PREFACE

India is among world’s most terror-hit states according to the US State Department report (Krishnaswami, 2008). The year 2008 was a vindication of this increasingly dangerous trend. Terrorist attacks are examples of acute danger, requiring a process of assimilation of the experience in people’s understanding of the situation. However, this study is about those children who live in a place that features in any discussion of terrorism in India – Kashmir. The study is about children living with chronic danger, where blasts, encounters, soldiers with guns, crackdowns, tanks and curfews are situations that have stopped being acute, because they are so persistent. Living with chronic danger requires a different kind of coping, it needs accommodations. According to Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow (1991) living with chronic violence requires alteration of personality, changes in patterns of behaviour, articulation of ideological interpretations of the world that makes sense of the ongoing danger.

The present thesis is based on a research study of children living with political violence in Kashmir and it is in continuation of my M.Phil. Research on children’s construction of experiences in Srinagar and we must talk about that study to draw a logical connection of ideas that led to the present endeavour. The M.Phil. Study was a qualitative inquiry1 into how do children living with political violence construct their experiences, and how such constructions are related to their stress and coping experience with respect to a grenade explosion outside their school in Srinagar. That study was therefore restricted to a group of ten children in the age range of 11 to 16 years who had survived a grenade blast. The May 2005 grenade blast in front of a Srinagar school severely injured 25 school going children, from which ten were interviewed to understand their constructions of self, family, political ideology, experience of violence and their coping with the grenade explosion in particular and violence in Kashmir in general. The findings and insights from those constructions form the bedrock of the present study.

---

1 The M.Phil. study has been referred to in the text of the dissertation as ‘the qualitative study’. 
Coping with political violence in Kashmir: insights from the M.Phil. study

The findings showed that the stress-coping experiences of the children were influenced by their construction of self, family and political condition in Kashmir. For example, the children who perceived themselves as reserved were withdrawn and fearful and perceived more distressing changes in the family while coping with their experience. Because these children were reserved and shy they did not perceive social support in the form of attention from family and friends positively. For them excessive attention and care following the experience was an added source of stress whereas attention and care was perceived positively by children who constructed their self as outgoing. Similarly children who constructed their families as close, communicative and cohesive experienced facilitative and supportive reactions from the family while coping with the blast as compared to children who constructed their families as not close. Some children were severely injured due to the blast and needed operations and hospitalization. Such children expressed a greater change in their beliefs and attitude as compared to children who sustained minor or no injuries. The study showed that children were not passive victims of stress and instead made sense of the events in order to cope with them. Below is an illustration of one girl with splinter injuries whose narrative showed the process through which she resolved the discrepancy between her global belief of security and her appraisal of the grenade explosion that punctured this belief through a meaning making coping model introduced by Park and Folkman (1997).
Sania’s global belief that children were secure in Kashmir’s political violence was jolted when she appraised the grenade explosion in front of her school as a direct attack on children. Such a discrepancy along with the injuries sustained due to the blast resulted in stress reactions including crying, disturbed affect and ruminating. Sania sought to cope with this particular discrepancy by making sense of the event. The information she obtained from family, friends and community lead her to understand that it was a common phenomenon in the world. Her sense of surety that nothing bad could happen to children was replaced by accepting that whatever is destined will occur and that stepping out of the house meant anything could happen. This is how she changed her previous belief that children were

---

2 Model adapted from Park, 2005b, p. 709.
somehow cocooned from the violence to accept that some experiences were out of our control.

This and other findings of the M.Phil study indicated a presence of meaning making process by which children made sense of their self, family, political condition and experiences after the grenade explosion and it indicated a presence of resilience in children. These children were not unscathed by the violence, they had physical as well as psychological wounds but they were “doing okay” by using various means of coping and by social support from family and friends. The reason why among them some were performing better than others was influenced by their meaning making processes. The present study was designed therefore to understand resilience in children living in Kashmir and explain the role of religion and political meaning systems in mediating the relation between risks associated with living in Kashmir including exposure to political violence and a child’s behaviour.

The present research concern

“The resilience of adolescents living with political violence in Kashmir: role of religious meaning system and political ideology” is how we have titled our research concern, because we aimed to explain why some children do well while others succumb to the all pervading situation of political violence in Kashmir. We specifically tried to explain the role of meaning systems and ideologies in the process that led adolescents living in violent contexts to resilience or vulnerability. The thesis belongs to the wide field of “resilience research” and would be of interest to people wanting to understand the strength of human spirit in situations where violence is a social reality, not an aberration. Earlier certain places were identified with violence, but with the current augment of global terrorism, violence is fast becoming a social reality for many instead of few. Resilience unfortunately has become a political term, especially after the Mumbai terrorist attacks on 26th November, 2008. It was very disheartening to see people distancing themselves from being labelled as resilient because of a very common though very erroneous misconception of the term resilience as invulnerable. Resilience does not mean invulnerability. People who function well despite adversities are not untouched by the tribulation of the adversity; they are just able to maintain the balance within the storm. They too need support and understanding, they too need protection and
shelter, because a study of resilience paradoxically vindicates that there is no such person as invulnerable.

Chapterization of the dissertation

The chapter scheme of the thesis begins with three introduction chapters and methodology chapter followed by four results and discussion chapters and ending with a summarization and conclusion chapter.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the broad field of research on children and armed conflict. It lays down conceptual and methodological positions taken in designing the present study. It explains why resilience and not Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the focus of this study and it presents a review of literature of children and armed conflict studies.

The second chapter introduces the concept of resilience and resilience research, which is an alternative to the dominant illness ideology, also known as medical model, of understanding human behaviour in stressful contexts. It elaborates on the definitions and methodological concerns within the resilience research approach and reviews literature on children and armed conflict with respect to resilience.

The third chapter introduces political violence in Kashmir as the broad context for the present research. It briefly traces the historical roots of the conflict going on to describe the nature of political violence and its impact on children in Kashmir.

The fourth chapter presents the blueprint of the research, the methodology followed to answer the research questions. It includes the rationale, research questions and objectives and research design and explains how exactly we transformed our ideas into a research act.

The fifth chapter discusses the lived experiences of political violence for adolescents in Kashmir. It describes the experience of political violence with respect to range of exposure, nature or type of exposure and level of exposure. The chapter also identifies features of an adolescent’s context that make them vulnerable to exposure to political violence.

The sixth chapter describes the meaning systems and political ideologies of adolescents living in Kashmir. It identifies the type of meaning systems and political ideologies and also explores the interrelationships between risk factors and these cognitive frameworks.
The seventh chapter begins with a description of how resilience is defined within the socio-political context of Kashmir. It then describes the features of resilience and vulnerability of adolescents in Kashmir. Finally it identifies factors that predict resilience and vulnerability.

The eight chapter presents person based and variable based study of factors that predict resilience and vulnerability and describes the ways in which the risks, meaning systems and political ideologies interrelate with each other to predict resilience and vulnerability among adolescents in Kashmir.

Finally the ninth chapter summarizes the findings of the study, presents the conclusions, draws implications for designing interventions and states the limitations of the study.

The appendix includes the survey questionnaire.