

EFFECTS OF TERROISM AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM ON STUDENTS' LIFE: A CASE STUDY OF PUNJAB UNIVERSITY

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Terrorism is the major social problem and a burning issue all over the world and Pakistan is a victim of terrorist activities from many years up till now as well as also considered as the home ground or the saving place for terrorists. Frequent terrorist activities had done on various places in Pakistan from last few years including religious places, public places and educational institutions. Last year after the massive attack on APS School which took the lives of so many innocent children, all the educational institutions got shut for almost more than a month due to terrorism threats. The present study is conducted to investigate the perceptions and experiences of students about the threats of terrorist activities on educational institutions. The present study used qualitative research methods to explore the views, perceptions and experiences of students from Punjab University Lahore about the effect of terrorist's attacks and threats on their life and studies. Interpretive approach has been used for getting a deeper and richer insight into the issue. Furthermore, an inductive approach was used to develop a substantive theory through the analysis of collected data. Findings revealed that Punjab University have least security measurements for students as it is not a priority of government and University management to provide security to students. Terrorist activities have affected the whole pattern of education in university and cause academic delay, semester squeeze and stressful exams. It also affects the mental health of students. Other than that, students also revealed the internal weakness and problems of Punjab University is becoming a support to terrorist activities and production. The findings also reveal that educational institution of society is under severe threats from terrorists, external forces as well as from bad governance of Pakistan. Terrorism is not an external problem instead of that it is an internal problem.

Key word: Educational Institutions, Security, Terrorism, Terrorist activities

Introduction

Terrorism is a high-sounding word these days and a burning issue from the last few years. It started from the beginning of twentieth century which is clearly marked as the "Age of Terrorism"¹. Terrorism is always an ambiguous term as there is no specific definition of terrorism. Apart from its descriptive and worldly accepted meanings, it has an ever-changing, diverse perspective of its own varying from time to time, situation to situation and per regional circumstances and

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perception of its victims. Different ruling bodies, government agencies and organizations have their own definition of terrorism as they mold it per their purpose or bias ². In general, terrorism is associated with violence, human violence is not a new phenomenon it exists in every society from many years. Human violence is of various types, but not all violence is included in terrorism attack this made the term controversial. The problem arises in explaining the use of violence against whom, by whom and at what ends is considered in terrorism ³⁴. Terrorism is a rapidly increasing social problem worldwide. Per Global Index Terrorism (GTI) 2015 report there is the largest increase in deaths from terrorism recorded in 2013 to 2014. The report stated that in 2013 to 2014 the number of deaths from terrorism increased by 14,574 which showed 80 percent increase in terrorism ⁵. Globally, Muslims are portrayed as terrorists and are considered as one of the main reason of increase in terrorism all over the world. Whereas, Muslim countries are facing more terrorist activities than rest of the world. Statistically, the five countries which have the highest rate of deaths by terrorism in 2014 are Muslim countries including Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria. Iraq is the country having highest number of deaths by terrorism in 2014 with 30.4 % death rate ⁶. Whereas, Pakistan stood fourth in list with 5.4 % death rate and Nigeria and Afghanistan on second and third position respectively with 23.0 % and 13.8 % death rates by terrorism in 2014. The major terrorist attacks recorded all over the world are on religious places, law and order institutions, security offices, various public places and educational sectors.

Education is considered as one of the most important pillar and a root to successful society. It provides training about how to live, compete and survive in this world. Education is a basic need and the fundamental right of every human being and it is necessary for every country to promote education for the betterment, establishment, development and success of country. From the past decade, the terrorist attacks and threats around the world are more inclined towards educational sectors. According to UNESCO's Education under attack 2010 report, the educational institutions of 31 states from all around the world got affected by terrorism in the period of January 2007 to July 2009. Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Israel/the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, India, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Thailand and Zimbabwe are the worst affected countries with highest number of incidents and

victims in educational institutions⁷. A statistical report stated that total 34000 attacks were happened on 110 countries till 2014 in which Pakistan ranked first among 110 countries. From 34000 attacks, almost 724 attacks were only happened in Pakistan from which 10 percent of all terrorist attacks were on educational institutions. Whereas, Thailand stands second in rank with 213 attacks in total that is less than half the number of attacks in Pakistan. The report revealed that in Pakistan schools, universities and educational institutions are 88 percent more likely to be attacked than the world average that is 69 percent⁸. As per a report, in 2014 there were 103 attacks on schools in Pakistan in result of which there were 201 deaths and 203 injuries. Majority of the attacks on educational institutions were to affect the infrastructure and are non-lethal⁹. apart from the attack on APS school which took many lives. Like Afghani Talibans, Pakistani Talibans are also against western education and education of girls which is the reason behind threatening and targeted educational institutions and affecting its infrastructure.

Getting education under the shades of Guns and security demolishes the morale of students. The presence of fighters and armed forces in educational institutions create an environment of fear and insecurity among students and teachers which results in creating lack of interest in students, lack of teacher retention and overall poor quality of education¹⁰. As per GCPEA report, at least in 24 countries during a period of 2005-2012 the military have used educational buildings and infrastructure¹¹. Every person wants complete freedom to get education in a healthy environment without any fear of getting hit by terrorists. But, in current situation students and their studies are highly getting disturbed due to terrorist activities. They faced a mental trauma daily while reaching and coming back from institutes. The continuous anxiety and fear of students about the attacks on their educational places make it hard for them to concentrate in class which affects their abilities to learn.

The present study attempts to investigate the effect of terrorist attacks on student's life as well as on their studies. It aims to identify the issues and problems which the university students have faced related to their studies and university life due to the terrorism threats. A case study of Punjab University is taken for the present study. Punjab University is the biggest University of Pakistan where a bulk of students come from all over the country to study. It has a huge diversity in its population as students belonging to different province,

family and religious backgrounds come to study so what are the feelings of insecurity students faced, and how much they feel that their university is safe. Punjab University was also under the threat of terrorist attacks that is the reason behind taking the case study of Punjab University for the research study, to get an in-depth analysis of how the threats of terrorism is affecting student's life and institute.

Methodology

The researchers adopted qualitative research methods to explore the views of students from Punjab University Lahore about the effect of terrorist's attacks and threats on their life and studies. Interpretive approach has been used for getting a deeper and richer insight into the issue of effect of terrorism on students' life¹². Both in-depth interview and focus group technique were used for data collection. Researchers conducted three focus group discussions in which total 9 (50 %) boys and 9 (50%) girls had participated and twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews in which total 6 (50%) boys and 6 (50%) girl had participated. An inductive approach was used to develop a theory through the analysis of collected data¹³.

The study was conducted in both Quaid e Azam campus and Allama Iqbal campus of University of the Punjab Lahore. The participants were selected for data collection through purposive sampling. Students from Law, Criminology, Sociology, Public health, development studies, gender studies, political science, IER, Hailey, Space sciences, PUCIT and Mass communication departments were selected to participate in the study. Those students were aware related to the information of terrorism and were politically active which facilitates the researchers to understand the understudy topic. An interview guide was formulated comprising of major themes and questions to be explored, which revolved around the feelings, perceptions and experiences of the university students regarding effect of terrorism on their students 'life. The researchers had an option of voice recording while conducting interviews and focus groups but due to the sensitivity of the topic most of the interviews and focus groups discussions were not voice recorded on the request of the participants. Alternatively, field diaries were used for taking written notes of those interviews and focus groups which remained unrecorded. Both English and Urdu languages were used while conducting interviews and focus groups that ranges from 45 mins to one and a half hours.

Researchers took informed consents from the participants through written consent form¹⁴. Date, time and place were decided per the

convenience of the participants. All Participants were informed about the aim of the study and the expected length of any interview and FGD before starting interviews and focus group discussions. Participants can leave interview and FGD session at any stage without informing any reasons to quit. Furthermore, researchers paid keen attention in ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of the data collected from the participants during the process of data collection and data analysis¹⁵.

Data Analysis

Express Scribe Software was used to transcribe and translate all interviews and FGDs from Urdu to English. Potential themes and the basic codes were derived from transcriptions. A set of standard rules were developed by research team through mutual consensus for coding procedure to achieve inter-coder agreement. One of the team members prepared a code list using data from one FGD and six interviews and gave a name and a concise definition to each code. This list helped other researchers to code the remaining transcripts. Coded data was clustered in different categories to develop major themes for analysis. Thematic analysis technique was employed for analyzing data.

Findings

During FGDs and Interview sessions, participants shared different perceptions, experiences, challenges and emotions related to terrorism issue. The researcher raised various questions to get the opinions of students related to the consequences of terrorism on students' life. In order to facilitate the analysis, the findings of study are discussed under following major themes: Academic delay, fear and anxiety among students, family concerns, security concerns and crossing security barriers and its effect on student's life.

Academic Delay

In response to the questions about consequences of terrorism threats, majority of participants stated that they got highly affected due to terrorist activities, threats and security issues. One of the participant mentioned that *"After the attack on APS School, all educational institutes suddenly got shut down for one month due to severe threats on education sector."*

Various participants described that the sudden shut down of universities had affected their studies badly as there were examinations in all educational institutions which got delayed and disturbed the whole semester studies of students. Examination delay affected many students result as they were not remained in touch with studies for almost one month and when the university got open they were not

mentally prepared for examinations. A participant stated that *"I was so overburdened and stressed due to exams and frequent classes that I didn't even understand what I had studied."* Another participant said that *"My whole semester studies is useless due to this terrorism disturbance and it also affected my result as I got least grades in this semester"*

Other than that, participants also described that the shutdown of university for a month has squeezed the semester due to which some teachers have shorten the course, and some took make up classes to complete their course. One of the student stated, *"Due to semester squeeze our teacher skipped many important topics which I think will put a negative impact on our careers in future."*

Every year all educational institutions including universities and colleges organize various recreational activities and extracurricular events for the mental and physical development of students. Participants revealed that Punjab University also organize many recreational events including sports day, book fairs and cultural day etc., but due to terrorist threats all these events also got delayed or some got completely cancelled. One of the participant explained *"University have various open grounds which are risky for organizing any event as huge number of students gathers in university events, so it will be very easy for any terrorist to blast inside that's why all recreational activities got delayed or some didn't happen this year."*

Fear/anxiety among students

Participants shared their experiences that they are living in an environment of stress and fear due to frequent threats of terrorist attacks on educational institutions and after the attack on APS school. They shared their feelings that getting education in a free and friendly environment increase the productivity and efficiency of students whereas a stressful environment creates disturbance and anxiety which damages them mentally and have a bad effect on their performance. One participant shared her views that *"Fear of being victim of any terrorist activities is now become a part of our daily life. It is badly affecting our education sector and future development of Pakistan. We need a secure country."* Another participant added *"Terrorists are creating a situation of fear and terror among students so that they cannot perform well which in results affect the progress of country"*.

Few participants had a view that everything is normal, and they don't feel any fear and anxiety while coming and studying in university. One of participant expressed that *"There is no such fear, anxiety and*

stressful situation I found in PU. I am perfectly alright, and I believe APS School have other story behind its hit and educational institutions are not in any threat of terrorism. It is just an agenda of creating fear among people."

Family Concerns

The study explored that the risk of terrorist attacks on educational institutions are not only affecting students' education and career but also affecting their personal life. Majority of the participants shared their frustration that getting education is now become a suffering than a desire for them as their families are very disturbed due to threats. Their families now become more concern about their lives instead of education as they don't want to lose their children. One of the participant said, *"I didn't attend my classes for almost 2 weeks after the reopening of university because my parents were too much afraid of terrorist attacks that they don't want me to go to university."* Another participant added *"I live in hostel and normally I used to talk to my family after two three days but now my family calls me almost 3 times in a day just to inquire that I am okay or not."*

Some of the participants shared different view that their family's concerns are normal just like they usually do as these terrorist activities are now become a part of our daily life. Every day we heard about various terrorist attacks on different places of Pakistan like public places, educational institutions and religious places etc. According to one participant *"My parents encouraged me to go to university and get my education properly as always. My father said be brave, as terrorism is an issue in Pakistan from many years, but it doesn't mean we stop working and stay at home just because of these threats."* Another participant shared his feelings *"If I will quit my studies then I am helping in the mission of terrorists to finish education from Pakistan, so I have to continue my studies just to show them that we are a brave nation and we are not afraid of them."*

Security concerns

The study found that security concerns is a big problem for students. When the researchers interrogate about the security issues and implementations in Punjab University and hostels one of the participant furiously stated, *"I am not sure whether I am secure or not."* Majority of the participants have a view that they are not satisfied from the security of Punjab University as one participant stated, *"The security is not satisfactory in Punjab University, the security which they are providing to students is like giving a lollipop to*

a child to stop him from crying instead of solving his problem.” Another participant added “Punjab University is located on almost 80 acres, according to me the security which Punjab University is giving it is totally insufficient infact it is not easy to provide security to PU. It is the responsibility of government to remove the cause of terrorism instead of giving useless security”

Few participants have a view that the security of Punjab University is sufficient whereas some participants have a view that they don't think they need any security as Punjab University is not under any threat of terrorist activities it is just an agenda to spread fear among people. One student shared *“University have good security in both university area and hostel side because I found security personnel checking people daily. I think they are doing good job infact I feel secure in university more than other places.”* Another student has a view *“I don't think we need any security even this security is more affecting are lives then terrorism. Punjab University is not under any threat because it is not a focus of terrorists as terrorists only attack on places which is on their target. APS School was a special case it was the revenge from Army personnel, so I don't think we are under any threat.”*

Crossing security barriers and its effect on students' life

Government of Pakistan orders to provide strict security to all educational institutions after the threats of terrorists. Punjab University also tighten its security on both university and hostel areas including security on entrance gates and transportations. All the students and teachers were informed to keep their ID cards with them to get entrance in university. These security barriers become the part of daily routine of students and teachers in all educational institutions.

The study revealed that majority of the students have a negative attitude towards the security barriers of Punjab University. According to them they have security only on entrance gates and no security inside university. The security guards just asked about ID cards or any card students have like bus pass or library card. Security guards don't even check the validity of the card or the card belongs to that person or not. One of the participant shared her views *“Instead of facilitating students the security is just creating frustration among us. The security guards check ID cards for only two three days then again the things come on normal routine i.e.no checking.”* Another participant shared his experience *“University security is not benefiting us like most of the time security guard allow me to take my cousins with me in hostel then what type of security it is. If I can take my cousins inside, then it is a*

possibility anyone can take a suicide bomber inside university.” One more participant added “Punjab University will be much secure if there will be implementation of better technology for security concerns like mobile apps, CCTV cameras connected to mobiles, RF ID security, GPS tracking system etc.”

Some of the participants showed a positive attitude towards the security of Punjab university. They shared that they must face some difficulties while entering university, but they can bear it as these security barriers are for the safety of students. One of the participant stated, *“I think these security barriers are good as it has reduced almost 40 to 50 percent entry of strangers in university.”* However, few students have a view that the security barriers create a threatening and fearful environment in university. One of the student shared her feeling *“while entering university we find many security guards checking us like we are criminals or terrorists and then a gun man is standing with posing a gun ready to shoot all this portrays that we are not going to study we are somewhere on a place of war. This terrifying scene affect our studies, our mental health and our families.”*

Discussion

After discussing the major findings, researchers tried to integrate findings with existing literature. Relevant literature has been used to substantiate the findings of study and arguments are built to justify those findings. The present study gathered the data about threats of terrorist attacks on educational institutions and its effect on students' life in Pakistan. In line with previous studies, the findings of the present study revealed that terrorist activities, threats and security issues in educational institutions have disrupted the lives of students. All educational institutions have a sudden shut down for a month due to severe terrorist threats. This sudden shut down of universities have a bad effect on students' education. In a study conducted in Afghanistan, it was noticed that large number of schools remain closed for a year or several years due to persistent attacks on educational sectors. It was reported that more than 400,000 children were not able to attend school due to frequent attacks on education sectors in Afghanistan which caused severe damaged to students' education¹⁶.

Findings revealed that the sudden shutdown of universities have affected the whole semester studies and results of many students as they were not remained in touch with studies for almost one month and when the university got open they were so overburdened, stressed and under pressure in completing semester coursework due to which they

were not mentally prepared for examinations. This finding is supported by the study conducted in Gaza in which it was reported that 80 percent of pupils got failed in their final exams due to military operations in schools¹⁷. Another study reported that in Gaza strip almost 30 percent of students studying in grade 4th to grade 9th got failed in their end of semester tests of Arabic and Mathematics subjects due to stress while studying under pressure of terrorist threats¹⁸.

Our study found that the continuous threats of terrorists' attacks and tight security in educational institutions creates a stressful and anxious environment for students in university. This fear and anxiety damages them mentally and have a bad effect on their performance and efficiency in learning and getting education. A study conducted in Thailand supported our finding it reported that those students who are worried and anxious about attacks on their institutes have problems in concentrating in class, loss of interest and mistrust which affects their ability to learn¹⁹. According to our study majority of the students feel that getting education is now become a suffering for them as well as for their families. Their families are now more concerned about the lives of their children instead of allowing them to get education. Many students shared that their parents didn't allowed them to go to university to continue their studies for many days due to the frequent news of terrorist threats on educational institutions. One of the previous research reported that in Afghanistan up to 200,000 students being withdrawn or were prevented from attending schools by their parents due to widespread fear of terrorist attacks on schools and threats to their children lives²⁰. As per the Afghan independent rights commission there was a decrease in attendance of 8 percent for boys and 10.5 percent for girls in 2007-2008 due to increase insecurity among parents regarding terrorist threats.

Our study identified that security concern is a big problem for students. The findings showed that students are not sure about whether they are secure or not in Punjab University. Majority of the participants are not satisfied from the security of Punjab university they think that it is the responsibility of government to remove the cause of terrorism from country instead of providing insufficient security. This finding is supported by the statement of Kamal Idrees the Peshawar civil society member that the state is responsible for the protection of people's lives and properties²¹.

The present study found that majority of the students have negative attitude towards security barriers in Punjab University. According to

them there is no security inside university it only exists on entrance gates. Many participants have a view that Punjab university have least security measures with no implementation of better technology for security concerns. This is because providing good security to educational institutions is not a priority of government. The latest UNESCO report stated that Pakistan is a country spending least amount of money on education even India spend more than Pakistan. As per the report Pakistan is spending only 2.5 percent of the total GDP that is one of the lowest in the world ²². It is shown from this report that Pakistan is spending least on educational sector than how it is possible that they will provide well and advance security to students and education sectors. Few participants have a positive attitude towards security barriers in Punjab university. They shared that they must face some difficulties while entering university, but they feel secure due to the presence of security guards and daily checking on entrance. This finding is supported by the previous study conducted in schools of Hispanic community which revealed the same that students have a favourable response towards school police officers and security officers. Students have a view that security officers treat students fairly and keep schools safe ²³.

Conclusion

Terrorism is the major social problem and a burning issue all over the world. Pakistan is a victim of terrorist activities from many years up-til now as well as considered as the home ground or the saving place for terrorists. Frequent terrorist activities had done on various places in Pakistan from the last few years including religious places, public places and educational institutions. Last year, after the massive attack on Army Public School which took the lives of so many innocent children, all the educational institutions got shut for almost more than a month due to terrorism threats. Punjab University is under threats due to its larger size with no tight security on gates as well as the boundary walls are threatening as anybody can easily enter university. Students think lack of security is due to mismanagement of university administration and bad governance of Pakistan as spending on education, educational institutions and students' security is not the priority of government. Study also revealed that terrorist activities has badly affected the studies of students, academic delay, semester getting short, urgent papers all these things are the outcome of terrorist activities. Furthermore, studying under security guards, checking of

cards and treating students like criminals have affected the mental health of students.

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