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**Abstract:**

Kashmir is a conflict zone from the past three decades. The Indian State has been addressing the issue as 'militancy' born out of a proxy war waged by the neighbouring country. There are people, who perceive and believe it as a part of the unfinished agenda of the partition and expect the Indian State to resolve it in accordance with the aspirations of the people. Be it as it may, the conflict has afflicted the population with numerous problems, gravest being the effect on mental health of the people and almost all the Stake Holders have, by and large, failed to alleviate the sufferings of the people and come up to their expectations. In a democratic set up, well being of the citizens is the fundamental responsibility of the State. Providing safety & security, education and healthcare to the people, is the basic duty of the State. Similarly, the society has to evolve a mechanism to safeguard its members from the onslaught of the ills brought by the exceptional circumstances. The instruments of the State and Society, related to the security, education and especially the healthcare, have to rise up to the arduous demands of the turmoil-situation, come up with the well established standards of handling war-zone type of situation and work in an innovative way. What is seen is the large gap between the requirement of the situation and the performance of all concerned. This paper is aimed at bringing out these gaps so as to remind the stakeholders of their enhanced responsibilities.

**Key Words:** Conflict, Indian State, Kashmir, Mental Health, Militancy, Stakeholders, Turmoil & War Zone

**1. Introduction:**

Thirty year war, fought primarily in Central Europe between Protestants and Catholics from 1618 to 1648, is often quoted for having devastated generations and leaving deep imprint on the psyche of the masses. Kashmiris have also been suffering a war of sorts for the past three decades and don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. They feel beleaguered and devastated. Much has been written on the problems faced by the people in the continuous and endless turmoil prevailing in the valley of Kashmir, be it bomb blasts, firing, death & destruction, forced disappearances, custodial killings, abductions, strikes and curfews, rapes and murder. There is no dearth of writings on the effect of the conflict on the mental health of the people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being. However, to my mind, the core issues relating to the mental health have not been addressed adequately leading to perennial mental illness. It is said that loss of property is easily sustained by the people but loss of life leaves deep scars on the mind and psyche. Numerous studies have already targeted the issue of conflict and mental health in Kashmir [1-7].

An objective assessment of the situation reveals that all stakeholders have, by and large, failed in adequately addressing the issues confronting the people. The State, in a democratic setup, is burdened with the responsibility of safeguarding the life and property of its citizens. It is the bounden duty of the State to provide adequate health care to the people. Unfortunately, the State is so much bogged with the security concerns that proper attention has not been focussed on the magnitude of mental health problems plaguing the people which have assumed the proportions of an epidemic.

The Society has failed to evolve a mechanism to safeguard the interests of its members. There has been a tenfold rise in the past decade in the number of cases of trauma [8]. The one, affected by the problems, is not merely left to himself, but often spurned and detested. Instrument of the State, the health department, has failed to provide proper medical, psychiatric and counselling assistance to the needy. Families have been wailing more and doing less. This has led to complications in the Mental Healthcare. It is imperative for all stakeholders to play their part with due diligence and seriousness and take innovative measures to tackle the Mental Health problems in the valley.

**2. Systemic Failure:**

Turmoil and conflicts have been havocking tragedies ever since humans walked on this earth, be it for survival or for the safety of others, it scars an image that can never be washed off the minds of the victims. Over the years the literal meaning of conflict has changed from survival to political beliefs, bringing insurmountable sufferings to the people.

Conflict in Kashmir has affected everyone irrespective of age, social-class or locality. It has filled the masses with horror to such a degree that the results either lead to indifference or over protectiveness among the families which again leads people, especially youngsters into exploring a world of either empathy or solace further taking to substance abuse or anti-social behaviour while opening a portal to mental illness. Being disconnected or over protected by the family is pure vulnerability and insecurity injected in the veins of this class of people through turmoil and conflicts resulting in an unending stream of mental ailments. Along this process of suppression, the emotional, mental and psychological health is tattooed by a sorrowful, rebellious and 'nothing- to- lose' kind of being that is fearless and extreme but very empathic at the same time. The state of being is akin to that of a sorry soldier who has lost his army in a desert storm hurt, bruised, confused, all alone and choice less in marching forward in a misty haze to fight. While these victims are considered as "criminals" or "anti-social elements" little does anyone know how grief stricken and helpless they really are?

This has a huge toll on the mental health of the suppressed masses and the worst part of such a situation, is the lack of awareness on 'Mental Health' and concern is shown only after an illness occurs. No, it isn't too late to buckle up and start taking care of one's mental health after you hit rock bottom, but, let's be honest here "was this even the right time to 'start'?"

Conflict, drug addiction and mental health are interrelated and so far have doomed hell out of this paradise called Kashmir and the residents have turned as violent as the calm of this spell binding valley. Severe mental ailments like anxiety, depression, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), Psychosis or even Schizophrenia ("arguably the worst disease affecting mankind, even AIDS not expected" {Nature 1998}) which can also be triggered by use or abuse of drugs (like heroin, LSD,

cannabis or marijuana, alcohol, inhalants or volatile solvents, cocaine etc) have barred the path of evolvement of a bright Kashmir. Psychosis and mood disorders are widespread in conflict-affected societies [9]. A scarred childhood is the biggest gateway to mental illnesses be it physical, emotional or sexual abuse or even neglect, victims have suffered a loss of childhood. Reports have shown that most victims of sexual violence in conflict zones are children.

"It is shocking that in conflict zones around the world, children are being raped and abused at such an appalling rate and "sexual violence is one of those hidden horrors of war and the damage it wrecks, ruins lives." said Save the Children chief executive Justin Forsyth.

Kunan Poshpora incident (1991), is a symbol signifying how Kashmiris can be stripped off their grace and dignity—end result-- every Kashmiri, born and bred, bear those marks, somewhere deep down his/her psyche. As a result of a systemic failure, the ones charged with the responsibility for the masses sleeping peacefully, have become the biggest cause of their worst nightmare.

Talking about the "expected missionary zeal" of the schools, it has been so dismal that the students are forced into an environment of constant reprimand and ill treatment (including corporal punishment and abuse) in the name of "character moulding" which is rather an assassination of one's character at a tender age. While some students can withstand the maltreatment, others feel suppressed, alienated and rejected, not only by their fellow classmates or teachers but by the society at large, gravest fault being that of the parents who expect enlightenment and transformation of their children despite knowing the treatment meted out to them, worst of all, considering their children mischievous or lazy rather than looking deeper into the matter.

According to Jean Piaget Intellectual Development are divided into four stages:

- ✓ Sensory-Motor-Stage which extends from birth to 2 years of age.
- ✓ Concrete Thinking Stage which lasts from 2 years to 7 years of life.
- ✓ Abstract or Conceptual Thinking Stage which begins from 7 years of age till 11 years of age.

Adolescent Thinking or Formal Operation Stage which begins at 11 years of age and continues life-long. By the end of adolescence, the individuals intellectual ability is nearly completely developed, although learning and intellectual growth go on through the life span of the individual.

However, a child surpasses the first stage somehow but soon is subjugated to a completely different environment which may alter his/her state of mind permanently.

While growing up, a child struggles and encounters many such barriers for survival during his/her stage of development but ultimately is choice less not to submit to the rules and regulations. These very children are robbed off their uniqueness while their innate talents and gifts are overlooked and belittled. The loop holes in their personality are always stretched until they've fallen deep down in that very miserable and unfortunate pit of a fate.

The teenage kicks in, and some of the sufferers change from this sad and suppressed self into a so called "degenerate" or "rebellious beast" who is further criticised and pushed into a pit of shame, guilt and hopelessness but that's a huge favour, right? It's called bending till you break.

A study named "Physical Punishment and Mental Disorders: Results From a Nationally Representative U.S. Sample" clearly states that children who are spanked and hit or pushed have an increased risk of mental problems when they grow old. The research seems to show that the effect can range from mood and anxiety disorders to drug and alcohol abuse. [10] And another study shows that among adults, 2 to 7 percent of cases of mental disorders – including major depression, anxiety disorder and paranoia – are attributable to physical punishments that occurred during childhood. [11]

Let children be understood. They may be different, precocious and may not deserve condemnation for not subscribing to the routine.

Moreover strikes and curfews have been taking a toll on the economy and education leading to a confined, lonely and depressive state of mind.

Parents/guardians, who can afford the expenses of getting their wards educated outside the tumultuous valley, again suffer on account of their wards for homesickness, identity crises and cultural shock and it doesn't stop there. Now the news of barbarity –brazen breach of laws, nay, slaughter of rights -- the barbed walls built by the ignorant psyche of an apathetic brainwashed generation, haunt the immigrants where ever they go, which builds further walls and alienates the subjugated individual. Courtesy of the Stake Holders, the guardians are always anxious towards the wellbeing of their wards for being exposed to an unsafe environment.

It all comes down to the treatment of patients in Mental Institutions, which has never been pleasant enough and let us face the fact that it isn't a secret anymore. Now this very treatment in Kashmir is of utter hostility. Counselling or psychiatric session starts with an assurance of restoration only if the ward is handed over but little does anyone know about the business that kicks in with a never ending stream of measures of maltreatment of the victims (patients) by categorising and putting them on high dose of medicines while hardly looking into the matter. More bucks in less time--is what counts. A creative young ward having imaginary friends is "Schizophrenic" for he/she has lost touch with reality, while an anxious person who may be growing up as a teenager or having a bad relationship, is suffering from severe depression for he is distracted by grief, and a drug user must be put on to anti-addictive medicines without the regard to the duration of usage or severity of addiction. Human race should be afraid of the day when a stressed and frustrated individual starts getting categorized as bipolar and the successive generation could happily go down the gutter with a proud tag of "lab rats" on their chest. Moreover the society, like always, has failed to let the victims outgrow their miseries and have cocooned them inside a fear of judgement that has hindered their sanity and enraged relapses.

According to a survey by 'Medecins Sans Frontiers' around 1.8 million people in Kashmir, accounting for nearly 45 percent of the valley's adult population, show significant symptoms of mental distress. In 1989, the Psychiatric Hospital at Srinagar had 1700 patients, which rose up to 35,000 till 1998 followed by 50,000 in 2002. In 2005 the number increased to 60,000,

an increase of 3530 % in a span of sixteen years. It is horrifyingly epidemic. The people initially suffered from anxiety due to fear which later on turned into depression. Cases of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder-OCD and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – PTSD, have increased over the years to an alarming extent. In normal circumstances, there is annual increase in the budgetary provisions of all the departments including the one related to health care. The government however prioritises healthcare schemes and make special provisions considering the requirements in accordance with the rising needs of the people. In Kashmir the stress situation demands much more than the routine enhancement annually. There is a huge gap between the increased number of patients related to mental health and the budget allocations made by the government for tackling these problems. It shall auger well if sizable budget is provided to the Psychiatric Hospitals.

### **3. Conclusion:**

Each stakeholder has to realize the responsibility and act in an uncommon and innovative way. There is dire need of proactive measures by the State, in providing proper education and awareness to the people. Specified teachers from every school must be trained to behave professionally. Moreover, school psychologist and counsellor should be established as a position and profession. There should be periodic and regular awareness camps wherein experts from within and outside the State can educate the people. Besides, trained professionals of repute from outside the State/Country may be invited to interact with our psychiatrists/counsellors. Psychiatry hospital has been in news for wrong reasons. Run with professional competence and missionary zeal, it can reverse the epidemic sort of situation. Family and the society have to help, with patience, tolerance and perseverance adopting innovative measures. If all concerned join hands to overcome the despondent situation, the day may not be far enough when a mentally ill mind will revert back to a healthy one.

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