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UNIVERSITY OF WAH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

The 'UW Journal of Social Sciences'(UWJSS) is a bi-annual publication of the University of Wah duly recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan in the category of Y. As an international journal, it is dedicated to understand the intricacies of research through empirical investigations and theoretical descriptions. UWJSS is a double-blind peer- reviewed journal that publishes quality articles in the field of Social Sciences.

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers

Another issue of UWJSS is in your hands, which is filled with innovative ideas and critical thinking to generate constructive academic debate. We have been able to retain the HEC recognition in Y category for the period 2022-23, which manifests our standards and hard work. However, we still aspire to be flying high to mark our recognition internationally.

We have brought changes in the Editorial Board to make it more inclusive and reputed. The direction and input of esteemed members are the real essence of our success. The sustained patronage of vice chancellor and financial support of HEC are the backbone of our continuous upward strides. And the devotion of our editorial team is remarkably outstanding. We are grateful to our national and international reviewers for their valuable quality time to uphold the standards and reputation of UWJSS.

We have made sure that our contributing authors have worked hard to make their research worth publishing, yet scores of papers have not been able to find space due to rigorous blind review process and editorial discretion. However, we hope that these authors would continue to bring innovation, critical thinking and incorporate fast-changing academic landscape to mark their presence yet again.

The feedback of our valued readers; researchers, practitioners and policy makers, is always welcome to make the UWJSS more competitive and reputed. We wish to produce better and better publications.

Have happy reading.

Editor-in-Chief

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Elevating Character and Nurturing Islamic Values to Develop Children's Personality in the Light of Seerah

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Abstract:

This article explains and discusses how the present-day educational institutes can foster high-quality ethics and ideals in children during meaningful instructions. Above all the Creator, Allah (the Merciful and the Beneficent) has chosen man and declared him as the crown of creation and His caliph on earth. Primary reason behind this honor is knowledge and wisdom. Necessary principles have been illustrated by the leader of worlds our Holy Prophet (S.A.W) to improve character and nurture desirable values by using this knowledge and wisdom. It can be consulted for guidance in different books of Seerah. By adopting these guiding principles, we can instruct individuals of society more efficiently and thoroughly. Thus, we can make our young ones better and responsible member of our society. Our ancestors used these basic principles and educated members of society to live their lives peacefully and blissfully. They transformed them into useful and responsible citizen according to the vision of Quran and Sunnah. We come to know that these set of rules and regulations that we find in books of Seerah played a vital and crucial role in developing the personality and character of children. It is desirable that we should adapt our educational system according to these golden principles to build a considerate, affectionate, and progressive society. These principles provide every individual an equal opportunity of success and progress; and this is the objective of teachings of our beloved Prophet (S.A.W). Therefore, individuals should be put right in the light of Seerat-e-Tayyaba.

Keywords: Islamic Values, Seerat-e-Tayyaba, ethics and ideals, meaningful instructions, Seerah, responsible citizen, Sunnah

Introduction:

A strong personality possesses the traits of high morals and elevated character which every society appreciates, and strives to inculcate these qualities in individuals. However, every community applies different measures to judge character. These measures are called values. It is necessary to preserve these values and transfer to next generation since it promises the continuity and prosperity of a society. Family is one of the many sources that help transfer values to the next generation.

Family takes the responsibility of preserving and passing values down to next generation. When a child moves from family to the new world of school, the transfer of values commences formally. Here, individual learns values about his own person, family, and society. Islamic values encompass the whole human life. Islam is a complete code of life. The Holy Quran describes this fact in the following words:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتِمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, and completed My favors upon you and chosen Islam as religion for you.”(Al Māidah 05: 03)

Muslims seek guidance from Holy Quran and Sunnah of Holy Prophet ﷺ in their everyday life. Islamic values comprise of these two sources. This short article discusses these two sources. Following question is fundamental to this research:

What guidance do we get from Seerat e Tayyaba to build and elevate children’s character and personality?

Research Methodology:

Exploratory and explanatory methods were used in this research. All the basic and important points were explained under the teachings of Holy Quran and Hadith.

Literature review:

Educating and training newborns is important for every nation, and every nation endeavors to achieve this goal according to its values and ideals. These ethics and values distinguish it from all the other nations. The word value denotes the importance, worth, demand and respect of something (Soykan,2007). Values are the shared and agreed upon rules and regulations for majority of a society. These values outline, define and influence the structure of a society (Naylor& Richard, 1987).

These are well thought out principles that guide and direct human life (Cooper, 2014). Every nation is distinct from every other nation due to its specific customs and habits. These habits and customs constitute values. Social values do not emerge automatically but are learned from infancy through whole life (Long, 1999). These are identified and conceptualized by using standards like community tradition and spirit, socialization, and social understanding (Akbas, 2004); and these moral beliefs and principle are adopted by a large portion of community to ensure the continuity of society (Ergil,1984). Nurturing Values through education is a sensible effort to inspire new generation to learn and assimilate the moral values in order to practice them as desired members of humanity (Johansson, 2018b). These common ideals define what is right and what is not for the society, and directly influence human conduct.

Importance of values:

Importance of social values is quite apparent. Values distinguishes a society and consist of basic human attitudes and norms (Cantan, 2008). These are helpful in harmonizing an individual to the society (Sen, 2008). A knowledgeable person moves to maturity having a strong sense of moral, social, and cultural values. Theodor Roosevelt maintains that educating an individual without moral values is the same as educating a threat for society. It means it would be a constant danger for peace and tranquility of the society. It is very crucial to maintain the existence of values in society for the comfort of individuals and society. This is possible only when we pass values through education to next generation who will gain moral maturity to the level of excellence.

Moral maturity is a specific state that helps an individual to acquire high level of attitude, behavior, and social cooperation (Ceken, 2018). A morally mature individual is expected to be responsible, just, trustworthy, empathetic, and responsible and having respect and feelings for others, and a law-abiding citizen (Lickona,1991).

Moral values are integrated to the conscience of morally mature persons who do not act against moral values even if they are alone. The individuals, who are able to assimilate moral values to their lives, believe that opposing moral values is as dangerous as losing human respect (Şengün,2008).

Shagufta et al.(2021)emphasizes the need for value nurturing and maintains that:... nowadays, modern education has its focus on students' academic and lesser on their holistic grooming in terms of their character and intellectual development. The frustration and disharmony in society might be due to the lack of moral upbringing of a young learner. The need of the time is to rediscover the significance of teaching character traits and to incorporate values, ethics, emotional maturity, and a civic sense to deal with the increasing complexity of this rapidly changing scientific and highly technological world.

. Since Islam is a complete code of life, it emphasizes the improvement and safety of individuals, and admires every act of human advantage to achieve this goal. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself set examples to safeguard the interests of individual in society that we find in books of Seerah.

Seerat e Tayyaba:

Different scholars have defined Seerah in their words but the gist is same. Dr. Jumma, a contemporary scholar, defines Seerah as:

ما كان عليه النبي ﷺ من الأقوال والأفعال والتقريرات حقيقة أو حكما والصفات الخلقية والحلقية حتى الحركات والسكنات يقظة أو مناما.

“Seerat e Tayyaba comprises of whatever Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said or mentioned before him and he did not express dislike (والتقريرات حقيقة); whatever he did or someone else did and was mentioned before him and he did not show any displeasure (والتقريرات حكما), and or whatever he saw himself and remained silent; Also, his exceptional traits and moral values even his movements and rest while he was awake or sleep.”

If we contemplate this definition, we find that Seerat e Tayyaba includes sayings, doings, and words of Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Hence, his whole life has been declared as “اسوة حسنة” the best example to be followed forever.

Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.H.U) Efforts for Education

Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.H.U) was sent to mankind as a teacher. He ﷺ himself said:“Allah sent me as a teacher.” (Sahih Muslim: 1478)

In another hadith he (P.B.H.U) said: “I have been sent as a messenger to complete good morals.” (al- Tirmizi: 1425)

As a teacher he (P.B.H.U) educated and trained the Arabs who did not like reading or writing. He (P.B.H.U) knew the importance of training and education so he stressed educating individuals right from childhood.Hazrat Abu Hurairah reported that Allah’s Messenger said, “Every child is born on the religion (of Islam). Then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a polytheist.”(Bukhari:1358)

From this hadith one can understand that Islam takes every individual of society innocent and believes that it is the training that changes the character of every individual. With right kind of education, we can expect a better society made up of good citizens.

How much value he (P.B.H.U) gave to learning is obvious from the incident of Badr. When prisoners of war were given the options for freedom; one of the options was to teach children how to read and write to get freedom.

When he ﷺ migrated to Madina, he ﷺ established the famous Plinth of Suffa. It was the place where selected persons would learn Quran and Hadith from Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.H.U). They were also trained as teachers to educate other Muslims. In other words, Plinth of Suffa was the first teacher academy of Islam which was established by Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.H.U). The Plinth of Suffa is the hallmark and proof of the fact, that in Islam education is necessary for all and everyone with equal opportunity and freedom.

Discussion:

Islam is a complete code of life and guides human beings in every field. Individuals can live with harmony and peace in the society by following this code. Therefore, Muslims in specific, and all the other human beings in general, should not look everywhere for guidance and should (Muslims) seek guidance only from Holy Quran and Hadith for every matter in daily life. Human life comprises three important aspects being spiritual, physical, and psychological. Islam guides for every aspect of human life. Since this is a short article only important things are described here.

Spiritual Aspect of Life:

This aspect demands that an individual should believe in Allah Almighty, worship Him and do not hold anyone else worthy of worship besides Allah Almighty. The Holy Quran says:

إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ

“There is no command but that of Allah; He has commanded that you do not worship except Him, this is the straight religion.” (Yousuf 12:40)

In Islam “دين”, the religion, means the complete code of life therefore, in this verse, it has been stated clearly that after the command of Allah Almighty we must follow the straight path of Islam, and subsequently, we will prosper and become useful citizens in true sense. A believer should always fear Allah Almighty as He عز وجل has commanded in these words:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

“Indeed, Allah is with those who fear and who do good deeds.” (Al Nahl 16:128)

So, he should (the believer) improve himself, forbear difficulties, hold himself accountable and keep improving spiritually, control desires and treat people with affection and good behavior.

Physical aspect of life:

Islam is a natural religion and respects the natural needs of human being. It is instinctive of man to live together with other human beings. He abhors monastic way of living (monkhood). Besides, he has some basic needs to meet which

include eating, drinking, and other necessities of life. Islam allows all the basic needs if one applies lawful means. Allah Almighty says:

يُنَبِّئُ عَادَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

“O children of Adams! Adorn yourself while going to any Masjid (mosque), and eat and drink and do not indulge in extravagances, indeed, He does not like those who indulge in extravagances.”(Al Aaraf 07:31)

In this verse, Allah Almighty has openly allowed man to eat and drink but also bound him to wear gracefully even when going for worship. This fact clearly defies monasticism as Allah Almighty nullifies monkhood in these words:

وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ

" And so, they invented Monkhood in the religion from their own selves; We had not ordained upon them. Yes, they made (this) invention to seek Allah's contentment.”(Al Hadid 57:27)

This verse clearly indicates that it was not will of Allah Almighty to enact a life of seclusion for human beings; but people themselves imposed this monastic life upon them. There is no place for monastic way of living in Islam. In addition, when, the Lord of all the worlds Himself appreciates adornment then there is no sound reason to abstain from a happy living. This is the reason that today monkhood is almost dead.

Cherished Behavior and Attitude for Psychological Health:

Psychological health and cherished behavior are mutual in nature. After receiving guidance from Seerat e Tayyaba, individual gains conceptual and social maturity. To improve personality, they can lead a balanced life full of psychological health and to shoulder social responsibilities. They acquire features like self-confidence and responsibility. From economics point of view, they are moderate that carries contentment and humbleness. If Allah Almighty has bestowed someone abundantly, they do not feel envious and greedy. If Allah Almighty bestows upon them in abundance, then they neither indulge in extravagance nor adopt parsimonious. Allah Almighty says:

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ

“And do they envy people over that what Allah has bestowed upon them from His Grace?”(Al Nisa 04:54)

Also, In the Holy Quran, Allah advises believers to live moderately in these words:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا

“And those who, when they spend, neither exceed the limits nor act miserly, and stay in moderation between the two.”(Al Furqan 25:67)

Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ said: “Look at those who are lower than you (financially) but do not look at those who are higher than you, lest you belittle the favors Allah conferred upon you.” (Sahih Al Bukhari: 6490)

Above quoted instances from Hadith testify that Islam provides guidance for every aspect of human life and we can train men and women, children, and grown-ups alike by seeking guidance from the Seerah Rasool ﷺ.

Importance of children's character building:

Childhood is the most important stage in human life. During this stage, he not only learns language skills but also learns good and bad values from his surroundings. Therefore, education in early age plays an important role in nurturing religious values and lifelong skills for children in the coming future(Hernik, 2019). The reason is that a seven years old child starts taking interest in the world outside his home that increases the chances of bad company and or of learning bad things. This stage of life is termed as golden age because during this period children have exceptional abilities of learning new things; moreover, future life depends upon this period (Susanto,2011).

In this period, children start learning about group relations, begin socializing among teachers and students, and absorb negative or positive social behavior and ideas after leaving traditional parents' custody(Bronson,2000). Hence, Islam advises to pay special attention to this period of life. Rasool Allah ﷺ said when a child is seven years old, advise him to offer prayer. That is Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ emphasized upon training and education from an early age.

Children's training in the light of Seerat e Tayyaba:

The training, according to Islamic teachings, is comprehensive and vast in its true sense. Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ said:

“Indeed, Allah Almighty will question every custodian about the protection and supervision of individuals under his care and training as to whether he safeguarded the duty of training or spoiled it.”(Sahih ibne haban: 4493)

Only that person seems to fulfill the requirements of a caretaker who considers all the aspects of training and does not neglect a single aspect. This Hadith puts forth a unique feature of Islamic training of which modern training of the day is devoid- that is sever impeachment in case of neglecting the duty of training. The absence of this fear-of-impeachment is social disorder. The west considers itself the champion of education, training, and morality. But the distortion and depravity that western education has spread is quite evident. Even, the West is worried now because, despite, providing every opportunity and resource, new generation is devoid of humanity and inclined to indecency. Every day, incidents of killings in educational institutes are evident that modern western education has failed.

We, as Muslims, should pay attention to this anew and arrange training of children in the light of Seerat e Tayyaba. Childhood is the right period of personality building. If from childhood training arrangements are made on the right lines, man becomes an epitome of elevated personality. The Prophet ﷺ of Allah Almighty said:

“Respect your children and teach them good manners.”(Sunan Ibn maja : 3671)

From this Hadith, we learn a specific style of training that begins with respect and ends on reprimand but in a lovely and unnoticeable way. Training is that improvement which happens in a mannered and cultured way. Imam Raghīb has defined training in these words: “Training is a gradual nurturing of someone such that he reaches to the highest level.”(Almufrīdat fi Ghrib al-Quran:p182)

However, to achieve fineness there should be a role model since without a destination no one can achieve objectives. For training, there is no better goal than Seerat e Rasool ﷺ. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran: No doubt, in Rasool Allah ﷺ, you have the finest example to follow. Education and training are important tasks. The Messenger of Allah

Almighty ﷺ himself said that I am sent as a teacher. Therefore, in the process of training, it is necessary, for both teacher and parents, to adopt the Seerat e Tayyaba.

As he ﷺ has guided us in every field of life, childhood has also been special focus of his (ﷺ) attention. First thing that he made compulsory at the birth of a child is to Say call for prayer in his right ear and call for Salah in his left ear. Then it is commanded to give him a good name. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

“So, give yourselves good names, on the Day of Resurrection you will be called by your names and by your father's names.”(Sunan abi Dawood : 4948)

From these Hadith, we come to know that Hazrat Muhammad(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) valued children's education the most.

Nabvi style of training individuals:

Nabvi style of training was lovely. He corrected a person in such a way that it would not hurt self-respect and the training would be done. Some instances of the training style of the Holy Prophet ﷺ are quoted here to prove how lovely and charming his methods of training were.

It is important to consider, while training and educating, the temperament, sentiments, and mental level of the learner. Moreover, human psychology is also involved in the learning process. Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ would take great care of all these elements. He ﷺ would always explain to his companions according to their psychology, understanding, and perception. Sahih al Bikhāri:7314

“Abu Hurairah Narrated that a Bedouin came to the Messenger of Allah Almighty (ﷺ) and said, "My wife has given birth to a black boy, and I deny it (that he is not my child)." The prophet ﷺ of Allah Almighty said to him, "Do you have camels?" He said, "Yes." The Rasool Allah said, "What colors they have got?" He said, " Red." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Is there any grey among them?" He said, "There is a grey among them." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, " From where this came to them?" He said, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! It is the result of hereditary disposition." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "And, this is, perhaps, due to inheritance as well (i.e., your child has inherited this black color)." And he was not permitted to deny his son.

It is clear from this saying of the Prophet ﷺ of Allah Almighty that he would very sagaciously address an addressee according to his knowledge and wisdom. The learner would not comprehend whether he was being taught or warned but lesson would be assimilated well. For instance, in this hadith:

“Rafi' bin 'Amr al-Ghifari said, “When I was a boy, I would throw stones at the Ansar’s palm trees and they brought me to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah Almighty be upon him).” He asked, “Why do you throw stones at the palm trees, boy?” I replied, “For eating dates.” he said, “Do not' throw stones, but you may eat anything that falls below from trees.”

Then passing his hand over my head he said, “O Allah, fill his belly.”

(Abu Dawood: 2622)

He ﷺ very wisely forbade Hazrat Rafi رضي الله عنه from throwing stones at trees and not from eating dates. If, however, he would have reprimanded and forbade him from eating dates then the result might not be as lasting and strong. As the need of Hazrat Rafi would remain unfulfilled. In the end, He ﷺ blessed him which is quite opposite to reprimand. Teacher of

Humanity ﷺ would plan training according to the situation, which had lifelong imprints upon personality. Similarly, ‘Umar ibn Abu Salamah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported:

“I was a young boy under the care of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. While eating, my hand would wander all over the dish (of food). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ advised me: "O boy, mention Allah's name, eat with your right hand, and eat from what is nearer to you." Since then, I have been eating that way.” (Sahih Bukhari: 5376)

The Messenger ﷺ of Allah عزوجل explained in such a way that he did not comprehend if eating manners were explained or admonished for mistake. This training style carries a lot of wisdom and there is a lot to learn from this. In the beginning, instead of reproof some manners were described. In this way, objective was achieved and training was completed in such a way that its effects lasted forever. Therefore, Hazrat Umer bin Abi Salma relate,” since then, I have been eating that way. “Now a days, man spends his whole life in acquiring modern education, reads numerous books about morality and values but of no use, he only considers material gains in the end. The main understandable reason of this is the absence of a role model. Whereas, the blessed Personality of Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ is the role model for everyone in Islam. In this regard, Allah Almighty says:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

“In the person of Rasool Allah ﷺ, indeed, you have a pretty pattern.”(Al Ahzab 33:21)

The Creator of the worlds declared exalted Nabi ﷺ as role model for the whole humanity. Now, we will have to follow his ﷺ Seerat in every matter. His ﷺ person is so comprehensive that we need not look for guidance in another direction. He ﷺ is the best guide. Therefore, we must seek guidance from his ﷺ Seerat e Tayyab for training and education as well.

Conclusion:

The literature of whole humanity is full of morality and values but in practice they are absent. It is needed that we should focus moral values and worldly gain equally. We find guiding principles for children’s religious and worldly training in the Holy Quran and Seerat e Tayyaba. Training means both physical and spiritual, which makes an individual valuable and successful member of society.

The process of training and nurturing a child means to inculcate high qualities and eliminating bad habits which is possible only when man is trained according to values. It helps an individual move from childhood to adulthood as a better and useful member of society. Whether Islamic or non-Islamic society, it is necessary to possess some values for a good personality. Nonetheless, there is a basic and fundamental difference between Islamic and other values. Whereas Islamic values result in contentment of Allah Almighty, the objective of non-Islamic values is to correct individual and society only. As Allah advises in the Holy Quran in the following words:

وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

“But the greatest pleasure is the good pleasure of Allah.”(Al Taubah 9:72)

In Islam, this aspect of personality building is the most important. Three things are acknowledged in character building that is values to be nurtured, character to be elevated and the teacher or trainer (role model). Islamic values include every aspect of human life. There is not a single aspect of human life about which we cannot find guidance in the Holy Quran and Seerat.

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Moreover, Allah Almighty orders to follow the Holy Prophet and reminds us that he is a role model for us as well. Hence, we need not look anywhere else for guidance.

This aspect of Islamic society provides individuals with the opportunity to live a life of freedom. In other societies, one must observe rules and regulations contrived by human beings, which is a kind of slavery. The individuals in authority can change those rules and regulations whenever they want. Whereas these values are fixed in Islam and everyone must follow them.

After values, one cannot deny the importance of character (individual). The objective of values is the betterment of individual. This is possible only when the individual is included in this process. We know from the Seerat e Tayyaba that he (PUBH) trained members of society wisely considering differences of personalities. Thus, he founded a welfare society in which all the individuals had equal opportunities. It happened only because of his (PBUH) unique teaching tactics.

The importance of teacher is crucial and one cannot deny it. Allah Almighty not only bestowed His prophet ﷺ with high morals but also conferred upon him matchless qualities of a teacher. Today, a trainer should acquaint himself with that style so that he may carry out his duty of training well. By adopting his style of training and teaching, we can provide better and practical members to society.

Recommendations:

It is important to train and educate children, but it is equally necessary to make them a living example of Islamic values. Syllabus should be designed in the light of Seerat e Tayyaba. It is important that Islamic values and manners should be nurtured adopting Nabvi style of training. We get following points from Seerat e Nabi (PBUH):

- 1 Motivating learner for training
- 2 Encouraging and appreciating in view of situation and temperament
- 3 Choosing a suitable method to get attention of learner for better learning process
- 4 Keeping in mind that training is a gradual process, because every learner cannot follow with the same pace, moreover they have different temperament as well
- 5 Choosing suitable method and content according to the temperament of learners
- 6 Situation based training

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Relationship of Smartphone Usage, Disclosure, and Interpersonal Closeness among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between smartphone usage, disclosure, and interpersonal closeness among undergraduates in Lahore Pakistan. A cross-sectional design was used to examine the relationship between study variables. Convenient sampling was employed on a sample of 350 male and female university students. The subscale of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (Darrow et al., 2014) and problematic mobile phone usage scale (Merlo, 2013) were used to measure study variables. It was hypothesized that smartphone usage negatively impacts interpersonal closeness. Pearson correlation analysis indicated a positive correlation between problematic phone usage and interpersonal closeness. Gender differences in Smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness were further examined using an independent sample t-test.

Keywords: Smartphone usage, interpersonal closeness, undergraduate students, Disclosure, Gender differences

Introduction:

Smartphones have become an integral part of modern society, as more than 3.8 billion people around the world are using them (Statista, 2021). A smartphone is a portable device that carries out browsing, GPS functionality, emails, sharing and editing documents, recording audio, keeping musical playlists, electronic diaries, video making and editing, etc. It is believed that smartphones were evolved by a combination of personal digital assistants (PDA) and the mobile phone. Early PDAs were more than the digital diaries of the day however, Research in Motion (RIM) first developed a device “Blackberry 4270” that integrated

the functions of a smartphone, PDA, and, mobile email. It was wider than a high shield shape with an identified keyboard, a very different device compared to the smartphones of the day (Charlesworth, 2009).

Since then, smartphones have rapidly evolved with each new generation. They have transformed the way people communicate and access information, providing instant access to a vast array of knowledge and entertainment (Pew Research Center, 2021). Today, smartphones are used for a variety of tasks, such as monitoring social media, emails, video games, photos, GPS navigation, audio calls, etc. However, the availability of such applications uses, and their excessive usage is unfortunately rising problem in society. Lin et al (2015) also identified excessive phone usage as a current worldwide social issue. The factors involving online gaming, social media engagement (Liu et al, 2016), personality traits, depression, mobility, accessibility to smartphones and the internet (Vaghefi & Lapointe, 2014), use of internet-based applications (Lin et al, 2015), and fear of missing out (FOMO) contributes towards excessive smartphone usage. Not only the young generation, but people of all ages are dependent on smartphones. Overall, one's familiarization and exposure to new means of communication, applications, video games, and other recent trends on social media has increased the level of smartphone dependency in youth particularly that is uprooting their relationship with their families, friends, and significant others. People spend more time staying online rather than spending time in real-life interaction which has largely affected the quality and quantity of in-person interactions. Smartphones are considered as most powerful personal devices in the world and that could be the reason why it has become a standard practice for people, to carry their smartphones in purses, pockets, and briefcases.

Smartphone usage has become problematic for the current generation, as it is the first thing to look for in the morning and the last thing before sleep (Lee et al, 2014). Whether at the grocery store, Doctors' office, at home, or in a meeting it might be tempting for people to pick up the phone and begin text messaging or scrolling through social media by ignoring their families, friends, and significant others (University of Arizona, 2019). Uperti & Singh (2017) reported that People, no matter how tired they are, use their phones before sleeping when they get home from work. In the past, masters had complete authority over their slaves, but in the modern era, smartphones appear to have replaced old masters who were abusive and cruel to their slaves even when they needed a break.

According to research by Mikulka & Brooks (2014), people treat their smartphones like an always-with-you ankle bracelet that follows them everywhere they go. Singh and Samah, (2018) suggest that cell phones make it more convenient to communicate online, but on a very serious note, they are undermining interpersonal ties in the real world. Even though there are gender differences in psychological features, mobile phone usage, and compulsive behaviors, such as anxiety, depression, sleep quality, gaming, text messaging, and internet social services (Chen et al., 2017). It has been acknowledged that the age of technology has given rise to conflict between families and couples. In addition to the real-world disconnection and conflict between people, smartphone dependency also results in sleep disturbances (Huang et al., 2020), depression, anxiety, loss of real-life social interaction, aggression (Kim et al., 2015) poor conversation quality and a decline in responsiveness and attentiveness (Santhi & Rajesh., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to

- Investigate the relationship between smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness among undergraduate students in Pakistan.
- Explore gender differences in smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness of students.

This study aims to address the following hypotheses:

- Smartphone usage will likely be negatively correlated with interpersonal closeness among undergraduates.
- Smartphone usage will likely be negatively correlated with age among undergraduates.
- Men and women will likely be different on all study variables

Holte & Richard (2021) suggested that the daily lives of individuals have become increasingly reliant on the usage of smartphones. Numerous people dedicate a substantial amount of time to engaging with their devices. Unfortunately, this growing dependency often leads them to overlook the potential negative consequences associated with excessive smartphone use disregarding its negative outcomes (Abid, 2021). In modern times, people use smartphones more than they focus on building relationships in the real world. This is an undeniable truth that smartphones help people to stay informed and connected, increase productivity, and work efficiently but excessive use negatively influences many aspects of life including social relationships (Obilor, 2023).

Interpersonal closeness is an experience of having an emotional connection with people (Darrow et al., 2014). Several researchers have reported that people who use their smartphones excessively may have poorer degrees of interpersonal closeness because they may become more preoccupied with their smartphones and less aware of their social interactions. Additionally, using a smartphone might have a negative impact on communication skills including nonverbal cues and active listening, both of which are crucial for creating and sustaining strong bonds with others (Misra et al., 2016; Barricket al., 2022 & Obilor, 2023). Excessive smartphone usage may also raise emotions of loneliness and separation, which can reduce interpersonal intimacy even further, paranoia, anxiety, antisocial personality disorder, and narcissistic behavior in young individuals are other indicators of using smartphones excessively. Conflicts in relationships arise from divided attention which are also brought on by excessive smartphone usage (Gritti, Bornstein, & Barbot, 2023).

It is crucial to look at the correlation between factors given the potential adverse effects of excessive smartphone usage on interpersonal relationships. For mental health practitioners, educators, and politicians, it may be crucial to comprehend the potential effects of smartphone use on interpersonal connectedness. Interventions to encourage better smartphone usage habits and increase social connectedness could be sustained by understanding the reasons that lead to lower levels of interpersonal closeness in close relationships.

Literature Review:

The relationship between smartphone usage, disclosure, and interpersonal closeness has been extensively explored in previous studies. This section reviews the literature addressing the impact of smartphone usage on the academic, psychological, and emotional aspects of students' lives. Konok et al (2016) explored young people rapidly developing an emotional attachment to their smartphones and experiencing distress when they are separated. For anxiously attached people, maintaining constant contact with others via phone was more important.

A study by Trub & Barbot (2016) on attachment to phones using a sample of 955 adults ages 18-29 years. A preliminary version of the young attachment to phone scale (YAPS), the experience of close relationships scale, and the problematic mobile phone usage scale were used in the study. Findings revealed that phone attachment was positively related to feeling safe with phones and uncomfortable during separation.

Morahan-Martin & Schumacher (2000) conducted research on correlates of pathological internet use among 277 undergraduate students. A questionnaire Pathological use scale (PUS) consisting of 13 questions was distributed to assess academics, work, mood, interpersonal relationships and, distress caused by smartphones. Findings revealed that pathological users were more likely to be males although those who scored higher on the loneliness scale were socially active online.

Emotional attachment to phones does not merely lead to pathological phone usage but also affects relationships at school, home, and work. A qualitative research conducted by Priyadarshini et al. (2020) on the impact of social media, Addiction on employees' well-being and work productivity. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, audiotaped, and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPS). The results indicated poor relationships with coworkers, not meeting deadlines, facing stress, compromising work quality, and distractions from work.

There is no denying that smartphones are the source of improved quality of life but excessive phone usage has a negative impact on the learning and cognitive abilities of students that they require to succeed in school (Sunday, Adesope & Maarhuis., 2021). Students from high school do not only use smartphones for communication, information, socialization, and entertainment purposes but also for academic purposes and they consider smartphones to be useful devices as they use them to access course material, discuss assignments with peers, take notes and search library catalog (Dukic, Chiu & Lo., 2015). Proximity to smartphones is the main source of distraction that leads to multitasking and task switching resulting in poor academic performance (Junco & Cotten, 2012). In contradiction, Sarwar and Soomro (2013) explored that it makes it possible for students to access a variety of educational resources and offers chances for people to continue their education from distant places. However, previous research has also demonstrated that student's academic life is at risk as greater use of smartphones leads to a greater negative impact on learning and the overall academic life of students.

One of the studies conducted by Nayak (2018) concerned the impact of smartphone usage on students' academic performance. The participants were 429 higher education students from India, 64.8% of whom were females which might have affected the findings. The results revealed that female students use more smartphones than male students while the negative effect of phone usage was found more in the academic performance of males even when the ratio of phone usage was more in females.

The research was conducted in Saudi Arabia among 324 undergraduate students from Najran University. The data was collected using questionnaires related to normal smartphone usage e.g. for entertainment purposes and usage for learning purposes. The findings revealed that 94.4% of the students owned smartphones but they were not utilizing the device appropriately for learning purposes but for making calls, snaps, pictures, etc. The authors suggest that future studies investigate why students in Saudi Arabia are not utilizing smartphones for learning purposes (Alfawareh & Jusoh, 2014).

In context to Pakistani culture, a research conducted by Naureen et al. (2021) intended to investigate the impact of text messaging on the interpersonal relationships of friends. The data was collected from 200 university students belonging to the age groups of 21-25 in Islamabad using a survey and proportionate sampling method. The results suggested that instant messaging had a positive relationship between interpersonal relationships of friends hence the shreds of evidence prove that there is a significant impact of texting via smartphones on maintaining face-to-face relationships or friendships. The suggestions provided for future research were to investigate why students are involved in texting, as it might be used to carry out educational activities.

In the exploration of interpersonal closeness and disclosure, it is essential to first understand the foundational concepts. Villanueva (2017) has defined disclosure as an act of sharing feelings, thoughts, and personal information with others. Another essential way of maintaining and establishing interpersonal closeness with each other is self-disclosure. However, disclosure is defined as feelings of being connected with others. It is also believed that there is a difference between behaving close and feeling close to others. Aron, Aron & Smollan (1992) inquired that "Interpersonal closeness is the inclusion of others in the self and interconnectedness of self and others" Martin (2014) determined that Positive interpersonal relationships have been identified as a defense against stress and risk, as a tool for task completion, as emotional support in daily life, as a company in shared activities, and as a foundation for social and emotional growth.

According to research conducted by Groarke (2014) on the impact of smartphones on social behavior and relationship. The study used a quasi-experimental design and a correlational method. 279 participants ages 17-77 were selected using a snowball sampling strategy. Self-report questionnaires including the Present Absence Scale, Face-to-Face or Computer-mediated Communication Questionnaire, Smartphone Problematic Use Questionnaire, and Cellular Phone Etiquette Questionnaire were used to collect data. The results revealed that smartphone usage was significantly related to preferences for face-to-face interactions. The authors suggested future researchers investigate the possible reasons for the negative influence of smartphone usage.

To investigate students' interpersonal connections with peers and staff at the start of higher education Makara et al. (2015) conducted a study in the US Midwestern public research university using a sample of 290 first-year students. Online surveys

were given to students to assess social networks through piloting. Findings revealed that students used text messaging to communicate with their friends, family, and teachers. It also showed that it was more important for the freshmen students to maintain interaction with the staff than their peers. The study suggested that future research to explore the interaction between demographics and social variables on achievement.

To bridge the gap in the literature, Liu, Yin & Huang (2013) investigated the interpersonal relationships of adolescents not only with friends but also with parents and teachers when using Facebook. The sample of 740 junior students participated in filling Real-life interpersonal relationships (RIR) questionnaire and Virtual Interpersonal relationships (VIR) questionnaire. The findings of the study suggested that higher use of Facebook expands interpersonal relationships of friends while weakening relationships with parents. It was also found that real-world interactions are stronger than virtual relationships of adolescents regardless of their friends, family, and teachers. The future recommendations suggested developing insight for parents regarding their children's Facebook usage, urging them to be vigilant and concerned.

Elsobeihi et al. (2017) conducted a study on the effects of mobile technology on human relationships using convenience sampling with a sample size of 120 at Al-Azhar University. Data was collected through questionnaires and field observations in populated areas of the university. The results showed that face-to-face communication with family and friends is reduced because of the use of technology. People are inhibited by phones in the presence of others and spend little time with their loved ones. Technology is responsible for the lower quality and quantity of face-to-face communications. The recommendations provided for future research are to investigate the reasons for poor social interaction as the technology appeared.

In conclusion, this research review highlights the complex relationship between smartphone usage, sharing personal information, and building close relationships. It shows how smartphones affect various aspects of students' lives, including academic performance, emotional attachment, and social connections. The review also emphasizes the importance of sharing personal information and building close relationships in understanding each other better. As technology continues to evolve, it's crucial to keep exploring these areas to understand how they impact human behavior and relationships.

Methods:

Research Design: This study follows a cross-sectional research design.

Sample Size: The total sample size of this study was 350 (175 males and 167 females) university students.

Study Population: The population of this study was university students from ages between 18 to 24 from Forman Christian College (A Chartered University) in Lahore, Pakistan. Both men and women with basic English reading and understanding skills participated in the study.

Sampling Technique: Convenient sampling was employed using questionnaires.

Data Collection: The data collection was based on formal permission sought by the university after the approval of the Board of Study (BOS), Ethical Review Committee (ERC), and Institutional Review Board (IRB). The students were asked to participate in the study according to their availability and accessibility. Informed consent was collected from the participants before their participation, where they were briefed about the nature of the study, their voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights. Data was collected using questionnaires about Problematic Smartphone usage (Merlo et al., 2013) and a Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (Darrow et al., 2014) along with demographics like age, gender, marital status, and closeness with others. No identifying information was collected. The participants were thanked for their voluntary participation.

Measures: A problematic mobile phone usage scale (Merlo et al., 2013) was used to measure the intensity of mobile phone dependence and its excessive usage among undergraduate students. The inventory consists of 20 Likert scale questions. On a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the participants were asked to state how much they agreed with each statement. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions with medium difficulty. An example item is “I used my phone when I knew I should be sleeping”. The higher score indicates more problems with smartphone usage among undergraduates. The overall alpha of this scale is 0.94 and the correlation with other scales of cellular dependency is ($r = .76, p < .001$). For each item, Cronbach’s alpha is high (above .931) indicating excellent internal consistency.

Disclosure and interpersonal closeness (Darrow et al., 2014) is a sub-scale of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (FIAT-Q) that was used to measure the close relationships of undergraduate students. The scale is composed of 24 items. The numeric scale ranges from 1-6 indicated by Agreement and Disagreement e.g. (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Moderately Disagree, 3=Mildly Disagree, 4=Mildly Agree, 5=Moderately, Agree, 6=Strongly Agree). An example item is “I listen to others and offer them support.” The overall Cronbach alpha is 0.8 indicating that disclosure and interpersonal closeness have a divergent validity of $r = -.39$ with the Social expressivity subscale (SSI) and convergent validity of $r = .50$ with Social avoidance and distress (SAD) also $r = .48$ with interpersonal relations subscale (OQ-45 TR).

Statistical analysis:

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to perform statistical analyses on the data. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the demographic information and study variables. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the categorical variables like gender, marital status, and closeness with others. Mean, Median, standard deviation, and range were calculated for continuous variables like age, smartphone usage, and interpersonal closeness. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was conducted to measure the nature and significance of the relationship between smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness. An independent sample t-test was carried out to report gender differences in interpersonal closeness of undergraduate students. The psychometric properties of the scales used in the present study were also calculated.

Results:

This section presents Descriptive statistical analysis (Demographics and psychometric properties of scales) and Inferential statistical analysis (Pearson product-moment correlation and t-test) on the study variable. The data was analyzed using a statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). Problematic smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness including demographic variables. The descriptive statistics including psychometric properties of scales, Pearson correlation, and independent sample t-test are reported in the following section.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis:

Descriptive statistics are calculated for the following demographic variables e.g. number of participants (n) and percentages (%) for nominal variables whereas, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are calculated for continuous variables.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of participants (n=350)

Variables	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	-	-	20.98	1.63
Gender				
Male	175	51.2	-	-
Female	167	48.8	-	-
Closeness status				
None	2	6	-	-
Father	34	9.7	-	-
Mother	79	22.6	-	-
Sibling	30	8.6	-	-
Friends	88	25.1	-	-
Family	20	5.7	-	-
Family and friends	61	17.4	-	-
All	31	8.9	-	-
Relationship Status				

Single	274	78.3	-	-
Committed	60	17.1	-	-
Married	12	3.4	-	-

Note: f= frequency, %= percentage, M=Mean, SD= Standard deviation

Table 1 shows descriptive for nominal and continuous variables from a sample of $n=(350)$ participants. The sample consists of 167 females (48.8%) and 175 males (51.2%) indicating balanced distribution of gender within the study. The average age of students was 20.98 with a standard deviation of 1.63. The participants' closeness status is categorized into different relationships, such as father, mother, sibling, friends, family, family and friends, all, and none. The percentages indicate the proportion of participants falling into each category. For example, 6% of participants reported having no closeness with anyone, while 9.7% mentioned having their father as the closest person. 22.6% of participants reported closeness with their mothers, 8.6% with siblings, 25.1 % with friends, 5.7% with family, 17.4% with family and friends both, and 8.9% of them reported closeness with all. The relationship status is classified as single, in a committed relationship, and married. For most of the students, 78.3% reported being single, 17.1% were committed and 3.4% were married.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for Problematic phone usage (PUMP) & Interpersonal closeness and disclosure.

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min-Max</i>	<i>α</i>
Problematic phone usage	61.50	12.62	27-90	.82
Interpersonal closeness and disclosure	85.47	12.63	36-124	.62

Table 2 shows the psychometric properties of scales used in this present study. The problematic phone usage scale has an average mean of $M=61.50$, $SD=12.62$, and an overall range of 27-90. The mean score of the Interpersonal closeness and disclosure scale is $M=85.47$ with $SD=12.63$ and an overall range of 36-124. The Cronbach's α value for the Problematic phone usage scale is .82 which indicates good internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's α value for interpersonal closeness and disclosure scale is .62 which suggests lower internal consistency reliability.

Table 3*Pearson Product Moment Correlation for study variables (N=350)*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Age	350	20.98	1.63	-	-	-
2. Smartphone usage	350	61.50	12.62	-.10	-	-
3. Interpersonal closeness and disclosure	350	85.47	12.62	-.03	.33**	-

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A Pearson Correlation examined the relationship between Problematic smartphone usage scale, interpersonal closeness, and disclosure. There is a positive correlation between the Problematic phone usage scale and interpersonal closeness, $r=.33$, $n=350$, $p=.01$. The correlation $r=-.10$ indicates a weak negative correlation of smartphone usage with age while a very weak negative correlation $-.03$ between age and interpersonal closeness and disclosure indicating age has a minor impact on interpersonal closeness and disclosure.

Table 4*T-test comparisons and descriptive statistics for smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness by gender*

Variables	Male		Female		<i>t</i> (340)	<i>P</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Interpersonal closeness	84.73	12.41	86.46	12.93	-1.26	.318	0.14
Smartphone usage	61.86	12.89	61.15	12.56	.514	.599	0.06

Note. N = 350, p > .05

Table 4 provides a comparison between the means and standard deviations of the variables smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness for two groups, males and females. The table shows no significant mean differences in smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness with $t(340) = -1.26, p > .05$. Findings showed that there are no significant gender differences in terms of using smartphones and having close relationships with others. The value of Cohen's d for smartphone usage was $0.06 (< 0.20)$ which indicates a small effect size and further supports the findings that there is no substantial statistical difference in smartphone usage in men and women. Likewise, the Cohen's d value for interpersonal closeness was $0.14 (< 0.20)$ indicating a weak effect size.

Discussion:

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness among undergraduate students. The study attempts to develop an insight into maintaining the social well-being of individuals. Additionally, it explores the potential gender differences in terms of interpersonal closeness both in male and female students. In light of the hypotheses, the current research's main findings will be summarized about research objectives and existing literature.

The first hypothesis "Smartphone usage will likely be negatively correlated with interpersonal closeness among undergraduates" was not supported in the present study as the results revealed a positive relationship between smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness. Previous research investigating the relationship between these variables at hand also found them to have a positive relationship (Konok, 2016; Naureen et al, 2021). This challenges (Groarke, 2014; Lin 2012; Brown et al, 2016 & Elsobeihi et al, 2017) findings reject the notion of a positive correlation between study variables. This difference in results between western and Eastern society is a very intriguing revelation. The possible explanation for the the current finding is the participants shared different cultural norms, values and social dynamics such as hospitality, respect for elders, extended family culture, community ties and gender roles therefore it is likely that the attitudes and behaviors of participants may have been influenced by cultural similarities like communication and connectivity with family, friends and communities, strong family networks, entertainment and media consumption (Zaman, Stewart & Zaman, 2006). Traditional gender roles exist in many communities that assign specific responsibilities and behaviors to men and women. These norms can influence power dynamics, decision-making processes, and the distribution of emotional support within relationships (Signorielli, 1990). Whereas, communication preferences within the cultural norms might also influence social relationships. These communication styles can affect how people express their emotions, resolve conflicts, and build bonds in their relationships (Cuming & Rapee, 2010). Additionally, family and community influence close family relationships, communal support, a sense of being interconnected, and loyalty within society also impact one's close interpersonal relationships (Umberson & Thomeer, 2020).

The second hypothesis of the present study “Smartphone usage will likely be negatively correlated with age among undergraduates” was supported. The results revealed a negative correlation between smartphone usage and age suggesting that smartphone usage tends to gradually decrease as the age increases, which means that younger undergraduates appeared to use smartphones more frequently than their older counterparts. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Sakthivel, Moovendhan, and Heggde (2020) which also found that younger people are more likely to score high on smartphone usage in comparison to middle and older people. Although age was not a central focus in this study as all participants were undergraduates within the same age group. However, the findings open up opportunities for future researchers to explore the relationship between age and smartphone usage. People belonging to different age groups have different preferences, attitudes, usage habits, and decision-making patterns (Chen, Hung & Goh, 2023).

The other hypothesis of the present study “Men and women will likely be different on study variables” was not supported. Previous research by Lee et al. (2014) Singh et al (2018) and Chen et al (2017) have consistently demonstrated gender differences in various aspects related to phone usage and interpersonal relationships. Specifically, studies have identified gender differences in terms of phone usage, closeness status, social interaction, need for touch, compulsive behaviors psychological features, gaming, text messaging, and internet social services. Lee and Colleagues (2014) also found gender differences in terms of psychological traits and phone usage patterns of men and women. However, the present research does not show any consistent significant differences in terms of closeness status.

There could be several possible explanations in the current study to refute the previous studies including cultural variations, methodological differences, and temporal changes. The cultural elements highlight the importance of understanding the complexities of the phenomenon under investigation. As Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) suggest different research designs such as interviews, observations, content analysis, experiments, or other mixed research methods produce different research findings.

Moreover, unlike Pakistani culture, western students are more likely to be independent at the university level (Butterbaugh, S. M., Ross, D. B., & Campbell, A.; 2020). Male and female students in Pakistan often rely on communal and familial support. Family members especially the parents play a key role in providing emotional, financial, and academic support throughout their educational journey, which eliminates the sense of responsibility in the students of our culture by giving them a sense of preference to use their smart device networks (Khurshid, Zahid, & Nisa., 2023).

Further, the link between gender, smartphone usage, and interpersonal relationships might be influenced by technology developments, societal changes, or changes in cultural standards over time. For instance, when technology spreads and becomes more incorporated into our everyday lives, gender inequalities in phone usage or social interaction patterns may disappear or change (Peterman, Behman & Quisumbing, 2014). However, it is to highlight that earlier studies may not have effectively accounted for these changing elements, the current study may capture the dynamics, as they exist right now.

Limitations and future research directions :

The data relied on the self-report measures e.g. the subscale of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire; disclosure and interpersonal closeness (FIAT-QD) and problematic mobile phone usage scale (PUMP). The scale (FIAT-QD) did not demonstrate a satisfactory validity that might have influenced the results. Future research should consider using alternative measures to address the validity concerns and improve the accuracy of the measurement. Additionally, the study's population was confined only to Forman Christian College. The recruitment method of convenience sampling in the current research specifically focused on university students between 18 to 24 years old.

Moreover, further research could be conducted to gain insight into how age-related variables like digital native generation, technological literacy, communication preferences, social networking, real-life connectivity, lifestyles, and life stages may influence smartphone usage behaviors and how these behaviors might connect to interpersonal closeness and other related social interactions. Further, a diverse sample might be included that encompasses participants from different universities, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, and age groups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the variables under investigation

Conclusion:

The present study investigated the relationship between smartphone usage Disclosure and interpersonal closeness among undergraduate students. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, a positive relationship was found between smartphone usage and interpersonal closeness. Age was negatively correlated with smartphone usage, indicating that younger students used smartphones more frequently. No significant gender differences were observed in terms of interpersonal closeness and smartphone usage among undergraduates. Further research should explore diverse sample and age groups to gain a deeper understanding of these variables and their implications.

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Association between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents at Deaf Reach School, Karachi Campus. In light of earlier literature, it was hypothesized that there would be a high prevalence of low self-esteem and depression in hard-of-hearing adolescents and a negative relationship between low self-esteem and depression in deaf adolescents. For this research, 60 students of the adolescent age group range (M= 30, F= 30) were chosen through convenient sampling at Deaf Reach School, Karachi Campus. Proper ethical considerations were maintained, and permission was taken from concerned individuals for data collection. Adolescent Self Esteem Questionnaire and Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale were used for this research. Findings indicated a high prevalence of low self-esteem (55%) and a consecutively high incidence of depression (49%) in hearing-impaired adolescents. Moreover, the research proved that a moderate negative relationship exists between low self-esteem and depression among hearing-impaired adolescents ($r = -0.575$, $p = 0.05$). The study has implications for educational institutions, psychologists, and counsellors for managing self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired students.

Keywords: *self-esteem, depression, hearing impairment, adolescents, relationship*

Introduction:

Hearing impairment, deafness, or hearing loss is the total or partial inability to listen to sounds (Felman, 2018). The World Health Organization defines hearing loss as the inability to listen to as well as an individual with normal hearing, which requires hearing thresholds of at least 20 dB in both ears. Hearing loss can range from mild to profound and impact one or both ears. Various factors contribute to hearing loss, including congenital or early-onset childhood hearing loss, chronic middle ear infections, age-related hearing loss, noise-induced hearing loss, and the use of ototoxic drugs that damage the inner ear. Worldwide, the number of people living with hearing loss exceeds 1.5 billion. In 2050, this figure might increase to more than 2.5 billion (Kushalnagar, 2019).

Hearing loss can have significant and far-reaching effects, such as impairing communication abilities and causing delays in language development. This can result in social isolation, feelings of loneliness, and frustration, especially among

individuals with hearing loss (Liverman, 2016). There are not adequate accommodations for hearing loss in many places, which affects the mental well-being of an individual in many ways (Bhargava, 2018).

People who develop hearing loss at an early age are at a higher risk of facing social isolation, low self-esteem, and depression. This condition can also lead to social exclusion and raise the likelihood of developing impairments in cognition and functionality. In addition, individuals who have hearing impairment may become more reliant on others and face an elevated risk of neglect, discrimination, or violence. As a result, hearing loss that occurs with age is frequently connected with emotions of sadness, diminished self-esteem, feelings of guilt, a lack of enthusiasm for daily routines, and disruptions to appetite or sleep, all of which can impact concentration (Jiang et al. 2020).

Consequently, it is not surprising that many researchers have discovered a heightened occurrence of mental health disorders, such as depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, in individuals with hearing impairment (Eaton, 2020). The teenage years are crucial for individuals with hearing loss, requiring ongoing adaptation to changing physical, social, and emotional demands. This can result in an increased susceptibility to various mental health issues. Among these, depression is the most prevalent, affecting between 10% - 85% of individuals worldwide, with between 22% - 60% of affected individuals being adolescents (Patel, 2016).

The presence of depression during adolescence can lead to numerous adverse outcomes, such as inadequate school adjustment, low academic performance, and an increased risk of dropping out of school. It can also result in diminished self-esteem, social incompetence, reduced self-confidence, feelings of loneliness, interpersonal difficulties, and decreased well-being in later life (Dat, 2019).

Your subjective perception of your worth or significance is your self-esteem. It expresses your degree of confidence in your skills and qualities, much like self-respect. However, the continuous decline of self-esteem can lead to different mental health problems, including depression (Susman, 2022).

Everyone experiences sadness at times, but depression is more than that. However, hearing-impaired individuals experience it more often because of the lack of communication and trust. Depression is a condition characterized by intense feelings of sadness or despair that persist for more than a few days. It can significantly impede daily activities and result in physical symptoms, such as changes in appetite and weight, disrupted sleep patterns, and a lack of energy. Individuals affected by depression may also experience difficulty concentrating, thinking of committing suicide or passing away regularly, as well as emotions of being worthless or profound guilt (APA).

Thus, it is not strange that a variety of researchers have discovered a rise in the frequency of mental health issues, such as depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, among those who are deaf. The research was conducted in Lahore to identify the psychological problems faced by adolescent boys with hearing impairment. Research has shown that teenage boys with hearing loss often struggle with emotional issues, anxiety, social immaturity, aggression, and a limited understanding of their own and others' emotions. These difficulties can be attributed to their inability to communicate effectively and societal attitudes towards individuals with hearing loss. The study also suggests that parents with a dominant parenting style may contribute to confusion and poor decision-making in these boys. This style of parenting involves making all decisions related to the child's education, entertainment, and social interactions without sharing relevant information or considering the child's opinions and desires. As a result, these adolescent boys are often dissatisfied with their current educational and employment opportunities (Umar & Muhammad, 2007).

Another research was conducted in Lahore to investigate the psychological problems faced by adolescent girls with hearing impairment. It was found that the over-protective behaviour of the parents may lead to anxiety, lack of confidence, low self-esteem and social immaturity in deaf girls, which later on provokes depression (Saeed and Aslam, 1996).

Furthermore, a researcher examined the impact of hearing loss on a child's personality and discovered that many of the deaf participants felt resentful towards their situation. However, there was no indication of an inferiority complex. Instead, the majority of them exhibited a lack of trust in others. The conclusion was drawn that hearing loss, in and of itself, does not lead to poor social adjustment or other psychological issues. Instead, such issues are a result of the communication gap that places deaf children at greater risk for problems such as aggression, low self-concept and reduced self-esteem compared to their peers in the general population (Waheed, 2007).

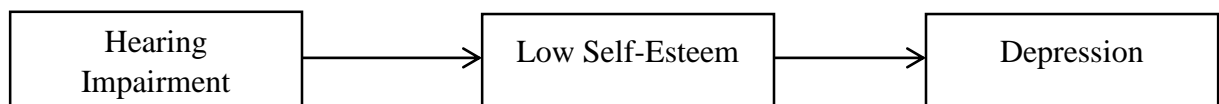
Rationale of Study:

The purpose of this current research was to investigate the association between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents at Deaf Reach School Karachi Campus. The findings of this research will provide insight into the correlation which affects an individual's self-esteem. If self-esteem is low, it will lead to depression. The research is conducted on male and female students to see their level of depression and its correlation with self-esteem. This research will provide information to society regarding the deaf community's mental health problems. This research can benefit people who want to study the same variables in the future. This research will also be helpful for government and non-government institutes and organizations as it reveals the current status of low self-esteem and depression, which is leading to dysfunction in daily life. It's precious research for educational institutes to consider hiring mental health professionals for students to process their mental health in a better way. They can also develop programs and strategies for how to cope with this alarming condition. This research aims to identify the levels of depression and self-esteem among hearing-impaired adolescents as compared to hearing adolescents.

Hypotheses of the study:

- 1) Hearing-impaired adolescents will have low self-esteem as compared to hearing adolescents.
- 2) Hearing-impaired adolescents will have higher levels of depression as compared to hearing adolescents.
- 3) There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents, such that lower self-esteem will be associated with higher levels of depression.

Conceptual Framework of the study



Method:

Research Design

The current study used a cross-sectional research design to determine the connection between depression and self-esteem in hearing-impaired adolescents.

Sampling Technique

In this study, a convenience sampling technique was used in order to find out the relationship between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. The data was collected from the Deaf Reach School, Karachi Campus.

Participants of Study

The sample consisted of 60 hearing-impaired students (30 males, 30 females) who were taken from the Deaf Reach School, Karachi Campus, through convenient sampling. The age range, which was chosen, based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages, was 12 to 19 (Erikson, 1994).

Instruments

The following scales were used in this study.

- 1) Adolescent Self-Esteem Questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965)
- 2) Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (Siddiqui & Shah, 1997)

Adolescent Self Esteem Questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965): To measure the variable of self-esteem, "Adolescent Self Esteem Questionnaire" was used. Morris Rosenberg (1965) developed it's a 13-item measure of global self-esteem. The Adolescent Self-Esteem Questionnaire includes negative and positive worded items. These items are based on a 5-point Likert scale. Item scores were summed, with positively worded items reverse coded, to determine an individual's self-esteem score. A higher score imitates higher levels of self-esteem. The internal consistency coefficient of this questionnaire is 0.91. Moreover, the reliability is 0.86.

Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (Siddiqui & Shah, 1997): To measure the variable of depression, the "Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale" was used. Developed by Salma Siddiqui and Syed Ashiq Ali Shah, it's a 36-item measure based on a 4-point Likert scale. The internal consistency coefficient of this questionnaire is 0.92. Moreover, the reliability is 0.84.

Statistical Analysis:

SPSS was used to analyze the data collected. Correlation analysis was done to see how each variable related to the others. On the other hand, the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable was evaluated using multiple regression analysis. Nonetheless, an independent sample t-test was used to investigate comparing demographic variables between two groups to test the hypotheses.

Ethical Considerations:

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) code of conduct, the study participants were treated with utmost care and respect, and no harm was inflicted on them. The researchers prioritized the protection of their dignity throughout the study. The participants provided full informed consent before participating in the study, and their privacy was safeguarded. Confidentiality was not breached and the anonymity of individuals participating in the research was assured. Moreover, participants were debriefed about the study and its purpose.

Results:

Table1

Descriptive Statistics of Main Demographics Variables (N= 60)

Demographics Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Males	30	50%
Females	30	50%
Siblings with hearing impairment	-	-
Yes	44	73.4%
No	16	26.7%
Parents with hearing impairment	-	-

Yes	12	20%
No	48	80%

This table shows the demographics of the participants. 30 participants were male adolescents, and 30 were female adolescents. The table also shows the frequency and percentage of the participants based on their siblings and parents with hearing impairment. The majority of the participants have siblings with hearing impairment (73.4%), however, the majority of them have parents who are not hearing-impaired (80%).

Table 2

Prevalence percentage of low self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents (N=60)

Variables	%
1. Self-Esteem	55%
2. Depression	49%

This table shows the prevalence percentage of two variables, low self-esteem and depression, which are used in this research. According to the table, there's a high prevalence of low self-esteem (55%) in hearing-impaired adolescents. Also, the prevalence of depression is high (49%). While making a comparison of it, low self-esteem leads to depression.

Table 3

Pearson's product-moment correlation for self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents (N=60)

Variables	1	Depression
1. Self-Esteem	-	-.575**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This table shows the product-moment correlation between low self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired individuals identified in the research. It shows that low self-esteem has a moderate negative correlation with depression ($r = -.575$) which is significant at 0.01 level.

Table 4

Independent sample T-test showing self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired males and females (N=60)

	Females		Males		t(df)	p	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Self-esteem	2.86	2.06	2.86	2.067	1.39 (58)	.17	-1.25	6.99
Depression	-46	3.57	-46	3.57	-.13 (58)	.89	-7.62	6.691

Note. CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, SD=Statistical Difference

This table compares the self-esteem and depression of male and female adolescents. However, no significant difference has been found in the self-esteem and depression of male and female students. Results indicated that both boys and girls are suffering from low self-esteem, which is leading to depression.

Table 5

Independent sample T-test showing self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents with hearing-impaired and non-hearing-impaired parents (N=60)

	Hearing		Non-hearing		t(df)	P	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Self-esteem	-.08	2.61	-.08	2.52	-.03 (58)	.97	-5.32	5.15
Depression	-.20	4.47	-.20	3.50	-.04 (58)	.96	-9.15	8.74

Note. CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, SD=Statistical Difference

This table compares the self-esteem and depression of adolescents with hearing and non-hearing parents. However, no significant difference has been found. Results indicated that children of both hearing and non-hearing parents are suffering from low self-esteem, which is leading to depression.

Table 6

Frequency and percentage of low self-esteem in hearing-impaired adolescents (N=60)

	N	%
1. Low Self-esteem	34	55.7%
2. High Self-esteem	26	42.6%

This table shows the frequency and percentage of low self-esteem and high self-esteem. According to the table, 26 students are having high self-esteem (42.6%), however, the majority of them are suffering from low self-esteem (55.7%).

Table 7

Frequency and percentage of depression in hearing-impaired adolescents (N=60)

Depression	N	%
1. Mild	14	23.0%
2. Moderate	16	26.2%
3. Severe	30	49.2%

This table shows the frequency and percentage of mild, moderate, and severe depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. According to the table, 14 students are suffering from mild depression (23%), whereas 16 of them are suffering from moderate depression (26.2%). However, the majority of the students are suffering from severe depression (49.2%).

Discussion:

The link between the hypotheses and results was generated through analysis. The purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. Around the world, mental health issues are rising. Several young people are suffering from self-esteem issues, which are directly linked with depression (Shah et al., 2020).

The incidence of depression is on the rise, and the failure to address it is leading to an alarming number of suicide cases. Adolescents with hearing impairments are particularly susceptible to lower self-esteem, as they may feel different from their hearing peers regarding communication abilities, physical appearance, and social maturity (Warner-Czyz et al., 2015). There is a strong correlation between self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, and these factors can significantly impact a student's quality of life, increasing the risk of suicidal ideation (Tan Nguyen et al., 2019). Hence, the current study provided indigenous data on these variables.

Table 1 indicates the demographic features and properties of the sampling frame; our sample size included N=30 male adolescents and N=30 female adolescents. Most of the population's siblings have a hearing impairment (N=44), whereas 16 participants have hearing siblings. Besides, most of the students' parents are hearing (N=48), however, 12 students belong to the family where parents are hearing impaired.

Our first hypothesis assumed the self-esteem of hearing-impaired adolescents will be highly affected and they will have a collectively lower incidence of self-esteem among their population in Deaf Reach School, Karachi. Table 2 indicates a relatively higher incidence of low self-esteem at 55% in 60 participants. This value suggests self-esteem is an adjunct feature of hearing-impaired individuals and has a more significant impact.

Previous literature also points in the same direction as our generated results. A study was conducted by Mohammad Ahmed Hammad (2020) to examine mental health problems like the association between traditional and cyberbullying and adolescent students' self-esteem in southern Saudi Arabia among grade 10 to 12 hearing-impaired students. 81 students were assessed with the help of three questionnaires. However, a correlation was found between self-esteem and two types of bullying. When traditional and cyberbullying were on the rise, self-esteem automatically decreased. Hence, it proves our hypothesis that self-esteem is an essential factor that leads to other mental health issues.

The second hypothesis aimed to investigate the higher prevalence of depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. Our result in Table 2 indicates that there is a high incidence of depression observable in hearing-impaired adolescents (49%). The third hypothesis states that there will be a negative relationship between self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. Table 3 indicates Pearson's product-moment correlation for self-esteem and depression in hearing-impaired adolescents as having a moderate negative correlation, $r = -.575$, which shows that self-esteem and depression are linked and produce a more significant impact on the mental health of hearing-impaired adolescents.

Self-esteem, which comprises negative evaluation by self and others, can lead to conforming to the norms and subjugating to the will of others. Research indicates that people who lack self-belief often conform to their environment (B.C, 2012). The adolescent period is usually marked by emotional turmoil and hormonal changes due to which impressionistic interactions frequently leave a mark on the young generation (Will et al., 2018).

Our study further additionally analyzed the demographic information to check the impact of environmental variables on the self-esteem and depression of hearing-impaired students. Result Table 4 indicates that our t-test values were nonsignificant at 0.05 levels for both variables. Independent sample T-test for self-esteem and depression in females and males showed similar differences. Table 5 shows that our t-test values were nonsignificant at 0.05 levels for both variables. Independent sample T-test for self-esteem and depression in students with hearing parents and non-hearing parents showed no significant differences.

Table 6 explains that 26 students have high self-esteem (42.6%), however, the majority of them are suffering from low self-esteem (55.7%). This is an alarming situation. Low self-esteem is the first step leading to other mental health problems. Table 7 explains the frequency of mild, moderate, and severe depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. 14 students are

suffering from mild depression (23%), whereas 16 of them are suffering from moderate depression (26.2%). However, the majority of the students are suffering from severe depression (49.2%). This issue needs to be addressed.

A study was conducted by Olufemi Timothy Adigun (2017) in Nigeria to investigate the trends of depression in hearing-impaired adolescents. A systematic review was conducted using a comprehensive search using five search facets across several databases. ("depression", "depressive symptoms", "hearing loss", "deaf" and "hard of hearing"). The recognized articles' key texts, references, and five electronic databases were examined for articles that have in their title "depression" and "hearing loss". The results indicated that there is a high risk of depression and suicidal thoughts between Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

The findings of this research are that hearing-impaired adolescents who have low self-esteem are prone to high depression. There can be several reasons, including lack of understanding, bullying by hearing people, academic stress and pressure, emotional breakdowns, and much more.

Conclusion:

The present study strongly emphasizes inculcating mental health seminars and workshops to benefit the students. As per the results, hearing-impaired individuals who suffer from depression have low self-esteem, which many factors can cause.

This research provides important insight for the school to introduce mental health professionals in schools so that they establish fresh strategies and directives to address the problem at its root to prevent mental health issues and enhance the well-being of students with hearing impairment. Moreover, it will provide a better understanding of what extent psychological help is needed for these children. Unfortunately, deaf students are a part of stigmatized groups, and every day, they suffer from different emotional disturbances which are overlooked by others. Also, teachers cannot understand and handle situations efficiently because of a lack of professional training. So, this research will shed light on why a psychologist or a mental health professional is needed in schools to train teachers and students in improving their mental well-being, which is directly linked with the other areas of their lives.

Limitations:

This study's generalizability is limited due to the focus on a single social class and a restricted age range (12-19 years). The participants' homogenous backgrounds may only partially represent the diversity of family experiences and social influences. Additionally, the findings may not apply to younger children or adults, as their experiences and social contexts will likely differ.

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Regional Dialogue on Infectious Diseases in South Asia

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Abstract:

A predictive health analytics company suggested a 27.5% probability of a pandemic as lethal as COVID-19 occurring within the next ten years. The dramatic global spread of the coronavirus exposed the cracks in public healthcare systems and demonstrated the importance of regional cooperation in limiting the spread of infectious diseases. Heightening global connectivity has meant that the next epidemic or pandemic may only be a flight away. Due to climate change, the incidence of infectious diseases is increasing. The risk of outbreaks is especially high in regions strained by poverty and conflict, such as South Asia. Since diseases do not respect borders, they pose a grave danger to global health and human security, which makes cooperation between states and regions even more crucial. This article aims to explore a) how infectious diseases are an imminent threat to human security in South Asia, and b) how regional dialogue can dissipate the threats posed by emerging epidemics and pandemics in South Asia.

Keywords: Health Security, Infectious diseases, South Asia, Non-Traditional Security, SAARC, Regional Dialogue.

Introduction:

South Asia is grappling with food-borne diseases, neglected tropical diseases, avian influenza, transboundary animal diseases, among other contagions, and emerging pathogens. Most South Asian countries do have a few operational infectious disease control programs such as routine immunization, vaccination, and provision of essential drugs. Still, it is the social determinants that make the spread and prevention so hard to manage in the region. Issues like poverty, illiteracy, poor sanitation, food insecurity, poor border security, and social stigmas pose an ever-present threat to the underdeveloped system of disease control and health care. The lack of surveillance systems and inefficient public health systems disrupt effective disease control in South Asia. Sri

Lanka is the only country in the region that has developed an adequate public health system and has made significant progress in managing infectious disease outbreaks in the country.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the necessity for multidisciplinary scientific research, capacity building, and improved surveillance for the detection and management of infectious diseases has been brought to light. Due to the recent trends of heightened globalization, national borders have become more permeable for pathogens to cross over. As seen from the dramatic spread of Coronavirus across the globe, it is safe to say that the increased global connectivity has led to the maximization of the threat of another epidemic or pandemic. The threat is even more enhanced in countries struggling with poverty, weak health infrastructures, and political instability, such as many countries in the region of South Asia. Many South Asian countries have neglected the formal directives for proper management of the outbreak due to the lack of functioning transnational institutions that oversee their efforts and progress in controlling infectious diseases in the region (Emerging Infectious Diseases in Southeast Asia: Regional Challenges to Control - The Lancet, n.d.).

South Asia as a region is home to a dynamic interconnected system of biological, social, technological, and ecological factors that give rise to conditions fertile for new microbes and infectious diseases to emerge and spread (Burden of Infectious Diseases in South Asia | The BMJ, n.d.). These factors include urbanization, population explosion, food sanitation and production, land usage and water sanitation, and drug resistance. Widespread under-reporting of emerging infectious diseases, absence of effective government response, and regional collaboration on resources and information create the likelihood of delayed preventative measures and hinder the regional response. Research on these factors that assist policymaking and the practical implications is scarce and still lacks substantial investment.

There is a need for research in priority settings for public health systems so that an effective response is provided to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. There is an increasing trend toward regional partnership, coordination, and cooperation in information sharing in South Asia. This tendency to cooperate should be directed towards addressing asymmetries in the healthcare systems and their capacity to address infectious diseases. Even in a conflict-ridden region, public

health experts and officials from neighboring countries can collaborate in emergencies such as disease outbreaks that pose a global threat to human security.

Disease Burden in South Asia

Infectious disease outbreaks have had a long history of sabotaging the social order and devastating the economies of countries that are affected by their dramatic spread. Once an infectious disease gathers the ability of human-to-human transmission, the contagion spreads at an alarming speed especially if the outbreak was unforeseen and as it generally goes, many infectious disease outbreaks are not anticipated.

The dramatic rise in COVID-19 cases as soon as it broke out stands as a highlighted example of how infectious diseases take the entire world by storm, overwhelming their inadequate healthcare systems and ravaging their vulnerable economies. By November 2022, there have been 635,709,158 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported to WHO, and 6,603,803 deaths directly related to coronavirus (WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, n.d.). The following table accounts for the total deaths that were reported in South Asia alone by 2021 which were directly related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Country	Cumulative Cases	Cumulative deaths	Case-fatality rate %	Total deaths per 100,000 population
Sri Lanka	522,002	13,142	2.5	60.28
Maldives	85,198	232	0.3	43.07
Nepal	798,766	11,180	1.4	39.08
Myanmar	471,308	17,957	3.8	33.23

India	33,871,881	449,538	1.3	32.90
Afghanistan	155,309	7,214	4.6	18.96
Bangladesh	1,559,452	27,614	1.8	16.94
Pakistan	1,253,868	27,986	2.2	12.92
Bhutan	2,613	3	0.1	0.39

Source: Mortality Analyses. (n.d.). Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

One of the lasting impacts of coronavirus has been the gradual weakness of vital health services, which has contributed to more deaths resulting from other infectious deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on human life in South Asia, causing a setback to the improvement in global life expectancy that had seen much progress in the past 20 years (Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Life Expectancy and Premature Mortality in 2020: Time Series Analysis in 37 Countries | The BMJ, n.d.).

South Asia is an infectious disease red zone. With various socioeconomic, environmental, and political factors to blame, South Asia is at high risk of facing a new epidemic or pandemic outbreak if preparatory measures are not timely taken to mitigate these risks (Wilder-Smith, 2005). The present major infectious disease threats to South Asia include dengue, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diarrhea, typhoid, malaria, Zika virus, measles, Congo virus, monkeypox, hepatitis B and C, and polio. These infectious diseases hinder the path of South Asia's epidemiological transition from infectious to non-communicable diseases, as they still make up almost half of South Asia's disease burden (Social Determinants of Infectious Diseases in South Asia - PMC, n.d.). South Asia is still struggling to get rid of preventable diseases that have long been eradicated from the West, such as the case of Polio.

Climate change and rise in health risks:

Recently, Pakistan faced devastating floods starting mid of June 2022 causing irreparable damage to the country's infrastructure and economy (Pakistan, 2022). This flashed a major warning sign to the rest of the world community about the dangerous consequences of climate change and the major health risks that are unfolding as an aftermath. With melting glaciers and flash floods, the risk of new viruses and mutations rises and poses a threat of an epidemic or pandemic. With climate change disasters becoming more and more frequent, research into new infectious diseases must become a priority, so that world health institutions can allocate resources for pandemic preparedness. Following is a table showing the projected population, in millions, expected to reside in areas prone to annual flooding by 2050 across six Asian countries, as per both historical and updated assessments.

Country	Old estimate	New estimate
China	29	93
Bangladesh	5	42
India	5	36
Vietnam	9	31
Indonesia	5	23
Thailand	1	12

Source: Climate change: Sea level rise to affect "three times more people." (2019, October 30). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-50236882>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of emerging diseases and public health threats to not only Pakistan but also its neighboring countries in the region, and therefore it becomes incessantly important to take preventative measures before another epidemic befalls the region of South Asia. In Pakistan, 888 health facilities have been damaged due to the unprecedented floods, and among them, 180 have been irreparably destroyed, it has only increased the burden on the working health facilities to cater to the needs of a population size beyond their capacities (Administrator, n.d.). In Pakistan alone, the cases of COVID-19 have recently gone up, and the flooding only introduced more contagious pathogens of water and vector-borne diseases including acute watery diarrhea, polio, malaria, and dengue fever, mostly resulting from poor sanitation and the absence of clean drinking water.

The securitization of AIDS/HIV:

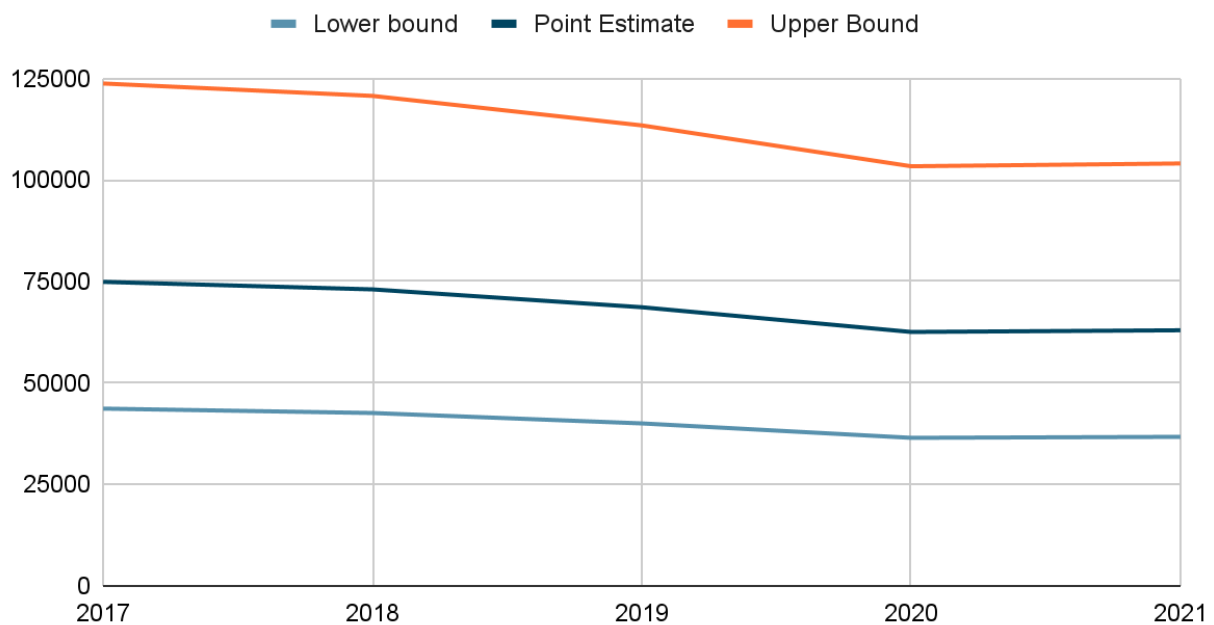
The COVID-19 pandemic may have caused much destruction and loss of life, however, it paved the way for more prioritized research into new and emerging health threats and optimization in healthcare systems and disaster management plans all over the world. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weakness of the healthcare systems of even the most developed countries in the West, like Europe and America, and brought attention to how little remediation and spending the public health systems receive.

The region of South Asia is claimed to be a breeding ground for an epidemic after Africa according to WHO. Around 33.2 million adults and children are living with AIDS worldwide however, among these, two to three million are estimated to be living in South Asia according to the United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (Current Status of HIV/AIDS in South Asia - PMC, n.d.). Back in 2006, Stephan Elbe urged for the securitization of AIDS/HIV as a global security threat, as the death toll from the contagion had risen three times higher than the casualties from the September 11 terrorist attack (Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security | International Studies Quarterly | Oxford Academic, n.d.). It still took many years for the HIV/AIDS threat to be considered a serious biosecurity threat by policymakers, scholars, and world politicians. On January 10, 2000, the United Nations (UN) Security Council officially declared HIV/AIDS as a threat to international peace and security in

Africa (Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security | International Studies Quarterly | Oxford Academic, n.d.).

Today, India alone has the third-highest population of patients infected with HIV/AIDS in the world, with over 4 million infected patients after South Africa (Zaidi et al., 2004). The burden of HIV new infections in India can be shown in the graph below;

Estimated Number of People Newly Infected With HIV



Data sources: Global AIDS monitoring UNAIDS/WHO/UNICEF (2021), WHO Country Profile 2021

Though there has been a notable decline in new infections in India since 2019, there still need to be active remedies and countermeasures to control the spread and provide adequate healthcare to the infected patients. There are no reported hospitals that are dedicated to the treatment and facility of HIV/AIDS-infected patients in the country (HIV Country Profiles, n.d.). While India is steadily decreasing their number of infected cases, the number only keeps rising in other countries, especially in Nepal and Pakistan.

Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic:

While looking through the lens of human security, infectious diseases pose a great threat to global security and must be considered an equally detrimental and dangerous international security threat as terrorism is considered to be among the Non-traditional security issues. Infectious diseases know no boundaries and respect no borders and therefore, containing an infectious disease such as Covid-19 which was a highly contagious air-borne virus at its root is much more difficult than it may seem. With the changing dynamics of modern warfare, likely, future security threats will also include the usage of biological weapons as a tool of warfare. In such uncertain and challenging times, the best policy is to anticipate and prepare individual and regional state healthcare bodies to counter such biosecurity hazards.

At the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, South Asian regional leaders met and discussed joint plans to combat the Coronavirus outbreak through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on 15 March 2020, a step initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India (Babu et al., 2021). India created a 'COVID-19 Emergency Fund' and contributed US\$ 10 million to it as a first encouraging step towards regional cooperation that would be funded by voluntary contributions from the region. SAARC Disaster Management Center was set up in India to render help to countries struggling with pandemic policymaking and require support and guidance in developing system efficiency, capacity-building, and health-care training and information regarding combating an infectious disease outbreak. Following is a tabular representation of the funds contributed by each member state for the Covid-19 Emergency Fund:

<i>SAARC Nation</i>	<i>COVID-19 Emergency Fund Contribution</i>
Nepal	NPR 100,000,000 (USD 831,393.45)
Bangladesh	USD 1,500,000
Bhutan	USD 100,000
India	USD 10,000,000
Sri Lanka	USD 5,000,000
Maldives	USD 200,000

Afghanistan	USD 1,000,000
Pakistan	USD 3,000,000
Total	INR 138.9 million

Source: SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund Disburses NPR 97.95 Million to Nepal! (n.d.). Retrieved December 2, 2023, from <https://www.nepalisansar.com/coronavirus/saarc-covid-19-emergency-fund-disburses-npr-97-95-million-to-nepal/>

With the episode of Covid-19 and its disastrous effects that went poorly managed by even the most developed economies, the concept of infectious disease control has gotten more media and political attention on the platform of global health and human security where policy-makers are increasingly aware of the disastrous consequences of under-preparedness in infectious disease outbreaks. Therefore, the human security paradigm urges high-risk regions like South Asia to cooperate and prevent their countries from becoming the breeding grounds for infectious disease outbreaks.

Communicative Action for Disease Control Collaboration

To bring substantive change in the current healthcare system and disease control practices of South Asian countries, a social dialogue supported by the Habermasian ideal of communicative action can serve as the foundational ground for regional cooperation. South Asian nations can provide joint efforts to securitize the health and human security of their respective populations and avoid another colossal disaster resulting from the unpreparedness of their management and healthcare sectors.

The theory of communicative action can be applied to regionalism in South Asia where countries can come forth to discuss their shared goals, reach an understanding within themselves about their preferred plan of action, and pursue specific approaches to actualize those mutually beneficial objectives. One such objective is pandemic and epidemic preparedness in the region. Many countries in South Asia are highly under-equipped to deal with the magnitude of responsibility that befalls countries stricken with an infectious disease outbreak.

The region of South Asia is looking up for potential collaborations on non-traditional security issues that concern the entire region. Since issues like infectious disease control are nonmilitary, the region of South Asia can come together to solve this collective problem through joint efforts.

While many countries in South Asia do not enjoy a healthy bilateral relationship due to ongoing political tensions and struggles, non-traditional security is an avenue where the regional neighbors can come together, putting aside their political disagreements.

Infectious diseases are a risk to the entire region as South Asia remains exposed to various dangerous variants of viruses and bacteria owing to the geography, climate, and structural flaws of the region. Similar to the conditions that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the countries to sit down for dialogue initiated by India and discuss various regional strategies that could be employed to counter the threat of COVID-19 to their countries, South Asia can still come together for a dialogue.

1) The SAARC Window:

SAARC is an already existing regional organization that has failed to bring the region together in more ways than one. SAARC's efficiency is hindered by bilateral issues among member countries, with India often cited as a factor contributing to the organization's challenges. India's stance and actions are perceived by some as detrimental to the smooth functioning of SAARC, impeding collaborative efforts and regional cooperation. Structural liberalism suggests that instead of creating another intergovernmental regional organization that may more or less fail once again to address regional issues, structural transformation, and improvement in the already existing structures could prove more helpful. SAARC has the potential to provide a common platform for regional discussions and operational strategies to fight against non-traditional security issues like the threat of infectious diseases and climate change that threaten peace and stability in South Asia. ASEAN can lead the example from which lessons can be borrowed and applied to the transformation of SAARC.

2) A New Regional Surveillance System:

South Asian countries can also opt for mutually launching a new regional surveillance system or network, which could help integrate the clinical and public health expertise these countries possess, so they can share new strategies and technologies to deal with non-traditional security threats like infectious diseases. A financial fund could be set up to which the South Asian countries could contribute to aid those underprivileged countries facing a disease outbreak. The fund could also

ensure financial safety to South Asian countries help them prioritize infectious disease threats and allocate funds for healthcare infrastructure and capacity building. Healthcare capacity building and improving public health infrastructure must be a top priority for South Asian nations, and they must collaborate to improve the efficiency of their healthcare responses to infectious diseases.

An international non-governmental organization that strings together six regional member networks aiming to end pandemics in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe is CORDS. CORDS facilitates informational sharing between the 28 member countries for disease surveillance of various areas of high risk of an outbreak. The neighboring countries work together in a regional collaboration network to fight emerging infectious disease threats that require collective action. Some of its regional networks include SECID (The Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases), MECIDS (Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance), MBDS (Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance), SACIDS Foundation for One Health, EAIDSNet (East African Integrated Disease Surveillance Network), and APEIR (Asia Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research) (<http://www.zigpress.com>, n.d.).

3) Exchange of Information and Expertise across the Region:

Sri Lanka for example has stepped up to assist Pakistan, which is grappling with a major surge in dengue virus infections across the country. The Sri Lankan government would send a team of trained public health care personnel and train the Pakistani medical and public health providers to respond to the growing cases of dengue fever. Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia that has relatively done better in terms of combating coronavirus and other infectious diseases such as vector-borne diseases primarily dengue, declaring it a national priority (Jahan, 2011). On the national level, the Sri Lankan government launched a community-based campaign to combat the spread of the dengue virus by destroying the breeding areas where mosquitoes that carry the dengue virus take birth. The government also invested in creating awareness among the public through media, schools, billboards, and pamphlets about disease prevention and treatment. The Sri Lankan government also ensured the operational outcome by levying heavy fines on the people who did not take care of the mosquito breeding grounds that promoted the dengue virus. Through

such extensive efforts, Sri Lanka overcame the outbreak and also learned the strategic and operational means through which the dengue infections could be contained efficiently.

4) Joint Efforts against Common Threats across borders:

South Asian countries can also engage in bilateral agreements and collaborations where they can work together in solving common health issues that concern only one or two states in particular, for example, the poliovirus is currently only present in Pakistan and Afghanistan alone. Pakistan and Afghanistan can jointly conduct polio eradication measures and crack down on this crippling disease while ridding their countries of this virus completely like the rest of the world has. Cross-border routine immunization and Pak-Afghan border surveillance can be enhanced through collective commitment and contribution, as the existing new cases of the poliovirus have been detected near the border between the two countries.

Pakistan and India also have many common infectious disease problems like COVID-19, AIDS/HIV, dengue, malaria, etc. which can serve as avenues for further bilateral collaboration and easing of political tensions through confidence-building measures like such. Infectious diseases can open doors to research and information exchange between the two countries, which can help each other ramp up their healthcare systems in response to infectious diseases that pose an equal threat to both countries alike.

5) Ground-level Pragmatic Approaches:

South Asian countries now have an opportunity to come together to remove tariffs on medical devices, protective gear, disinfectants, and cleansing agents. Setting up a joint agency for the region and having a meeting to talk about expertise and strategies to counter these issues is one of the more realistic plans of action. Such ground-level pragmatic approaches are doable if governments put the commitment to these actions. South Asia is a region with ample opportunities for regional collaboration and dialogue on non-traditional security issues that concern the countries collectively. While it is immensely important that South Asian countries come together for regional dialogue and collaborate on grand projects to mitigate the risks of infectious diseases in the region, it is equally important to look for smaller-scale pragmatic solutions that are doable and can be easily realized with commitment.

Challenges to Regional Dialogue and Collaboration in South Asia

Regional cooperation and integration are widely considered to be sustainable means to expand trade, support the economy, and provide mutual security and world peace. Throughout the world, there has been a reported increase in regional cooperation projects since the 1980s (Neemia, n.d.). Don McLain Gill says, “The concept of regional cooperation revolves around the idea that states in a shared geographical space cooperate to achieve goals that go beyond the capacity of individual national attainment.”(Challenges to Regional Cooperation in South Asia: An Overview | Journal of International Affairs, n.d.). Control of infectious diseases as a transboundary problem is an issue that concerns the entire region’s well-being and is beyond the abilities of one country alone.

1) Lack of Political Will

The greatest challenge to regional cooperation and dialogue in South Asia is political will. Political will is arguably the biggest constraint to the realization of regional dialogue and cooperation projects in South Asia. There’s only so much research and policy papers can do if there is an absence of political commitment to bring about substantial change in the system. Political leaders in South Asia rarely ever bring up the issues of non-military security to that level of importance as they highlight traditional security issues.

South Asia has always been a step behind in regional integration. SAARC is one of the least connected organizations in the world in terms of regional cooperation among its member states. The stark truth is that the dominant force lies within SAARC rather than outside it. The lack of regional cooperation is mostly attributed to the political tensions in the region, which create negative influences on the member states about trusting and collaborating on economic and highly political issues. As the largest member of SAARC, India exerts significant influence over it. India has frequently employed its influence to advance its hegemonic objectives, sometimes to the detriment of SAARC. A recent instance illustrating this is the postponement of the Islamabad SAARC conference, a consequence of Indian maneuvers that highlight how SAARC has borne the consequences of Indian ambitions (Falak, 2017).

Some analysts argue that historical tensions and geopolitical complexities, including the strained relations between India and Pakistan, have hindered the full potential of the SAARC. The long-standing issues between these two major members of SAARC have at times led to diplomatic standoffs and a lack of consensus, impeding the organization's ability to foster robust regional connectivity. While infectious disease control is a non-military, comparatively less controversial subject, it is still subject to several challenges that create a hurdle in regional collaboration.

The lack of sustained political will in South Asia allows for important non-traditional security issues like that of infectious diseases to go ignored and unmanaged. The only solution to increasing political will in the region is to educate political leaders, policymakers, and bureaucratic stakeholders on the risks of non-traditional security threats in terms of national security and socio-economic damages. Public opinion can also place pressure on the decision-makers to steer their focus toward what the public thinks is important and urgent. The role of media in bringing political attention to issues like the threat of infectious diseases is undeniable in this regard.

2) Power Imbalances

South Asia is a region constantly riled up in conflicts and tensions of a political nature. There is an undeniable power imbalance in South Asia, which creates conditions fertile for political rivalries and conflicts. India considers itself to be an unofficial leader of SAARC as it caters to 75% of SAARC's population and accounts for around 80% of its GDP while the second and third largest SAARC members only make up 10% and 7%, respectively (Kher, n.d.). Therefore, the resulting power asymmetry in the region is not unprecedented.

3) Miscommunication and Trust Deficit

Owing to the long-standing conflicts and tensions in the region of South Asia, it is arguably possible that the next infectious disease outbreak originating from any country in South Asia could practically become a cause of more conflict instead of cooperation. Some South Asians have strong hostile feelings and unresolved tensions, which could cause them to point fingers and blame each other for the cause or spread of an infectious disease within the region. There is a possibility that South Asian countries could grow more distrustful and suspicious of each other, thinking of the

possibility that a disease outbreak could be a biological weapon used against them to devastate their economies and public health.

The historic and ongoing conflicts in the region have resulted in hostility, mistrust, and a lack of openness among SAARC members. One major example is the strained relationship between Pakistan and India. The implementation of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) in South Asia has, at best, been inconsistent. While both India and Pakistan acknowledge the absence of trust as a pivotal factor for enhancing relations, neither nation has opted to proactively build trust through voluntarily negotiated CBMs (Khalid, 2021). The obvious power imbalance forces decision-makers to develop policies and legislative structures based on their own country's strategic and political goals. This creates a hard gap to fill when it comes to regional cooperation, as Pakistan and other South Asian states show a distaste towards the dominating order India has been trying to imply in the regional affairs of South Asia. South Asia, however, must realize that nontraditional security issues like infectious disease threats go beyond individual political conflicts. They concern all countries equally and devastate them indiscriminately.

4) Chronic Political Discord and Public Opposition

While cooperation would be ideal for addressing common problems of the region, the deep-rooted insecurities and hostilities may result in public opposition towards regional integration in South Asia. If the public remains strongly distrustful of their neighboring countries, it's likely the government of that state would avoid making controversial decisions that could cause a spike in public dissent.

5) Inadequate Infrastructure

The lack of proper infrastructure is another crucial challenge to regional cooperation. Without proper physical and binding structures in place, regional cooperation on these issues becomes an almost idealistic plan. Health consistently receives the lowest priority in yearly budget allocations. In a country like India, with a population exceeding 1 billion, the health budget constitutes less than 2% of the overall budget (Behranwala, 2004). In the realm of healthcare financing, the primary source is often out-of-pocket spending, referring to health expenditures directly covered by households. This reliance is notably pronounced in Afghanistan (77 percent) and Bangladesh

(72 percent) (Bloch, n.d.). This highlights the significant burden placed on households for healthcare payments, underscoring the inadequacy of government-provided health services in these nations.

Many infectious diseases are directly transmitted through poor border surveillance, for example between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These infectious diseases could be managed and prevented from spreading if there are proper structures in place that can ensure that no transmission of infectious diseases occurs between borders. Without proper transportation infrastructures, the exchange of physical assistance like medical aid, vaccines, testing kits, and medical equipment across borders becomes a costly and arduous task.

6) Deficiency of Research and Information

The Lack of credible and adequate information and data available on infectious diseases is yet another challenge. Many of the cases of infections go unreported, which significantly reduces the level of urgency and devastation of that disease, allowing it to spread to dangerous levels before it's finally taken into serious consideration. There is a lack of research into new infectious diseases and little is known about the newly emerging disease-causing viruses and bacteria, leading to ignorance of the public and policy-makers, who are unable to comprehend what the problem even is, and what SOPs must be taken to prevent an epidemic. The available data isn't credible enough to formulate the country's policies.

7) Insufficient Funding

Funding and financial aid are of prime importance when it comes to setting up new regional bodies and structures. Surveillance systems, medical gear, vaccines, research development, enhancing healthcare capacity, and institutional capacity all require a great deal of funding and a lack thereof can be a hindrance in materializing these large-scale goals. On average, South Asian governments allocate relatively minimal funds to healthcare compared to other regions. However, there has been an upward trend in health sector funding with the growth of income per capita. Notably, there is significant variation within the region; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan allocate less than 1 percent of GDP to healthcare, whereas Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and to some extent, Nepal, exhibit higher levels of public spending on health (Bloch, n.d.). The health budgets of South

Asia aren't big enough to finance these mechanisms, which makes it difficult for South Asian countries to be prepared for an upcoming pandemic or epidemic. A regional fund could be set up with voluntary contributions to aid countries unable to enhance their healthcare and institutional capacity.

South Asian countries face economic challenges, with many struggling due to poverty and limited financial resources. Insufficient funds pose a significant hurdle for adequately funding healthcare initiatives. With constrained budgets, these nations often find it challenging to allocate the necessary resources to address the complex and evolving healthcare needs of their populations. Below is a table presenting the latest available data on socio-economic indicators for South Asian countries.

Country	GDP growth	Income Group [1]	HDI [2]	Poverty Rate [3]
Afghanistan	2.2	Low-income	0.498	54.51
Bangladesh	7.4	Lower-middle-income	0.608	14.8
Bhutan	7.3	Lower-middle income	0.612	1.5
India	7.3	Lower-middle income	0.64	21.2
Maldives	4.8	Upper-middle income	0.717	7.3
Nepal	6.3	Low-income	0.574	15
Pakistan	5.4	Lower-middle income	0.562	3.9
Sri Lanka	3.3	Upper-middle income	0.77	0.8

Source: World Bank (2019c): income group; UNDP (2019): Human Development Index; IMF (2019b): GDP growth; and World Bank (2019b): poverty rate and Gini Index.

8) Attitudes and Misinformation

Attitudes towards infectious diseases are still a work in progress in South Asia. With COVID-19 reception standing as a glaring example of how a huge chunk of the world population was unable to accept that the pandemic was a real global health emergency or danger to their lives. Many remained in denial that the coronavirus was a real threat and not simply a hoax created for political interests. Numerous social media misinformation propaganda and theories appealed to the public and delineated their focus from curbing the pandemic to other useless rhetoric.

The media, while serving as a crucial source of information, regrettably played a negative role in perpetuating misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sensationalism and the rapid spread of unverified claims fueled confusion and fear among the public. Misleading headlines, unscientific theories, and sensationalized reports contributed to the proliferation of myths, hindering public understanding of the virus and preventive measures. The impact of such misinformation extended beyond individual awareness, potentially jeopardizing public health efforts and eroding trust in authoritative sources. In navigating the pandemic, a responsible and evidence-based approach to reporting is essential to ensure accurate and reliable information reaches the public.

After the vaccines were first introduced, people believed them to be a hazard to their health and resisted them, despite all the government and media coercion to get vaccinated. In ignorant societies and far-flung areas, vaccine providers are denied permission or even killed for various misinformed reasons. These attitudes contributed to the sluggish progress in controlling the pandemic and getting control of it before it devastated the entire world. Ignorance about infectious diseases is a leading cause of these attitudes. Education should be duly provided about infectious diseases so that the myths and false propaganda that are spread at times of outbreak can be curbed before they can hinder the process of controlling a pandemic or epidemic.

9) Unfavorable Role of Religion

Religion can be a challenge in controlling infectious disease outbreaks like pandemics in several ways. First, religious beliefs may lead people to resist public health measures, such as vaccination or quarantine. For example, some people may believe that vaccination is a violation of their

religious beliefs, or that quarantine is a form of punishment. Second, religious practices may spread disease. For example, some religious rituals involve the sharing of food or drink, which can transmit disease. Third, religious leaders may discourage people from seeking medical care, which can delay diagnosis and treatment. For example, some religious leaders may believe that illness is a punishment from God and that seeking medical care is a sign of weakness.

During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2016, some religious leaders discouraged people from seeking medical care, believing that the disease was a punishment from God. This led to delays in diagnosis and treatment and contributed to the spread of the disease. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some religious leaders have discouraged people from getting vaccinated, believing that the vaccine is a violation of their religious beliefs. This has led to pockets of vaccine resistance, which has made it more difficult to control the spread of the virus. In rural India, villagers constructed a shrine dedicated to the "goddess Corona" and were earnestly offering prayers, seeking divine intervention to eradicate the threat posed by the deadly virus instead of observing SOPs and quarantine rules ("Indian Village Prays to 'Goddess Corona' to Rid Them of the Virus," 2021).

It is important to note that these are just a few examples, and there are many other ways in which religion can be a challenge in controlling infectious disease outbreaks. However, it is also important to remember that not all religious beliefs are a challenge to public health. Many religious leaders are working to promote public health and prevent the spread of disease.

Conclusion:

South Asia suffered tremendous losses during the Covid-19 pandemic. When the coronavirus outbreak occurred, state authorities around the world were blindsided and rendered useless in controlling the spread at the root. The coronavirus pandemic spread so fast that it was unforeseen by health authorities around the world. The pandemic did however bring significant attention to the gaps in pandemic preparedness of all health infrastructures. All pre-existing disaster management protocols, surveillance systems, and early warning mechanisms proved to have disparities and flaws in their work to prevent infectious diseases from becoming a global health emergency.

South Asia faces significant challenges with infectious diseases, exacerbated by social determinants like poverty, poor sanitation, and weak healthcare systems. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for better surveillance and regional cooperation. Despite existing immunization and vaccination programs, the region remains vulnerable due to factors like climate change, urbanization, and drug resistance. South Asia, particularly with its dense population and frequent natural disasters, is at high risk for future pandemics. Efforts towards regional collaboration, such as those initiated by SAARC during the COVID-19 crisis, underscore the importance of shared resources and information to enhance disease preparedness and response.

To enhance disease control in South Asia, adopting Habermas's theory of communicative action for regional cooperation is essential. Countries can work together to securitize health, especially against pandemic threats, despite political tensions. Utilizing SAARC's existing structure, rather than creating new organizations, can improve regional strategies. Establishing a regional surveillance system and a financial fund can aid underprivileged countries during outbreaks. Lessons from global networks like CORDS can inform regional collaborations. Practical examples include Sri Lanka's assistance to Pakistan in combating dengue and potential bilateral agreements between Pakistan and Afghanistan for polio eradication. Joint efforts can also help manage shared health issues like COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS between India and Pakistan. Additionally, removing tariffs on medical supplies and establishing joint agencies for expertise sharing are realistic, pragmatic approaches for regional health security.

Regional integration and dialogue can enhance the region's capacity to respond to infectious disease threats by improving pandemic preparedness, information, and medical expertise exchange between the neighboring countries. Cross-border surveillance, regional infrastructure, mutual interdependence, and confidence building can also help cool down the boiling political tensions and reduce regional conflict that exists between South Asian countries.

Regional cooperation in South Asia faces significant challenges primarily due to a lack of political will, power imbalances, and trust deficits. Political leaders often prioritize traditional security issues over non-military threats like infectious diseases, hindering initiatives such as those

proposed by SAARC, which is weakened by India-Pakistan tensions. India's dominant role in SAARC creates power imbalances, fostering distrust and political rivalries. Historical conflicts and miscommunication exacerbate these issues, making cooperation difficult. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and public opposition due to misinformation and religious beliefs further impede efforts to address regional health crises effectively.

There is generally greater scrutiny over health budgets, and the quality of public healthcare, with an increased sense of responsibility to avoid any future debacle like that of COVID-19 in the post-pandemic era. It is important that sustainable changes and developments in regional healthcare and pandemic preparedness are made while the wound is still fresh and the public is still aware. To enhance regional cooperation in South Asia, tangible recommendations include increasing political will through education and media advocacy, investing in infrastructure, and establishing a regional health fund. Building trust through consistent Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and addressing misinformation with accurate public health communication is also crucial. In the future, improved political collaboration and infrastructure development could lead to more effective management of transboundary health threats, fostering a stronger, more resilient regional alliance.

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National Security Policy 2022-2026 and Baluchistan: A critique

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Abstract:

The province of Baluchistan has always remained a source of concern for Pakistan. From the beginning, Baloch nationalists have challenged the writ of the state based on the suppression of their rights. This challenge has posed serious threats to the security apparatus and, also to the nationalistic narrative. The focus of the government of Imran Khan in the National Security Policy 2022-2026 was on the safety and security of its citizens. This citizen-centric approach rests on two aspects—national cohesion and the prosperity of its citizens. This document provides strategic guidance for policy actions. The question still haunts how such reconciliatory policies can be applied. There is a need to apply reconciliatory mechanisms to solve this issue. The question this paper, hence, seeks to answer is—what kinds of reconciliatory mechanisms can be applied to make the nationalist forces part of mainstream politics? A qualitative approach would be applied in this study where data would be collected from primary sources—National Security Policy documents and secondary sources—published articles.

Keywords: Security, Insurgency, Reconciliation, Minority Rights

Introduction:

Pakistan has unveiled its first-ever National Security Policy 2022-2026 in the previous government (NSD, 2022). The main objective behind the formulation of the document is to reorient and redesign the policy objectives that are vital for the national narrative and nation-building. The document has used the semantic ‘citizen-centric’ approach to deal with the current complex issues Pakistan faces. It is divided into different sections – policy formulation, national security framework, national cohesion, securing economic future, defence, internal security, foreign policy and human security. The areas of concern in this paper are national cohesion and internal security. Pakistan is a federal state that is contaminated with the colonial legacy (Grare, 2013). Pakistan is a heterogeneous nation that relies on the federal model of governance. A Federation is a system that rests on a complex balance where the central authority demands national cohesion and federating units aspire to become more autonomous (Ali, 2024). Unfortunately, the political system of Pakistan has remained weak leadership – civil and military that promoted

authoritative and central policies that emphasized state-building over nation-building. This phenomenon has resulted in a weak law and order situation, secessionist hues and tussles between the federal government and provincial governments.

Baluchistan with all its grievances ranging from economic, political and social is a source of concern. The nationalist forces and insurgents are serious threats to nation-building in Pakistan. Verily, these issues surfaced because of the negligence of the state apparatus. The research questions that this research paper aims to answer include which strategies the government used in the past? what kinds of reconciliatory mechanisms can be applied to make the nationalist forces part of mainstream politics? Is the National Security Policy of Pakistan enough to resolve the Baluchistan crisis? This paper aims to analyse the National Security Document and find reconciliatory mechanisms to make nationalist forces part of mainstream politics. The paper argues that in the security document there is no mention of a strategy that will relieve the grievances of Baluchistan. The literature review is arguing about that how the issues of minority groups can be mitigated with the application of rigorous policy actions. This paper applies the “Theory of Minority Rights given by Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman. The issue and gap lies with the National Security Policy and by applying the theory this paper aims to fill that gap. This paper has used a content analysis qualitative approach where primary and secondary sources are used. Analysing and concluding various texts of primary and secondary nature. Primary data is collected from the National Security Policy document and secondary data from published journal articles and books. The paper is divided into sections that include the literature review, historical background of the Baluchistan issue, reconciliatory policy options, critique and conclusion.

Literature Review:

Kymlicka & Norman (2016) have discussed the rights of ethno-linguistic minority groups. Their framework is to accommodate diverse ethnicities in societies on public policies, and legal and political rights (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000). Two distinct features are focused on that the rights of minorities are different from the rights of the majority and need to be protected; secondly, the rights are adopted to recognize the distinguishing aspects of the minorities (Jones, 2009). Political scientists and philosophers have not given any attention to minority rights before so in liberal democracies the minority groups have to accommodate themselves with the general rights provided in the constitutions. They argued that the rights of minorities are a complex phenomenon and their rights must not be mixed with the rights of a simple majority. They trying to create an argument that minorities with their distinct ethnicity, culture, and language must be given distinct rights which must go beyond the common political and civic practices. These rights must be given to ethnic and cultural minorities for greater cultural assimilation.

Right to Preserve Culture:

The "Right to Preserve Culture" places a strong emphasis on how crucial it is to protect minority groups' cultural identities within a wider social context (Kymlicka, 2004). This right emphasises how important it is to let minority cultures continue to exist independently of the dominant culture and to maintain their customs, languages, and ways of life. Minority cultures must have the freedom to preserve and transmit their cultural legacy to the next generations in a diverse society. This entails shielding them from laws and social forces that could weaken or eliminate their unique cultural identity. Recognising the importance of cultural diversity and making sure that minority groups have the freedom and resources to continue their cultural practises, beliefs, and traditions without encountering prejudice constitute the fundamental components of this right.

Exemptions Granted to Minorities:

The minorities are given exemptions from the laws and practices that snub their freedom. The laws which are made for the majority do not apply to minorities and indigenous people (Jones, 2009). Laws made in a community, which frequently reflect the beliefs, customs, and preferences of the majority, may not adequately or fairly address the unique needs and issues of indigenous people and other marginalised groups. This discrepancy may mean that certain groups' rights and interests are not adequately protected by laws that appear to apply to everyone.

Some laws or policies might unintentionally harm minority or indigenous communities or ignore their unique circumstances and cultural concerns. For example, these groups may not effectively have their interests served by laws that are designed without taking into account their particular cultural, historical, or social contexts. For this reason, there is a need for laws and policies that take these minority groups and indigenous people's needs into consideration. It is acknowledged that, within the larger framework of society, these communities may need particular protections or considerations in order to preserve their autonomy, language, land rights, and cultural integrity. Laws that actively protect the rights and interests of minority and indigenous groups, guarantee their participation in decision-making processes and preserve their distinctive cultural identities. They also support a legal and political framework that recognises and respects the cultural diversity within a society.

Assistance Rights:

Moreover, assistance rights are provided to minorities in liberal democracies. The lingual and educational rights of minorities and indigenous people need to be safeguarded. Minorities may have different educational concerns than the majority of a certain state concerning literature and language (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Minority groups in a state or society frequently have different educational needs than the majority population, especially when it comes to literature and language. Their need to preserve their language and cultural identity within the larger educational framework gives rise to these needs. Minority groups may look for

educational programmes that highlight aspects of their cultural heritage, such as locally relevant literature, history, and language. The history, literature, and language of the majority culture may receive more attention in the mainstream educational system than they would otherwise, which may leave out important minority groups' experiences, languages, and cultural contributions. Thus, educational policies that take these variances into account must be implemented. Ensure that the literature and languages of minority communities are not only preserved but also honoured within the educational system, this may entail making provisions for bilingual or multilingual education. By doing this, they hope to offer a more diverse and inclusive educational experience that meets the needs of all societal groups, advancing social cohesion and a deeper understanding of other cultures.

Autonomous Self-Government System:

The self-government system is another right of the minorities and indigenous communities (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000). This right would empower the communities to make their decision-making apparatus. This right is based on some historical affinities such as indigenous people could claim that in history they were independent of any social contract with the state. Also, the minorities are mistreated by the majority so to safeguard their rights they require a separate mechanism of governance. Furthermore, the self-local governments are a more decentralized form of governance than central and provincial. Similarly, the self-local government would preserve their cultural ethos and political autonomy and a local representative would be able to resolve its issues more amicably (Kymlicka, 1997).

Safeguarding Cultural and Lingual Rights:

The scholars argue in favour of immigrants who are also regarded as minorities in a foreign land. They stressed that the cultural and lingual rights of immigrant minorities must be protected (Kymlicka, 2000). There is an example of Quebec where language laws only allowed the use of the French language in commercial signs which was sheer discrimination against lingual minorities. Due to such laws, minorities are forced to leave their primordial identities that are closely embedded in their culture. Internal rules for members' conduct are enforced by ostracism and ex-communication. Scholars have discussed the conventions of a particular community that are not shaped into constitutional laws but are still practised and implemented on diverse minorities. However, such conventions and internal laws have no cultural, religious or social applicability to minorities and indigenous people (Kymlicka, 1997). To accommodate the legal and traditional distinction between minorities and indigenous people, the incorporation and enforcement of distinctive laws fall under minority rights. A need for various legal frameworks to take into account the unique rights of both indigenous peoples and minorities.

These groups frequently have unique historical, cultural, and legal circumstances that call for particular attention within the larger legal framework. Although both groups may be viewed as minorities in a broader social context, there are important traditional and legal distinctions between them. Indigenous peoples frequently have unique rights regarding self-governance, land rights, and cultural practices that are distinct from those of other minority groups because of their historical presence and special relationship with the land. Frameworks for minority rights need to take these variations into account. They support political and legal frameworks that specifically acknowledge and defend the unique rights of indigenous peoples, taking into account their particular historical and cultural contexts, in addition to safeguarding the rights of minorities more broadly. In order to do this, laws that protect indigenous peoples' languages, customs, land rights, and systems of self-governance must be incorporated and upheld. These laws may differ from those that protect other minorities living in the same state.

Symbolic Recognition of Rights:

This right of representation of minority and indigenous groups is an old practice. This right needs to be preserved. These rights provide the inclusion of minorities in the decision-making apparatus and become the voice of dissent groups (Kymlicka, 2000). The distinctiveness of the minorities and indigenous communities must be maintained through symbolic recognition (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000). The significance of symbolic recognition is essential in recognising and maintaining the unique characteristics of indigenous and minority groups in a broader society. Cultural and religious symbols, flags, national anthem, public holidays and their historical uniqueness must be recognized by the state. Acknowledging these groups' cultural, historical, and social significance conspicuously is known as symbolic recognition. The provision of symbolic recognition, not only affirms these communities' identities and histories but also their place in the greater social fabric. This acknowledgement addresses the significance of cultural validation and respect in addition to legal and political rights. It seeks to preserve the rich diversity that these groups contribute to society at large while promoting a sense of respect and belonging.

Historical Antecedent:

Baluchistan is the largest territorial area in Pakistan with heterogeneous population that is bordered by Iran and Afghanistan (Noraiee, 2020). It constitutes various ethnicities such as Baloch, Pushtoons, Brahui and Hazaras (Muzaffar, Karamat, & Saeed, 2018). rectangle miles of the southern eastern with deserts area and Helmand stream. Baluchistan is a land with natural resources and strategically Baluchistan is vital because of coastal resources as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Bansal, 2008). The culture of Baluchistan is dominated by primordialism and Baloch Nationalism is constructed on rivalries, fragmentations and personal vendetta (Titus & Swidler, 2000). More broadly these contentions rest on continuing the status quo and building

alliances with a foreign power (Grare, 2013). Since its inception, the political and constitutional history of Pakistan has been tainted by the authoritative tendencies of the central government.

This phenomenon has halted the devolution of power from the upper hierarchy to the lower one. The tussle of power between the two tiers of government in Pakistan has given birth to the Baloch nationalism that evolved from the freedom struggle to secessionist hues and then to the armed rebellion. The tribal nature of Baluchistan province has given birth to ethno-nationalistic tendencies and patron-client inclination (Grare, 2013). The successive governments of Pakistan have also tried to manage the conflict rather than resolve it. The main and dominant actors in Baluchistan are tribes, political parties and government-claimed insurgent organisations (Khan, 2012).

Pakistan has adopted a three-pronged strategy to deal with the issue of Baluchistan (Bansal, 2008). First, through management of information, and psychological warfare; secondly, through political and civil harassment, divide and rule, execution of tribal leaders; and thirdly, through military deployment and cantonments (Wirsing, 2008). The successive civilian and military governments have supported tribal chiefs thus inculcating a sense of isolation among the common Baloch people. This is the reason that Balochs have failed to recognize themselves as rightful citizens of Pakistan. Many instances that happened such as the One Unit plan, the separation of East Bengal based on suppression of Bengali rights, successive military operations, military-bureaucratic oligarchic system, issues of resource distribution, demographic changes, deterioration of law and order, representation in state apparatus, no go areas, and cases of missing persons that accentuated feelings of alienation and estrangement among the Baloch people (Khan, 2009).

These political instabilities become the cause of various insurgencies in Pakistan. In 1948, the first insurgency occurred in Baluchistan followed by other issues that occurred in 1958-59 and 1963-69 (Muzaffar, Karamat, & Saeed, 2018). The first Civilian Chief Martial Law Administrator Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, from 1973-79 ignored the demands of the provincial government of Baluchistan that became the cause of a systemic insurgency (Haq, 2006). The insurgency continued and shaped into a hostile environment when the Baluch nationalist Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was murdered in 2009 (Haq, 2006). The Government of Pakistan took the charge of Frontier Corps which created more cleavages. Another instance that fueled conflict was the murder of Nawabzada Balach Marri, of the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), in 2007 (Dunne, 2006). In this period there were many incidents of violence ranging from kidnappings, murders, target killings and blasts.

Some summarized analyses of the Baluch period of active insurgencies are discussed below.

When Pakistan came into being the Pakistan military intervened in Baluchistan and gained control of it from the Khan of Kalat. The Khan of Kalat resisted this move and demanded the autonomy of the area from the army's intervention. For this purpose, armed struggle was driven with the help of the National Liberation Group of Baluch (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen, 2021).

In 1950, Prince Abdul Karim rebelled against the military and state forces which led to the armed conflict. To restore peace a reconciliatory agreement was made between state forces and Prince Karim, but the Pakistan army deviated from that initiated a new era of resistance (Ahmad, 2012). Another conflict happened in the era of President Iskander Mirza when he asked General Ayub Khan to forgive Khan of Kalat for the politico-socio progress of Baluchistan. But Ayub Khan was not ready to do any rapprochement and blamed the Baluch people for conspiring against Pakistan under the leadership of Afghan forces (Ul Haq, Khan, & Nuri, 2005). To satisfy his egoistic ambitions General Ayub Khan set up new facilities in Baluchistan in 1958. Under the leadership of Tikka Khan, a new resistance movement started relying heavily upon the weapons smuggled from Afghanistan and Iran (Burki, 2012). In 1973, when Bhutto held the command of the government, he installed his men as Governor and Chief Minister, Ghaus Bukhsh Bizenjo and Ataullah Mengal respectively (Khan, 2011). This imparted more sense of alienation in the people of Baluchistan. Similarly, in the era of General Zia Ul Haq, the norm of absolute authority was exercised (Hussain & Kumar, 2023).

In Pervaiz Musharraf era the Baloch people were dissatisfied with the government's policies because it handled resource extraction, economic progress, and military actions. Development initiatives of the government encountered criticism and scepticism, especially the building of the Baluchistan Package and the Gwadar Port. Many Baloch believed that rather than helping the local people, these programmes were intended to benefit the central government and other outside parties (Alamgir, 2012). Allegations of human rights violations in Baluchistan were made against the administration of Musharraf. The circumstances surrounding Nawab Akbar Bugti's assassination and the subsequent abduction of the Baloch people signalled a shift in the intensity of the region. The circumstances in Baluchistan deteriorated after the death of Nawab Akbar Bugti (Alamgir, 2012). Beginning in 2000, guerrilla warfare involved frequent attacks on armed personnel. The people behind these acts were those who wanted to subvert the power of the government. As the People's Liberation Front made it clear that resistance against the control of Baloch resources would not be tolerated by attacking a police station close to Kohlu, tensions increased (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen, 2021). The creation of the Baloch Liberation Army marked the beginning of a new era despite the ongoing atrocities in Baloch areas. The group declared its resolve to fight against what they considered to be oppressive Punjabi forces and pledged to battle the Frontier Corps (Bukhari, Roofi, & Bukhari, 2015).

President Pervez Musharraf launched the construction of Gwadar in 2002, a significant seaport project in the area. China provided substantial financial and material help for the building of Gwadar, which was intended to strengthen the region's infrastructure (Bansal, 2006). Chinese engineers were assigned the responsibility of accelerating the project during this time. Nonetheless, a concerning event took place in the seaside resort of Gwadar in 2004 where Chinese labourers were attacked (Khan, Azhar, & Muhammad, 2018). Similarly, Extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and human rights abuses were

reported, which fuelled separatist sentiment and increased agitation. Protests continued to show that the Baloch community was not satisfied with the government's efforts, even though the Baluchistan Package was an attempt by the government to address issues of the Baloch people (Kundi, 2008).

Nawaz Sharif's administration, which persisted from 2013 to 2017, the province of Baluchistan dealt with a wide range of complicated problems through the civilian government and the military launched operations against the unrest and insurgency. Security issues, the region's socioeconomic development, and the Baloch population's fight for autonomy and fundamental rights were all ongoing issues. Responses to the government's strategy of political discourse, infrastructure development, and reconciliation efforts were not entirely positive (Khan, 2022). Some positive developmental changes happened in this era under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project (CPEC), for example, the Gwadar-Hoshab (M-8) road. However, the Baluchi people perceived this project as a new way of colonialism (Kaur & Malhi, 2023). Many incidents happened in Baluchistan in this respect, such as, Without consulting the provincial government, the federal government unilaterally extended the mining lease contract for the Sui field in 2015, even though Baluchistan has the right to use the gas resources it is not getting its due rights. The province government was not consulted or included in these decisions, so they had no control or influence over these important projects (Kaur & Malhi, 2023).

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), a newcomer, rose to prominence in Pakistan in 2018 on both the national and local levels. Historically, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan People's Party have dominated the political landscape of the nation. With its ascent to power, PTI was perceived as a fresh force in Pakistan's intricate political landscape, signalling a break from the country's established political system. Some saw it as a new wave of refreshing politics, while others saw it as a synthesis of old and new (Hussain et al., 2021). Baluchistan encountered numerous political and socioeconomic difficulties from 2018 to 2022 while the PTI government was in power. The area struggled with demands for more provincial autonomy, security concerns, and infrastructure development (Shafqat, 2022). The region's course during this time was determined by the government's approach to resolving these issues in Baluchistan, which included development projects, efforts to enhance security, and interactions with local stakeholders. Many instable incidents took place in this period of time, such as A van carrying Chinese faculty members connected to the Confucius Institute in Karachi was the target of an attack in April 2022. The attack claimed the lives of three Chinese nationals and their local driver. The attacker was described as an educated female suicide bomber connected to the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) (Kaur & Malhi, 2023). Both the Chinese government and the Islamabad ruling elite expressed grave concern and strong reactions to this incident. Beijing is already becoming increasingly uneasy about the increased security costs for Chinese nationals working along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Kaur & Malhi, 2023).

National Security Policy 2022-2026:

In the National Security Policy document, the policy regarding national cohesion is clearly defined and delineated. The document describes that Pakistan is a country of diverse cultural contours. For cohesive national integration, the country needs to reinforce the discourse of unity in diversity. Otherwise, the ethnic, religious and social differences will hinder the nationalistic narrative thus leading to anarchy, disharmony and chaos.

Moreover, national cohesion and integration are only possible when socio-economic justice is equally distributed among all the segments of society. Furthermore, there is a dire need to overhaul the institutional and governance disparities in all tiers of governance structure. The reconciliatory mechanisms discussed in the document are based on preserving the identity, ensuring unity and stability, and making the public service responsive. The document describes inclusiveness and harmony despite class, creed, ethnicity, sect and gender. Similarly, stresses the need to foster democracy and pluralistic norms. Consequently, improving the public service delivery system through responsiveness, accountability, transparency and e-governance. In the realm of security, the issues of terrorism, sub-nationalist forces, sectarianism and extremism are grave concerns that inhibit national cohesion. For resolving the given issues, the document talks about preserving the law and order situation and the rule of law (NSD, 2022).

Reconciliatory Mechanisms:

First, dialogue and negotiation with the nationalist forces in Baluchistan is the key to resolving the issue and accommodating them in mainstream politics. A major step was taken in past but did not proved very fruitful, for example, after the restoration of democracy in 2008, the then government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) took initiatives to meet the grievances of Baluchistan, the most important one in this wake was the 'Aghaz-e-Huqooq Baluchistan' package (Hassan, 2020). For reconciliation, the PPP government aimed to settle long-standing disputes and lessen separatist sentiments in Baluchistan. A committee was constituted to formulate all-encompassing recommendations that would tackle the province's persistent political and economic problems. On November 24, 2009, during a joint parliamentary session, this committee formulated a package named Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Baluchistan (the initiation of Baluchistan Rights) (Waseem, 2007). The package was well received by mainstream national political parties, who saw it as a constructive move towards reducing tensions in the volatile province. However, some expressed scepticism regarding its efficacy. Moderate nationalists cautiously clung to their optimism regarding the possible effects of the reform package. However, these centrist political forces conveyed their dissatisfaction, pointing out that the package did not convince anyone or include extremist elements. Regionalist groups that support Pakistan's integrity and unity expressed grave concerns about the actions of the federal government. In Baluchistan, the political parties have restated

their demand that the federating units be honoured as stipulated in the 1940 Lahore Resolution. They argued against the reform package in favour of total provincial autonomy as well as local management of the province's resources (Zia, 2012).

Secondly, there is a dire need for the state forces must recognize the identity and presence of the nationalist forces in Baluchistan. In the hegemonic control approach, it has been stated that in heterogeneous societies the elite segments of the state control and regulate the minority groups for their interests (McGarry & O'Leary, 1994). This is the way to create the element of stabilisation in society. With the help of coercive domination and elite co-option authoritarian and hybrid states control and manage minority groups. This issue is the crisis of identity. The Baloch nationalist forces perceive the federal government of Pakistan as a "Colonist" and "Occupier" (Noraiee, 2020). When the state would recognize their identity the sense of alienation of nationalist forces would decrease. Thus, such forces would move forward to become part of mainstream politics. Inculcating a sense of inclusiveness and belongingness is very important.

Thirdly, the state apparatus must recognize the fact that the rigid social structures of Baluchistan, i.e., the 'Sardary System' cannot be abolished overnight. The governments have tried to abolish the 'Sardary System', for example, in 1976 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto passed the Sardari Abolition Ordinance (Samad, 2011). Such policies resulted in a more conflictual scenario. The people in Baluchistan should not be forced to abandon their cultural practices. Baluchistan needs to go through a social and cultural change. This is only possible when the region becomes politically stable. Their cultural rights and identity must be protected such as their language and literature.

Fourthly, the countries or states that possess natural resources are more prone to conflicts such as civil wars, ethnic cleavages and sectarian rifts (Samad, 2011). Baluchistan is a hub of natural resources this is another reason that it is a conflict-driven region. It is one of the reasons for Baloch antagonism, for example, the gas resources of the Sui area are not used by local people but are supplied to the largest populated province of Pakistan, Punjab (Samad, 2011). The government and state should give due rights to Baluchistan because the people have the first right to use the resources. An ample amount must be allocated resources there for developmental and structural growth.

Furthermore, the government must check the international funding provided by foreign elements and nationalists in Baluchistan. The diaspora and transnational elements penetrate the regions that face ethnic conflicts (Long, Singh, Samad, & Talbot, 2015). The Baloch diaspora that resides in the Middle Eastern countries, especially the Gulf countries actively funds separatist and secessionist movements in Baluchistan. Moreover, the Baloch diaspora living in democratic states such as the UK, USA and Europe are actively involved in raising their voice for a separate Baloch state.

In order to incorporate nationalist elements into Baluchistan's mainstream politics, power devolution is imperative. The Pakistani Constitution gives provinces a great deal of autonomy, but the central government and military establishment in particular are

reluctant to give up power, which has prevented the provinces from fully exercising their autonomy. Local voices have frequently been ignored by this concentration of power, which has inflamed discontent among the Baloch people. Giving province and municipal governments more financial and administrative authority is necessary to empower Baluchistan through true devolution. The Baloch will be able to create and carry out policies that are tailored to their own sociocultural environment with such a change. This is especially crucial in an area where cultural customs and different tribal ties set it apart from other parts of Pakistan. Furthermore, by encouraging a sense of ownership and involvement in politics, decentralization might lessen nationalist emotions. Local communities feel less alienated and are better equipped to make positive contributions to the advancement of the country when they are involved in government. By bridging the divide between nationalist forces and the federal government, this inclusive strategy can promote a more cohesive and peaceful political environment.

Moreover, there is a need to recognise and resolve the ethnic fractionalisation, especially between the Baloch and Pashtun communities through social contract and assimilating policies. In the past, these differences have increased hostilities and impeded the growth of the area. It is crucial to encourage social interaction and assimilation techniques that close the divide between different groups in order to promote peace and stability. More interaction between various groups might lessen prejudice and promote understanding amongst them. The Baloch and Pashtun communities can work together and share knowledge through projects like inclusive educational programs, cooperative community projects, and intercultural discussions. These exchanges contribute to dispelling myths and fostering trust, which paves the way for a community that is more unified. The legislature has a crucial role in formulating legislation that safeguard the distinct identities and cultural legacies of the Pashtun and Baloch populations while simultaneously addressing pressing social challenges. This entails preserving customs, fostering regional languages, and acknowledging and appreciating cultural occasions. By taking these steps, development initiatives in Baluchistan are guaranteed to protect the ethnic landscape's diverse mosaic and not to homogenize culture.

The long-standing use of a divide-and-rule tactic in Baluchistan by Pakistan's military bureaucratic oligarchy has exacerbated ethnic tensions and threatened the stability of the area. This strategy, which is typified by encouraging discord among many ethnic and tribal communities, has proven to be ineffective, intensifying mistrust and igniting insurgencies. It is essential that the military give up this polarizing strategy in order to bring about long-lasting peace and progress. One of the main points of dispute in Baluchistan is the large number of military camps and cantonments. Instead of seeing these installations as security measures, many Baloch people see them as symbols of oppression and outside domination. The significant military presence has frequently resulted in violations of human rights and a feeling of occupation among the local populace, further dividing them from the state. Reversing military installations would be a critical first step in fostering healing and fostering confidence. It may be possible to foster an atmosphere where local government and civilian institutions can thrive by lessening the military's presence and

influence in civilian matters. Alongside this demilitarization, there should be a sincere attempt to hold discussions, listen to the concerns of Baloch leaders and communities, and include them in the decision-making process.

Thus, the people of Baluchistan must be given their rights on the lines provided by Kymlicka & Norman. The above-mentioned reconciliatory mechanisms can be applied effectively to bring the nationalist forces into mainstream politics.

Critique and Conclusion:

The National Security Policy of Pakistan is merely a document of semantics. A well-written policy document is a guide, outlining the norms, regulations, and protocols that must be adhered to in different situations. A strong policy document has a few essential components that work together to make it both effective and easy to use. Simplicity and clarity are the cornerstones of a comprehensive policy document (Apthorpe, 1997). It is imperative that the language employed be lucid, succinct, and easily understood by all parties involved, regardless of their level of experience with the subject. It guarantees that the organization-wide understanding of the policy's instructions and intent is achieved by avoiding superfluous technical jargon and unclear terminology.

Moreover, a format that is ordered and well-structured is crucial. The writing should flow logically so that readers can easily find relevant information and move between sections with ease. Accessibility and understanding are improved by having a well-defined division of sections that include an introduction, purpose, scope, policy statements, procedures, and enforcement provisions. Involving stakeholders is essential when creating or updating policies (Apthorpe, 1997). A strong policy document takes into consideration the opinions of pertinent stakeholders and recognises the value of a variety of viewpoints and needs. This inclusive approach guarantees that the policy covers a broad range of issues and situations while also encouraging a sense of ownership among those who will be impacted by it. A successful policy document also clearly outlines the goals and anticipated results, as well as its scope and purpose. It should outline the policy's application to all parties and the penalties for noncompliance in order to promote an accountable culture. Furthermore, it's important to explicitly state the procedures for regular evaluation, updates, and revisions so that the policy stays applicable and useful in evolving contexts.

The policy must be easily accessible and comprehensible to the people it affects in order to be considered accessible. Widespread understanding and compliance are facilitated by using a multifaceted communication strategy to distribute the policy, holding training sessions, and developing easily accessible platforms or resources (Apthorpe, 1997). Consistency with the values, mission, and other current policies is maintained by a well-written policy document. Maintaining uniformity among policies guarantees coherence and prevents inconsistencies or clashes in the operational structure of the basic theme. All things considered, these characteristics work together to make a policy document more effective by guaranteeing that it accomplishes its

goals and is comprehended and followed by all parties. All these characteristics were lacking in the National Security Policy 2022-2026.

In the context of Baluchistan, there is no clear mechanism given in the document in the realm of national cohesion and internal security that how it would resolve the crisis of nationalist forces in Baluchistan. The Baloch people have underlying grievances related to economic marginalisation, political exclusion, and perceived resource exploitation that the security policy has not adequately addressed. Achieving long-lasting peace may be difficult if these fundamental problems are not resolved. It is not mentioned in the document whether or not the state would use the military to resolve the crisis as a military in the shape of Frontier Corps already deployed in Baluchistan. If military tactics were employed it could increase tensions and alienate local communities. It might be more successful to take a more comprehensive strategy that incorporates political inclusion and socioeconomic development. Various stakeholders, such as local communities, tribal leaders, and political representatives of the moderate Baloch community, may not have been sufficiently involved in the policy-making process, as not mentioned. For any resolution to be sustainable, their representation and input are essential. Human rights protection in conflict-affected areas is not mentioned, particularly when it comes to addressing the issue of missing persons. Human rights violations and the overuse of force are two more things that can exacerbate the situation and inflame local discontent. The policy has not explicitly listed priorities or provided step-by-step solutions for Baluchistan's overall economic development. Dissatisfaction and instability can be exacerbated due to the lack of economic opportunities. The lack of mechanisms for dialogue and reconciliation with separatist movements and dissident groups in the policy may limit the opportunities for a peaceful resolution and the integration of these groups into the mainstream political process.

However, it is a positive move for the government and security apparatus to issue a national security policy document. Pakistan must recognize that it needs implementation of policy pursuits, not just policy written on paper. The seven decades of ongoing Baloch struggle highlight the systemic failure to address the aspirations of the Baloch people. It is an example of how they are left out of important decisions that affect their basic standard of living. This long struggle for independence is a result of their deeply held sense of their unique tribal identity, which they are trying to preserve in the face of a demographic shift brought about by the influx of non-Baloch people into the area.

In the federal state of Pakistan, the emphasis is always given to state-building rather than to nation-building. The province of Baluchistan has remained a source of concern because successive military movements and civilian government mechanisms have suppressed the rights of the Baloch people. The rebellious narrative of Baloch nationalist policies has threatened the nationalistic cohesion of Pakistan. Baloch nationalism that dated back to the colonial era remained intact even after the independence of Pakistan. The government and state always focused on managing the crisis instead of resolving it. Pakistan has documented its

first security policy that almost failed to narrate and describe which policies it would implement to bring nationalist elements into the mainstream political discourse. This paper by applying the framework of Kymlicka & Norman tried to devise reconciliatory mechanisms to resolve the crisis of nationalistic cohesion (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000).

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