



The Mental Health Crisis in Kashmir: An Epidemic Within A Pandemic

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Short Communication

It's not a hidden fact that the Indian government wants sole claim over the State or now known as the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir is no stranger to lockdowns, curfews and military crackdowns when rules are not followed, and has always been the primary talking point whenever someone wants to defend the Indian Armies might or every time Pakistan threatens to free Kashmir from India's stronghold.

It is interesting to note that for a state that everyone wants a piece of nobody in reality pays much heed to what the inhabitants of the state want. The narrative here is not just political but it is important to understand that no conversation about Kashmir can ever be apolitical. Everything that happens or has happened in the UT of Kashmir since India's independence in 1947 till the Abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, is always going to be political.

While the rest of the world is updating their Covid-19 positive caseloads every day, not much

is known about the number of positive cases, recovered cases, and deaths taking place in the UT of Kashmir.

The 30 year long insurgency in Kashmir has resulted in several generations experiencing state induced violence as well as collective community violence. The official numbers state that about 40,000 people have died since India gained independence from the British in 1947.

When young children see their primary and secondary caregivers die in front of their eyes or not see them return home one fine day, a lot of questions arise. Some simple questions and some complex ones, the answers of which are not enough to soothe their aching soul for the loved ones they have lost.

Furthermore, the current Coronavirus pandemic has added to the plethora of preexisting trauma faced by Kashmiris.

A study conducted found that 45% of the adult population currently inhabiting Kashmir suffers

from some form of mental distress. There is a high prevalence of depression reported in 41%, anxiety reported in 26% and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder reported in 19% of the population while 47% people had experienced some form of trauma in their lifetime.

There are studies conducted on the impact that violence has on the mental health of children too and 22-27% children belonging to the age groups of 8-14 years have a prevalence of childhood disorders. A retrospective study on suicides show an increase of more than 250% in the number of deaths by suicide between the years 1994-2012.

As per the 2011 census of India, the UT of Kashmir comprises 12.5 million people

and the number of psychiatrists available to them are 41 and are based out of either Jammu or Srinagar. There are only two mental health hospitals which provide psychological aid to the people and these are the GMS Srinagar and the SKIMS hospital.

The National Mental Health Plan and the District Mental Health Program was officially initiated in several Kashmiri districts but 10 districts of Kashmir have 140 beds indoors, whereas there 16 psychiatrists, 12 psychologists, and one social worker providing outpatient services to the people in the UT of Kashmir.

There are a few mental health practitioners who provide aid in a private practice setup but the fees make the services unaffordable for several.

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