

Patterns of Coping in the Context of Conflict: Voices of Young Women from Kashmir

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Abstract Growing up in the context of conflict brings one face to face with many challenges. The experiences in such a context, however, also evolve coping mechanisms/patterns of people. Focusing on the 2010 scenario of unrest in Kashmir, this paper is based on a qualitative research that aimed to explore perspectives of young women from Kashmir in terms of events, impacts and patterns of coping in their life. This research involved 9 young women in the age group of 16 to 26 years from two districts of Kashmir: Srinagar and Budgam. The paper presents findings related to patterns of coping in their life. Narratives of young women presented a sense of collectivism and identification with issues and concerns of other Kashmiris in terms of an identity of victimhood and a sense of being oppressed and discriminated against. Following patterns of coping emerged from narratives: use of community support, preparations based on past experiences, use of supportive relationships and existing resources of family, engagement in activities, expressing and communicating, seeking information and restructuring life and schedules based on information about the situation, normalizing and acceptance, and identification with scenarios/contexts of oppression and struggle for rights.

Keywords Kashmir, Coping, 2010, Young Women, Youth

Introduction

Kashmir has been a center of attention in South Asia for more than 60 years now. The recent focus in 2014 was due to floods that significantly impacted several areas and lives of people. As the focus on floods faded, recent election results and long process of government formation brought media attention back to Jammu and Kashmir, and hence to the dynamics associated with its disputed nature. 2010 scenario of unrest cannot be easily ignored among several events or incidents that have occurred reflecting various dimensions of the discourse on Kashmir. This paper, located in the 2010 context, begins with a brief overview of events that took

place in Kashmir. This is followed by literature on coping, with examples of research conducted on coping in other contexts of conflict as well as Kashmir. The subsequent sections detail methodology of this research and present findings on coping with events of 2010 scenario. This is followed by discussion on findings and reflections on further areas of research.

An overview of Kashmir scenario

There are different views about the age of Kashmir conflict in India. One view considers the current situation as an extension of what Kashmir has been witnessing since the Dogra Rule of Maharaja Hari Singh (Ashraf, 2008). Another view dates the problem to 1947 when partition of the Indian sub-continent along religious lines led to formation of India and Pakistan. Following this, peace in Kashmir got disturbed repeatedly with wars and war-like situations between India and Pakistan. 1989 saw an uprising by pro-independence armed groups in Kashmir Valley. This led to a situation of turmoil for many years. Indian armed forces moved in to counter the armed insurgency. Since then, there has been a significant military presence in Kashmir. This had significant impact on Kashmiri population, especially with the implementation of strong legislations like- The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990 and Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978. As a need to preserve a nation and its security intersected with a need for 'freedom' and 'equal rights', what resulted was a combination of feelings of anger, insecurity, and of being oppressed among people in Kashmir. As people faced use of power and authority imposed through forms of punishments such as prolonged curfews and crackdowns, Indian military seemed to turn into '*an illegitimate agent of repression*' (Kazi, 2009, p. xv).

In the last decade, the nature of conflict and strategies of resistance have undergone changes. Armed uprising has been replaced with the use of protests and strikes. In the last 7 years, protests were triggered because of several reasons. In 2008, protests started after the transfer a part of land to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) for setting up temporary shelters and facilities for the pilgrims who come

during the *Amarnath Yatra I*. Rape and murder² of two young women in unexplained circumstances in Shopian district triggered protests in 2009. Protests and strikes continued for many months after the death of a 17 year old student during a protest in June 2010. As the cycle of curfews-strikes-deaths-protests continued, 87 deaths were reported along with 63 days of curfew and 69 days of strikes and agitation between June 11 and September 13 of 2010 (Chatterji, 2010). By December 2010, the total death count was considered to be 112 (Sharma, 2010). These events received a lot of media attention. Post 2010, focus also shifted to the unknown, unmarked graves reported in districts of Kashmir Division. In 2013, death penalty to Afzal Guru³ also led to protests in Kashmir after his hanging in February 2013 for his role in an attack on Parliament in 2001.

Living in the context of conflict, whether armed or not, evidently brings one face to face with many challenges. This is also reflected in reporting by International Agencies and civil society groups on human rights violations, as well as several political discussions and writings on issues of Kashmir. However, research seems to be limited on how, over the years, people living in Kashmir have evolved mechanisms to survive in response to impacts of conflict. While acknowledging how experiences are shaped by violence in the context of conflict, it may be useful to challenge some aspects of the victimhood discourse (Manchanda, 2001). We also need to remember that people are actually more than just the victims or survivors (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011). It is therefore, useful to draw from the strengths based perspective in social work, which has been proposed by Dennis Saleebey. The strengths based perspective emphasizes on recognizing inherent strengths and capacities, which help people deal with adversity (Guo & Tsui, 2010; Pulla, 2012). Guo and Tsui (2010) emphasize on recognizing resistance and rebellion as strategies and key resources for the marginalized. Considering the inadequate research on the use of strengths and coping among people in Kashmir, it remains an important area for further exploration. The paper aims to bridge this gap by presenting findings from a qualitative research that focused on understanding how youth coped with the 2010 scenario in Kashmir.

Coping in the Context of Conflict

One cannot assume that the impact of political violence will be the same on everyone. There is diversity in what people get exposed to, what happens to them, what they think about it, how and for what reasons they get involved, how they respond to a situation of conflict, and how experiences influence their personal and social development (Barber, 2008). Among youth, higher exposure to trauma/violence has been found to be significantly associated with high number of subjective health complaints, especially for females (Giacaman, 2007). There is also a strong relationship between stressful social conditions (during conflict and in the post conflict situation) and mental health and psychosocial functioning of people (Miller et al., 2008). For children, impact of violence is also influenced by the interaction between nature of violence exposure and their developmental capacities (Margolin, 2005). However, while people do experience distress and lowered sense of safety in the context of conflict, everyone does not develop high levels of psychiatric distress (Bleich et al., 2003). Bleich et al. (2003) in their study of exposure to terrorism, stress-related mental health symptoms, and coping behaviors among a nationally representative sample in Israel in 2002 considered this to be possibly related to a habituation process and to coping mechanisms.

Coping refers to responses that diminish the impacts of stressful events. There are diverse ways in which people cope with the impact of circumstances in life. The strategies for coping have been grouped according to their purpose, functional value, and meaning. Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996) have summarized the classification of coping strategies in the following manner: problem-focused and emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); monitoring and blunting styles (Miller, 1987); vigilance and cognitive avoidance (Krohne, 1993); appraisal-focused, problem-focused, and emotion-focused (Billings & Moos, 1984); problem solving, seeking support, and avoidance (Amirkhan, 1990); aggression, stress recognition, distraction, self-destruction, and endurance (Dise-Lewis, 1988); distraction, situation redefinition, direct action, catharsis, acceptance, social support, relaxation, and religion (Stone and Neale, 1984). Following coping mechanisms have are also associated with maintaining or enhancing subjective well being: downward comparison i.e. comparing oneself with 'worse-off others in order to achieve self-enhancement' (Will, 1987a, p. 244), help seeking (Wills, 1987b) positive reframing (Stoeber & Janssen, 2011), sharing one's story (Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999), finding benefits in adversity (Tennen & Affleck, 1999), mastery oriented thinking (Dweck & Sorich, 1999), optimism (Carver & Scheier, 1999) and hoping (Snyder, Cheavens, & Michael, 1999). These are only some examples of the ways in which people cope. It is important to remember that consistency in the coping responses of an individual may not be there across different situations (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996).

1 Article 370 of Indian Constitution grants greater autonomy to J&K, which also implies that an outsider cannot own the land. Hence, the transfer of land caused a controversy, with demonstrations from the Kashmir valley against the land transfer and protests from the Jammu region supporting it. This led to withdrawal of the land transfer order to SASB. This was followed by counter protests in the Jammu region. The agitation against the transfer of land in Kashmir valley is said to have led to a renewed movement for freedom everywhere. The agitation in Jammu ended in August when 40 hectares of land were granted to the SASB for exclusive use during *yatra* period.

2 There were strong protests against the Shopain incident, with protesters accusing CRPF personnel of raping and murdering the women. They also accused the State government and the Jammu and Kashmir Police of hiding facts. The state government appointed a commission in June 2009 to investigate the case. The report by this panel called for more investigation into the role of security forces personnel, and suggested that the killings were most likely the result of a family feud that was misrepresented by the media. In August 2009, Jammu and Kashmir Government decided to handover this case to the CBI.

3 Afzal Guru was executed in and buried at Tihar Jail in Delhi. Afzal Guru's family was not allowed to meet him before his execution.

Scenarios of conflict bring challenging circumstances and hence are often likely to contribute to the use of various coping strategies. For example, a study on Palestinian Israeli youth found that those who experienced stressful events also tended to use the following two coping strategies more often as compared to those who were not exposed to such events: seeking emotional support and venting emotions (Musallam, Ginzburg, Lev-Shalem, & Solomon, 2005). Role of social support has been widely recognized as an important factor that influences impact of conflict and violence on people. Findings from a study on adolescent survivors of the 2004 terrorist attack in Beslan (Russia) suggest that social support and community connectedness can serve as protective resources in adolescents' psychological responses to terror-related stressors (Moscardino et al., 2010). In a similar way, narratives of resilience among Palestinian adolescents living in and around the West Bank area in a qualitative study in 2004 presented themes that reflected presence of supportive relationships to deal with distress in the climate of suspicion and tension, efforts to make life as normal as possible through structure and stability in daily routines, political participation, the role of education as a weapon and contributing to endurance, and the continuing optimism despite hardship (Nguyen-Gillham, Giacaman, Naser, & Boyce, 2008). At individual level, coping in context of conflict may also consist of actively seeking relevant information, better structuring the situation, shifting expectations, and use of diverting coping strategies (Shaley, 2005). Shaley (2005) has shared about these as coping methods of Israelis while summarizing mental health impact of conflict and interventions for mental health care in Israel.

Although there is literature on how people cope in the context of conflict, it is very limited vis a vis Kashmir. Conflict and its impacts have been studied more often than the process of coping in the context of Kashmir. Medecines Sans Frontiers, in 2005, studied exposure to violence and psychosocial impact in two districts of Kashmir- Kupwara and Budgam (de Jong et al., 2008a). Respondents (N=510) reported frequent direct confrontations with violence since the start of conflict, including exposure to crossfire (85.7%), round up raids (82.7%), the witnessing of torture (66.9%), rape (13.3%), arrests/kidnapping (16.9%), torture (12.9%), and sexual violence (11.6%). Males reported more confrontations with violence than females. Findings also show that one third of respondents reported psychological distress with women scoring significantly higher. The most common ways of coping were withdrawal (isolation, not talking to people) and aggression, while religion was also reported as a helpful source of support (de Jong et al., 2008b). In another study, deteriorating social and economic situation was found to impact mental health of people in Kashmir (Ali & Jaswal, 2000). The narratives of respondents (N=100) from this study, which focused on low income households in urban Srinagar, reflected how day to day life was filled with fear, worries and uncertainty of future, threats to oneself and safety of family, and fulfilling everyday basic needs. The

study by Ali and Jaswal (2000) also suggests use of two types of coping strategies- internal (praying, crying, suffering in silence, emotional breakdowns, thinking it over, day dreaming, and fantasizing) and external (talking it over, violent attitude, frequent quarrels at home, engaging in different activities such as formation of mohalla groups, collection of funds etc.). Social comparison and praying has been pointed out as dominant and socially approved patterns of coping by Sonpar (2002) in her work with groups in Kashmir. Considering the lack of more recent literature on coping in the Kashmir context, this paper presents patterns of coping in life of young women vis a vis the 2010 scenario.

The Study

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study as it has been considered suitable for a rich and in-depth understanding of a process/phenomenon within a context. While quantitative studies deal with large samples, qualitative studies generally include fewer cases with variation across the sample (Ungar, 2003). This research aligned with the view that the objective of a qualitative research is not on universal de-contextualized generalization of findings but on understanding the meanings that people attribute to processes or events in their social setting (Nakkeeran, 2006). With emphasis on 2010 scenario, this qualitative research focused on how young women in Kashmir cope with challenges associated with living in the context of conflict.

This research aimed to answer the following three questions focusing on 2010 scenario in Kashmir: What did young women from Kashmir think about the current scenario there? What were the patterns in life of young women, from Kashmir, which helped them cope and survive in the context of conflict? What were the similarities and differences in these patterns among young women from urban and rural areas?

For the purpose of this research, young women were considered to be those in the age group 16-26 years. 'Current Scenario' was considered to be the period of 2010. Coping was understood in terms of strategies, tactics, responses, cognitions, or behaviors used to deal with the impacts of environment.

The data was collected in January 2011 in the two districts of Kashmir Division- Srinagar and Budgam. The sample included nine young women from different social, economic and educational backgrounds. All the respondents were identified through local contacts who sought permission from them to participate in the research after informing them about the theme of this research. Four interviews were conducted in Budgam District and five in Srinagar District. An interview guide was used in the process of data collection. Following themes were explored in the interview: description of the situation in 2010 in Kashmir, impacts on

the people of Kashmir, impacts on the life of respondents, patterns that helped people cope, patterns that helped respondents cope, and factors that generally contribute to coping among young women. Before beginning any interview, about 20 minutes to half an hour was spent by the researcher in sharing about herself, the research, the content and process of the interview. The researcher also explained how confidentiality would be ensured in the research. Any questions that respondents had before or after the interview were answered by the researcher. Respondents had choice to not answer questions if they felt uncomfortable. They also had choice to have another family member or known person present in the interview if they felt more comfortable with that. This choice was exercised by 2 respondents as they wanted a family member to be present in their interview.

All interviews were recorded except one in which the respondent did not give permission to do so. All interviews were conducted by the researcher in Hindi, Urdu and English depending on the convenience of respondent. A research assistant was available in case someone wanted to communicate in Kashmiri only. However, all the respondents exhibited acceptance of the use of Hindi and Urdu mix.

Data collection was followed by transcription and translation of interviews and notes. Constant comparison (based on grounded theory) method of inquiry was used in the analysis of interview transcripts. Constant comparison inquiry involves categorizing and constructing themes through a process of comparing and contrasting units of data or field texts (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In this process, we begin with applying codes or labels (to the text) that are descriptive or analytic. Generally, one begins with open coding (where we focus on what is emerging from the data instead of imposing a pre-existing theory). This is followed by axial coding (where categories are developed out of initial codes) and selective coding (where the central category is identified and related to other categories) (Gibbs, 2007). Applying this method of inquiry, codes were developed primarily on the basis of participants' own descriptions. Through open coding process, following codes emerged from the transcripts: description of general scenario in Kashmir; description of current scenario (i.e. 2010); impacts of last year scenario; impact on one's own life; perceived future impacts; factors contributing to current situation; patterns that helped respondents cope; ways through which others coped; description of coping and what factors generally help people cope; about self; and others. The code 'others' included few perspectives/narratives which, at the time of this process of open coding, did not seem to be linked with any specific code that had emerged till then. From narratives associated with these codes, further themes or categories were identified. These are being presented in the section on findings with specific focus on- description of 2010 scenario and its impacts; and the way people coped with these impacts.

Limitations of the Study

As the sample size was small, it is likely that many

perspectives have not been covered in this research. This limitation however is compensated by the use of in depth interviews. The study, however, did not include those who lost a family member in the deaths in 2010 scenario to avoid re-traumatizing them. Considering the political background of conflict in Kashmir, the researcher's relationship with the participants might have been impacted by her personal background-the identity of being an 'Indian' and hence may not have been perceived neutral. It is also likely that most participants responded as 'spokespersons' for Kashmir instead of focusing on their individual lives because the interview focused on the socio-political aspects of the 2010 scenario. This, however, further strengthens the finding- as it emerges through this paper- that people have a collective view of themselves and their situation.

Participants

The participants in this research included 9 young unmarried women in the age group of 16-26 years. Among these, 4 were from rural areas (Budgam District) and 5 from the urban areas (Srinagar District). Out of 9 participants, 5 were students, 2 were employed, 1 was staying at home without a job and 1 was earning at home through giving tuitions. 7 participants reported their father as the key earning member, 1 reported both father and mother as key earning members while one reported her brothers to be in such a role. Key sources of income in participants' family were Government employment (n=6), daily wage based work (n=1), traditional embroidery work (n=1) and others (n=1). Though 2 participants also reported their family to be involved in agricultural work, it was not reported to be a key source of income.

Findings

The themes that emerged from the interviews are being presented in two sections. The first section gives an overview of the description of the scenario in 2010, as described by the participants. The second section focuses on patterns of coping that participants talked about. The terms 'participant' and 'respondent' are used interchangeably in this paper.

1. The Scenario in 2010

"In the last 12 months, the situation was awful (kharaab)..... there was no guarantee for a person who left home in the morning...whether he/she would be back home in the evening..... Approximately, the whole year was spent in curfew. So we stayed at home during curfews and strikes. And circumstances were very bad. Everyone faced a lot of mental stress." [Respondent 6]

The narrative of Respondent 6, a participant from Srinagar, represents the perception of other participants who witnesses 2010 scenario. It was linked with uncertainties. As one participant described the situation between June and October as a cycle of deaths, protests, strikes and curfew, and

impacting on several spheres of life, she also perceived that the 'disturbance' and deaths of youth continued to happen in some other parts of Kashmir. While 'everything closed down' and 'every sphere of life was affected', one participant expressed that 'nothing should have happened' when she was reflecting on the events of 2010. The 2010 scenario was described by participants in terms of events, contributing factors and impacts. While a detailed description of all these themes is beyond the scope of this paper, a summary is being shared here.

Describing the 2010 scenario, respondents shared about deaths, protests and stone pelting, arrests of people not involved in stone pelting or protests, efforts by Govt. to organize meetings involving different stakeholder groups in Kashmir, impact on education, closure of schools and colleges, delays in exams, negative impact on earnings, negative impact on development and a few other incidents. Stating factors contributing to the 2010 scenario, respondents talked about the need for resolution, the role of politics and the Government, and a sense of oppression, isolation and discrimination among people. Participants described impact on the following areas of their life and the life of people in Kashmir: education and career, work and income, mobility, availability of food and nutrition related items, mental health, difficulties related to accessibility of health related resources, and restrictions on media and communication. Impact on women's mental health was perceived to be more as compared to men. Among the gains or benefits of the scenario, participants talked about international attention on Kashmir issues. "At least we were able to tell the world what has been happening to us." [Respondent 8]

They also talked about increasing awareness among people, and expression of 'unity and bond' among *Kashmiris*. "One thing that I could see was the unity. We all used to feel as one." [Respondent 6]. The need for resolution of the political conflict was also evident in the narratives of the respondents.

2. Patterns which helped young women cope and survive in the context of conflict

Narratives of participants focused on factors at individual, family and community levels. All these factors were interlinked as participants described how their context had contributed to shaping their coping mechanisms.

Applying learnings from previous experiences: Four participants considered 'previous experience with similar situations' to be linked to factors that helped in coping with the 2010 scenario. "For about 20 years in Kashmir.....since I have grown up... I mean, I have always seen such a situation. So, we have gotten used to facing....whatever difficulties come." [Respondent 10] She lives in an area of Srinagar District where curfews and strikes had a substantial presence. Two participants shared that they can now prepare for difficulties as they have become aware of the pattern. One of

them shared,

"now we have started understanding this concept that now there will be strikes in the month of June-July. So those days if we have to study or do some other work.....the girls here prepare themselves to face every difficulty..... They adjust.....no matter what the situation is.....whether it is sad or happy.... They adjust themselves. They work...some study, some are with their family engaged in some work, and some do some other work.... But they face these situations well." [Respondent 3]

However, one shared that she had not faced such experiences earlier and was not prepared for what had happened. She had lived in another district for many years before moving to Srinagar.

Using supportive relationships in personal network: Support systems had a role to play when most of the time was spent at home. Most of the participants talked about their families as supportive relationships. One participant from Srinagar shared, "Everyone was together, sitting at one place. Mother did this a lot those days, 'now do this thing.' ...Others also said that 'let's see what all happens. Maybe there will be justice. All this has happened'. The family was there. So because of the family we could cope." [Respondent 8]

Some also mentioned relatives, neighbors and the people in their locality while one also considered her teachers among their supportive relationships. Support systems were also important as there was likelihood of shortage of certain items like, medicines, rice, and milk. At one level, support was available in terms of information about the supply of necessary items (like ration, LPG), and at another level, it was in the form of sharing the necessary items related like rice, vegetables, etc. According to one, neighbors and relatives were the only one providing instrumental support, "our neighbors, our relatives...Who else can it be? I mean, my aunt...sometimes when vegetables were not available, we used to go to her. She has a lot of land. We used to ask her. Such people helped." [Respondent 10].

Role of friends was also described in different ways by the participants. Most of them maintained contact with friends over telephone.

One participant however perceived everyone to be in problems and hence unable to support. According to her, "Neighbors were distressed themselves. And where I live, it's not an educated society. There people around me were distressed/troubled themselves. They were not able to do anything. All of us, in a way, were dependent on each other and hence, were also not able to do anything." [Respondent 6]

Use of community support: Among the respondents, only one reported to have utilized the community support though everyone shared examples of how others coped

because of this. *“Some people used to volunteer...they used to go to some place...milk was supplied there and they used to get it...they used to get these things...and then announcements were made...that supplies are coming...so daily life still used to run”* [Respondent 9]

In this manner, during the period of ongoing strikes and curfews, people voluntarily collected money, rice, milk and other food items to distribute among those who were perceived to be facing more difficulties, for example, daily wage earners in city, people without land and a flow income in villages. Mosques were one of the points of such collections. Material collected from rural areas was also sent towards the city. Sometimes, people also asked for support from those who were perceived to have more resources. For example, in a village, people asked for rice from those who owned agricultural land and hence had it in stock. Blood donations were also organized by people in communities. One participant shared that people from all religions were involved in this. All the participants reported that there was no support from civil society organizations or the Govt. in their area. Even when some of the respondents shared examples of support from Govt. that they thought was available, they did not report to have taken any help themselves. One of the participants expressed anger that the Govt. did not come to help. However, she also perceived that people would not have taken help from Govt. even if it was provided. According to her,

“people were against India. So how could they have taken support that time? If you are killing them on one hand, giving them money on the other hand....then they will not take it.” [Respondent 8]

She believed that community support was the only thing because of which some people could cope.

Use of existing resources of family: Some participants shared about existing stocks of food and other necessary items at home. Most of the participants did not consider their position to be difficult regarding availability of food and nutrition related items. Except one, most of the participants did not perceive their families to be facing financial difficulties as well during 2010 scenario. This can be linked with the fact that six of them had family members in Govt. employment and hence had a continued source of income. In rural areas, existing resources in terms of agricultural land and produce seemed to have contributed in coping. This was shared by one in the following manner:

“It was easier to some extent that when strike was n or the situation was bad.....we had things to eat at home only. So when we got time, we used to go for gardening....Sometimes, I used to go to the garden and sometimes to our fields. When one thought, ‘now, what should I do?’.... At that time I used to go to the fields and sometimes listened to the Radio too. Sometimes, I used to read books to spend time. I think that when one studies, then one does not think that ‘I am doing nothing’. Rest, I did not face so much impact.” [Respondent 3]

This reflects that being located in rural areas not only provided access to certain resources (like vegetables) but also provided avenues to engage in activities outside instead of being confined within home. Existing resource in terms of location of the house in certain parts of urban area (Srinagar) also seems to have contributed to coping as one of the respondents living in higher-income group area did not consider her locality to be much impacted. Her home was at a distance from the ‘downtown’ area of Srinagar. Those living in or closer to the downtown areas witnessed the impact of curfews and strikes directly. As shared earlier in this section, resources in terms of supportive relationships – within family, friends, neighbors, and relatives- were also perceived by respondents to have helped in coping with difficulties.

Engagement in activities including altruism: Depending on their location (rural or urban) and available options, participants structured their day with household work, watching TV, studying (those who had to prepare for exams), listening to radio, agricultural activities, and giving tuitions. Social networking website was also used as a mode of recreation and a source of information. One participant in urban area took initiatives to help others through voluntary coaching, organizing blood donations and participation in collecting necessary material for distribution:

“my life was impacted a lot; especially my studies were very much impacted... I could not study...not at all, as a result of which I was not selected for a course this yearbecause I was not able to study at all. My mind...as I had told you... I used to hear something the whole day and then at night also. And finally, I started voluntary coaching in my area. I thought that if I can't help myself, I should help other people because student community was suffering a lot. So my day used to pass with voluntary coaching..... Additionally, we also used to organize blood donations when required because there was lack of adequate blood here. And we also used to see whether there is a house in our area where even rice is not available. Then we used to pool and organize such things and used to deliver to them.” [Respondent 6]

Later, while talking about her gains in 2010, she also added, *“I did not benefit as such but one benefit was there that I am satisfied where I am....that I helped someone. And yes, I learnt many things at home.”* Hence, for her, the 2010 scenario gave a sense of purpose which helped in moving her away from helplessness and distress that she experienced at that time.

Expressing and communicating: Conversations with relatives over phone became part of daily activities. According to one, discussions on the ongoing situation in Kashmir became part of everyone’s routine. Another participant also shared about her role in organizing and participating in protests. She shared,

“last year, this happened for the first time. We were in University, we organized a protest, I raised

slogans against India.....Till today, I supported India but when my conscience developed, I also began to understand what is happening. So I also turned against..... I mean, this is happening in Kashmir only. But the way it is happening here..... I mean, if the army is guilty, then they are not told anything. So we cannot tolerate so much.”
[Respondent 8]

Hence, participating in protests was her way of expressing her thoughts and feelings.

Identification with similar scenarios/contexts: One participant compared and identified the 2010 scenario with India’s freedom struggle and reflected on her own capacity to deal with difficulties in a similar manner. She also linked this with importance of reading and becoming aware of the history. According to her,

“When the British were in India, then what the situation here...was there in those days? We read that, their examples....Mahatma Gandhi and other people. So when we read about them, then one feels passionate that when these could tolerate so much and then in the end they reached their destination, then why won't we get it? So we can also do that.” [Respondent 1]

This also indicates that learnings from what others have gone through and the hope of what one can achieve can contribute to coping. This can happen as people are able to re-define their personal/individual experiences as part of larger political oppression and hence gain support from a sense of collectivism and normalization (i.e. ‘everyone is going through it. It is not just me. This happens in such situations’). However, one of the participants seemed not to align completely with this collectivism. She considered the lack of opportunities for youth as one of the factors contributing to the 2010 scenario and expressed her dissatisfaction with the current scheme of things. She said,

“...here there are some boys who are M.Ed., M.A... I mean, some have very good degrees. Their situation was very difficult because of what?...that the circumstances were not good. There were boys studying with me.....they are very educated. They used to think that we will be in job. If nothing else.....at least P.A. post will be available.....But when the circumstances got bad. Then they got into stone-pelting. And their situation.....now, that they thought that, ‘now we don't have to study, we don't have to work. We have to do only this.’ Why? Because our leaders...the leaders of Kashmir.....they destroyed our lives. Our thinking is this only.....that our leaders...the separatist leaders, parties are there....they are the ones who are spoiling our lives. Not just this...the rest of people, if we had moved forward by ten years, then we got back by 20 years.....because the situation had got bad.” [Respondent 10].

This reflects the diversity in the resistance movement. Her point of view also seems to be linked with her own experiences- as care of her pregnant sister and the family income- got impacted due to the cycle of strikes and curfew.

Social comparison, Normalizing and Acceptance: Social comparison was reflected in the narratives of six out of nine participants. This might have helped them cope with their own situations, which seemed to be ‘similar’ or ‘better’ as compared to others. One of the participants, who considered 2010 scenario as a continuation of the ongoing conflict, expressed a sense of ‘no choice/option’ along with acceptance of her circumstances. She said, “We had to face the challenges on our own. Everyone was sailing in the same boat. If there was curfew, we had to stay at home.” [Respondent 2] This seems to indicate a feeling of helplessness (in terms of changing the scenario) linked with the normalizing thought (that everyone was going through it) and a sense of acceptance (that there was no other option but to deal with and adjust to the situation). None of the respondents talked about withdrawing as a method to cope.

Restructuring life according to the scenario based on the information: people were actively seeking information and keeping track of the ongoing events of protests, strikes, etc. Local channels on Television were a key source of information for people during the period of unrest in Kashmir though there were restrictions on the method and the extent of information that could be shared by media. While describing her source of information, one participant from an urban area said,

“mostly from TV. And we have contacts. Like we live in one district and our relatives live in every district. What is happening there? We used to call up because there was worry about what happened at their side. Every evening, we had to call each and every relative asking, ‘everything is okay at your side?’ So through that also we got to know. Not so much on TV because the local channels had been banned. Because they could not show anything, we used to watch National channels also. But on those too, not so clearly..... Though, media also did not hide so many things.... whatever used to happen, they used to show something.....but not everything clearly.” [Respondent 8]

Hence, interactions with others in different parts of Kashmir also provided people with information about situation in those areas. Apart from this, websites including social networking sites (such as, www.facebook.com) were mentioned as an important source of information in urban areas. In rural areas, radio was mentioned as another important source of information. Newspapers were mentioned by some though the accessibility of printed version of these was impacted due to strikes and curfews. The breaks between curfews and strikes were utilized to buy necessary items, students visited their institutions (if open). People also scheduled their travels accordingly. A family

taking care of a member in the hospital had to schedule it's to and fro journeys according to curfew timings every day. The respondent and her sister shared how their father managed his routine at the time when their pregnant sister was admitted at the hospital for delivery, *"If we did not have our own transport, we don't know what might have happened to her....he[father] used to go in the morning, come back in the evening..... There used to be curfew the entire day.....He used to go early in the morning, in dark only.....then used to come back in the evening. He used to stay there the entire day."* [Respondent 10] This reflects that while people structured their day according to curfew/strikes, their existing resources also helped in dealing with the situation. Others avoided going to the areas which were more impacted in protests, stone-pelting, strikes and curfews. Participants reported that some people also left Kashmir in 2010.

As reflected from the findings shared in this section, people coped using various strategies and various resources. In the next section, I will discuss these findings in the context of other literature.

Discussion

The research presents voices of young women regarding the 2010 scenario which they perceived to be significantly marked with deaths and protests, continuation of past, and linked with own life. Participants identified with all those who had been facing difficulties even if their personal experiences in 2010 scenario did not include physical violence or deaths in the family. The distress is likely to be there as the victims and the participants have much in common and hence the impact can extend beyond individuals within the geographical boundaries of the event (Musallam, Ginzburg, Lev-Shalem, & Solomon, 2005).

The key patterns of coping were cognitive, problem-focused as well as emotion focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and included help-seeking (Moscardino, Scrimin, Capello, & Altoe, 2010), downward social comparison (Wills, 1987a), and findings benefits (Tennen & Affleck, 1999), e.g. in terms of unity. Following patterns of coping emerged from the narratives were: community support, preparations based on past experiences, supportive relationships, existing resources of family, engagement in activities, expressing and communicating, seeking information and restructuring of life and schedules based on information about the situation, social comparison, normalizing and acceptance, and identification with similar scenarios/contexts of being oppressed and struggling for rights. Expression, communication, and engagement in different activities seem to be in alignment with the following coping strategies that were documented by Ali and Jaswal (2000) : talking it over, engagement in different activities such as formation of mohalla groups, collection of funds, etc. Resources in life of young women influenced their view of situation and supported in dealing with the impact.

The coping patterns of young women in Kashmir were similar to the ones in other contexts as these were related to distraction, venting feelings, political participation, problem-solving, acceptance, seeking support, presence of supportive relationships, making life as normal as possible through structure and stability in daily routines, continuing optimism despite hardship and re-defining the scenario (Shaley, 2005; Musallam et al., 2005; Moscardino et al., 2010; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). In the present study, the role of past experiences, normalizing and acceptance seems to be similar to the role of 'habituation' found in study by Bleich et al. (2003). Patterns of coping also reflect how people continue to focus on quality of life even when larger issue of resolution of conflict remains. However, similar to the findings by Barber (2008), within the common patterns, there is also diversity. There is diversity in what people thought about the scenario, how it impacted them, how they responded to it and how they communicated about it. Participation in protests was a method of expression by one. At the same time, for another participant, the cycle of protests and curfews was considered unhelpful along with the role of local leaders. Use of cognitive strategies such as normalizing, acceptance, reframing current situation as a continuation of past by people reflects their identity of being 'victims' of oppression.

While overall impact varied on rural and urban areas, no significant differences were found in the patterns that helped in coping in the two contexts except two aspects. One aspect was - difference in the daily routine. Those in rural areas seemed to have higher mobility and different options in terms of activities to be engaged in. On the other hand, young women in urban areas had more access to the use of social networking sites like Facebook. Second, access to food and nutrition related resources such as, rice, milk was higher in rural areas and hence probably contributed to less negative impact and better coping.

Withdrawal and praying, however, did not emerge among the common ways of coping that was found in a study by de Jong et al. (2008b) in Kashmir. Various explanations can be linked with this. One is related to the possible difference in methodology. This research aimed to explore and capture perspectives and voices of young women, rather than evaluating their life and coping strategies through pre-defined categories in a questionnaire/quantitative tool. The present study did not include specific questions about the religious practices and significance of religion in coping. Instead, these aspects were documented only when they emerged in the narratives. This could have contributed to some differences in the findings related to 'praying' as a pattern of coping documented in the previous studies by de Jong et al. (2008b) and Ali and Jaswal (2000). While the concerns of people may seem similar to these previous studies, their descriptions of coping seem to have some differences (from previous studies) when presented from the points of view of participants. This indicates that the way others perceive youth can differ from how youth perceive

themselves. Second, this might be related to the focus on a different age group and time period of the study. Coping strategies of young people today may differ from those of other age groups in past. Third, situation specific (i.e. 2010 scenario) coping efforts may differ from what the overall general reports state about coping by people, i.e. actual ways in which people cope may be different from what is generally reported (Wolfer, 2000). This is because in generalized reports of coping, some coping efforts may receive more emphasis while some may not be recognized. Fourth, religion and praying might be such a normal part of everyone's routine, that it may not be considered as a coping strategy in a specific scenario as it might be something that always happens and does not need to be done specially. However, all these explanations may be used only for the young women who participated in this study. These cannot be generalized for all without further research.

It is important to note that the narratives from this research reflected some 'societal beliefs' that comprise ethos of an intractable conflict, e.g. societal beliefs of 'one's own victimization', 'patriotism', 'unity', 'peace', 'justness of own goals' (Bar-Tal, 2007). According to Bar-Tal (2007), these beliefs are part of the 'socio-psychological infrastructure' which helps in coping with stress in the scenario of intractable conflicts. It will be useful to explore the aspect of socio-psychological infrastructure as the framework for coping in the context of Kashmir.

Implications for practice

The findings from this study have implications for practice at micro as well as macro level. At one level, interventions with youth need to acknowledge and support their meanings and methods of coping. Use of social networks and support systems reflect that interventions need to happen in multiple forums- not just at individual level but also at the family and community level. Engagement of youth in activities, perceived to be purposeful by them, can be helpful. Recent engagement of youth in post flood rescue and relief work indicates that youth in Kashmir would continue to be involved in purposeful activities, especially as they perceive inadequate support or response from other duty bearers. Findings also indicate the significance of channels of expression and communication. The use of these channels has to be supported. It's not helpful if expression of anger or dissatisfaction by people is often judged only on the parameters of national security. Many spontaneous protests have faced criminalization in India (Telumbde, 2013). However, if channels of expression have to be facilitated, then the protests on streets or through social networking websites can't be criminalized.

Hence, engaging with perspectives shared by Guo and Tsui (2010) and Pulla (2012), the challenge for social work and mental health professionals is to continue the strengths-focused interventions without being dismissive of their coping patterns, without ignoring resistance and rebellion as part of their strategies to deal with adversity, and

without labeling people only as 'victims'. We have to continue to see people as more than just victims or survivors as stated by Pulvirenti and Mason (2011).

Additionally, the institutions working on diverse issues have to acknowledge the diversity in views and impacts of people about everyday scenario. People who depend on daily work for income get impacted in scenarios of curfews and strikes. This group might be in minority but their needs also need to be taken into account when political decisions are taken by any side.

Areas of further research

The narratives and findings in this research bring forth areas of further research as well. As experiences of a person impact his/her perspectives and view of life, it can also be useful to further explore how similar or diverse experiences contributed to shaping their thinking and actions today. This needs to include experiences of those who have always remained in Kashmir as well of those who migrated temporarily or permanently. An aspect that may be useful to focus upon is- how does 'socio-psychological infrastructure' suggested by Daniel Bar-Tal (2007) help people cope in the context of Kashmir conflict? Another area which needs to be explored is related to 'future'- as individuals perceive for themselves. This could be useful in order to understand how people focus on improving quality of their own lives while waiting for the long term resolution of conflict. What are the patterns in life of those who have mental health difficulties? Another area of research could focus on exploring coping strategies of women across age-groups. As participants present a view of what people in Kashmir face, it might also be useful to explore what people from several parts of India think and feel about situation of people in Kashmir and what could help people gain tolerance to listen to understand the others' perspective whether or not they agree with it? Though there are writings available on some of these questions, however, there is a need for research based answers as well.

Conclusions

The research aimed to present perspectives of young women from Kashmir. The emphasis of this qualitative study was on the 2010 scenario in terms of its events, impacts and patterns in life of young women that helped them cope. The narratives of most young women presented a sense of collectivism and identification with issues and concerns of Kashmiris in terms of an identity of victimhood and a sense of being oppressed and discriminated against. The patterns that helped young women cope were cognitive, problem focused as well as emotion focused. Resources in the context played an important role. The emphasis of the research was not on generalizing the findings but on presenting voices of some young women from different backgrounds. Further research will be useful on the important questions that have

emerged. It is important that we understand people's strengths and coping strategies instead of ignoring their resistance strategies. At the same time, just because people cope, it does not imply that we should not focus on making the environment less adverse or hostile for people. Diverse stakeholders need to continue to work towards creating respecting, enabling, safe environments for everyone. This involves questioning the 'national' narrative that, according to Kazi (2009), "normalizes violence as an inevitable and integral part of producing a nation" (p.198) and instead "envision a democratic and non-national vision for Kashmir based on recognition and respect for Kashmiri identity and Kashmiris' desire to chart a political future free from central control and dominance"(p.202). Considering the changed political scenario, we wait to see how this national narrative changes.

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