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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Khalid Sandhu, A., & Makki, M. (2023). Post-conflict Rehabilitation: Understanding the Role of Civil-Military Cooperation in Supporting Child Protection Units (CPUs) in Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), Pakistan. *Journal of Human Security*, 19(1), 53-62. <https://doi.org/10.12924/johs2023.19010053>

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Research Article

Post-conflict Rehabilitation: Understanding the Role of Civil-Military Cooperation in Supporting Child Protection Units (CPUs) in Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), Pakistan

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Submitted: 23 April 2022 | In revised form: 5 April 2023 | Accepted: 1 August 2023 |
Published: 12 December 2023

Abstract: Several studies have examined the humanitarian Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) in post-conflict environments. However, there has been limited focus on establishing and making available an institutional setup for child welfare, which harnesses CIMIC experiences in the post-conflict rehabilitation phase. This paper aims to address this gap in the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Pakistan, where the local population experienced a series of crises in the form of terrorism, subsequent military operations, and conflict-induced internal displacement, making children, in particular, extremely vulnerable. In doing so, the paper outlines the underreported vulnerabilities related to the children of NMDs and further identifies the related institutional dynamics of CIMIC in the immediate post-conflict environment. The key findings encompass the delineation of direct and indirect vulnerabilities and the identification of a lack of distinction between child welfare and protection for adequate redressal policies. Regarding the pre-existing institutional infrastructure, the study confirms the prominent role of national and international development organizations and further validates the discord between relevant government departments in providing child welfare services. Furthermore, this research argues that the Pakistan military deployed throughout the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) effectively utilized the pre-existing social-tribal hierarchy to provide protection and development services. The research suggests that the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), specifically through its Gender and Child Cell, collaborates closely with the Social Welfare Department, which is responsible for providing child protection and welfare services in the post-merger environment. The objective of this collaborative effort is to facilitate the effective and practical implementation of Child Protection Units (CPUs) in the NMDs.

Keywords: Child welfare; Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC); Newly Merged Districts (NMDs); Pakistan; vulnerabilities

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that children are one of the most vulnerable groups in (post-) conflict societies [1–3]. In the

case of Pakistan's Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), formerly known as the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), children have been particularly affected by prolonged terrorism, military operations, and displacement

[1–3]. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize their well-being and establish dedicated institutional arrangements, especially in a post-conflict environment.

Unfortunately, most of the existing literature concerning NMDs focuses on terrorism and violent extremism [4,5], with only a few studies addressing the social welfare, institutional structures, and regulatory mechanisms as critical areas for improving post-conflict governance and service delivery [6,7]. Other studies examine the impact of various socio-economic indicators on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the provisions made for them [8–10]. However, none of these studies employ a holistic framework to address child protection and welfare issues, making them fragmented rather than serving as precursors to identifying child welfare needs and vulnerabilities in post-conflict rehabilitation scenarios.

This paper addresses the aforementioned gaps and aims to contextualize the issue within the broader environment of post-conflict rehabilitation in the NMDs. The study explores the vulnerabilities of war-torn children, particularly those exposed to perpetual vulnerabilities due to internal displacement, and proposes an institutional framework that can address children's welfare. The paper also discusses the involvement of several actors, through the lens of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), and their experiences with child welfare and protection during both the conflict and immediate post-conflict environments.

Furthermore, with the recent historical merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 2018 [11], this study is the first of its kind to focus on the various vulnerabilities of children, the manifestation of key CIMIC arrangements, and the identification of potential areas for collaboration to improve child welfare. This analysis allows us to identify the interplay between child vulnerabilities and needs assessments, as well as future risks that this vulnerable population may encounter. Additionally, this research proposes an institutional infrastructure with the Gender and Child Cell of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in KP as the centerpiece, which appears to be a more viable arrangement for the post-merger FATA.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Vulnerabilities, Child Welfare and Institutional Infrastructure

Numerous scholars have contributed seminal works regarding child rights, protection, and the institutional structures required for their welfare [12–17]. Goldhagen et al. [18] acknowledge that armed conflicts and conflict-induced migration are significant factors that affect the well-being of children. Such conflicts produce both direct and indirect effects on children, including physical injury, psychological trauma, displacement, death, violations of children's rights to food and nutrition, adequate living conditions, protection from environmental hazards, separation from family, and access to healthcare and education. Scholars have also

highlighted other issues such as early marriages, forced labor, and trafficking. Miller and Rasmussen [19] further describe the relationship between war exposure and daily stressors on the mental health of youth [20]. Such insights underscore the impact of armed conflict on mental health and psychosocial functioning.

Moreover, research has provided evidence of how conflict and post-conflict environments exacerbate certain factors that contribute to child vulnerability. These factors can be assessed at the individual, family, community, and structural levels and include poverty, limited educational opportunities, and weakened family structures that affect marriage practices [21]. Such observations have been made regarding children in Nepal, particularly IDPs of Mid-Western areas during the decade-long civil war (1996-2006) between Maoists and the Government of Nepal [22], IDPs in Mucwini transit camp (northern Uganda) and Congolese refugees in Nakivale refugee settlement (southwestern Uganda), former child soldiers facing stigma and psychosocial adjustment issues in Sierra Leone [23], and children with disabilities in Western Darfur [24].

Over time, extensive literature has developed that explains the role of community engagement programs. Community-based approaches have been suggested to engage the local population for need assessments and strategies. Consequently, community-based vulnerability and need assessments for child welfare and protection have been well-recognized by the developmental sector [25–27]. Another notable study has highlighted the community approach through a pilot project catering to child protection services in China [28]. In the absence of state apparatus, the actors involved in community engagement activities serve as a substitute to care for families with vulnerable children. McBeath et al. [29] comprehensively explore the role of institutions in ensuring effective child welfare, which is highly dependent upon the organizational structure, management style, and availability of human resources. It is also important to understand that public agencies, mandated with child welfare, interact with multiple other organizations belonging to both the public and private sectors that provide services and regulation and are affected by the policies made at the federal or provincial level.

2.2. Post-conflict Environments and CIMIC

Various studies have emphasized the importance of the humanitarian aspects of CIMIC arrangements in conflict and post-conflict settings, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses [30–32]. Given the unique challenges of these contexts, CIMIC has become essential to achieving sustainable peace and development [33–35]. Cook and Yogendran [36] have argued that CIMIC must identify agents and actors with whom to develop functional relationships and establish wider partnerships in the post-conflict environment. Jenkins [37] presented a joint venture approach to CIMIC in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo through the Peace Support Operations (PSOs), which focused on ef-

efficient, grassroots-level survey-based aid allocation. This approach combined the assessments of military personnel (both in patrols and headquarters) and civil representatives from all major international organizations operating in the countries.

Over time, CIMIC has evolved to meet the needs of populations undergoing trauma due to conflicts. For this purpose, military peacekeepers undergo necessary training to assist peacebuilding while encompassing all post-conflict scenarios (see modules of UN-CIMIC STM 2014). The training aims to prepare them for liaison tasks (information sharing, planning, reporting), military support related to civil assistance in complex emergencies, community support, cultural awareness, conflict resolution, Protection of Civilians (POCs), Security Sector Reforms (SSR), and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) [38].

3. Methodology

In order to gain an understanding of the vulnerabilities of children in NMDs, a qualitative methodology was employed in this research. Official documents, official websites and assessment reports [39–41] were consulted to analyze the existing policy-related infrastructure and its limitations to establish the case. The inclusion criterion for documents was reference material from organizations that have been delegated the mandate of child protection and welfare through legislative and administrative authority (i.e. FATA Secretariat) or are directly involved in working with vulnerable children for risk and needs assessments over the past two decades, including OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNHCR.

This study focused on exploring the concept of vulnerabilities of children and their psychological and physical needs, with a particular focus on entire generations of conflict-torn children who were displaced and exposed to perpetual vulnerabilities as IDPs. The lens used to establish protective mechanisms or institutional arrangements in the form of new Child Protection Units (CPUs) for each NMD was grounded in CIMIC. The fundamental role of CIMIC actors and PDMA-KP in assessing future needs and risks of children in the NMDs was also explored in this study.

3.1. Data Collection Method

The research employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the vulnerabilities of children in NMDs, given the absence of any previously successful model for needs assessment. Primary data was generated through ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with military officers, academicians, and individuals affiliated with various NGOs, all with diverse experience working in NMDs. The pandemic restricted our access to potential participants, limiting our sample size and making it challenging to obtain a diverse range of perspectives [42]. During the selection process, preference was given to respondents with extensive years of experience and those belonging to or residing in different NMDs. Prior to the interviews, respondents were provided

with a project information sheet that elaborated the concept of vulnerabilities, the issue of unattended children, referred to as ‘children at risk’ by the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010* [43], and the scope of the research.

3.2. Data Analysis and Ethical Consideration

Prior to conducting the interviews, each respondent was informed about the audio recordings that would be made. The interviewees were probed to provide specific details in response to the questions. To facilitate analysis, the audio recordings were transcribed and reviewed in detail. An interpretative analysis, mainly through emic coding [44], was performed. This coding process allowed the research to elaborate on the patterns in responses and trace their connections with contextual realities by considering the perspectives, observations, and interactions of the respondents.

During conversations with the respondents, several themes were identified, and the conceptual difference between child rights and welfare was thoroughly discussed. The respondents specifically highlighted the impact of terrorism, military operations, and internal displacements on children, correlating these issues with their historical context. They also provided detailed information about the institutional infrastructure available for child protection and welfare in immediate post-conflict scenarios. Furthermore, the changing yet crucial roles of various stakeholders in the post-merger environment were explained while discussing the impacts of crises. Finally, the necessity of developing new CPUs and the mandate of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA-KP), through its Gender and Child Cell, was unequivocally recognized [45]. Throughout the research undertaking, high ethical standards and impartiality were maintained to ensure the security of the respondents. Most importantly, the confidentiality of the respondents’ identity was assured.

4. Theoretical Framework

In post-merger NMDs, the CIMIC arrangements demand a rigorous framework that moves away from securitization/de-securitization debates, which are more compelling and valid during the post-conflict phase. Instead, a focus on human security dimensions that incorporates child welfare and protection efforts in their social sector reforms is necessary. The role of armed forces has been advocated as that of a bridge between society and state, based on their interactions with society [46,47]. This is because the subjective perception of the army and its objective content, i.e., military policy, do not always coincide [48].

In the case of post-conflict NMDs, the armed forces have effectively contributed to the rehabilitation of vulnerable children through the reconstruction of basic infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, houses, and roads. Based on these blueprints, the long-term vision of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child

Protection and Welfare Commission (KPCPWC) in establishing CPUs in NMDs requires effective and efficient governance models managed and monitored by civil administration. However, the spatial knowledge mandatory for needs assessment of children in NMDs remains incomplete. As a result, the resultant policies may prove to be ineffective due to the absence of organizational capacity required for attending to human security facets. Gender and Child Cell, PDMA-KP is overseeing multi-sectoral data generation and associated policy formulation and has the capacity to fill the said gap.

The arrangement between KPCPWC and the Cell needs to be based on 'Services Management Theory' [49], which looks after the distinctiveness of the service experience and the role of the users as the shaper, co-producer, and evaluator of the service experience. Through this 'public service-dominant' logic of public services delivery and management, the KPCPWC can manage activities and processes concerned with the transaction of intangible benefits and where ownership of these activities is not transferred, thus providing children with an integrated and comprehensive welfare and protective experience.

5. The Case for CIMIC in erstwhile FATA

5.1. FATA Terrorism and Humanitarian Crises

The former semi-autonomous FATA region (see Figure 1) remained the epicenter of protracted terrorism and violent extremism. To counter this menace, the government of Pakistan and its military initiated several military operations to establish normality in the region [50,51]. Scholars widely agree that certain structural conditions, such as regional inequality, poverty, underdevelopment, spatial exclusion, and ill-governance [52,53], are main drivers of terrorism [54]. These conditions led to the development of the context as the 'most dangerous place' [55]. Due to the terrorism, subsequent military operations, and internal displacements, the local population was exposed to severe humanitarian crises.

The protracted conflict and internal displacement had severe consequences for the physical infrastructure (education and health), dismantled social capital, loss of livelihood, increased food insecurity, and poverty, which impacted children [56]. Children in the conflict zones experienced horrendous violence, propaganda, and its socio-economic consequences, severely impacting their psychological well-being. Additionally, Internally Displaced Children (IDC) from the former FATA faced a sense of alienation, deprivation, and profiling (i.e., suspect community). This aspect has been well identified with regards to marginalized families, with limited socio-economic resources, in the form of "health hazards, malnutrition, lack of physical security and psychological trauma ([57], p. 182)." It has been further added that unattended children, i.e. those living in "unprotected shelters or on the streets, are often at risk of being forced into child labor and early marriages ([57], p. 182)." Although, peace has largely been restored in the NMDs, the immediate post-conflict environment, marked by a politico-legal vacuum and lack of institutionalization, exposed the authorities to enormous challenges at various fronts.

5.2. Child Welfare: Organisational and Institutional Context

In the context of NMDs, the historical background highlights a grim situation regarding child rights, protection, and welfare. Mahmood [58] described the absence of policies and institutional mechanisms for child rights and emphasized the intentional disregard for policy-making, resulting in a neglectful child rights status concerning international conventions. The Social Sector Department (SSD) [59], although responsible for operational oversight under the former FATA Secretariat, introduced its first FATA Child Protection Policy in 2012 [60,61]. The policy aimed to establish a Social Welfare Complex across tribal agencies and a dedicated FATA Commission to lead the protection and welfare of children [62].

Additionally, the SSD established a Child Protection and Coordination Unit to devise "policy and institutional reforms for child protection" and "mechanism for data and information management, including evidence collection, monitoring of different departments' interventions, and situation analysis of child protection issues ([61], p. 232)." However, Shujaat [61] noted that no noticeable on-ground progress was observed, even in areas unaffected by terrorism-related incidents. Consequently, the five child protection centers established in Safi Tehsil of Mohmand in 2010 later became ineffective and were closed due to a shortage of budget.

The overall ineffective policy-making journey culminated in the recommendation report of the Committee on FATA Reforms, 2016 [63], and the subsequent historical merger of erstwhile FATA agencies with KP, SSD into KP Civil Secretariat in 2019, and erstwhile FATA Secretariat wholly subsumed into KP Secretariat in 2020 [64]. However, there is currently no child protection and welfare mechanism, in the form of a commission or authority, for the children of NMDs in the post-merger scenario. The post-merger scenario implies that all the rules and regulations applied to any other district of KP will also apply to the NMDs. Therefore, it can be inferred that the child protection and welfare of NMDs fall within the administrative ambit of the KPCPWC until stated otherwise. The said Commission was established in 2011 by the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010* [43] and currently covers multiple areas of the province to cater to the needs of 'children at risk. The Act provides legal foundations and administrative guidelines (see *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010, Section 2* [1] and *Section 9*) or establishing a CPU for a local area, i.e., district level.

Nonetheless, all the NMDs have their own geographical and demographic realities on which the administrative needs of the population are based. The merged districts differ even in terms of the nature of conflicts and the overall experience of the terrorism-induced crises faced by their populations. Moreover, considering the unique immediate post-conflict environment, the role of the military cannot be disregarded, particularly during the transition period (i.e., from conflict to peace). Hence, there is a niche for CIMIC arrangement that, through its experience and expertise, can act as a cornerstone for any viable future institutional infrastructure for child welfare in these NMDs.

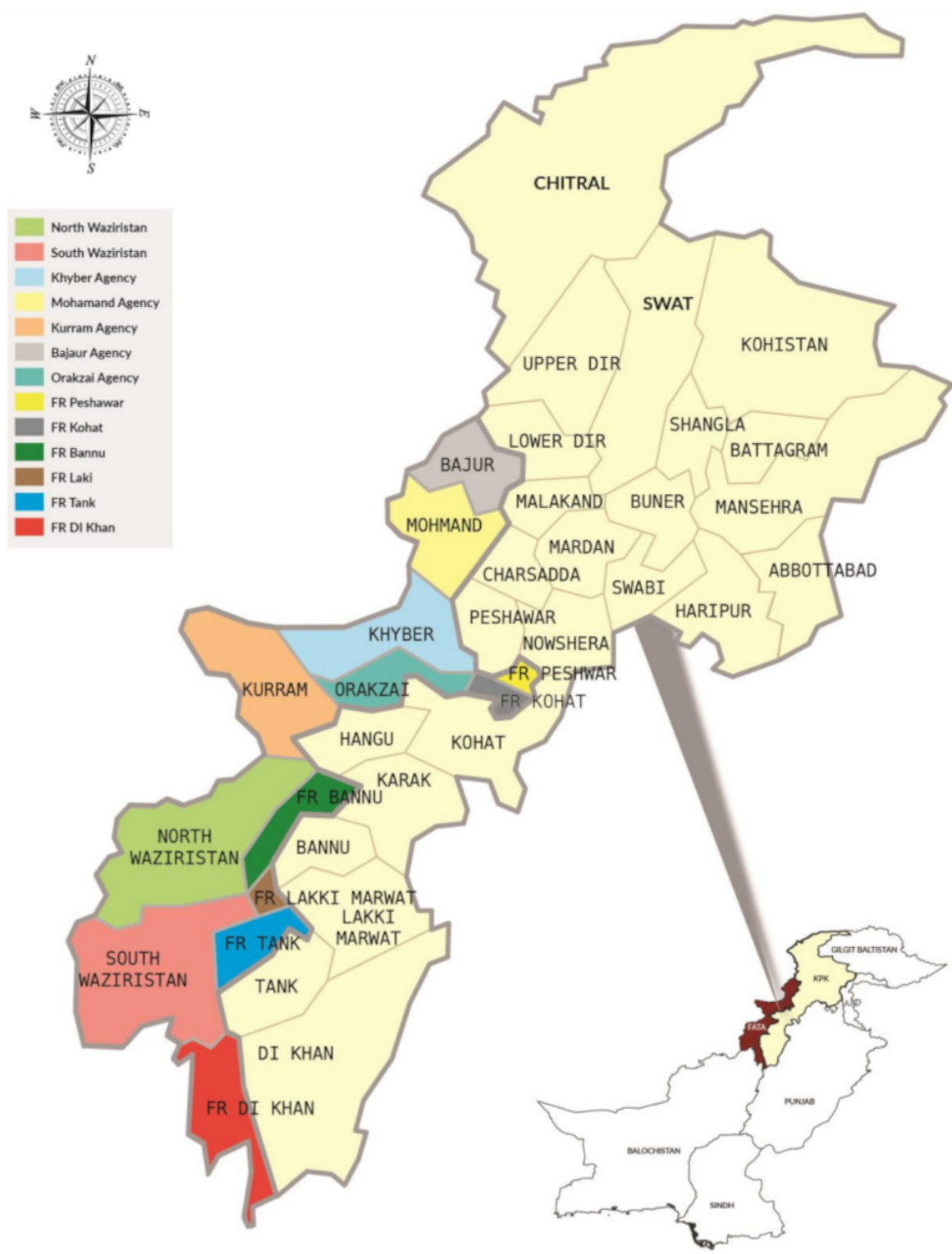


Figure 1. Annual Security Report (2020), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tribal District [65].

6. Findings

6.1. Vulnerabilities of Children

In regard to children's vulnerabilities within the context of NMDs, several respondents emphasized the multifaceted nature of factors or characteristics that make children 'at risk', and the framing of vulnerabilities within the context of conflict, terrorism, and consequent impacts on children. The previously discussed *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act* [43] also refers to the term 'children at risk', defined as any child "in need of protection, orphaned, disabled, belonging to migrant workers, working/begging on streets/living in abject poverty, without any ostensible means of sustenance, having parents/guardians unfit/incapacitated to exercise control over child, living in immoral environment, born out of wedlock, left deserted", abused and manipulated, and juvenile delinquents.

Respondents noted that the conceptual understanding of the distinction between child protection and welfare was missing in available policies both in the erstwhile FATA and post-merger NMDs. Therefore, the terms were used interchangeably, signifying the same meaning. The difference between the two and redressal through this lens was highly ignored and unexplored, previously, even in the limitedly available policies (personal interview, 21 August 2020).

In their account of events, respondents generally agreed that terrorism, military operations, and internal displacements have collectively affected children by exposing them to direct vulnerabilities, such as impacts on their health, education, and psychological well-being. On the other hand, cultural or identity profiling, stereotyping, children's overall exposure and growth in ill-governed spaces, and informal or illicit economies can be further constituted as drivers of indirect impacts (personal interview, August 11, 2020).

Few respondents representing the development sector pointed towards some demographically varying data regarding NMDs' children vulnerabilities. For instance, one respondent revealed that age and gender must be considered in order to assess the children's vulnerabilities or the impacts of terrorism and related consequences (personal interview, 10 August 2020). It was mentioned that children aged 0-5 years faced several health issues, particularly lack of vaccination and nutritional deficiencies, while children aged five years and above faced difficulties in accessing educational facilities.

Another respondent shared insights concerning the conflict-induced displacement of children from South Waziristan (primarily shifted to the settled districts of Bannu or Tank) and the grave impacts on their education. Although the Pashtun ethnic identity dominates both the settled districts, however, the children, in particular, faced serious dialect issues while adjusting and/or assimilating into the new 'host' environment, making the substitute educational arrangements ineffective for them (personal interview, 06 August 2020). Furthermore, the impacts of terrorism on the education system varied from one district to another. The

available schools were either too far off or destroyed by the terrorist groups [65]. Overall, educational activities were notably halted in the case of female children, thus becoming a prime target of restrictions due to terrorist threats to parents [66]. Another respondent claimed:

"Children attending madrassas were at the mercy of a religious ideology with no monitoring by parents or any state-led institution to regularize them and generally exposed to propaganda with insurgents disseminating anti-military and anti-state false narrative, thus impacting their psychological health" (personal interview, 15 August 2020).

Furthermore, the restricted and confined areas of IDPs camps and makeshift arrangements themselves became sites of psychological burden as children were accustomed to segregated yet spacious abodes of living in their areas of residence. Similarly, several children moved to urban environments that proved challenging for them. For example, children migrating from Kurram towards Hangu and Orakzai towards Kohat faced difficulties while moving along with the children of these areas.

6.2. Pre-existing Institutional Arrangements and CIMIC for Child Welfare

Regarding institutional arrangements in NMDs, this research confirms that child protection and welfare have been highly ignored areas of concern, with a remarkable difference between policies on paper and those practiced. Several respondents believe that despite the establishment of SSD, effective and viable institutional infrastructure to cater to the needs and vulnerabilities of children is limited or negligible. One respondent mentioned, "administrative and policy-making bodies such as the Planning and Development Department or the erstwhile FATA Secretariat differed in their priorities" (personal interview, 19 August 2020). As a result, the allocation of funds, their spending, protective mechanisms, and even the utilization of available vulnerability or needs assessment reports varied during policy-making and implementation. Nevertheless, national development organizations like Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) [67], UN organizations, NGOs, and INGOs (e.g., International Red Cross) provided immense support through their programs, which involved certain components for children (personal interview, 24 August 2020).

Another respondent narrated that "the cultural system in the former tribal agencies served as another factor, and it is difficult to directly intervene despite the concerning conditions for children" (personal interview, 15 August 2020). Therefore, a noticeable number of respondents realized that the mere presence of institutional infrastructure and arrangement for child protection is insufficient until cultural acceptability is developed, or community-driven programs are developed within the existing structures of the welfare agenda.

Nevertheless, a few respondents quoted that the comprehensive 'FATA Sustainable Return and Rehabilitation Strategy 2015' [68] (commonly called R&R Strategy), for-

mulated by UNDP, was extensively incorporated by the concerned government organizations. The strategy provided a guideline to introduce limited health reforms, educational policies (e.g., the construction of schools, hiring of teachers, etc.), psychological or nutritional awareness programs, local government initiatives, and needs-based rehabilitation (personal interview, 17 August 2020).

Similarly, considering the cultural bindings and tribal divisions, festivals and activities were arranged for children in consultation with the tribal elders at the village level, either in small stadiums or mosques for male children and vocational activities at home for female children by UN organizations. In this regard, 'Taleemi Islahi Jirga' (TIJ), ultimately engaging the youth in productive activities like gardening, sports and athletics, etc., was initiated (personal interview, 24 August 2020). The Pakistan military deployed throughout NMDs acted as a key player in this community engagement and development, thus, socially positioning itself within the security-development nexus. Like their civilian counterparts, the military operates through the existing social-tribal hierarchy. For instance, it involves *Malaks* or *Masharans* before any community-development related interventions (personal interview, 26 August 2020).

Apart from protecting development actors to facilitate their activities, the military itself has been highly proactive in carrying out development activities, including building educational institutes, orphan houses [69], scholarship programs, and organizing and facilitating several events to develop an environment within which children can return to normalcy/life. Likewise, viable educational institutions in the form of cadet colleges and Army Public Schools (APS) such as in Miranshah (North Waziristan) were established to adjust a reasonable number of children. After the clearance of active operations, security forces ensured protection to all schools in their areas of responsibility, and the Pakistan military's Quick Response Forces (QRFs) were made available for continuous surveillance (personal interview, 01 September 2020). Apart from these development-related activities, the Pakistan military has played an important role in providing humanitarian response during the displacement and rehabilitation phases, providing food and shelter, IDPs camp management, and safe return of children and families.

6.3. Role of Gender and Child Cell, PDMA, KP

Several respondents from both the military and development sectors emphasized on the pivotal role of the PDMA-KP, which, through its Gender and Child Cell, has the mandate to guard and tend to the affairs of 'children at risk'. This is accomplished through the thorough assessment of risk and needs in the NMDs. The Cell takes a holistic approach, rather than focusing on a few agenda-based projects, as was done in the past with limited or purpose-based statistics (personal interview, 24 August 2020). As a core civilian component for all future CIMIC arrangements, it can provide the base or groundwork upon which capacity-building and cooperation requirements of

new CPUs can be formulated for the post-merger NMDs (personal interview, 17 August 2020). The military component of the CIMIC can help overcome hurdles to provide protection cover for smooth working (personal interview, 26 August 2020). The respondents also believed that as being involved in all post-conflict phases as well as those of the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) cycle [70]— i.e. Prevention & Mitigation, Preparation, Response, and Recovery — the military can help in devising plans detailing the district-wise security and service needs, possible risks to which these children are exposed, and the mechanisms that can be employed to avoid the loss or to minimize it in NMDs.

At the same time, the civilian component can focus on institutionalizing this data-driven and evidence-based information for establishing risk-resistant CPUs, in particular, and more resilient future infrastructures related to children, in general. However, according to the respondents, a few necessary measures must be taken to fully utilize the benefits of this arrangement. According to the respondents, the Cell needs to focus on the children's needs, as identified in the needs assessment analyses, according to the weightage given to them by the recipients (i.e., children of NMDs). Secondly, considering the cultural realities, community engagement activities may be incorporated and formalized to increase the effectiveness and credibility of the projects. Lastly, considering the limited resources and capacity issues of government organizations, a focused approach by the managerial leadership is mandatory to avoid duplication of activities or the achievement of irrelevant or untargeted results.

7. Concluding Remarks

The children in NMDs are highly vulnerable due to immense exposure to adversities, primarily driven by terrorism, military operations, and internal displacement. The absence of a viable institutional infrastructure further exacerbates their vulnerabilities, both during the conflict and post-conflict environments. This paper proposed a holistic rehabilitation approach to ensure the generational transfer of peace, which addresses the multifaceted vulnerabilities and risk assessments.

Similar to the broader security-development nexus in NMDs, this research argued that child protection and welfare must also be functionalized through CIMIC, particularly during the immediate post-conflict and post-merger scenarios. Furthermore, it is important to consider that NMDs have certain socio-economic, demographic, and contextual realities, and therefore, context-specific and community-driven approaches need to be adopted regarding child welfare and protection plans, especially in the post-merger environment. In pursuance of this approach, the paper suggests that the future roles of stakeholders constituting the CIMIC cluster(s) in NMDs are profoundly dependent on the dynamics and demographic realities of that particular district.

Finally, the paper asserts that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010 assigns primary responsibility for catering to the needs of unattended and vulnerable children to the KPCPWC. However, the the PDMA, through its Gender and Child Cell, can play a crucial role in identifying the needs of children and conducting disaster risk assessments. Additionally, the PDMA can act as an advisory body before establishing new CPUs to address the vulnerabilities of children in these NMDs.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF Pakistan) for providing funding for this research. Additionally, we express our gratitude to all of the respondents for the erudite exchanges and invigorating engagement with them.

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