

Prevalence of Trauma Among Young Adults Exposed to Stressful Events of Armed Conflicts in South Asia: Experiences From Kashmir

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Objective: There is dearth of studies regarding the exposure of traumatic conflicts in Kashmir, India, because of limited research undertaken in this area. Therefore, the main intent of this study was to estimate the prevalence of trauma among young adults exposed to violent and stressful events of armed conflict. **Method:** This was a cross-sectional study conducted on the prevalence of trauma in all the 10 districts of Kashmir Valley using multistage sampling technique. Data were collected from 693 students by means of the Demographic Information Questionnaire and Kashmir Conflict Exposure Checklist (KCEC). **Results:** Findings revealed that one third of the respondents were exposed to high traumatic exposure (33.3%), close to quarter of the participants reported extremely high traumatic exposure (23.7%), over one third of the respondents were exposed to moderate traumatic exposure (33.5%), and about one tenth of the sample were exposed to low traumatic exposure (9.5%) in the context of the Kashmir conflict. The prevalence of trauma was 100% in both males and females. The traumatic events with highest rate of prevalence were “feeling stressed” (97.3%), followed by “fear of search operations, crackdowns or curfews” (89.2%); “witnessing a protest or being part of it” (88.3%); “a family member, relative or friend being hit with a bullet, pellet, or any other explosive” (76.5%); and “exposure to violent media portrayals” (74.3%). Thirteen of 17 traumatic events were significantly associated with gender wherein males reported significantly higher prevalence in all of these events than females, except one. **Conclusions:** The findings of the current study revealed a very disturbing picture regarding the prevalence of traumatic experience of Kashmiri young adults and recommends that educational institutions and nongovernment organizations in Kashmir should pay attention toward guiding the young adults of Kashmir in the right direction for their growth, safety, and welfare, in addition to providing mental health support services, to enhance psychological competence, prevent the development of psychiatric disorders, and utilize the potentials of youth for nation building.

Clinical Impact Statement

In a longstanding conflict, trauma is an evitable part of life and plays a key role in the development of various psychiatric disorders. Mental health professionals should focus on the treatment of pathogenic consequences of trauma such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, somatization, and so forth. In addition, salutogenic consequences of trauma like posttraumatic growth and resilience should be taken into consideration to help the exposed population withstand in the face of traumatic exposure of armed conflicts.

Keywords: armed conflict, trauma, violence, psychiatric disorders, psychological support services

Currently, there are two billion people living in the areas affected by armed conflicts across the globe, and more than 191 million conflict-related deaths were reported in the 20th century (Garry & Checchi, 2020). Globally, armed conflicts are associated with increased levels of traumatic exposure, stress, violence, destruction of infrastructure, and human rights violations. In addition, armed conflicts are associated with direct mortality or deaths

and long-lasting and severe mental health consequences (Garry & Checchi, 2020; Rozanov et al., 2019). According to Amnesty International (2020), more than 100,000 people were killed and 65 million were displaced in 2016 due to armed conflicts across the globe. Moreover, thousands of survivors were tortured and abused (physically, emotionally, and sexually) as a result of conflict violence. In conflict zones, the prevalence of mental disorders can be traced in both combatants in uniform and civilian populations exposed to the stressful and traumatic events, but to a great extent, the consequences are found in the civilian populations (Alemi et al., 2018; Housen et al., 2017; Rozanov et al., 2019). Therefore, civilian populations exposed to conflict-related traumatic violence are at higher risk toward developing mental disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorders, depression, anxiety, somatization with

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