

Misconceptions about the Relationship Between Militancy and Madrassahs in Swat

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Abstract:

The paper aimed to analyse the determinants of young militants' recruitment by the Taliban in Swat, Pakistan from 2007-2009. The research evaluated whether madrassas played a pivotal role in militant recruitment, as often quoted by the media or if recruitment was an outcome of multifaceted processes with various causes. The case files and detailed histories of 76 ex-militants belonging to Sabaoon (a rehabilitation and deradicalization centre based in Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) were studied using a mixed method approach. A content analysis was initially performed after which the qualitative data was statistically analysed to produce results. The findings revealed that madrassahs were not significantly involved in militant recruitment and other factors like family and social group influence as well as personal inclination also determined youth recruitment into the terrorist organization.

Keywords: Youth, Militancy, Radicalization, Madrassahs, Taliban, Swat

Introduction

Among the challenges faced by Pakistan was the mounting terrorist activity in district Swat which has a population of approximately 1.2 million and remained unstable since the 1990's when religious cleric Sufi Muhammad's Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) began to rebel against

the provincial government.¹ Although TNSM was outlawed by President Pervez Musharraf in 2001, Sufi Muhammad's son-in-law, Mullah Fazlullah, took control of TNSM and led the Taliban to take over Swat.² The Taliban caused unrest in Swat for several years and recruited and abducted children to strengthen their movement. After several failed peace agreements between the provincial government and the Taliban, in 2009, a military operation was started in Swat which eventually regained control of the district.³ Several civilians from Swat became internally displaced people (IDP's) and a significant number of children were implicated and apprehended for their involvement in militancy.

Militancy has become a global concern. Its effects are wide-ranging and pose ramification for Pakistan, its neighbouring states and beyond.⁴ Militancy has badly affected Pakistan and stands in comparison to the strife found in countries like Sudan and Iraq.⁵ Madrassahs or religious seminaries are increasingly implicated in the war against militancy. In fact, they were branded as "Weapons of Mass Instruction" in the early 2000's.⁶ Following 9/11, the association between these schools and militancy became stronger.⁷ Although none of the 9/11 attackers were educated at madrassahs, the link between terrorism and madrassahs soon became a part of political

¹ Luras, Helge, and Khalid Aziz. "Swat: Main causes of the rise of militancy." (2010), 1.

² Luras, 1.

³ Luras, 1.

⁴ Winthrop, Rebecca, and Corinne Graff. "Beyond Madrasas: Assessing the links between education and militancy in Pakistan." Center for Universal Education working paper 2 (2010), 7.

⁵ Winthrop, 7.

⁶ Fair, C. Christine. "The enduring madrasa myth." *Current History* 111, no. 744 (2012): 135-140, 135.

⁷ Bergen, Peter, and Swati Pandey. "The madrasa scapegoat." *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 115-125, 117.

discourse.⁸ An important point to consider is that madrassahs did not grow out of nowhere. Madrassahs were scarce during Pakistan's independence and began to increase exponentially after the Afghan-Soviet war because they were utilized as breeding grounds for training of the mujahideen. Around 1000 madrassahs were founded during the 1980's where jihadis sprouted to fight against the Soviets.⁹

Several assertions have been put forward to account for the rise of militancy in Pakistan. Increasingly highlighted is the assumption that Pakistan's lack of funding for the education sector has led to the growth of militancy.¹⁰ To mitigate this threat, the United States (US) endowed more than a \$100 million dollars to Pakistan's education sector.¹¹ Nonetheless, concerns about madrassahs and their supposed link to militancy continue to worry US policy makers today.¹²

The controversy surrounding madrassahs is undeniable and the debate that madrassahs contribute to violence cannot be dismissed altogether. Madrassahs were undoubtedly involved in the creation of the mujahidin in Afghanistan during the 1980's.¹³ It is also likely that a few madrassahs may have been involved in militancy in tribal areas.¹⁴ Madrassahs are also considered to be significant sources of suicide attackers, especially in

⁸ Bergen, 117.

⁹ Iqbal, Abdul Rauf, and Sobia Raza. "Madrassa reforms in Pakistan: A historical analysis." ISSRA PAPERS 7, no. I (2015), 28.

¹⁰ Winthrop, 1.

¹¹ Fair, The enduring madrasa myth, 135.

¹² Fair, The enduring madrasa myth, 135.

¹³ Winthrop, 18.

¹⁴ Winthrop, 18.

Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹⁵ For some militant groups like the Taliban and those propagating sectarian differences, madrassah students seem to be advantageous to their cause.¹⁶ Although most madrassahs are not linked to militancy, some religious seminaries do act as gathering places for militant groups to recruit participants.¹⁷

In addition to this, madrassahs and modern society cannot merge writ large. It is recognized that madrassahs do not inculcate modern values and education in their students.¹⁸ Furthermore, a minority of madrassahs are known to foster illogicality in students and engage in hate speeches.¹⁹ It is also likely that madrassah students hold views that would encourage them to participate in militancy.²⁰ Tariq Rahman's²¹ study on intolerance in Pakistani society adds to this viewpoint after conducting a survey on tenth grade students from public schools, private schools and madrassahs. He assessed their views about militant groups in the country, Pakistan's conflict with India and religious minorities' rights. Rahman²² discovered that madrassah-going students were more likely to support war and militancy while disregarding equal rights for religious minorities.

¹⁵ Fair, C. Christine. "Who are Pakistan's militants and their families?." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 1 (2008): 49-65, 62.

¹⁶ Fair, Who are Pakistan's militants and their families?, 59.

¹⁷ Fair, C. Christine. "Militant recruitment in Pakistan: A new look at the militancy-madrasah connection." *Asia policy* 4, no. 1 (2007): 107-134, 108.

¹⁸ Bergen, 118.

¹⁹ Fair, Militant recruitment in Pakistan, 108.

²⁰ Fair, Who are Pakistan's militants and their families?, 62.

²¹ Rahman, Tariq. "Pluralism and Intolerance in Pakistani Society: Attitudes of Pakistani Students Towards the Religious 'Other,'." *New Perspectives on Pakistan* (2007): 122, 29.

²² Rahman, 29.

Literature Review

Several studies have sought to debunk the various assumptions associated with madrassahs. For example, Bergen and Pandey²³ examined 79 terrorists who were responsible for anti-West attacks (September 11 attacks, Africa embassy bombings, Bali nightclub bombings and London bombings). Their findings revealed that the individuals were highly educated and rarely belonged to madrassahs. In fact, madrassah enrolment accounted for only 11% of the sample.²⁴ Bergen and Pandey²⁵ found that some of the terrorists had either completed their doctoral degrees or were in the process of obtaining one, and most of them went to universities in the West. Most university-educated terrorists had opted to study Engineering, suggesting that initiating terrorist attacks involves technical knowledge and skills which are rare in madrassah students.²⁶ This is reiterated by Fair²⁷ who studied the notebooks of militants in Kashmir, which were mostly written in English, and found technical and mathematical instructions about making explosives. Such technical dexterity could not have possibly been the work of a madrassah-going student.

Bergen and Pandey's (2006) findings are similar to the results assimilated by researchers such as Krueger and Maleckova²⁸, and Berrebi.²⁹ Krueger

²³ Bergen, 117.

²⁴ Bergen, 118.

²⁵ Bergen, 118.

²⁶ Bergen, 118.

²⁷ Fair, *Militant recruitment in Pakistan*, 121.

²⁸ Krueger, Alan B., and Jitka Malečková. "Education, poverty and terrorism: Is there a causal connection?." *Journal of Economic perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 119-144.

²⁹ Berrebi, Claude. "Evidence about the link between education, poverty and terrorism among Palestinians." *Peace economics, peace science and public policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 18-53.

and Maleckova³⁰ examined the correlation between lack of education, poverty and inclination towards terrorist activity by assessing the biographical data of slain Hezbollah members. They discovered that participation in Hezbollah was determined by higher education and higher standards of living. They concluded that terrorist groups prefer those who have university degrees because high educational attainment shows an individual's determination and motivation to succeed in their cause.³¹ Berrebi³² examined whether lack of education could determine an individual's inclination towards terrorism by analyzing the biographies of Hamas members in Israel. He found that individuals who became suicide bomb attackers were more likely to be educated and concluded that individuals who are highly educated tend to join terrorist groups.³³ Further findings by Marc Sageman³⁴ also add to the literature. He suggests that students studying in the West are more likely to become terrorists because they feel isolated and discriminated against in their countries.

These findings stand in stark contrast to assertions that higher education and higher standards of living should stop individuals from engaging in violence. Beuno de Mesquita's³⁵ theoretical model provides an explanation for all conflicting findings regarding madrassahs. He suggests that militant groups require certain attributes from their militants and recruit only those whose qualities match their needs. Such attributes include a potential militants' educational attainment, previous work experience and social

³⁰ Krueger, 120.

³¹ Krueger, 122.

³² Berrebi, 1.

³³ Berrebi, 38.

³⁴ Sageman, M. "Understanding Terror Networks,. University of Pennsylvania." (2004).

³⁵ De Mesquita, Ethan Bueno. "The quality of terror." American journal of political science 49, no. 3 (2005): 515-530.

standing in their communities.³⁶ Militant groups choose higher-quality recruits when there is more supply than demand and in times of national economic crises, more high-quality recruits apply for positions in militant groups because they seldom find employment opportunities elsewhere.³⁷ Therefore, even if madrassah students are interested in jihad, militant groups will only select individuals who they deem better-suited to their needs, and this may exclude madrassah students from the equation altogether.³⁸ Hence, rather than questioning whether madrassahs produce terrorists or not, it is better to analyze the militant groups themselves and assess the conditions under which they operate, and instead of associating all madrassahs with militancy, it is far more constructive to first consider the requirements of militant groups.³⁹

Madrassahs are heavily misconstrued even when it comes to their definition.⁴⁰ For example, madrassahs display significant differences between various cities and countries, madrassah students can be day scholars or boarders and madrassahs can have a general syllabus or they can solely be religious and attached to mosques.⁴¹ Most analysts researching the militancy-madrassah connection do not take such diversity into account and erroneous assumptions and data are twofold in such research. For example, Jessica Stern (2000) claimed that Pakistan's madrassahs are terrorist factories, although her data was solely based on Deobandi madrassahs who are known to have jihadist sympathies.⁴² Misconceptions further arise with

³⁶ De Mesquita, 515.

³⁷ De Mesquita, 515.

³⁸ Fair, Militant recruitment in Pakistan, 119.

³⁹ Fair, Militant recruitment in Pakistan, 120.

⁴⁰ Bergen, 119.

⁴¹ Bergen, 120.

⁴² Fair, The enduring madrasa myth, 135.

regard to the number of madrassahs existing across the country. Following 9/11, the International Crisis Group estimated one-third of Pakistani students to be enrolled at madrassahs. The ICG's claim was based on flawed data provided by Pakistan's Minister of Religious Affairs who could not have possibly known the enrollment rates for madrassah students because no such calculations have been formally conducted.⁴³ The popular media has estimated madrassah enrollment in Pakistan to range from 500,000 to two million children and such estimates have been established without any empirical backing.⁴⁴ However, Winthrop and Graff⁴⁵ assert that there are definitely fewer madrassahs in Pakistan than previously speculated.

Growing Youth Militancy in Pakistan

Concerning the madrassah-militancy connection, it is asserted that Pakistan is increasingly challenged by growing youth militancy. The population surge in developing countries has led to an increase in the recruitment of vulnerable young militants.⁴⁶ Pakistan's youth cohort accounts for 60% of the country's entire population which makes increasing militancy in this age group an alarming prospect.⁴⁷ Terrorist groups prefer young militants for their operations mainly because of monetary advantages like the low-cost associated with recruiting and training children. Furthermore, children are considered to be compliant and controllable, and are more likely to be loyal

⁴³ Fair, The enduring madrasa myth, 136.

⁴⁴ Fair, Militant Recruitment in Pakistan, 111.

⁴⁵ Winthrop, 16.

⁴⁶ CRIME, UN. "Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System." (2017).

⁴⁷ Yusuf, Moeed. "Prospects of youth radicalization in Pakistan." Brookings, Analysis Paper 14, no. 7 (2008): 1-27, 2.

towards group leaders which makes their recruitment easier.⁴⁸ Such alarming prospects of youth militancy make it imperative for effective counter extremism strategies and prevention measures to be employed for this age group.

SWAaT (Social Welfare, Academic and Training) for Pakistan is a non-profit organization that promotes initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism among youth living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁴⁹ The organization has rehabilitated young males from Swat at a rehabilitation centre called Sabaoon (Pashto word translating to “first ray of light at dawn”). Initiated by the Pakistan army, Sabaoon aimed to deradicalize young militants who had been recruited by the Taliban in Swat. SWAaT launched its project, the Monitoring Centre (MC), in Mingora, Swat during November 2011 to deliver reintegration support to Sabaoon graduates who had been involved in militancy. The MC was established to ensure that reengagement into violent extremism would not occur. By December 2018, Sabaoon was successful in reintegrating 211 individuals and by May 2019 the MC discontinued monitoring of 39 of these reintegrated youth. The current study researched a sample from Sabaoon’s reintegrated population to analyse why the youth in Swat joined the Taliban. The study aimed to evaluate whether madrassah enrolment played a significant role in youth militant recruitment or if recruitment was a multifaceted process with various causes.

⁴⁸ CRIME, UN. "Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System." (2017).

⁴⁹ Peracha, Feriha N., Raafia R. Khan, Arooj Ahmad, Sadia J. Khan, Sahar Hussein, and Haroon Rashid Choudry. "Socio demographic variables in the vulnerable youth predisposed towards militancy (Swat, Pakistan)." *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 19, no. 3 (2012): 439-447.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was utilised for this research, including a qualitative content analysis and quantitative frequency analysis. A mixed methods approach was preferred due to the descriptive nature of the data being analysed. In addition to this, it was decided that combining the two approaches would yield more comprehensive and in-depth findings.

Participants

Data from 76 individuals were recruited from a population of 211 reintegrated individuals. The inclusion criterion was madrassah attendance. The mean age of the participants was 15.26 years at the time of induction to Sabaoon. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured for this study and participants' names are not revealed.

Materials

Information about the participants such as their age, education, socioeconomic status, father's presence, mode of involvement, type of training at camp and reasons for joining militancy were extracted from their individual case files which detailed their histories.

Strategy of Analysis

A content analysis was initially conducted for this research. The researcher extracted information from individual case files. Each reintegrated individual's age, education, socio-economic status, father's presence, mode of involvement, type of training at camp and reasons for joining the

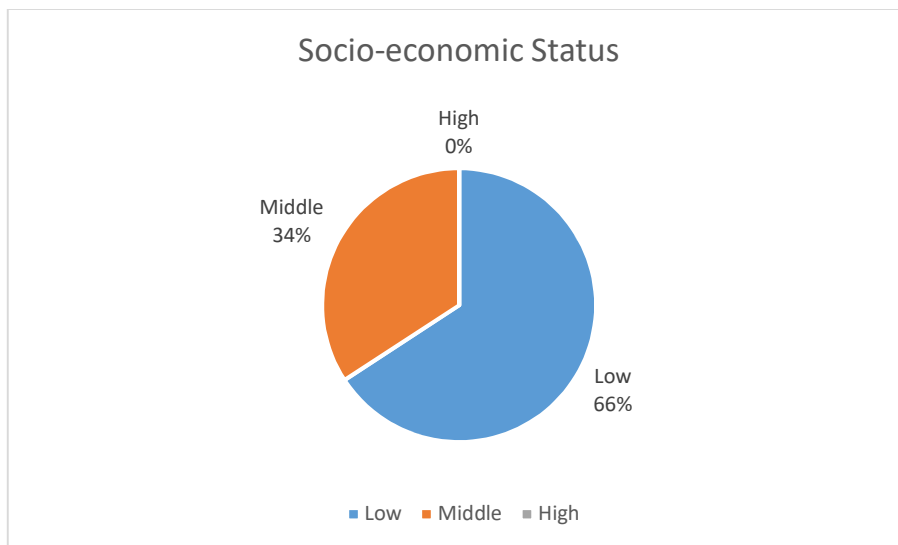
militants, was noted next to their code. The data was put into statistical analysis software (SPSS) and a frequency analysis was performed.

Results

The militants' socio-economic status (SES) was divided into three categories. 50 militants belonged to a low SES, 26 belonged to a middle SES and no militants belonged to the high SES category (See Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-economic Status

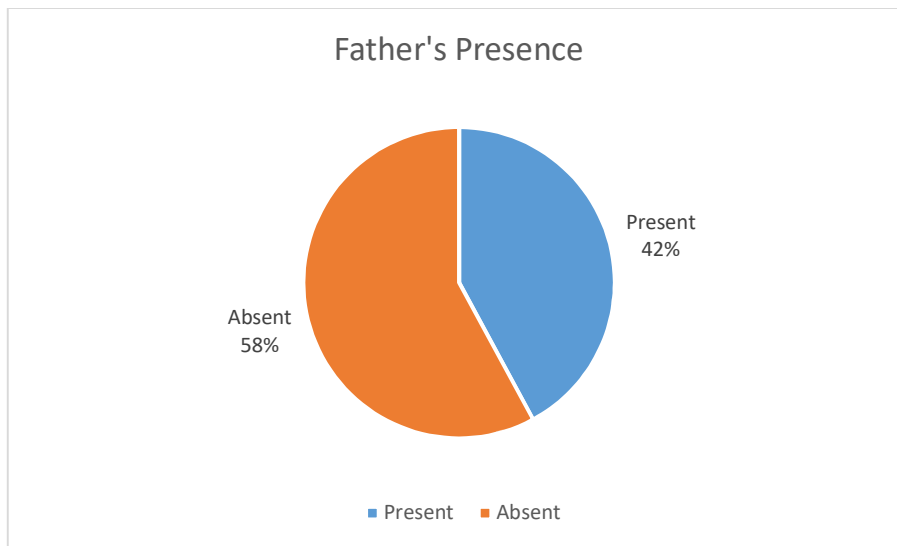
SES	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Low	50	65.8 %
Middle	26	34.2 %
High	0	0 %



Father's presence was divided into two categories. 32 militants had fathers who were present in their households during the militants' involvement and 44 militants had fathers who were absent during the militants' involvement (See Table 2).

Table 2: Father's Presence

Father's Presence	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Present	32	42.1%
Absent	44	57.9%

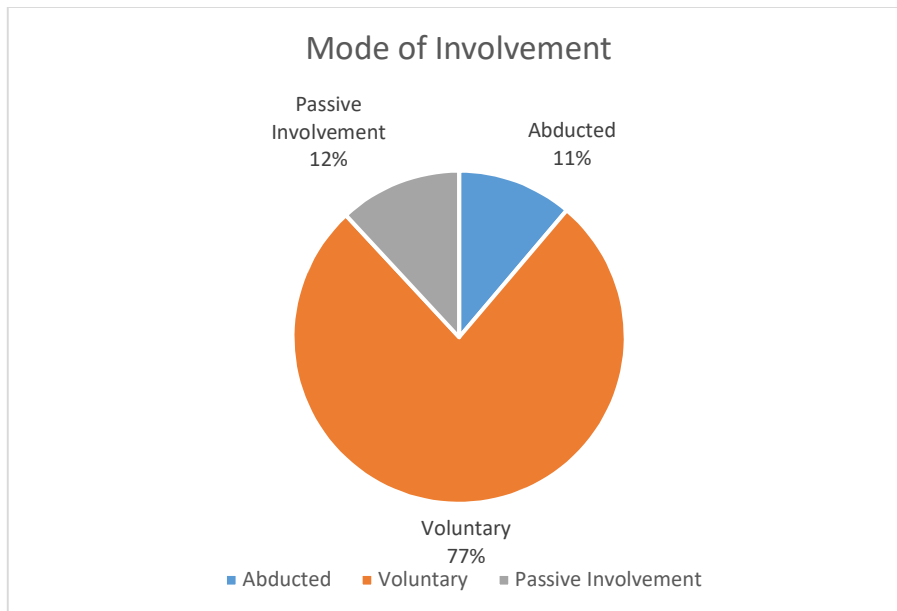


The militants' mode of involvement was divided into three categories. *Abducted* included those individuals who had been forced into militancy unwillingly, *voluntary* included those who had joined militancy willingly and *passive involvement* included those individuals who had no active involvement in militancy but were vulnerable. Out of the sample, only nine

individuals had been abducted by the Taliban militants whereas 58 individuals had joined the militants voluntarily. Nine individuals had no active involvement in militancy (See Table 3).

Table 3: Mode of Involvement

Involvement	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Abducted	9	11.2%
Voluntary	58	76.9%
Passive Involvement	9	11.9%

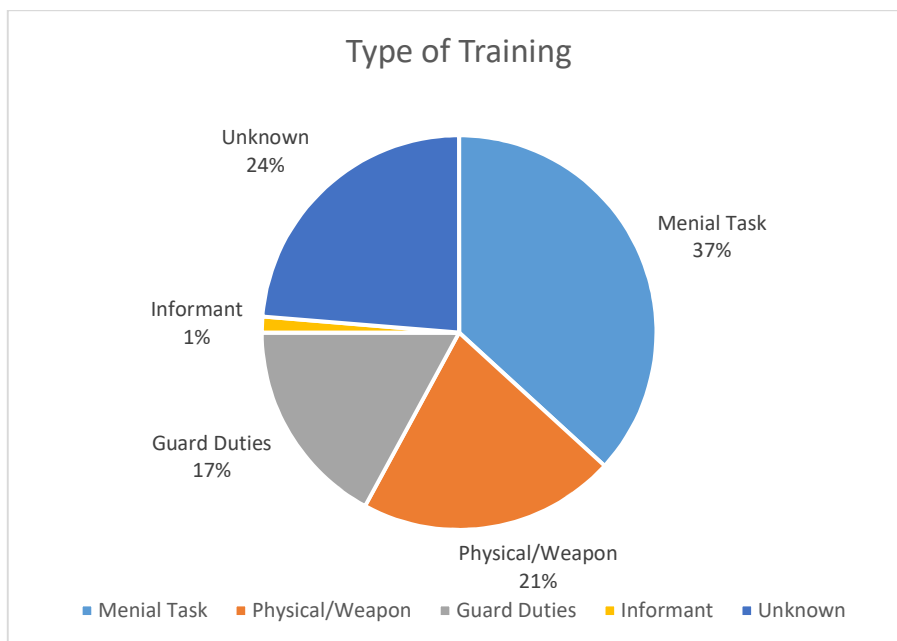


The type of training the militants had received at camp was divided into five categories. 28 individuals had performed menial tasks such as cooking, washing dishes and clothes, cleaning rooms and collecting food. 16 individuals had received physical and weapon training which also included

suicide bombing training for some individuals. 13 militants had performed guard duties which involved patrolling various camps and stations of the Taliban with weapons. One militant was an informant for the Taliban. 18 individuals' type of training remained unknown due to unavailable data (See Table 4).

Table 4: Type of Training

Training	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Menial Task	28	36.8%
Physical/Weapon Training	16	21.1%
Guard Duty	13	17.1%
Informant	1	1.3%
Unknown	18	23.7%



The reasons behind why the militants joined the Taliban were divided into five major categories which were then separated into subcategories. 17 individuals had been either impressed by the Taliban's style, power and ideology or convinced by the messages they conveyed through F.M. Radio and sermons. The other 17 individuals were influenced by their social group into joining militancy. Nine of them were influenced by their peers, five were influenced by their community members and three were influenced by their relatives. 20 individuals joined militancy because of their families. 14 were influenced by their family members to join the militant organization whereas six had joined the militants because of discord with their families. Nine individuals had been abducted and were forced to join hands with the militants. Only 13 individuals had joined militancy because of influence from the teachings at their madrassahs (See Table 5).

Table 5: Reasons for Joining Militant Group

Reason	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Convinced/Impressed	17	22.4%
Influence of social group	17	22.4%
Influence of peers	9	11.8%
Influence of community	5	6.6%
Influence of relatives	3	3.9%
Family	20	26.3%
Family influence	14	18.41%
Discord with family	6	7.89%
Abducted	9	11.8%
Influence of Madrassah	13	17.1%

Out of those individuals who were convinced by the Taliban's message or impressed by their style, 17 individuals had joined the militants voluntarily. Out of those who were influenced by their social group to join the militants, 14 had voluntary involvement, two were abducted and only one was not actively involved. Out of those who joined the militants because of their families, 12 had joined voluntarily and eight were not actively involved. All 13 of those who had joined the militants under influence from their madrassah had done so voluntarily (See Table 6).

Table 6: Mode of Involvement in Relation to Reasons for Joining the Militants

Reason	Abducted	Voluntary	Passive Involvement
Convinced/Impressed	0	17 (100%)	0
Influence of social group	2 (11.8%)	14 (82.4%)	1 (5.9%)
Influence of family	0	12 (60%)	8 (40%)
Influence of Madrassah	0	13 (100%)	0

Out of those individuals who were convinced by the Taliban's message or impressed by their style, five had performed menial tasks, five had received physical or weapon training, five had performed guard duty, one was an informant and one individual's type of training remained unknown. Out of those who were influenced by their social group into joining militancy, five had performed menial tasks, two had received physical or weapon training, five had performed guard duties and five individual's type of training remained unknown. Out of those who joined militancy because of their families, five had performed menial tasks, six had received physical or

weapon training, one had performed guard duty and eight individual's type of training remained unknown. Out of those who were abducted or joined because of fear, seven had performed menial tasks, one had performed guard duty and one individual's type of training remained unknown. Out of those who had joined militancy under influence from their madrassah, six had performed menial tasks, three had received physical or weapon training, one had performed guard duty and three individual's type of training remained unknown (See Table 7).

Table 7: Type of Training in Relation to Reasons for Joining Militancy

Reason	Menial Task	Physical/Weapon Training	Guard Duty	Informant	Unknown
Convinced/ Impressed	5(29.4%)	5(29.4%)	5(29.4%)	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)
Influence of social group	5(29.4%)	2(11.8%)	5(29.4%)	0	5(29.4%)
Influence of family	5(25%)	6(30%)	1(5%)	0	8(40%)
Abducted	7(77.8%)	0	1(11.1%)	0	1(11.1%)
Influence of Madrassah	6(46.2%)	3 (23.1%)	1(7.7%)	0	3(23.1%)

Discussion, Data Analysis and Findings of the Study

Do Madrassahs Lead to Militancy?

The purpose of analysing this data was to assess the causes of militancy in young militants and to ascertain whether madrassah played a conclusive role in propagating terrorism. It was found that madrassahs were not significantly linked to militancy as only 13 (17.1%) individuals from our sample of 76 militants who had attended madrassah joined the Taliban

because of influence from their respective madrassahs. Although all thirteen of these militants had joined militancy voluntarily, their involvement was not serious, and they were mostly involved in trivial menial tasks or guard duties. Only three individuals from these thirteen militants had serious involvement like weapon training. The study's findings are consistent with previous research. For example, Fair⁵⁰ surveyed 141 families of slain militants who had been waging jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir. She discovered that most of the slain militants had been recruited through their peer group, followed by religious gatherings and relatives. Madrassahs were the source of recruitment for only 13% of militants and had the same percentage as public schools and it was also found that only 23% of the slain militants had attended madrassah.⁵¹

Furthermore, Bergen and Pandey⁵², in their examination of the 79 terrorists involved in terrorist attacks, discovered that only 11% of the 79 terrorists had attended madrassahs, most of them were university graduates, and two had doctorate degrees. Of those who were university graduates, 48% attended universities in the West and 58% received scientific degrees.⁵³ Bergen and Pandey⁵⁴ concluded that madrassah-going students lack the skills required to orchestrate terrorist attacks or lead terrorist groups.

The Family: An Important Agent of Recruitment

In our sample, the militants' families played the most important role in promoting militancy, with 20 (26.3%) individuals being influenced into

⁵⁰ Fair, Who are Pakistan's militants and their families?, 49.

⁵¹ Fair, Who are Pakistan's militants and their families?, 54.

⁵² Bergen, 118.

⁵³ Bergen, 118.

⁵⁴ Bergen, 118.

joining the Taliban because of their families. This is consistent with previous research with Mariam Abou Zahab⁵⁵, an eminent academic researching militancy, positing the family to be an important contributing factor in militant recruitment. She discovered that most militants belonging to Lashkar-e-Taiba refused to join the organization without their family's consent.

57.9% of the participants in the present study had grown up without a father figure. This was shown in Botha's⁵⁶ study who interviewed 285 members of al-Shabaab, Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Lords' Resistance Army (LRA) in Kenya and Uganda to assess the root causes of militant recruitment. 44% of ADF members, 38% of LRA members, 18% of al-Shabaab members and 31% of MRC members had grown up without the presence of their fathers.⁵⁷ Botha posited the family to play an important role in an individual's life, especially during the early years and considered the family to instil essential fundamental beliefs in its members. She also suggested that the parental bond is essential in formulating a child's identity and that negative value formation has the capacity to carry far into adulthood.⁵⁸ Absent fathers, in particular, can make youth vulnerable towards militancy.

⁵⁵ Abou Zahab, Mariam. "I shall be waiting for you at the door of paradise': the Pakistani martyrs of the Lashkar-e Taiba (Army of the Pure)." *The Practice of War: The Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence* (2008): 133-158.

⁵⁶ Botha, Anneli. "Radicalization to terrorism in Kenya and Uganda: Political socialization perspective." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 5 (2015): 2-14, 2.

⁵⁷ Botha, 6.

⁵⁸ Botha, 6.

When Terrorism is Appealing

17 militants in our sample were either impressed by the Taliban's style, power and ideology or convinced by the messages they conveyed through F.M. Radio and sermons. Aziz⁵⁹ conducted a survey with district officials, community leaders and households to examine the causes of militancy in Swat. 68% of participants agreed that the sermons transmitted through F.M. Radio garnered support for militancy.⁶⁰ Aziz⁶¹ found that F.M. Radio successfully radicalized the population of Swat, causing a surge in donations for the Taliban. According to Botha⁶², secondary socialization through the media does promote militancy. She noticed in her study that several vulnerable individuals adopted the views of al-Shabaab after hearing the terrorist group's audio recordings.

Previous research explains why young militants are more likely to be impressed or convinced by terrorist activity. According to Botha⁶³, young individuals in their early and late teens are more **influenceable** and inclined towards radicalization and it is easier to draw the youth into nonconformist political actions because they are idealistically willing to initiate change and reform. Furthermore, some young individuals want to join a terrorist organization just for the thrill of it or because they seek adventure.⁶⁴ Joining a terrorist group also instils feelings of belonging, security and pride in young members. It has also been suggested that potential terrorist recruits

⁵⁹ Aziz, Khalid. Swat: The main causes of the breakdown of governance and rise of militancy. Regional Institute of Policy Research & Training, 2010, 5.

⁶⁰ Aziz, the main causes of the breakdown of governance and rise of militancy, 18.

⁶¹ Aziz, the main causes of the breakdown of governance and rise of militancy, 18.

⁶² Botha, 7.

⁶³ Botha, 11.

⁶⁴ Hudson, Rex A. "The sociology and psychology of terrorism: Who becomes a terrorist and why?." Library of Congress Washington Dc Federal Research Div, 1999, 44.

are young individuals who exhibit low self-esteem and are willing to adopt new identities.⁶⁵ Moreover, novelty-seeking and impulsivity are significant aspects of adolescent growth which can be linked to altering neural activity in young people.⁶⁶

Influence of the Social Group

The militants' social groups were also important agents of recruitment, with nine (11.8%) individuals being recruited through their peer group. Similar to this, Botha⁶⁷ found in her study that friends introduced 66% of MRC members, 38% of al-Shabaab members, 35% of ADF members and 31% of LRA members to their militant organizations. Nine (11.8%) militants in our sample were forced into militancy by the Taliban through either abduction or threats. According to the Office of the Special Representation of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict⁶⁸, children are forced into militancy through various ways like abduction and physical abuse. In fact, abduction seems to be a prominent method of recruitment that is routinely used by terrorist organizations.

⁶⁵ Olsson, Peter A. "The terrorist and the terrorized: Some psychoanalytic considerations." *The Journal of Psychohistory* 16, no. 1 (1988): 47.

⁶⁶ Dahl, Ronald E. "Adolescent brain development: a period of vulnerabilities and opportunities. Keynote address." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021, no. 1 (2004): 1-22.

⁶⁷ Botha, 7.

⁶⁸ Office of the Special Representation of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict. (n.d.). Child Recruitment and Use, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>

Conclusion

The findings of this research revealed various causes of young militants' recruitment in Swat by the Taliban. More importantly, it suggested how the youth militancy phenomenon cannot be generalized to one, often misunderstood, source like madrassahs. The results showed that madrassahs did not play a decisive role in militant recruitment in the current sample and there were more important agents of militant recruitment such as the family, the social group and the individual's own inclination and predisposition. It is essential to study all facets of a phenomenon in greater depth before making assumptions about the role of certain institutions like religious seminaries. Where certain madrassahs have spread militancy, it is imperative to assess and evaluate the underlying ideologies that led them towards it. This will facilitate us in gaining a more thorough understanding of the madrassah-militancy connection and limit irrational generalizations which ultimately do more harm than good.

Policy Recommendations

The youth of Pakistan are the nation's most important resource that militant organizations continue to hijack for malevolent purposes. It is important to understand the education system in vulnerable areas like Swat and reform deficits in the system accordingly. Students who join militant organizations are more likely to be school dropouts. They lack a sense of belonging and do not possess concrete goals. Militant organizations offer an alternative "in-group" for school dropouts to inculcate feelings of belonging. It is of utmost importance for schools to report dropouts to local authorities in vulnerable areas, especially if the students are absent after repeated

warnings. In addition to this, more technical training options should be made available in schools for children who are not academically oriented to decrease the dropout rate. Furthermore, schools should encourage activities such as sports' clubs and matches to keep students grounded and interested. Undoubtedly, the majority of school dropouts are routinely seen loitering in their communities out of boredom which makes them susceptible to being recruited by militant commanders and groups. Offering healthier and more productive alternatives at schools can decrease this risk substantially and aid young people to become responsible citizens of Pakistan.

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