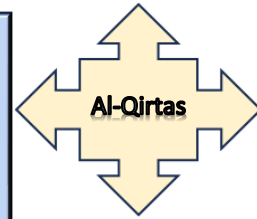# Youth Radicalization in Conflict Zones: The Interplay of War, Poverty, and Political Instability

Al-Qirtas

Amjad Hussain
Aqal Mir
Saqib Ullah Khan*

Lecturer at Higher Education Department KP
Lecturer at Higher Education Department KP
Lecturer, HITEC University Taxila Cantt

Abstract

This article explores the intricate phenomenon of the youth radicalization in the conflict zones. This paper posits that unemployment, lack of political stability, and war pave the way for extremist outlooks to be embraced by families and individuals. This paper investigates the interactions among the above-mentioned determinants, through an analysis of these causal pathways that give rise to the fantasy a yearning for personality and the achievement of belongingness that certain extremist groups exploit. The psychoanalysis explores far the unnoted stressors of young people in the war that include trauma, displacement, and social dissolve. It also analyzed how poverty has created hopelessness in young people, as well as eliminated chances of a better life, rendering them more vulnerable to feed peddlers providing radical narratives of a brighter future. Political instability is a major issue which is seen through those factors like corruption, lawlessness, and sectarian violence, hence embarking anger toward the existing institutions. The article walks shrewdly through the strategies of extremist groups that help in their reach out to the youth. On the other side, the article also examines the function of education and social programs for preventing the radicalization by suggesting the need for developing cognitive critical skills and offering an exposure into the society activity. The article emphasizes on the necessities of conflict resolution activities, economic development projects, and making good governance a top venture. The piece additionally stresses the need to include education and social initiatives that strengthen youths` self-worth and create them an opportunity to escape ideologies of terror. Thus, the article concludes with such recommendations for a thorough assessment of the perceived factors of radicalization whereby war, poverty and political instability are the driving forces of this worldwide phenomenon.

Keywords: Youth Radicalization, Conflict Zones, War, Poverty, Instability, Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Youth radicalization, or the process through which the individuals embrace extremely violent beliefs (Horgan & Dwyer, 2017), is a widespread phenomenon in war zones. Such situations, even though are mostly a breakdown of social order, poor economy, and all-over sense of injustice, occur more often than being imagined by common people. In these circumstances, youth are in a particularly high risk situation since they find themselves mainly trying to establish and prove their identity, looking for the sense of belonging and coping with psychological traumas (Feinstein International Center, 2017). The extremist groups prey on these gaps in understanding proposing a twisted sense of the mission, community, and convenient explanation of the matters (Refugees and Asylum Seekers Network working Group, 2016). Thus, we can conclude that this situation is one of the top-security concerns, with apparently radicalized youths being the backbone of militant groups that are constantly associated with cycles of violence.

The deleterious combination of war, poverty, and political instability sets up a cauldron for youth radicalization in conflict regions. Armed conflict splashes apart the social systems and leaves youngsters on a lonely island with neither hope nor sense of belonging (Basu, 2017). This comes from being exposed to violence and brutality that can bring very disturbing traumatic experiences in them, in turn, they lose control and hope which exposes them to extremist narratives that have purpose and control in them (Carwilley, 2019). Moreover, the conflict usually breaks the education and therefore the civilians are still running the risk of not obtaining the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are essential in distinguishing the right things from the wrong ones that lead to being manipulated by the extremist groups (RAN Working Group, 2016).

The economic insecurity results to the aggravation of the crisis. The poverty circumscribes the educational and employment prospects, in fact, it does not leave youth any room for a hopeful future. This has generated their anger and hatred that always puts them on top of the list of people who join the violent groups, and those who fight to change the system by promising them a job, money and a chance to change the system. Extremist discourses widely use discontent caused by corrupt government or intervention of foreign forces as their basis, they present themselves as solutions to mentioned problems and as a way of achieving a social justice (Horgan & Dwyer, 2017). It works this way, the multiplying effect of war, poor state governance, and political instability arises and becomes a vicious circle where radicalization and conflict produce more inequality and political insecurity.

This article gives a holistic perspective of the youth radicalization in conflict zones that is a very complicated issue. It screening explains how while the masses are faced with the war; this being economical, and political instability of the regions serve as factors, working together to breed the extremists worldviews apt to the youth. The author studies the breakdown of social order, the economic hardships, and the pervasive sense of injustice that can often develop in places affected by conflict. The article then shows how these elements create conditions that make the extremists to exploit. Final goal is to clarify the role of these elements in the process of radicalization among the youth.

War and Its Psychological Impacts

War's cruelty destroys the peace of minds of youngsters by leaving permanent emotional cracks that need years to mend. Witnessing the grisly scene directly can be a triggering factor at the root of complex post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) in small children and young people (Carlson & Bryan, 2017). Symptoms could include nightmares, flashbacks, hypervigilance, and even

emotional detach which makes it very hard for the compassionate individual to trust and have healthy relations (Betancourt & Betancourt, 2010 A feeling of continual concern about the future is not the only outcome of war zones, because it can manifest in other ways, including anxiety and depression, which can affect a learner's ability to focus on the lessons and join in social activities (Wessells et al., 2008).

The displaced populations which most often come about as a result of war additionally aggravates the psychological repercussions of young people. Being displaced from the dwellings, friends, and customs make them suffer equally as much with a very unsettling and disoriented (Fazel et al, 2012). It is possible to lose loved ones to the effect of violence, or to the separation from the family, which can weigh heavy on the mind of refugees. The distressing experience may cause the feeling of rejection, and the anger too (Miller & Rasmussen, 2018). The hardships of adjusting to a new environment which is exemplified by poverty and discrimination can intensify the existing mental health difficulties and force the young people into many risky activities which can thereby become barriers to their success and extend the cycle of poverty.

The joint effect of numerous traumas, loss of homes and loneliness, which teenagers' face in war zones can result in serious hopelessness and feeling of being out of place. The veterans have always the feeling of violence or PTSD which could deprive them from the social integration and the friendships making it possible for them to feel isolated. Watching their neighborhoods being destroyed and the occasions of getting split from beloved ones may break their feeling of belonging and safety, thus developing the feeling of loneliness in them (Fazel, Ismail, and Noradze, 2014). In addition to their dilemma over their situation and adapting to a new setting, they could also get a feeling of futility and helplessness about their future, since they have no answers (Betancourt & Betancourt, 2010). Under these circumstances these people feel abandoned from themselves,

169

community, and any possibility of a better future and so become targets of demagogues and extremists whose views turn around on their head and destroy what was left of normal thinking system leaving nothing but twisted purpose and belonging and false hopes and ambitions.

Power And Lack of Opportunities

Poverty plays the main role in the growth of youth radicalization in war-torn zones. Protracted adverse economic situations limit poor families' ability to afford essential expenses such as food, shelter, and healthcare; this is primarily responsible for a sense of hopelessness and dissatisfaction among the young (Basu, 2017). At this stage, the anger will be highly directed at the government and any other authoritative those who caused the scenarios where civilians cannot solve their problems. The result is that most of them become highly receptive to extremist narratives that blame the government and those authoritative personalities who came to be responsible for what the civilians do not even know how to solve their troubles. The extreme groups use to exploit these grievances by all the means to promise economic stability and a chance to challenge the longstanding systems which kept the poor groups as a lesser people. Secondly, poverty usually goes hand in hand with restricted education accessing to and holding maturity level low as they fail to comprehend matters well. These people directed by their fathers who ignorant, and so they are unable to notice the manipulations and the simple explanations radical extremist groups present.

Insufficient opportunities which are available for legal work are only able to worsen situation to the youth radicalization. Socially discontented youth with nowhere to go and no real prospects for a brighter future are easily manipulated and attracted to extremism, possibly as a source for meaning, sense of purpose and belonging (Feinstein International Center, 2017). The terrorists organization can easily come up with some financial incentive by claiming a certain

170

amount for so and so services and promising the youth favorable ranks within their own ranks, which is the twisted form of economic empowerment for these disadvantaged youth. Similarly, the lack of formal paths may lead to feelings of hopelessness, and eventually, contribute to the alienation of the young people, who might become more vulnerable to embrace extremist ideas simply to escape from all this and to get a sense of belonging and the belonging to the world, that the extremist groups can offer (Carwilley, 2019). Therefore, the conclusion is that poverty and insufficient chances form the ideal scenario for youth radicalization, providing youth people with feelings of being worthless initially and then generating a belief in the words of extremists groups.

Political Instability and Erosion of Trust

Political instability that persists for a long period of time in war-torn areas causes the growth of radical youths. When the governments are strong, they provide their citizens with security and public goods but in a setting where they are weak and inefficient they have problem with even basic security provision and services (Basu, 2017). Thus, in this situation teens limit their desire do anything and stop believing in their power to change something about their future. They can start to blame the government for the failure of protecting them and meeting their all hopes and foster a feeling of aggravation and demand of a more stable order.

Also, the prevalence of corruption among governments gives birth to vast skepticism and distrust the state institutions (Horgan, Dwyer, 2017). Youth observe the rich getting richer by mishandling national matters. That creates a feeling of a system geared against them and s the young as regarding those in power positively As a consequence of the perception of power being eroded among the authorities and institutions, a legitimacy gap occurs. Exploiting the blockages that the Government has created, extremist groups affect "opposition" posture to the unjust and the dysfunctional situation of the Government. They exude an abnormal form of moral, fairness,

and community to which disenfranchised youth in a system which they see as broken but can help them become right.

The sectarian strife creates still another complication, tearing the communities apart along religious, tribal or ethnic lines (RAN Working Group, 2016). Young people often experience intense emotional reactions when they see violence against own group. They usually feel helpless and angry due to perceived threat. The extremists manipulate such already existing rifts, causing people to re-evaluate their world views and emotions, based on grievance and reversed accounts. They give people their feeling of togetherness and certainness as an identity or such ideology while labeling the rest into 'them' who are opposite. Meanwhile, this takes advantage of the intergroup rivalry weakening trust and reliance on the traditional institutions that betray some cause or become associated the conflict. They, therefore, widen the political instability, corruption and sectarian violence such that the youth who are radicalized will be operating in a risky environment where these are the ingredients for radicalization. Such groups supply a twisted and false image of carrying out order, belongingness as well as justice and in a way they are occupying the space left behind by traditional institutions that keep on failing and this is how the cycles of violence are kept on going.

Tactics of Extremist Groups

Radical organizations use a comprehensive approach as a means of young people mobilization in war torn areas. A vital tool in the playbook of social media propaganda is using the social media. Extremists take the advantage of these platforms to disseminate their ideologies in various ways, for example, through videos which are so entertaining giving people a reason to view, fake social media accounts pretending to be individuals and finally, online forums to avoid traditional media filters. Media platforms provide a tool that allows them to tune the message to young

person's complaints and hopes, Manipulating their discontent, provisionally with the existing order and portraying the unclear picture of the reality (RAN Working Group, 2016). They may choose to user picturesque imagery, online campaign strategies, as well as humor and then convinces youngsters to normalize their ideological stand.

The third tactic is when positions of religious narratives are being exploited. Extremist organizations resort to manipulating scriptures and religious teachings to claim the use of violence and create an "us vs. them" context (Horgan & Dwyer, 2017). They turn faith into their pawns by giving their adherents a misguided sense of salvation and purpose by reading faith into their violence. Young people are drawn to organizations which offer a twisted interpretation of religion in order to achieve the goal of these religions: through violence they are able to provide their adherents a false religious identity and social connection. Religion, which thrives in some regions, is widely used, especially since it has a great role in how people live their lives.

Manipulative groups often manipulate people by filling the gap of people who lack a sense of belonging and purpose. Young adults who are estranged and don't know the direction of their lives are vulnerable to extremists organizations (Feinstein International Center, 2017). They provide a much needed sense of community, mate-ship and the feeling belongingness among some members of the group through the commonly held belief of distorted essence of the right and wrong or through having chosen group; It could however be attractive especially to those young people who experience a feeling of making the social connections or experiencing low level of community belongingness. Fanatics are said to offer security, a chance to do something worthwhile, or being a member of a greater cause. These groups achieve such an objective by driving these psychological weaknesses and loves among the young people to their causes that will only lead to a repetition of the cycle of violence and extremism.

Addressing the Challenge

A Multi-Pronged Approach

Countering radicalization of youth in conflict zones means taking multidimensional action which focuses on both its root causes and the nature of this complex problem. Conflict resolution initiatives would provide the explanation as to why peace must be promoted and cyclical violence should be stopped (Basu, 2017). The mediation process may come in the shape of peace negotiations, conflict management and settlement of any existing issues that may be the driving forces to the fighting parties. Mediation as well as curbing injustice is a tool to fight the dominance of exclusionary ideologies which flourish on anger and a sense of deprivation.

Economic development, in this understanding, is the engine with which a future can be created that allows young people to have a legitimate path of success (Feinstein International Center, 2017). Education programs which create jobs and infrastructure development is a way to stop the poverty and lift the young generation's spirits because they can see a hopeful future. This protects them from the risk of embracing violent extremist agendas, which often are built around the slogans of economic prosperity. To add to this, ensuring good governance contributes to the public's trust in the institutions which government has control over. Implementation of anti-corruption measures, good governance and rule of law practices will make a society fairer so that people will not be attracted by a band of extremists that act as a solution to a prevailing corrupt system.

Education and Social Programs: Building Resilience

Education can be having an effect as a vehicle directed to the prevention of radicalization (Carwilley, 2019). The quality education that is given to young people helps them to develop critical thinking that enables them to think deeply and to analyze truthfully and to challenge the

174

ideologies of extremists. Educational programs which emphasize tolerance, diversity acceptance and peaceful conflict resolution could therefore be the source of a more accepting and tolerant society. It is possible that such programs are a basis of a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Social programs may act as the context to raise the inclination to embrace moderate attitudes and to sever the relations with and participation in extremist groups (Horgan & Dwyer, 2017). Such programs become means for youth to give something instead of just getting, so they can experience a state of self-worth beyond the extremist doctrines. Initiatives geared towards social cohesion, volunteerism, and recreations are platforms which can help us to make our surrounding and atmosphere for young people much easier and friendly. This can be achieved by focusing on the social and economic aspects that foster radicalization and introducing educational and social programs which tend to encourage critical thinking and positive social participation. Hence communities will be able to resist extremist ideologies and young people to draw a more positive and promising future.

Conclusion

To wind up, this article delved into the complicated subject of youth radicalization in conflict zones. Instead, it illustrated the war, poverty and political instability's symphony that makes the space enough for the deadly hatched ideologies. The article mentioned the mental consequences of the war among young people such as being unable to forget the scenes of gun battles, civilian losses, and one's own battle fatigue. This also highlighted the fact how they might fall into the trap of the stories coming from the fighters of extreme ideologies. Moreover, political uncertainty, corruption, and sectarian violence undermines the legitimacy of trusted institutions which result in effective space that terrorist networks can fill. These groups have developed many different techniques to go after the young folk, such as social media propaganda, playing with religious

themes and the enticement to the member of a society or group. Subsequently, the article highlighted the significance of multidimensional strategy for managing the interface of students with technology. Thereby includes this: the settlement of navigational conflicts, the economic growth, the way of life with good governance, the teaching of a critical thinking, the social affairs with positive alternative. Setting in place measures to remove the underlying causes of radicalization and ensuring that young people have a positive outlook on life, will bring about a peaceful and equitable world for the youth at all levels to do well.

References

Horgan, J., & Dwyer, T. (2017). Deradicalization: Changing minds and hearts. Routledge.

Basu, A. (2017). Fragile states: The logic of violence in the developing world. Oxford University Press.

Carwilley, A. (2019). Psychology of terrorism. Routledge.

Horgan, J., & Dwyer, T. (2017). Deradicalization: Changing minds and hearts. Routledge.

Betancourt, L. L., & Betancourt, J. C. (2010). The psychological effects of war and violence on youth: An overview of the evidence and implications for mental health services. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 11(2), 12-36.

Carlson, E. B., & Bryan, A. D. (2017). Psychological effects of war on children. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 13, 217-241.

Fazel, M., Stein, A., Dosenovic, S., & Boureaux, C. (2012). Mental health of refugees and asylum seekers in high-income countries. The Lancet, 379(9820), 2100-2113.

Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2018). Grief and loss after war and violence: A comprehensive clinical guide. Routledge.

Wessells, M. G., Ludtke, G., Nguyen, N. H., & Soler, N. (2008). The psychological impact of war and civil conflict on youth. Child Development Perspectives, 2(3), 121-128.

Betancourt, L. L., & Betancourt, J. C. (2010). Treatments for children exposed to war and disaster. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 11(2), 129-168. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21943168/

Fazel, M., Stein, A., & Refugees, U. N. H. C. R.'s. (2014). Mental health of refugees. The Lancet, 384(9947), 1663-1674.

Miller, M. N., Paúl Pacheco-Vega, M., & Rajkumar, R. P. (2017). Post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents. World Psychiatry, 16(2), 142-150. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16633528/

RAN Working Group. (2016, September). The drivers of radicalization. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

Feinstein International Center. (2017, March). The drivers of youth radicalization and violent extremism. Feinstein International Center