Teachers' Perception about Terrorism in Swat: A Qualitative Study

*Amir Zeb Khan
Department of Psychology, Hazara University, Mansehra
Muhammad Illyas Khan
Department of Education, Hazara University, Mansehra

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of teachers about the causes and consequences of terrorism in Swat, Pakistan. Pakistan in general and Swat in particular have witnessed terrorism on a large scale during the recent decades. Education has been a consistent target of terrorist attacks in Pakistan in recent years. Teachers are one of the most important elements in the education sector, therefore this study explored teachers' perceptions regarding the issue. Data were collected from 20 teachers (10 men, 10 women) from district Swat. The sample was selected through purposive sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents to collect data. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Findings indicate that lack of education, lack of good governance, flawed security policies, corruption in the society, poverty and unemployment, religious extremism, economic inequality, weak judicial system, social injustice and lack of tolerance were major causes of terrorism in the area. The main consequences of terrorism included fear, insecurity, economic hardships and psychological problems among the populace. The study has important implications for policy makers, educational leaders, academics in Pakistan and elsewhere.

Keywords: education, terrorism, teachers, perceptions, Swat, Pakistan

Terrorism has become a significant topic of academic interest during recent decades (Silke, 2001). There are different theories about the causes of terrorism. Researchers have attributed terrorism to

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*Correspondance concerning this article should be addressed to Amir Zeb Khan, Department of Psychology, Hazara University, Mansehra.
Email: amirzeb588@yahoo.com

poverty, economic deprivation, unemployment and inequality (Haider, Heredero, Ahmad & Dustgeer, 2015). Jones (2006) found that that one of the major cause of terrorism is religious extremism. Other researches have attributed it to cultural, strategic and institutional causes (Boylan, 2012; Pape, 2003; Sen, 2008).

Research also indicates that the factors responsible for extremism and the resultant terrorism could be termed as 'push factors' and 'pull factors' as well. Push factors are environmental factors that actually push individually in thinking extremist thinking and terrorism. These factors include poverty, unemployment, deprivation, social and political marginalization, oppression, lack of good governance and access to justice. Besides, corruption and lack of an environment of fair play are also indicated as push factors that has the potential to push individuals into acts of desperation and extremism (Denoeux & Carter, 2009). The 'pull' factors are factors that attract people towards extremists thinking and ultimately to involvement in acts of terror. These factors include incentives to get involved in acts of terrorism including monetary incentives, promise of power, social prestige, and promise of particular religious incentives, to name a few.

A study conducted by Chachar, Mangi, Abbasi and Ahmad (2013) examined the impact of terrorism on working women. 100 women were included in the study. The study revealed that working A study conducted by Chachar, Mangi, Abbasi and Ahmad (2013) examined the impact of terrorism on working women. 100 women were included in the study. The study revealed that working women in Pakistan are afraid because of sudden suicide bomb attacks, assassinations, and planned armed robberies. A research was also conducted on psychological terror at work and cardiovascular diseases among teachers (Malinauskiene, Obelenis & Dopagiene, 2005). They found that psychological terror at work and cardiovascular diseases among teacher have a significant relation-ship with each other. Terrorism and fear are strongly interconnected, terrorist spread fear through different sources such as by media and by messages (Borgeson &Valeri, 2009). Various researches that have been done after 9/11 attacks found that terrorism has long term adverse psychological impact (Helgeson, 2015). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Major Depressive Disorder and anxiety disorders are the noticeable disorders that appear during or after the terrorism.

Studies alsoindicate that many psychopathological disorders are caused by terrorism (Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal, Iruarrizaga, Cano-Vindel, & Galea, 2011). Moreover, psychological problems like Acute Stress Disorder has been associated with terrorist acts. Studies also indicate that psychological symptoms mostly appear during or after terrorism and may remain intact for long periods of time (Kinman & Jones, 2006). Although there has been adequate research on causes and consequences of terrorism around the world, limited research has been conducted on school teachers' perceptions regarding the issue in Pakistan (Cinar, 2009). This study, therefore, aims to fill this research gap. This study, therefore, aimed to explore answer to the research questions including: What are school teachers' perceptions regarding the causes and consequences of terrorism in Swat? The aim was to explore this significant issue from the perspectives of these teachers who were in one way or another direct affectees of this phenomenon.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted qualitative, exploratory research design. Qualitative research has a range of research designs but this study adopted the more accessible 'generic qualitative research design' (Kahlke, 2014) that is quite useful in conducting qualitative research studies on an issue of social import.

Sample of the Study

The target population consisted of teachers of 5 schools of District Swat. A sample of 20 teachers was selected out of which 10 were men and 10 were women teachers. This small size was in line with the requirements of qualitative studies which aim at depth rather than breadth in terms of exploring the issue. Purposive sampling technique was used and data was collected with the help of Semi-structured interviews. The sample respondents belonged to district Swat (Koza-bandai, Nengolai, Kanjo, Matta and Mingora). Most of the teachers were qualified and trained. Men' age range was between 20 and 50 years and women teachers' age ranged between 20 and 40 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection from the respondents. Semi-structured interview is regarded as a very useful data collection tool in qualitative, perceptions based studies as this interview helps in accessing respondents' perceptions in detail. Initially a pilot study was conducted with two teachers. The pilot interview process and the subsequent analysis of the data so obtained resulted in the overall improvement of the interview schedule. This was followed by the main data collection process from the respondents. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews. During interviews, the respondents were allowed to answer the questions in a language of their choice: Pashto, Urdu, English and Torwali. All the interviews for data collection took a total of 3 months between December 2015 and February 2016.

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was done in light of the six phases suggested by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to produce meaningful patterns. These phases are as follows.

- Familiarization with data
- generating initial codes
- searching for themes among codes
- reviewing themes
- defining and naming themes
- producing the final report

First interview data was transcribed. After the transcription, the data was arranged and analyzed through coding. Coding is a process which structures the data into analyzable form. The codes were mainly developed in the light of the main questions in the interview schedule which were developed in line with the research question and objectives of the study. Themes were thus mainly based on the interview questions, however, some inductive themes also came out as a result of the data analysis process.

Ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity were taken care of and validity of the data was established through peer review process and piloting.

Results

Major Causes of Terrorism

A number of factors were identified as causes of terrorism. These included 'lack of education', 'misinterpretation of religious education', 'unemployment' and 'lack of socio-economic justice', 'insecurity and bad governance'.

Lack of education. Respondents argued that lack of education has been one of the major causes of terrorism. It was pointed out that many people in Pakistan, especially in Swat, were illiterate and lacked the ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong when it comes to their understanding of religious concepts.
One male respondent said:

> *Lack of true Islamic as well as modern education is the major cause of terrorism in Pakistan. Moreover, lawlessness, nepotism, corruption and marginalization also give birth to terrorism in a community. Ignorance and lack of quality education and lack of knowledge about the true spirit of religion* (MR4)

Another respondent pointed out,

> *In my point of view, due to illiteracy in the area, people are not aware regarding their rights and duties to live in a society on the peaceful coexistence. In our area terrorism took place due to misunderstanding of the people regarding the concept of religion"* (MR8)

Illiteracy and lack of quality education were consistently associated with narrow-mindedness, prejudice and hate. The above statement seems to indicate this intricate relationship between these phenomena. This also indicate the respondents who were teachers, had an insight into the issue that lack of quality education can lead people have misconceptions and to misperceive social and religious phenomena.

Lack of Socio-economic Justice and unemployment. Push factors such as lack of socio-economic justice in the area and rampant

unemployment among the people, especially among young people was associated with the phenomenon of terrorism. As one respondent argued:

> *In my point of view, when there is a big difference between rich and poor in the society then people feel deprived. Only the upper class and rich people are happy and the lower and the middle class are suffering. This difference in society results in terrorism. Poverty can lead people to desperation and they can commit acts of terrorism.* (MR10)

Another woman respondent perceived that unemployment as one of the major causes of terrorism. She said,

> *In my point of view, unemployment is a source of terrorism. Unemployment leads the youth to acts of desperation and terrorism. Unemployment creates crimes and criminals.* (FR7)

Bad governance and insecurity. Respondents expressed that bad governance and insecurity were the major causes of terrorism. A male respondent said,

> *The unsuccessful implementation of rules and laws of government for securing the country and country resources are the causes of terrorism. Failure of government leads to terrorism.* (MR4)

Another woman respondent also highlighted that due to lack of proper security apparatus, terrorists have opportunities to spread terrorism. She argued,

> *In my point of view there is a great security problem in our country. Our institutions have security problems and there is lack of proper security arrangements. We have suffered great losses due to insecurity. This often leads to acts of terrorism.* (FR-3)

Most of the causes identified by respondents could be categorized into the 'push factors' including unemployment, lack of

proper governance, lack of security, desperation among people regarding their access to socio-economic justice and lack of an education system that develop people's thinking on a more rational basis. However, there seemed to be a lack of awareness among respondents regarding the 'pull factors' as possible contributors to the phenomenon of terrorism in the society.

Consequences of Terrorism

Terrorism was associated with a number of consequences. Major consequences are discussed in this section.

Psychological consequences. Most respondents identified psychological consequences such as fearfulness and lack of mental wellbeing as possible consequences of terrorism in the area.

Fearfulness. Respondents argued that terrorism spread fear among people and lead to lack of peace of mind. Sleeplessness, insomnia and restlessness were some of the consequences associated with this fear of terrorism. One respondent, for instance argued:

> *"Our area was safe before terrorism. With the arrival of terrorism people have lost their peace of mind. Incidents of terror and killings added to the fear of the people. The same fear is still lingering in our mind, as a result we fear to send our children to religious institutions and government institution as well in the present situation. Fear has greatly affected our minds. We find it difficult even to sleep well at night.* (MR8)

Other respondents also identified fear as one of the outcomes of terrorism.

> *During terrorism time I was very disturbed. My concentration was diverted towards terrorism and related issues. I was continuously worried about what will happen if someone attacks us. We had fears about our security and safety. Every time thinking of killing and suicide etc. Terrorism like situation made me nervous, was we experienced in Swat* (FR10)

Similarly,

> *"In my point of view people including teachers suffered a lot. Many people became victims of collateral damages. I often got upset whenever there were security issues and threats. I got nervous when I would see my students frightened due to terrorism in the area"* (FR5).

Worry and confusion and financial issues. Respondents identified that teachers and parents would have constant worry about their students and children. Respondents also argued that there was a prevalence of confusion because they did not understand why all of this was happening in their society. The following quotes represent such concerns:

> *In my point of view teachers and parents are always worried about the safety of their children. We have become psychological patients due to terrorism. Our children are unwilling go to schools. We are psychologically highly affected by terrorism.* (MR10)

> *We felt helplessness because of mistrust and confusion as who is against whom. There are questions as to why security forces find it so difficult to curb the terrorists despite being well organized and equipped.* (FR1).

Other respondents too expressed these mixed feelings of worry, helplessness and confusion about the where, how and why of terrorism. Concern for security was one of the most significant issues that came to the fore during interviews. Feelings of insecurity, fear of extremist attacks, fear of bomb blasts, kidnapping and extortion were highlighted as very serious issues in the area the respondents belonged to. Another respondent argued:

> *In my point of view, the major problems of teachers are the security issues. Teachers feel insecure at schools. They fail to attract the attention of students towards education. Every day there is a fear of attack. They want the schools to be safe. Beside heavy life losses and economic losses the education*

system in our area suffered highly due to insurgent attacks. The education system has been highly shattered because of insurgency as so many schools were destroyed and many had been closed in other areas. A high number of women teachers lost their jobs and thousands of students were unfortunately deprived of education (FR 5)

Similarly, one respondent said:

We were feeling insecurity of life and honor. We were also feeling insecurity of our belief and ideology. We were uncertain about the life of our students and their safety. Though there were very rare instances of attacks on teachers but the rumors were spread in a sense of insecurity and fear. During terrorism I was unwilling to teach due to insecurity of my school and students. (FR1)

Terrorism and its impact on teachers' professional life. Respondents reported that their performance as teachers was affected badly and they suffered professionally. They found it difficult to focus on their professional responsibilities. The following quotes indicate some of these issues:

Terrorism has affected us badly. Despite security around, we are fearful and this has decreased our performance because we are psychologically not ready to teach or to concentrate on our very important work(MR-6).

Another respondent also expressed her opinion

In my point of view terrorism impacts every aspect of my life especially teaching because we are always tense due to terrorism. Being a teacher it has affected me a lot but I believe in Allah and that death and life is in Allah's hand (WR7).

But despite the solace of their faith fear of violence had an effect on the mental wellbeing and hence professional efficiency of teachers.

Interestingly, most of the respondents seemed to have sought peace and courage in their belief in God and in their faith in the predestination.

However, despite this some of the respondents reported that they wanted to resign from the school because there was no peace in the schools as the following quotes indicate this:

> *According to my point of view our performance was restricted and limited. I could not give full attention and time to the teaching-learning process, as there is always a fear of being victim of terrorism. My performance as a teacher has been severely impacted by it. We became disheartened and all of our enthusiasm in teaching learning process vanished away. Its impact was manifold. Moreover, the students were most of the time worried about their well-being and security which in turn hampers their focus on education and learning*(WR9).

Overall teachers' professional life was severely affected by terrorism in Swat:

> *In my point of view teachers were mentally disturbed and it was difficult for them to focus on their teaching in such a frightful environment. A fear of bomb blasts and unpleasant environment did not let them to teach the students. It greatly affected the teaching and learning process of the teachers in the schools. Major psychological problems among teachers were fear, and the resultant lack of interest in teaching and learning process* (MR-9)

> *When we go out for job we have fear and cannot perform our duties well and everyone in homes are not relaxed and have feeling of stress. Undoubtedly, I have been worried and anxious about my family and the whole society. To make myself strong, I said to myself that we have to die once. Our life and death is only decided by God. God is the supreme power and protect his creatures* (FR4)

Discussion

This study revealed a range of causes for terrorism in Swat. These included illiteracy and lack of education which was subsequently associated with acts of extremism and terrorism. This finding is consistent with Butler et al. (2009) who found that illiteracy is a major reason of terrorism.

Unemployment and the consequent financial desperation came out as other important cause of terrorism. It is understandable that these factors lead to desperation in the youth and they are pushed towards desperate acts of extremism. Besides, other factors associated with terrorism included bad governance and security issues. Attanayake et al. (2011) have also found that unemployment and poverty leads to frustration which then becomes the causes of terrorism. Weiler and Widom (1996) and Amjad and Misbah (1998) also found that bad governance and security issues are the major causes of terrorism. Interestingly most factors identified in this study that were associated with terrorism could be recognized as the 'push factors' as indicated in the introduction section of this study. Respondents seemed to have little awareness regarding the pull factors as possible causes of people getting involved in terrorist groups and ideologies.

The consequences of terrorism included mental, psychological, economic and physical implications. The current study found that teachers were badly affected psychologically by terrorism. This seems to be in congruence with previous researches (Comrey & Lee, 2013; Day & Leitch 2001; Sinclair & LoCicero, 2006) which found that terrorism impacts the psychological well-being and causes anxiety, stress and depression. Studies conducted by (Cole & Maxwell, 2003; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Gillham et al., 2007) also support these findings. The consequences of terrorism as identified in this study are serious enough to be taken notice of. There seems to be a significantly negative and debilitating effect on the normal working life of individuals and the result was desperation, a sense of hopelessness and frustration.

Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that the major causes of terrorism are lack of education, bad governance, weak governance, lack of justice in the society, poverty and unemployment, and religious extremism, The

main consequences of terrorism included fearfulness, feelings of insecurity, financial constraints, disruption of normal life, and desperation and disappointment on an individual and social level.

This study indicates that terrorism has significant impact on the mental and physical well-being and performance of teachers in the terrorism affected areas. It is therefore important that steps are taken for rooting out terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It is also important that teachers and other stakeholders in educational institutions are provided with training and facilities to deal with terrorism related issues and problems. This will have useful impact on their psychological well-being and ultimately on their professional performance. This study also implies that this issue needs to be explored further in similar contexts and areas as the issue has not been substantially explored in other terrorism affected areas. The study indicated mainly the 'push' factors responsible for the phenomenon of terrorism. This might be due to possible lack of rigor in the study to explore the 'pull factors' as well as in their association with terrorism. We would, therefore, suggest this as a possible limitation of the study, and would suggest further studies, that are explore the issue in more detail, analyzing terrorism both in terms of the 'push factors' and the 'pull factors'. The issue might also be explored on a broader, quantitative scale for greater generalization and possible consolidation of the findings of the current study.

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