Thousands of Kashmiri migrant youth have been forced to find ways to cope and protect themselves, when social support systems are torn apart by ongoing violence. Dramatic role reversals took place, as parental and community support had either disintegrated completely or were in rapid flux. Opportunities for young people and adults to negotiate the changes in their social circumstances are limited, and the generation gap between them widened as young people struggled to find new ways to survive, connect and find a place in society. As young people took on new roles, community views of them often hardened. Young people are increasingly viewed as potentially violent and dangerous. In migrants' camp, both parents and children grew concerned about young people's "immorality" when social controls loosened and girls and boys began relationships or socialized with one another without parental approval. As education systems failed and young people lost opportunities to learn, they are viewed as ignorant, inarticulate and lacking credibility.

Youth of Jammu University reported that conflict has resulted in population movements (forced or due to no opportunities to participate in economic life) in hilly areas due to disruption of productive activity, lack of access to markets and loss of means of production, increase in child malnutrition and increase in female-headed households. They opined that regional conflicts and disputes have further strengthened due to volatile neighbourhood with internal conflicts (political and violent) in neighbouring countries. The psychosocial impact of ongoing conflict and social upheaval manifested itself in many different ways among young people, who said they often felt unloved, abused and even betrayed by adults and society. Many lived in constant fear of violence and deprivation, and some developed psychological problems that required counselling or other traditional healing rituals to address. Some further broke traditional boundaries by increasingly challenging elder's authority, and demanding more support for their capacities and community roles. Others, however, lacked self-confidence and a sense of self-worth despite the creative skills they had developed to survive during the conflict. The surrendered militants, like most other young people in Jammu region without educational or job opportunities, felt acutely socially, economically and politically marginalized, and if not supported in livelihood sustenance, violence would likely to continue. They found few spaces where they could address their concerns or engage with elders to work out constructive solutions. Many felt desperately "disconnected" and longed to find a secure place and identity in their communities. Many young people formed youth groups that were extremely important focal points for conveying their concerns to decision-makers and engaging peers in actions to improve their lives.

3.3. Role of Youth in Construction of Society

FGDs with youth of Kashmir University reveal that the political participation has not provided a channel to express their needs, aspirations and grievances. Over the last two decades, the declining level of political engagement of youth in Jammu and Kashmir has been a matter of concern for decision-makers. As a result, the idea of promoting ‘youth participation’ has become popular. The political institutions are often called upon to be more ‘youth friendly’, less bureaucratic and to ‘speak the language of the youth’. However, it is highly questionable that this approach addresses the main barrier to youth participation in decision-making. Recently, a favoured response has been to support the creation or development of youth organizations. However, youth organizations are not necessarily representative. They can be exploited for purposes that have little or nothing to do with youth needs and aspirations. Such organizations can also be gender-biased, especially because girls might feel more ‘represented’ by women’s organizations. Often, youth organizations are not connected to decision-making in any significant way, so that they can result in frustrating ‘talk shows’ with little concrete results. However, they have emphasized on greater youth participation in post-conflict settings. The peace processes appear as a window of opportunity for promoting a higher degree of youth participation. A first and fundamental reason for this is that Kashmiri youth has acquired a status through conflict, and if they are defrauded of this status when peace returns, they can turn into ‘spoilers’. However, the need to avoid turning young people into spoilers is not the only reason to involve them in political processes.

Youth of Jammu University have the feeling that their future prospects are shrinking. Lack of education and unemployment are the major symptoms, and at the same time reinforcing causes, of this crisis. The alienation from the formal decision-making system – which is increasingly perceived as inaccessible and irrelevant – prevents these grievances to be channelled through mainstream political avenues. Youth are involved in violent conflict as a result of a youth crisis. This should not, however, lead us to argue that involvement in violent conflict is the only – or even the main – response to a youth crisis and responses to such a youth crisis are not necessarily violent. In the following paragraphs, we concentrate on analyzing some of the non-violent responses to a youth crisis – namely, urbanization, migration and involvement in religious movements. Kashmiri youth today experience an unprecedented exposure to the world. The economic, social and political changes affect the experiences and perceptions of Kashmiri youth, and in turn affect their capacity to negotiate. While many Kashmiri youth have perceived these changes as an opportunity, many others feel marginalized and alienated.

Kashmiri Hindu youth in migrants’ camp reveals that the information and communication technologies (ICTs) have put youth in Jammu and Kashmir in unprecedented contact with modern culture. Television, tourists and returning migrants bring powerful images of another world. Whether such images are distorted or accurate, they have influenced young people to rethink their own culture in light of this new information. This has led to the questioning of one’s identity, or the reaffirmation of one’s separateness from ‘the other’ – or, as it is often the case, some kind of combination

of the two. Youth cultures are becoming more and more global, but, at the same time, they assume very different forms depending on the local context. In this process of 'domestication', external cultures and foreign models are re-interpreted according to the specific local concerns of youth. These identity shifts and the 'search for the other' are part of, and influence, two processes – namely, migration and urbanization. 15 to 29 year-olds appear as the group most likely to migrate for employment purposes, and they comprise the bulk of the urbanization trend. However, the prospects in the cities or countries of destination are often grimmer than what might have been anticipated, or glimpsed on TV. In addition, transitions are difficult in themselves, and the difficulty of finding employment in already overstretched cities or as yet another member of growing immigrant communities can lead to alienation and discontent. For the rural youth, urbanization serves a similar purpose. Kashmiri youth migrate to the city from rural areas for a myriad of reasons – including the search for economic opportunity, boredom with traditional rural life or the escape from community disruption due to violent conflict. Once in the cities, however, they find little outlet for their talents and energy. Urban youth migration is widely regarded as overwhelmingly negative, leading to crime and unrest. The participation of Kashmiri youth in religious movements appears as an increasingly prominent phenomenon. This has provided youth with security, moral guidance, education, employment contacts, friendship and alliance networks. In essence, this has offered survival strategies for increasing numbers of Kashmiri youth as they move away from their families and communities.

3.4. Growing Up in Conflict Situation

Kashmiri youth viewed threats of violence and physical insecurity, psychosocial hardships and a range of socio-economic development problems - especially lack of education - as their top concerns. Young people also overwhelmingly viewed education as key to ensuring their physical protection, psychosocial well-being, and economic and social stability by providing an alternative to ongoing violence in the immediate and long terms. When the threat of physical violence from warring parties is imminent, concerns about physical security are paramount to young people and when violent conflict will subside, socio-economic problems will be their chief concern. They are worried about violence and the prevalence of guns and other weapons, including suicide attacks, and abduction. Kashmiri migrant youth living in camps are worried about future economic opportunities and prospects of peace and security in the state and possible return to their homeland, while youth from Jammu region are worried about growing violence and lawlessness within their own communities, which they cited as recent phenomenon experienced during last decade or so. Youth in migrant camp have suffered from restrictions placed on their freedom of movement as they are confined to peace zone and are not permitted to visit their native places, and young people in all groups - feared kidnapping, trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation (especially girls). All were despondent about the loss of family and friends, and Kashmiri migrant youth especially felt hopeless about the future. Poverty and the rising prevalence of drugs have also key concerns among Kashmiri youth. The lawlessness, justice for crimes committed during the period of violent conflict, information about missing persons and the political future of Kashmir are constant preoccupations for young people in Kashmir.

Youth of Jammu University are principally concerned with the daily threat of physical violence in upper hills. They have awareness that their family members, relatives and kins are key targets for abduction and murder by the militant organizations. Their top priorities are peace, getting an education and returning home to settle in jobs, business, etc. In case of youth whose family members are killed in the ongoing conflict, they lack protection, food, shelter, education and other support and suffer from poverty and unemployment. Those living in migrants camp are particularly concerned about the conditions of displacement, living and civic facilities available. However, they had no fear from militant attacks in camps due to adequate security. They have no land to feed themselves and dependent on doles from government. Cramped, unsanitary camp conditions contributed to social distress. Living in migrants' camp is not safe place for girls and those with sufficient means are putting in rented accommodation or constructed their own dwellings. Youth of Jammu University are concerned about lack of educational opportunities, poverty, unemployment, and lack of health care, shelter, food, water and clothing. These concerns were more important to them than other threats of physical harm, including sexual violence and exploitation and forced marriage. Believing that the conflict stemmed from social inequality and the political marginalization of young people, they saw material well-being and access to social and political institutions as essential to both their own recovery and as the means to a permanent end to violent conflict and social degradation. Ongoing displacement, the absence of parental and family care, neglect by elders and government, and the lack of opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making are also major concerns. Kashmiri migrant youth believed that education is essential to their survival, protection and full recovery from their experience of armed conflict. They saw it as answering their need for self-respect, economic opportunity and having productive roles and voices in society. They stated that the principal barriers to education are insecurity and the destruction of education systems, the high costs of attending school, transportation problems, and competing responsibilities, especially for girls. They are often forced to choose between learning and survival and care-giving priorities. Due to the breakdown of both traditional family networks and the social infrastructure, non-formal opportunities for learning job and life skills, such as those acquired through apprenticeships, family trades and recreational activities, are also very limited. Kashmiri migrant youth viewed education as vital to the establishment of peace, and said that access to education opportunities would help them feel less excluded from society. The absence of educational opportunities and jobs also drove some girls into early marriages and continued poverty.

In conflict, large numbers of young people have either been forced, or are poised to enter the labour force without the skills or education they need to generate a sufficient livelihood. In addition, markets are often weak and do not support their livelihoods. Addressing young people's poverty is central to their protection. All young people affected by conflict say they need the means to become self-reliant, for their protection, survival, self-esteem and ability to improve their societies. However, little is done to comprehensively assess and match youth employment and skills needs with immediate and long-term reconstruction and economic development planning. There has been no official labour market or skills survey done for disturbed districts and there has been only

limited discussion about linking economic development with useful vocational education. As a solution to these problems, young people suggested that, in addition to formal primary and secondary schooling, vocational training programmes be linked to viable employment opportunities. Education and skills training must be linked to economic recovery planning that accommodates growing youth employment needs and generates the skills needed by society to ensure survival, and contribute to reconstruction and economic development over time. Girls and disabled youth must be fully included in these efforts.

3.5. Participation in Decentralized Governance and Development

Youth of Kashmir University perceived that decentralization has vastly increased the opportunities for democratic participation. But it has also opened the possibility for local elites to use the institutions for their own benefit. Fiscal decentralization has increased the potential gains to be made by corrupt officials at the local level. The reliance on criminal networks for political purposes has increased the threat of violence. The monitoring is hindered by favouritism and nepotism. They opined that the slow pace of reform of government institutions has impacted the conflict and peace dynamics. The widespread disillusionment with the police and military has contributed to upsurge in violence, which has often manifested along communal lines. There are considerably fewer programmes aimed at recovery and promoting peace. Local non-government organizations (NGOs) have also played a role in the reconciliation process. In fact, local NGOs can be said to be the key to successful reconciliation, largely due to the extra legitimacy they carry with local populations. The key to the success of local non-governmental responses appears to be their ability to draw on the existing legitimacy of traditional structures. However, these institutions are something of a double-edged sword. Although they have apparently offered an important route to reconciliation, they have also been used to mobilize communal antipathies. Issues arising from FGDs have been many and varied and are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

The government policy towards the provinces (Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh) at all levels continues to be plagued by inconsistencies. The government policy is inconsistent with other attempts to rebuild social cohesion and trust. These weaknesses are compounded by a lack of an integrated policy. Some attention has been paid to reviving traditional institutions, particularly by local NGOs, but there has been no systematic attempt to understand what this would involve and what its effects would likely be. The issues of inter-group inequality have been completely neglected. The activities of NGOs continue to be vulnerable and lack the ability to respond promptly to the changing dynamics of conflict. Both informal and formal peace-building activities appear to be plagued by a lack of follow-through. Government responses have also failed to meet expectations. Kashmiri youth has widely complained of exclusion and lack of consultation in the decision-making and planning processes. The 'top-down' peace efforts have failed to connect strongly with the local populations. More emphasis needs to be placed on understanding conflict dynamics in order to tailor programmes to meet local needs. There must be a sustained commitment to capacity building of local institutions and stakeholders. It is also vital to address key issues related to the governance gap such

as corruption and elite manipulation of ethnic identities, and a need to professionalize security forces.

Youth's perception of government's accountability is mixed. While many youth of Jammu University hope that decentralization measures will improve accountability, they can also create a new system of power relationships and paving ways for local elites creating more corruption and misuse of power at the local level. The elites still monopolize information, which grants them power. The government planning process is strictly confidential. They complain that the government only "informs" them of development projects once a decision has been made. Even when occasional bottom-up development planning meetings take place, only local elites are invited. The ordinary public, therefore, has no institutionalized channels to voice their needs other than through petitions or demonstrations. With more emergency development funds flowing in from the central government, local government officials have ample opportunity for corruption. The division of decision-making authorities and assignment of responsibilities between regions remain unclear. This has led to more corruption and increased sense of injustice. The local revenue sharing arrangement is not coupled with a sufficient equalization mechanism and has led to inter-regional disparity. The rule of law and its enforcement are very weak, which undermines the legitimacy of the government and strengthens people's sense of injustice and insecurity. Stories of police and military misbehaviors abound, especially in rural areas. The special police force and paramilitary forces are notorious for violent abuses. Some people suspect that the special police force and paramilitary forces are deliberately trying to increase the tension between communities to remain stationed in the area. The sense of injustice extends to the relationship between elites and non-elites. Since special police force and paramilitary forces fail to keep elites accountable for corruption and nepotism, those who lack power are consistently marginalized. Thus, the objective of creating more accountability through decentralizing is threatened by law enforcement that does not keep elites accountable.

Kashmiri Hindu migrants in camp opined that devolution has given local elites opportunities to capture the benefits while sufficient checks and balances are lacking to hold them accountable. Currently, internal checks and balances in the government hardly exist. Lack of incentives to improve accountability aggravates the problem. There is no performance-based evaluation in civil administration. Wages and promotion are standardized based on seniority. Unless they engage in illegal acts, civil servants do not get fired. Civil servants benefit from privileges such as pension funds, favourable interest rates on loans, subsidized housing and so forth. The basic work ethic, therefore, is "do no harm and stay in the system until retirement." Legislators currently do not function as a safeguard either, since benefits from collusion and corruption trump the costs of violating the law. First, ineffective law reduces the chances of getting caught. Second, because they were chosen through a representation system, current legislators are more loyal to their political parties' interests rather than those of local constituents. Lack of an institutionalized participatory mechanism where civil society or communities can get involved also offers opportunities for corruption. Opportunities of community participation have increased, but these meetings tend to be either a ritualistic participatory process where people are allowed to be present and "listen" but not talk, and/or a

representation by only a small fraction of the relevant constituency - the rich educated elites.

3.6. Coping in Societies under Stress

Young people with limited education and few employment opportunities often provide fertile recruiting ground for parties to a conflict. Their lack of hope for the future can fuel disaffection with society and make them susceptible to the blandishments of those who advocate armed conflict. This problem can be especially acute in societies that have a 'youth bulge'. Addressing the needs and aspirations of youth is therefore an important aspect of long-term violent conflict prevention strategy. In addition, youth can also be an important resource for peace and conflict prevention. Without employment or productive alternatives, young people are prone to engage in violence, that they possess their own culture of violence, that they are a threat to society and that they are disaffected and marginalized. While young people are seen as agents of violence, they are not necessarily identified as full actors in peace settings, and they are not recognized as having an active role as civil society actors, political constituents or participants in measures to redress violence. Young people are sometimes urged to be peacemakers, but they are seldom mentioned in responses to conflict through governance and political measures.

All cultures recognize youthful age as a highly significant period in which young people learn future roles and incorporate the values and norms of their societies. The extreme and often prolonged circumstances of violent conflict interfere with identity development. Moreover, sudden changes in family circumstances, such as the death or disappearance of parents, can leave youth without guidance, role models or sustenance. During violent conflicts, some youth become responsible for the care of younger siblings. Despite all of this, youth seldom receive any special attention or assistance. This is a matter of urgent concern. If the values and norms of society are not transmitted to youth and by extension to future generations because of violent conflict, then that society must recover from more than just violent conflict. Young people represent agents, beneficiaries and victims of major societal changes and are generally confronted by a paradox: to seek to be integrated into an existing order or to serve as a force to transform that order.

There is equally an increasing difficulty for young people returning from armed and violent conflict and confrontation in integrating into the community and gaining access to education and employment. Young people are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, both as victims and as active participants. Thus, they have a significant role to play in peace-building, conflict prevention and conflict resolution. It emphasizes, in particular, the role of youth and youth organizations in promoting peace and non-violence as well as in mobilizing youth for post-conflict reconstruction. The link between youth unemployment and social exclusion has been clearly established; an inability to find a job creates a sense of vulnerability, uselessness and idleness among young people and can heighten the attraction of engaging in illegal activities. Young people have neither been recognized as legitimate agents of change, nor have they been empowered or capacitated to fulfill this responsibility. Many youth are forced prematurely into elder roles and responsibility through violent conflict and social upheaval. They increasingly

mistrust elders, who are unable to keep them out of harm's way, to feed and clothe them, and at times become additional sources of abuse. Youth need support to build new, compassionate and understanding relationships with one another, during and after conflict. New peer support are important starting points for a range of youth and community support programmes that build on their capacities, interests and needs. Violent conflict disrupts and destroys social cohesion, but it also creates opportunities for social renewal as youth organize and work together to cope with their circumstances.

4. Summary of Findings

The persisting violent conflict in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is perceived to be due to restricted civil and political rights, availability of arms among non-state actors, ethnic dominance, regional disparities, high youth unemployment, exclusion from educational system, group identity building, poor governance and weak political institutions, lack of accountability of political leaders and institutions, politicization of media and escalating human rights violations. While it is likely that each of these factors exacerbate situations thus portending the outbreak, escalation, or resurgence of violent conflict, none of them are individually necessary or sufficient for violent conflict. The perceived effects of ongoing violent conflict on youth are varied. They continued to suffer from serious psychological and social difficulties, deprivation, hopelessness and profound social alienation. Their right to a sustainable livelihood and economic insecurity has been severely hampered and the trust and interaction between communities is low and the desire for revenge remains strong. Kashmiri youth who became orphaned or separated from family have left for other parts of the country for getting better education and employment. Dramatic role reversals took place and young people took on new roles of family care taker and there is growing concern about immorality among the youth. The distressed migration and female-headed households has also increased.

There has been declining trend in political participation of youth. However, recently the government has initiated creation of youth organizations to promote their participation. Besides, the initiatives for peace appear as an opportunity for promoting their greater participation. Youth of Jammu region are also engaged in non-violent responses such as migration. Kashmiri youth in Valley are worried about prevalence of gun culture, suicide attacks and kidnapping. Youth living in camps are worried about future economic opportunities and prospects of peace and security and possible return to their homeland. Youth of Jammu are worried about growing physical violence in upper hills and lawlessness within their own communities. Kashmiri youth perceived that initiatives for decentralization have increased the opportunities for democratic participation but it has also increased the potential gains to be made by corrupt officials. The peace-building initiatives have been hampered due to inadequate follow-up and they complained of exclusion and lack of consultation. Youth of Jammu region hoped that decentralization will improve accountability, whereas youth in migrants' camp opined that this will give local elites the opportunities to capture benefits and aggravates the problem. They opined that limited education and few employment opportunities have provided fertile recruiting ground for militia and there is need to meet their aspirations as a conflict prevention strategy. There have also advocated the need for integrating the

returning militia into the community and support their social cohesion and social renewal to enable them cope with their circumstances.

5. Policy Recommendations

Youth in Jammu and Kashmir proved themselves to be invaluable spokespersons for their concerns and those of their communities. They provided unique, first hand perspectives on the ongoing violent conflict they face, offered viable solutions and described the serious consequences of inaction in support of their rights. However, their concerns differed between groups of youth studied according to individual as well as gender specific experiences, and depended on the nature and status of the experiences of the conflict. There are both similarities and major differences between young people's experiences across the selected groups, and there are no "one size fits all" approaches to ensuring their protection and wellbeing. Action to support young people must be youth-driven and must respond to the diversity of their circumstances. Youth across the selected groups shared major concerns about violence and physical insecurity, psychosocial problems and socio-economic hardship. They maintain that people in positions of power often indoctrinate youth to achieve their own selfish desires, and then dump them at the end of the day without being given any responsible roles to play.

The following policy recommendations if implemented in right spirits will go a long way in ameliorating the conditions of the youth facing violent conflicts. There is urgent need of fostering social and ethnic cohesion by establishing respect and collaboration between different community groups. The economic opportunities should be more equitable across the regions of the state, for which the government should provide the necessary incentives to interact and cooperate and to ensure increasing equal distribution of public and private investment. There is need for initiating conscious effort ensuring equal access to social services, relief and development assistance across the regions. The disadvantaged groups should be provided equal access to education and public service. There is need to encourage associations across groups and cross-cutting cleavages e.g. supporting women's groups across ethnic lines and community projects across conflict groups.

All the community groups have some commonalities, which needs to be focused during peace talks. The dominant opposition group/faction should be made a vital partner in peace talks. At the same time, there is need to punish those actors who were/are involved in propagating hate crimes and anti minority/majority actions. There is also need to amend untrue history versions related with Independence so that negative stereotypes may diminish. There is need to establish well governed political institutions by giving greater representation and power-sharing to youth, reserving seats for disadvantaged groups, ensuring free and fair elections, and strengthening minority/majority rights (freedom of practice in social, cultural and religious spheres).

There is urgent need to address the issues of corruption and ensuring adherence to laws. Concerted efforts should be made to remove and correct perception of biases prevalent among the public by encouraging local leadership and building trust in

government. The neutral and fair media should be promoted so that media may serve as tool of reconciliation. The economic measures such as trade, industries, credit, etc needs to be promoted so that more and more job opportunities may be created for youth of the state. There is need to initiate schemes to assist victims of armed conflict especially the female-headed households. There is need to improve the situation of youth by strengthening their capacities and to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society. There is also need to scale up investments in youth to create verifiable indicators for the priority areas and to ensure vulnerable or disadvantaged young people receive special attention.

It is necessary to avoid generating false expectations that the situation of youth is going to be vastly improved by means of development programmes alone. In place of ad hoc and small level interventions with grand ambitions, there is need for holistic and crosscutting programmes that reflects the importance of taking into account the necessity of working at multiple levels of society (individual, households, communities) and links programmes that directly target youth with those that benefit youth indirectly. Furthermore, the new programmes must place more emphasis on the social and economic challenges that youth face, rather than assuming that young people are themselves the problem. The new programmes must take into account the necessity for location specific implementation. In the preparatory stages, needs assessments should be situation-based, age-specific and participatory, and should investigate the resourcefulness of young people.

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