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Pakistani Hazara Shia victims: challenges, survival techniques, and protective needs

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ABSTRACT

News reports frequently convey acts of violence against Hazara Shias in Pakistan, but there is limited empirical scholarship about lived experiences of the community. To contribute to the knowledge in this field, interviews with Pakistani Hazara Shia victims, who have also lost immediate family members to violence, were conducted. Interviews with thirteen participants took place between February and May 2021. Thematic content analysis revealed two broad areas: *Challenges and fears* and *Coping and hope for a better future*. The former showed that participants struggled with: (i) uncertainty about which factor plays a greater role in violence; (ii) facing psychological warfare and living with violence by normalising it; (iii) discrimination and exclusion; and (iv) mental trauma, drug abuse, and suicide ideation. The latter thematic area uncovered that participants persisted through: (i) religious coping and spirituality; (ii) plans for migration versus nationalism; and (iii) hope that basic human rights and special quotas would be secured in the future. The study highlights that unless it is stopped, the violence against Hazara Shias will have to be accepted as an 'extension of genocide' which deprives living members of the community from essentially continuing with life beyond pure survival and suffering from 'social death'.

KEYWORDS

Hazara Shia; violence; victims; Pakistan; social death; challenges; coping

Introduction

Miqdad Ali¹ narrated:

On 8th June 2003, Sunday, there was a police procession on Saryab Road . . . 15–16 of our people were fired at, of which 12 were martyred. My brother was in the police and a community hero. He got the maximum bullets as he was in the front of the line. My father's health deteriorated so much after this incident that he passed away. My mother is alive, but not with us . . . she is just a person who breathes in the house. Although it has been 18 years, she still keeps my brothers' clothes and sleeps with them. I have tried to stop talking about him and hide his pictures, but the heart cannot erase his memory. It is the heart that is in constant pain and the mind which is in constant fear . . . wondering who is next. The 2003 attack was one of the initial terrors seen by my generation against my

community in Quetta . . . and since then the violence has continued. Last year an attack during the Ashura² procession included the use of 1,000 kg of C4 explosives on us.

Those who survived, including myself, buried 120–130 dead bodies on the same day.

There is no family here who has not suffered through killing of a relative and there are very few men left without a physical disability from a blast or attack. Recently in a blast my cousin got disabled and the doctors had to cut off his legs. A few hours later another blast was targeted at an ambulance transporting victims. In this blast we picked up pieces of flesh of our people . . . 60–70 sacs were filled. We didn't know whose flesh it was . . . and had to bury the sacs in a communal grave. Another thing we cannot forget is that nobody helps us. Even protesting with dead bodies for days does not invite a response. There is no one to get us justice or assure us safety. Our only sin is that we were born Shia Hazaras. For decades now the intensity of violence and persecution against us is rampant and relentless . . . and there does not seem to be an end in sight!

The story of Miqdad summarises the life experiences of the families of non-combatant Hazara Shias who have been killed. Like Miqdad, nearly all the Hazara Shia community in Quetta have lost a loved one, are dealing with elder parents and relatives that are suffering from emotional and mental trauma and are experiencing some kind of physical disability due to bombing and attacks. The collective feelings are of fear and helplessness with no hope that anyone will help or support them. Ultimately, many believe that they are born to face injustice and die.

This paper is part of a wider study to investigate the life circumstances of Hazara Shias residing in Quetta, Pakistan, and understand their experiences and challenges. The background and origins of the Hazara Shias in Afghanistan and their migration to Pakistan is described at first, along with the aim of the study. Next, a theoretical framework for the study is discussed mainly using Claudia Card's work on the death of social vitality. The methods section describes the qualitative nature of the study and the recruitment of participants through purposive sampling. Thematic content analysis has been used to report the findings, with rich participant quotes, and the final section of the study includes a discussion and conclusion which highlights the need for critical and immediate mobilisation to secure safety and protective policy for the Hazara Shias of Pakistan.

The Hazara Shias of Afghanistan

The Hazaras are a minority ethnic group of Afghanistan who comprise 20 per cent of the Afghan population.³ Majority of the Hazaras follow the Twelver Shia faith or the Shia Imami Ismaili faith, whereas some are known to be Sunni Muslims. The Hazara Shias have a long history, since the 1800s, of facing killing and persecution in Afghanistan, with estimates suggesting that 10–12 million have been killed over the years.⁴ Hazara Shias stand out for their distinct ethnicity and religious beliefs and though they belong to Afghanistan, there is some uncertainty about their origins and descent.⁵ Five different theories can be found about Hazara origins, which include: (i) they have inhabited Afghanistan land since the time of Alexander the Great; (ii) they are descendants of the Mongol soldiers who came to Afghanistan with Chengiz Khan's army in the 13th century; (iii) they are descended from various Turkic clans; (iv) they are a mixed race and the product of intermarriages between Mongol soldiers, native Tajiks, and the Turks who

settled in Afghanistan before the Mongol invasion; and (v) that they originated from Tibet.⁶ Regardless of these theories, what is certain is that the main dominant group in Afghanistan has remained the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns have been rulers of Afghanistan and done their best to maintain supremacy as rightful sovereigns over the other three main ethnic groups that have been residing in the country for centuries including the Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek.⁷

Not only has ethnicity been a major cause of exclusion and persecution against the Hazara Shias, but there is a role of sectarianism as well.⁸ Predominantly the Hazara Shias follow the Twelver Shia Islamic faith, which makes them a minority sect across the Muslim world, and in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Extremist Sunni sects do not consider Shias as Muslims and persecute them based on their 'infidelity', non-Muslim status, and accuse them of blasphemy.⁹ Though there are other Shias in Afghanistan like the Pashtun Shias, the Qezelbash, and Sayeds, the Hazara Shias have distinct physical features that makes them easily identifiable and convenient targets by Sunni extremists.¹⁰ The Hazara Shia persecution in Afghanistan, began with the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan in the late 19th Century, who considered them non-Muslims and infidels.¹¹ Under his reign majority Hazara Shias were massacred, enslaved, or forced into exile from their lands, mainly to neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan. Subsequent Afghan rulers through the 20th Century, emulated Abdur Rahman Khan's policy and continued to confiscate Hazara lands and forced Hazara Shias to either emigrate or convert to Sunni Islam. In 1993 the Sunni militias of Jamiat-e Islami and Ittihad-e Islami committed the worst massacres against the Hazara Shias killing civilians including children, women, and the elderly estimated at 1,000 people and 5,000 homes.

Notable in history and the violence against the Hazara Shias of Afghanistan is the emergence of the Taliban in 1994. The Taliban, an extremist Sunni group, consider Shias to be non-Muslims and propagate that killing Shias is a service to Islam.¹² After the 1998 takeover of the Afghan regime by the Taliban, one of the first purges was the violence against civilian Shia Hazaras with an edict to the remaining that they must convert to Sunni Islam.¹³ In 1998 the Taliban committed the worst recorded massacre against an estimated 8,000 Hazara civilians in Mazar-e Sharif. Between 1999 and 2001 the Taliban continued killings against the Hazara Shias, slaughtering civilians, destroying homes, and detaining and torturing victims to spread terror in living members of the community. Consequently, more Hazara Shias fled to Pakistan at this point in history.

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the Hazara Shias embraced democracy and supported the peace process of the new Afghan government hoping for improved safety.¹⁴ However, the Taliban had found another reason to persecute the Hazara Shias based on political animosity.¹⁵ Despite Afghanistan's ratification of the Rome Statute in 2003, the killings against the Hazara Shias has continued with incidents of death and detention remaining undocumented, though UN documents have estimated figures in thousands.¹⁶ Overall, an estimated 60 per cent of the Hazara Shias of Afghanistan have faced a genocidal campaign of ruthless killing since the 19th Century, while the remaining 40 per cent have been forced to relocate to barren mountain ranges of Afghanistan or migrate to another country, including neighbouring Pakistan.¹⁷ The Hazara Shias that remain in Afghanistan face systematic persecution including: (i) attempts at forced conversion to Sunni Islam; (ii) takeover of Shia mosques by Sunni clerics; (iii) removal from Afghan state positions and government jobs; (iv) facing oppressive and unfair

taxation; (v) stripping of rights to education and land ownership; and (vi) deprivations with regard to basic rights for safety, housing, education, and employment.¹⁸ The place of killing of Hazara Shias in Afghanistan has included:¹⁹ (i) transit ways and highways; (ii) religious and cultural centres; (iii) schools and workplaces; and (iv) neighbourhoods where Hazara Shias reside, especially on the occasion of weddings or funerals. There has been very little peace and security for the community, who have had to face extreme and constant fear about when and where they may face killing, both within the home or outside. It is also because of this exclusion and structural discrimination that Hazara Shias in Afghanistan remain the poorest of populations. Approximately 40,000 have immigrated to European countries to seek asylum, where they struggle as second class citizens or than as illegal immigrants.²⁰ Refugee Hazara Shias can also be found in countries like Iran, Australia, Russia, and America.²¹

The refugee Hazara Shias of Pakistan

Pakistan is the sixth most populated country in the world, which is also home to multiple ethnicities of which the Hazara Shias constitute a small minority.²² From the approximate 8 million Hazara Shias across the world, 0.65 million reside in Pakistan, mainly in the capital city of Balochistan province, named Quetta.²³ Apart from the city of Quetta, the Hazara Shias can also be found in other parts of the country such as Parachinar, Karachi, Sanghar, Nawabshah, Hyderabad, Sanjawi, Much, Zhob, Harnai, Loralai, and Dukki. Regrettably, the fate of the Hazara Shias that migrated to Pakistan, since the 1800s and also post 1998, is not dissimilar to that of the Hazara Shias that are persecuted and killed in Afghanistan.²⁴ Quetta city is known to be a ghettoised prison for Hazara Shias, where they face restrictions in terms of moving out of their assigned zones and also limited opportunities for trade and business.²⁵ The Hazara Shias have distinct Mongolian features which also make them easier targets for identification and killing in Pakistan.²⁶ Latest reports suggest that over 1,000 Hazara Shias have been killed since 1993,²⁷ but exact statistics for how many have been killed in total across the years is uncertain.²⁸ Some scholars suggest that non-combative Hazara Shias in Pakistan have been killed in the thousands, and the lack of systematic data collection about their killing is in itself a grave violation by the state in recognising their plight or planning protective measures for them.²⁹ Thousands have been injured and suffer from physical and mental consequences of attacks and ghettoisation, but again exact figures are not certain.³⁰

Though the Hazara Shias of Pakistan have faced killing since migrating from Afghanistan for many years, there was a significant upsurge in targeted killing post the 1979 Iranian revolution and General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization process in 1984 which gave rise to Sunni militancy and extremism. Extremist groups like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS have openly claimed to kill Shias, and particularly Hazara Shias.³¹ Deobandi Sunni organisations in Pakistan supported the establishment of the militant Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in 1985 and its splinter group, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).³² The primary objective of both groups has been to kill Shias to maintain Sunni dominance and anti-Iran agendas. Some reports also claim that Pakistan's alliance with USA to fight the war against terror, post 9/11, has been a catalyst for violence against Hazara Shias by the Taliban regime. The Afghan Taliban have been funding the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)³³ and LeJ³⁴ to create unrest in Pakistan through the killing of the Hazara Shias. LeJ has been

known to have close ties with Taliban, support their objectives and militant actions, receive funding from them, and receive sanctuary from Taliban leaders when they need it³⁵. The SSP is also known to receive funding from the Afghan Taliban.³⁶ In 1998 the LeJ fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan and was a partner in the massacre of thousands of Hazara Shias at Mazar-i-Sharif.³⁷ LeJ is also known to have ties with the Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies, who have used LeJ in the 1990s to forge strong links with armed Islamist groups fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan.³⁸ Attacks against the Hazara Shias by the LeJ also increased post 2008, for multiple reasons, such as: to create instability in Balochistan; undermine the Pakistan military; sustain extremist ideology to eliminate Shias; and also to show that the Taliban were still powerful.³⁹ A recent concern is that with the 2021 re-emergence of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and the silence of the international community about the violence facing the Hazara Shia community, what the continued fate of the Hazara Shias will be in coming years?

Similar to Afghanistan, the Hazara Shias that are killed in Pakistan are also non-combative civilians. They are either shot at in crowds, in their homes, in transit, at their workplace, or after being rounded up in front of civilian witnesses. Reports of ways of killing include blinding and beheading them,⁴⁰ and making them declare that they follow the Shia faith before shooting or slitting their throats.⁴¹ Reports also state that corpses have been hidden, dragged, and mutilated after the killing,⁴² in order to spread terror and make the killing more tragic for the family members left behind. The places of killing for Hazara Shias in Pakistan are not dissimilar to that of Afghanistan and include the following spaces: (i) while travelling and in transit to and from work, and at their workplace, example shops and vendors; (ii) in markets during shopping and while visiting relatives; (iii) at funerals and marriage ceremonies; (iv) at hospitals or emergencies where victims are being provided health services; (v) at places of worship and in transit to and from religious pilgrimage; (vi) outside passport and identity card offices; and (vii) at schools or student rallies for equal rights.

Numerous news reports have also described the atrocities against the Hazara Shias of Pakistan as 'genocide',⁴³ claiming that it is one of the biggest hurdles to stability, unity, and progress in the country.⁴⁴ Furthermore, some reports⁴⁵ and scholarship⁴⁶ also assert that it is not just the Hazara Shias, but all the Shias of Pakistan who are facing systematic persecution and violence, which contributes to the killing of religious minorities being considered a norm in the country. Leaders from the SSP and LeJ have been publicly calling for the 'genocide' and wiping out of all living Shias.⁴⁷ The demographics of the Hazara Shia victims includes unskilled workers and daily-wage earners, but also skilled and specialised workers such as judges, doctors, engineers, police officers, bureaucrats, professionals, journalists, bank managers, community leaders, and provincial government employees.⁴⁸ Male members of the community, both men and boys, are the main targets, though women and elders have also been reported to be persecuted. There have also been reports of wives and household members of killed Hazara Shias receiving continuous threats, thus forcing them to stay locked inside their homes.⁴⁹

Pakistan's institutional discrimination

The unwillingness of state to investigate crimes against the Hazara Shias or persecute the perpetrators is a major concern in Pakistan. Reports have claimed that the Pakistan army

and security,⁵⁰ and the police⁵¹ do not intervene in the attacks against the Hazara Shias, and that instead they remain bystanders. Known perpetrators, who have claimed to kill Hazara Shias, have neither been arrested or punished for their crimes in the country, and instead perpetrators have enjoyed impunity. Due to some international pressure, post 2008, Pakistani authorities claimed to have arrested suspects in attacks against the Hazara Shia, but no final verdicts have been passed and those who await trial during temporary custody have been known to remain remote leaders in orchestrating more killings.⁵² At times political leadership may allow atrocities to take place by extremist groups, when the group is considered beneficial for the maintenance of state rule and power.⁵³ Main perpetrators of crimes against the Hazara Shias in Pakistan, including the TTP and LeJ, are perceived as more important allies for the state and security forces of Pakistan. This may explain why security services and elected officials have responded to appeals by the Hazara Shia community with alarming hostility, including: (i) suggesting that the Hazara Shias remain home-bound and not leave their homes; (ii) blaming the Hazara Shias for being agents of Iran and deserving of killing; or (iii) accusing them of lying about the killings in order to seek asylum from foreign countries.⁵⁴ In a recent incident from 2021 when innocent coal miners from the Hazara Shia community were ruthlessly killed, family members seeking help and protection were accused of ‘blackmailing’ the government by the Prime Minister.⁵⁵ Some argue that the response by the Pakistani state, security, and judiciary to the Hazara Shia killing has not just been indifferent, but rather complicit.⁵⁶

There are also discriminatory state laws which have impacted the community negatively. The refusal of the Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in issuing Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) is a major obstacle in accessing public services, land ownership, loans, and state schemes for poverty alleviation.⁵⁷ There has also been discrimination against the Hazara Shias during the COVID-19 pandemic, with them being blamed for bringing the virus to Pakistan from Iran when visiting for pilgrimage,⁵⁸ and further being restricted by the government.⁵⁹ Since the pandemic the issues of institutional racism, gaining fair employment, and mental health in Hazara Shias has compounded, and this area has been researched by authors, with a quantitative study forthcoming.

Hazara Shias and the death of social vitality

We use Claudia Card’s work to argue that the violence facing the Hazara Shias is not just about killing, but also the death of social vitality.⁶⁰ Social vitality exists through relationships with family and members of the same community. Killing of family members and restrictions on movement for education, work and cultural events contributes to loss of identity and meaning of life. Furthermore, preventing community members from meeting for religious or cultural events disrupts the transmission of community values from one generation to the next. As elder generations and male members of the family are mainly targeted for killing, the Hazara Shias also face what is referred to as ‘natal alienation’.⁶¹ They are unable to gain from cultural inheritance or historical traditions that people usually gain from their kin and community elders. Hazara Shias speak the language Dari, which is a dialect of the Farsi language. To date there is no recognition or

integration of Hazara Shia language in local schools, a negligence that contributes to alienating Hazara youth from their cultural heritage.⁶²

Apart from the individuals who have been killed, the family members who are left behind face a form of social death as they mourn the dead, care for the injured, take on additional responsibilities to manage the home and dependents, and face fear of being the next targets of violence. The persecution against the Hazara Shias can also be described as ‘*indecent*’ due to the humiliation faced by the victims.⁶³ Not only have the Hazara Shias been robbed of freedom of movement and security, but they are humiliated, disrespected, and shamed during the killings, through: (i) beheading; (ii) kidnapping before killing; (iii) hiding of dead bodies only to be released after the corpse starts to decay; (iv) stripping of clothes; (v) robbing of their possessions; and (vi) being killed in front of witnesses, like family, friends, neighbours, and local community members. The ghettoisation faced by the Hazara Shias of Quetta also limits their opportunities for advancement and survival.

Historic exclusion can reduce a victim community to a dehumanised status, preventing community members from acting with accountability or including the minority group in the ‘universe of obligation’.⁶⁴ Society becomes immune to recognising that minority groups facing exclusion and violence may need support more from civilians, especially in the case of complete neglect by state and security agents. The Hazara Shias have also faced historic exclusion and the wider Pakistani community has not demanded accountability for their persecution and plight. Scholars have also argued that ‘hierarchies of victimhood’ exist, such that some victims are allocated more support and sympathy compared to others, for example women and children.⁶⁵ In Pakistan, women and children are still receiving more attention for both research and development projects aimed at equity and protection. However, ethnic and religious minorities and the third gender are more neglected groups lower in the hierarchy for both research and protective policy planning.

A dis-privileged and minority community

Much more research is needed on the victims of violence, as they suffer unique and complex social and health challenges.⁶⁶ Weak and vulnerable groups are easy targets as they have less ability to fight back or seek revenge from aggressors. This seems to be the case with the disprivileged and minority Hazara Shias of Pakistan. In lieu of the above, the aim of this qualitative study is to understand the lived experiences of Hazara Shia family members who have lost non-combative relatives to killing and who are currently living in the grips of random acts of killing, with intent, and expecting to become targets any day. Findings from this study would help contribute to the use of empirical evidence to understand the multiple challenges they face and help advise better protective policy for the community.

Methodology

Ethics

This study has received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Forman Christian College University. Informed consent was taken from all participants

and free counselling services were offered to them in case recounting their experiences created mental trauma, or they had need of them prior to the interviews but could not access services. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The telephone interview time schedules were coordinated based on the convenience of participants. This was considered sensitive research and care was taken to prevent re-traumatisation caused by questions related to traumatic memories of loss and violence.⁶⁷ Data was collected by two experienced clinical psychologists, the second and third authors of this study. The advantage that the clinical psychologists brought to the interview process was that they were sensitive to the voices and responses of the victims and knew how to probe or continue the interview without compromising the mental health of participants.⁶⁸

Sampling

The selection criterion for interviews was Shia Hazaras currently living in Quetta who had lost an immediate non-combatant family member(s) to killing. We adopted a purposive sampling technique and took the help of six undergraduate student research assistants who were part of the Shia Hazara community in Quetta. The research assistants contacted potential participants in Quetta and described the research aims to them. They also helped arrange suitable times for interviews. A total of 37 Shia Hazara victims were contacted, of which 17 agreed to participate in the study. Finally, data collectors were able to interview 13 participants, with 4 not being able to coordinate suitable times or remaining unresponsive after giving initial consent. Based on the literature review and experience of working with the Shia Hazara community members a semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix A). The questionnaire addressed the following broad areas: (i) belief about which factors contributed to violence and played a larger role; (ii) life experiences and challenges being faced; and (iii) response to violence and coping strategies.

Data collection

The data was collected telephonically between February and May 2021. Telephone interviews were considered suitable as the trained data collectors (second and third authors) were located and working in Lahore and the coronavirus pandemic made travel to Quetta city or in-person interviews difficult. Each participant was called either one or two times, with the length of interview time ranging from 20 to 35 minutes.

Data analysis

All data from audio recordings were transcribed to Microsoft Word. Data was collected in Urdu language and translated to English by the second and third authors independently. Both authors are bilingual and fluent in English and Urdu. The transcribed data was then double checked by the first and last authors. The data was analysed using a thematic content analysis approach.⁶⁹ The first and second author independently read the transcripts twice to create codes and derive themes. Meetings were held to share and agree on findings. Later to secure trustworthiness,⁷⁰ findings were shared with the

student research assistants who belonged to the Shia Hazara community, four other student alumni from Balochistan who were not part of the study, and two Shia Hazara victims from Quetta in Zoom meetings, who did not participate in the study.

Findings

All participants belonged to Quetta and were currently residing there. From the thirteen participants in this study, eleven were male and two were female. Their ages range from 22 to 64 years. They were either the children or siblings of non-combatant Hazara Shias who have been killed. The educational status ranged from no schooling to graduate level status. Participants were currently either looking for a job ($n = 07$), private employees at an NGO ($n = 02$), teaching at a local school ($n = 02$), driving a rickshaw ($n = 01$), or running a small, rented garment shop ($n = 01$).

We found two broad areas of struggles faced by the participants: *Challenges and fears* and *Coping and hope for a better future* (Table 1). With regard to the broad theme *Challenges and fears*, four sub-themes were found including: (i) Confusion about which factor plays a greater role in violence; (ii) Psychological warfare and living with violence by normalising it; (iii) Discrimination and exclusion from kin, friends and custodians; and (iv) Mental trauma, drug abuse, suicide ideation, and armed defence. Three sub-themes were discovered with respect to *Coping and hope for a better future*, including: (i) Religious coping, positive fatalism, and spiritual lessons from the pandemic; (ii) Conflicting preference between migration versus nationalism; and (iii) Demands for basic human rights and special quotas.

Challenges and fears

Confusion about which factor plays a greater role in violence

Participants were divided in their reasoning for which factor played a greater role in sustained killing against them- ethnicity, religion, or politics. Some believed that their ethnicity played a bigger role, while others were adamant that their religious belief played a bigger part. However, both groups agreed that as a minority population they were soft and easy targets for persecution. Some also explained that untrained religious leaders were responsible for fuelling sectarian division and building intolerance against the Shias to the extent that they provided legitimacy to perpetrators by guaranteeing them heaven. Safdar Ali⁷¹ stated:

It is the religious factor that drives the violence against us. We belong to the Shia sect. We are considered to be *Kaafirs* (non-Muslims). Many so-called Muslims think the Quran is demanding for us to be killed. How can you argue with such '*Muslims*'. These sectarian misunderstandings have been fueled for years by our religious leaders. Their punishment is in the next life . . . and unfortunately for them to be punished in the next life, we are being sacrificed in this life.

Discussion by participants also extended to geopolitical and religiopolitical factors, with some arguing that violence against the Hazara Shias was being fuelled and funded by the enemies of Pakistan and Islam. Extremist religious lobbies and neighbouring countries

Table 1. Summary of themes, sub-themes, and categories within sub-themes.

Broad Theme/Sub-theme	Categories within sub-themes
<i>Challenges and fears</i>	
Confusion about which factor plays a greater role in violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethnic background (Afghanistan/descendants of Genghis Khan army and the Mongolian Empire) and minority status (Shia sect) contributes to persecution - Untrained religious leaders fuel sectarian division and build intolerance - Extremist religious groups and neighboring countries orchestrate violence - Insurgents and internal enemies target Hazara Shias in Quetta to destabilize the Balochistan province
Psychological warfare and living with violence by normalizing it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educated and professional male members of the community are killed, leaving no one with clout or power for advocacy and patronage - Young boys and male students are killed, compromising future generation and male members of household - Male members of community are primary targets, to weaken the family system and leave women without male heads of household - Perpetrator locations of violence create fear of all movement (Locations include: workplace, commute to work, during participation in religious rituals, commute from religious pilgrimage, shopping areas, at health and educational institutes) - Years of violence and lack of support has forced Hazara Shias to treat their loss and violence as normal and an 'accepted eventuality'
Discrimination and exclusion from kin, friends and custodians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repeated and shared loss has created a strain on the community and kinship bonds, with decline in physical visitation and emotional support - The community is generally poor and unable to support those who are suffering due to loss of earning members of household - People who are earning members of the community have developed 'estrangement tactics' to avoid financial burdens - When and if victims received financial assistance or scholarships, it was not provided free of cost, but rather came at the expense of having to suffer humiliation and shame, and even some forms of abuse - People generally maintained a distance and were reluctant to work with or be friends with Hazara Shias due to the fear of random attacks and violence - Women without fathers and brothers were considered 'weak alliances' for marriage as they do not have dowry or family strength (living male members of family)
Mental trauma, drug abuse, suicide ideation and armed defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents and elders were like lifeless souls, who had 'frozen their realities' - Relentless trauma of violence and overall powerlessness about the future had made suicide ideation common amongst community members - 'Extreme poverty' and the 'financial insecurity inherent of daily wage jobs' intensified depression and suicide ideation - Drugs were used as a form of escape from life circumstances, and to forget the pain of loss and bereavement
<i>Coping and hope for a better future</i>	
Religious coping, positive fatalism, and spiritual lessons from the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ideological belief for the Hazara Shias has evolved to have faith that they are born to be martyred for Islam - Prayer is considered the best coping strategy - Positive spiritual coping was learnt from the narrations of Karbala. Commemorating and honoring spiritual role models, the persecuted grandchildren of the Prophet- Imam Hussain and Hazrat Zainab (peace be upon them), gives strength and patience to bear losses and hardships - Non-combatant victims of violence were juxtaposed to patients of the COVID-19 virus. Both were described as innocent parties who face death due to external circumstances and without any fault of their own. It was hoped that the pandemic would serve as a 'spiritual lesson', leading to improvements in public health and safety for marginalized groups

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Broad Theme/Sub-theme	Categories within sub-themes
Conflicting preference between migration versus nationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Migration and relocation to other cities was seen as a means of rebuilding lives and escaping persecution - Pakistan was seen as home, where the Hazara Shias belonged, and where they, and their ancestors, had been contributing to the country's development. Possibilities for housing in 'gated communities' with fool-proof security were seen as a means of survival and progress within the country
Demands for basic human rights and special policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants discussed the basic human rights they hoped the state would provide to them, including: security, education, and employment opportunities - It was believed that social media and civilians would help mobilize support for specific protective policies, which would help in survival and development: 1. educational scholarships, 2. home ownership, 3. health coverage; 4. separate quotas in government office and public sector; 5. monthly cash transfers (to families who have faced killing and violence, especially widows and orphan girls); and 6. separate national identity cards for victims (which should help in accessing social support schemes like: free transport, funding and grants, dealing with assets and banks, and opportunities for small business development)

were mentioned as allies who were orchestrating violence to create instability in the country and disunity amongst Muslims. Shezad Muhammad⁷² shared:

This persecution against us is actually a proxy war being orchestrated by the enemies of Islam and Pakistan. Neighboring or Muslim countries like India, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia . . . are not our friends, they are our enemies. They have banded together and targeted us (Hazara Shias), as we are easier targets.

Some participants stated that Hazara Shias in Quetta were being targeted to destabilise the province of Balochistan by insurgents and internal enemies. Proof of this was provided by explaining that it was not just Hazara Shias that were being attacked, but that, to a lesser extent, other minorities in the province, like the Pathan, pro-government Baloch people, and Punjabi, were also facing persecution. Hazara Shias however faced the brunt of the persecution as they are 'perceived better targets' due to their distinct physical features, ancestry from Afghanistan, and Shia sect belonging. There was also discussion that internal insurgents were being funded by external enemies of Pakistan. Muhammad Fida⁷³ explained:

Baloch separatists have been taking money from India for years to create instability in the province. It is not just us (Hazara Shias)! All minorities of Balochistan- including our Pathan, (pro government) Baloch and Punjabi brothers, are being targeted. They are not leaving anyone. Even the Pakistan armed forces, are being attacked. They want to destroy Balochistan's peace through target killings and bomb blasts. Hazara Shias are just an easier and more frequent target.

Psychological warfare and living with violence by normalising it

All the interviewed victims confirmed that the initially educated and professional male members of the community were targeted. In recent years, since very few educated and professional men remained in the country, either due to death or migration, it was the turn of unskilled and uneducated men to be targeted, which included young boys and

male students. The killing of heads of households, fathers, and young male members of the family, who were described as ‘mountains’ and ‘fortresses’ for the family was a means of psychological war. Haider Ali⁷⁴ described:

My brother and farther were both martyred. I am the only earning male member left now. At first, we thought the uneducated and unskilled are safe. But now they are targeting us (educated males) and young boys. After Matric (10th grade) I had to start working to support the family. I work three (unskilled) jobs. I am a WAPDA (Pakistan Water & Power Development Authority) employee, a boxer, and a rickshaw driver. There is not much money involved and the monthly earning is erratic. However, I am able to support my mother, three sisters, wife and two children. My prayer is that I stay alive to get my sisters married and ensure my children get a university degree. Let’s see what God has written for my family.

Psychological warfare was further contextualised as participants shared where the killings and beheadings happened. Interviewees confirmed that they are attacked and killed either at the workplace or during commute to work, or during participation in religious rituals or commute from religious pilgrimage. Perpetrator locations of violence kept victims in a state of perpetual fear as they struggled to pursue a livelihood and maintain spiritual connections. This emotional warfare was especially vicious and brutal as family members were struggling with bereavement and loss of loved ones. Muhammad Fida⁷⁵ described:

It is not important that we know our killers’ names. He (the enemy) is always there . . . throughout the day . . . as we go to work or when we are returning from prayer. He (the enemy) is almost a part of us. We are sick of this fear and bondage. Where is the justice in this kind of emotional warfare?

The acceptance and normalcy of living with violence was described. Participants explained that since no one had ever come to their help, they had accepted their fate and at times felt guilty about mourning and complaining to fellow community members, as each was suffering and juggling multiple losses. In this way, though people of the community understood and empathised with each other, they were also unable to support each other emotionally over long periods as each was suffering their own loss and victimhood. Instead, community members and kin began to treat their loss and violence as normal and an ‘accepted eventuality’. Muhammad Hussain⁷⁶ shared:

In our neighborhood every house has a martyr. Emotional support is there for a few days and then everyone just accepts it and has to continue with life. Each house returns to their private loss. Helplessness has made us accept our lives and what we are facing. We have learnt to live with violence by thinking it is normal for us to face it.

Discrimination and exclusion from kin, friends and custodians

Participants described false beliefs of outsiders about how the strong Hazara communal bond was enough to support families of victims. Because the community suffering was similar, it was the community who were expected to help each other socially and financially. However, participants claimed that this dependency and burden had created a strain on the community and kinship bonds and that people who were earning members or lived abroad developed ‘estrangement tactics’. Though participants understood the financial reasons for maintaining a distance, there were still feelings of pain

described at losing the social support and physical visitation of living family members and ‘elder father-figures’ who were needed for emotional support. Fatima Abbas⁷⁷ described:

After the first few days of mourning, our relatives started to withdraw. They (relatives) fear having to bear our expenses, especially our Chachas (paternal uncle) and Mamus (maternal uncles). We understand. We know they (income-earning uncles) hardly earn enough for their own families . . . we know they have to save money for their own daughters’ weddings and sons’ education. But we miss them. We have lost our fathers to martyrdom . . . but we have also lost our uncles and elder male cousins who are alive.

Some participants shared that when and if victims received financial assistance or scholarships, it was not provided free of cost, but rather came at the expense of having to suffer humiliation and shame, and even some forms of abuse. Different groups of benefactors who imposed this shame and abuse were listed to include relatives, sponsors, teachers, school administrators, and hostel or accommodation administrators. Instances or examples of this ‘humiliation’ were described as not speaking to them courteously and kindly; discrimination in grade allocation and hostel room allocation; or treating them like a servant and making them do chores without any acknowledgement. This served as a deeply painful and humiliating existence for the victims, who yearned and prayed to gain financial independence and freedom from the humiliation of being ‘shamed dependents’. Shabbir Hussain⁷⁸ described:

Abuse and indirect shaming by relatives and teachers is common. This is because they know we have no money and assets and are dependent on them entirely. My brother who attended [Masked] college on scholarship (in Chakwal City), faced discrimination from teachers and administrators. This is why he never did well. One of my orphaned cousins was provided a home by a Shia family in Karachi. They were also our distant relatives. However, he was treated like a servant by them . . . he couldn’t study because he was being made to do so much work in the house. He told me that he could not sleep due to the feelings of shame . . . after three months he came back (to Quetta) to live with us.

Participants described how people generally maintained a distance from them due to the fear of random attacks and violence. There was an exclusion with respect to everyday activities, for example people walked away if they entered the market for grocery shopping, whereas developing long-term friendships with non-Hazara populations was rare. Many interviewees shared their great pain and disappointment about community members and other Shia families, who are not willing to propose for daughters of Hazara Shia martyrs. It was explained that women without fathers and brothers have less money for marriage ceremonies and almost none for assets and dowry. Also, marriages with daughters of martyrs were considered a ‘weak alliance’, in a culture where relations with strong families having multiple male members were considered more favourable. Muhammad Hussain⁷⁹ explained:

Friends refuse to travel with us due to fear of targeted attack. Markets and shops clear out when we enter. I was helping to take my childhood friend, a Pakhtun, to Karachi for his medical tests at a hospital as a favor to his widowed mother who could not travel. Before we left his mother asked me not to wear a mask when we were travelling despite the coronavirus pandemic. This was so that I am easily recognizable and that if we were targeted, they (perpetrators) would know which one of us to kill.

Mental trauma, drug abuse, suicide ideation and armed defence

The collective, immense, and relentless loss faced by Hazara Shias affected participants and their families with serious mental trauma. Many described how their parents and elders were like lifeless souls who breathed but did not live fully. Instead, they ‘froze their realities’ by living in the past or not having any response to life events post the violence of loved ones. Interviewees shared that this ‘numbing act’ of many elders and community members helped them to live with the constant fear of losing another family member and hearing about news of another attack. Khyzer Safdar⁸⁰ described:

Our elders and parents have lost hope. They are living like dead souls. This numbness is always there, even during marriages and subsequent attacks or news of death. The doctors said my aunt will get better after her stroke and that the paralysis was temporary, but I think she does not want to get better or move around like before. She just sits in her room all day.

Participants also shared that the relentless trauma of violence and overall powerlessness about the future had made suicide ideation common amongst community members. A few even claimed that suicide was regular, but it was not declared or reported as such by the family members. Some interviewees discussed the reasons for mental trauma and suicide and rationalised that the obvious reasons were loss of loved ones, inability to live without them, and the feelings of constant anxiety about when and how they would be killed or targeted. However, discussion also focused on the important role of ‘extreme poverty’ and the ‘financial insecurity of daily wage jobs’ which intensified depression and suicide ideation. Hussain Ali⁸¹ stated emphatically:

There is no doubt about it . . . the combination of killing, poverty, and lack of any assets or wealth exacerbates our mental health issues. There is no data on suicide of our community members. There should be! There are a lot of young people who have committed suicide due to loss of loved ones and no livelihood.

For some participants response to loss and violence entailed managing mental health deterioration and instability through the use of drugs. Not only were drugs used as a form of escape from life circumstances, but they were also used to forget the pain of loss and bereavement. The four participants that shared this information agreed that the use of drugs was dangerous and risky behaviour, but they also insisted that they had no other choice in order to ‘survive and forget’ and remain ‘passive’. No response was provided about what type or name of drugs were being used or who the suppliers of drugs were. Saleem Ali⁸² explained:

I don’t know the name of the drug I am taking. My friend gave it to me. It is like medicine . . . just like people need blood pressure medicine, I need this medicine to survive. I will die without it. It helps me to sleep and accept things as they are.

Coping and hope for a better future

Religious coping, positive fatalism, and spiritual lessons from the pandemic

In general, all participants agreed that their ideology had now been cemented to believe that they were born to be martyred. It was also agreed that prayer was the best coping strategy. Many described that when they heard news of killing in their community, they fell into ‘prostration of gratitude’ to Allah for granting them ‘martyrdom’ and accepting

their ‘sacrifice for Islam’. Though the loss was described as extremely painful and harrowing, the bereavement and mourning was not separated from the gratefulness that their loved ones were privileged to become martyrs of Islam. Haider Ali⁸³ explained:

Allah has written this (martyrdom) for us. We have accepted this as our fate and we thank Allah that we are considered worthy for this sacrifice. Our fathers and brothers have made the sacrifice before us. We know that we will be rewarded with peace for eternity with our loved ones.

Interviewees also shared that they learned positive spiritual coping from the stories and narrations of *Karbala*.⁸⁴ They shared that commemorating and honouring the martyrs of *Karbala* gave them strength and patience to bear with their losses and hardships. Participants named Hazarat Zainab and Hazrat Imam Hussain as role models who stood bravely in the face of losing loved ones to martyrdom and how they tried to deal with their own loss with the same dignity and grace. Safdar Ali⁸⁵ described:

Every Muharram⁸⁶ we are reminded of the atrocities against Imam Hussain and Bibi Zainab (peace be upon them). Compared to the sacrifice that the Prophet Muhammad’s grandchildren and their companions gave for Islam, our sacrifice is still nothing! When our own innocent family members are martyred, we ask Allah to accept us as the true followers of Islam and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Five participants explained the recent discussions in their community about the coronavirus pandemic and its relationship with the violence that they faced. Non-combatant victims of violence were juxtaposed to patients of the COVID-19 virus who do not survive. Both were described as innocent parties who faced death due to external circumstances and without any fault of their own. Both groups needed collective help from the world community for ‘prevention and safety’. Interviewees believed that the pandemic would serve as a ‘spiritual lesson’ in human rights and protection of vulnerable populations not just for infectious diseases burdens and public health, but also for protection from violence and massacre against minority groups. Akbar Ali⁸⁷ explained:

Have you seen how the coronavirus pandemic has affected the world? Now the world knows how it feels to face untimely death without any fault of one’s own. How does it feel when your healthy children and parents are killed by the virus and your future is snatched away? If people wake up, they will realize that the coronavirus has come to raise awareness about injustice and improve equality. Will you learn from this message Allah is sending us?

Conflicting preference between migration versus nationalism

There was a conflict between participants about what the best prospect was for them with respect to escape from violence, survival, and equal opportunities. Most participants believed that migration was their only hope for them to rebuild their lives and escape persecution. Some also explained that migration or relocation could be a catalyst to forget the past and dilute the impact of loss. Living in the same community and homes reminded them repeatedly of their martyred loved ones and kept them ‘caged in recollections’ of their trauma and pain. Sher Mohammad⁸⁸ stated:

We need official support and proper channels for fast and legal migration. Safe and welcoming countries like Canada for example can change our lives. From those of our community members who have migrated we see that the influence of Western countries

has brought positivity and recovery in their lives. They are not trapped anymore . . . they have opportunities for jobs and therapy . . . health and equality. This is what we need and deserve.

However, some participants also shared that migration by some of their community members was another form of distress and trauma. Illegal Hazara Shia refugees suffered their own anxiety and fear about deportation and limited capacities in a new country. For family members left behind in Quetta, there was also stress and fear about the fate and future of those who had migrated illegally. Even with legal migration it was mentioned that families had been separated and that as refugees they would always be ‘secondary citizens’. Chaman Ali⁸⁹ explained:

We sold everything so my brother could migrate. We believed he would get settled and then call my mother and me. However, after six years now there is still no news of our sponsorship. It is because he went illegally and faced many problems there. Maybe it might have been better if he had remained. At least we would have been together. I don't know.

Interviewees also shared their belief that Pakistan was their only home and that this was where they belonged. They rationalised that they and many of their forefathers had struggled for the development of the country and that very soon their efforts and sacrifices would be recognised. There was hope that they would be protected and provided equal opportunities in the future. Some participants discussed possibilities for housing in ‘gated communities’ with fool-proof security. Others contributed that relocation to other cities in Pakistan provided them better opportunities for education, housing, and employment. Saleem Ali⁹⁰ argued:

Ever since Pakistan became independent (1947), the Hazara community has given a number of sacrifices for the country. In the 1965 war against India, the Commander-in-Chief of our army (General M. Musa Khan) was a Hazara and in the 1971 war (against India) the Air-Marshall, Sharbat Ali Changez, was also a Hazara. Our people have served and given countless sacrifices for Pakistan. We are loyal only to Pakistan and we want to remain here. Until our enemies are rooted out, we should be provided gated enclosures with foolproof security. Another option is that we could be supported by the state for relocation to other cities of the country, where violence cannot follow us.

Demands for basic human rights and special quotas

Participants discussed how journalists and social media were helping to create pressure for their protection and how basic human rights could be secured for their community. They also shared hope that basic rights would be granted to them with advocacy by Pakistani civilians and international pressure. Interviewees listed basic demands for security, education, and employment opportunities that they needed critical support for. The immense resilience was evident in participants who argued that if basic rights were provided to them, the Hazara Shias could become responsible for ‘picking up the broken pieces and rebuilding’ of their own community, and also becoming valuable partners for the growth of Pakistan. Akbar Ali⁹¹ explained:

We have faith that our basic rights can be secured in Pakistan. The people of the country are good overall, and they want to support us. The first and primary concern is security. Give us security, let us remain in schools and give us jobs! Then see how hard we will work and how

we will contribute to our own community and national development. This is only possible however, if the senseless violence is stopped.

Participants also deliberated some valuable and specific protective policies they considered crucial to their survival and development. It was mentioned that equal opportunities and capacity building was possible after years of facing persecution and continued violence, only if special policy was provided for educational scholarships, home ownership, and health coverage. Separate quotas in government office and public sector would help to build representation and change mindsets. Random and one-off cash transfers to families who have faced killing and violence have to be recognised as '*grossly insufficient*', especially in the case of widows and orphan girls. Instead, it was suggested that there is need for monthly cash transfers. It was also recommended that separate national identity cards must be introduced for victims, which should help in accessing social support schemes like free transport, funding, and grants, dealing with assets and banks, and opportunities for small business development. Shabbir Hussain⁹² explained:

One-off cash transfers have no long-term benefit for families of martyrs. We need sustainable support like health coverage, house ownership, and monthly cash transfers. Jobs must be guaranteed to our people with government quotas assigned. Our women, the widows and orphan girls specifically, must be provided separate CNICs (computerized national identity cards) to help them gain access to loans, bank accounts, property, and to buy things. This will be a better protection for them than trying to get them married.

Discussion

The limitations of this study include the small sample size and the gender imbalance in sample. Despite attempts we were unable to sample more women because of the conservative and reserved nature of women from the Hazara community, and possibly lack of permission from male members of the family. However, this study has its strengths in that it has highlighted the lived experiences of Hazara Shia victims. The silence by state, society, and the world regarding the long-standing persecution and killing against the Hazara Shias of Pakistan needs immediate collaboration and mediation. For future scholarship more of ethnographic and quantitative research is needed about the Hazara Shias, and their physical and mental health, adoption of coping strategies, and deliberation over which sociopolitical interventions would support the community best and help in building resilience. With the Shia Hazara violence there is a complexity of multiple perpetrators. Though the LeJ and TTP may claim the killings, the indifference or complicity of state and security forces is a considerable reality for Hazara Shias and the world. Participants stressed how they feel burdened and incapable of fighting against different forces to stop the killing. It is this helplessness that possibly exacerbates the mental turmoil and fear faced by victims and also prevents an effective collective response or advocacy from the community.

To add to the trauma it is not clear who the next victim will be due to the randomness and unpredictability of the next attack, blast, or beheading. A salient feature of the violence is the use of psychological warfare by perpetrators and the demographics of the persecution. Male members of the household are targeted in order to rob families of their providers and protection, and the location of killings is always at, or during transit

to, the workplace or places of worship. In this way, families cannot escape fear of assault within the homes or outside of the homes and live in perpetual fear of what may happen in the future. In their ghettoised lives they suffer from a grave form of 'social death', where they are unable to interact with community members, transmit their culture to their youth, participate in their ethnic ceremonies, or practice their beliefs and rituals. Ultimately, victims are unable to rebuild lives or seek rehabilitation through employment and spirituality, which are important tools for recuperation after the loss of loved ones.⁹³

The responses of victims to killings and continued violence were complex and diverse. When a Hazara Shia immediate family member is killed there is initial mourning and then an acceptance and normalisation to the extent that people from the community believe they are 'born to be martyred'. It is passively accepted that many elders will fade into lifeless beings and many of the young will turn to drugs or suicide. Living in the past, adopting 'numbness and remaining caged in recollections', or drug abuse is normalised as survival techniques within the community. The need to collect statistics for suicide and encourage reporting is needed as some interviewees claimed that suicide was a hidden part of the community.

The extent of the emotional trauma and the long-term consequences cannot be certain, but what is evident is that negative coping of abandonment of life and drug abuse are susceptible realities within the Hazara Shia community. This would have implications on intergenerational transfer of emotional health and also in the collective motivation of Hazara Shia to mobilise efforts for protection and rights.⁹⁴ In most cases protective policy for victims, related to cash transfers or security, can be offset if the therapy and counselling for victims is not effective or provided over longitudinally.⁹⁵ Research has revealed that victims and survivors may deal with positivity and constructive coping,⁹⁶ when social and community support measures are adequate.⁹⁷

It was found that Hazara Shias are able to use religious coping as a means of survival. For them martyrdom and sacrifice is recognised as a special privilege, which will cement their allegiance and loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad and the Ahlebaït (peace be upon them). Recollections of the event of *Karbala* and the ruthless martyrdom and subsequent beheadings of Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) and his followers serves to train the community with passive acceptance of the violence they face in the name of 'sacrificing for Islam'. However, this use of 'passivity' and 'patience' through religious coping may not be a long-term solution or a substantive reality for all community members or for future generations of the Hazara community. It is not unknown for people to honour and venerate religious leaders and symbols, but eventually start resenting and begrudging consistent exploitation against their self and their loved ones.⁹⁸

In the absence of support from the state and wider society, victims are exclusively dependent on the Hazara Shia community for both emotional and financial sponsorship. Most victims however described feelings of guilt in constantly discussing the violence or expecting emotional support from community members as nearly every family is suffering from their own loss and grief. In fact, it was shared that there was so much burden within the community to provide emotional and financial support to each other, that this strain has led to members developing 'estrangement tactics' to avoid each other and remain distant. In some cases, benefactors and sponsors, including relatives and educational administrators, who do provide financial support, treat victims with scorn,

discrimination, and abuse. Overall, Hazara Shias yearned for freedom from the humiliation of living as ‘shamed dependents’.

We found that the helplessness and shame faced by victims is exacerbated by the collective abandonment from the state and wider society. This is best voiced in the sentiment of political leaders and Pakistani civilians who have equated Hazara victim families as ‘emotional blackmailers’⁹⁹ or labelled them as ‘non-Muslims and apostates . . . worthy to be killed’.¹⁰⁰ Loss and grief of the victims is explained expansively as not just having to deal with living without loved ones and in perpetual fear of killing and violence, but also having to deal with financial insecurity, extreme poverty, and the ‘stigma of dependency’. The exclusion and discrimination by state and society is a palpable reality, but it is made worst by the neglect, segregation, and at times even shaming, of relatives and kin. Overall, our findings suggest that if the Hazara Shias are not provided security and basic human rights in Pakistan, it would not be wrong to argue that they suffer from an ‘extension of genocide’. Scholarship confirms that deprivation of personal security, health, and dignity are a form or component of genocide by state and non-state actors.¹⁰¹ Thus, for Hazara Shias it is not just the beheading and killing of non-combatant innocents of their families, but the abandonment and exclusion they face in their daily lives which are perceived as ‘worse than death and martyrdom’.

To escape dependency and build capacity for themselves and their future generations, victims are divided between migrating versus remaining in the country. In the case of illegal or legal migration, the challenges of legitimate or fair opportunities, informal employment, and secondary citizenship status are understood well. Experiences of family members that have migrated suggests that safety is secured in another country, but at the cost of becoming ‘secondary citizens’; which is another form of anxiety and uncertainty facing refugee Hazara Shias.¹⁰² Many strongly contended that they were loyal nationalists and that they could not fathom any other homeland apart from Pakistan. Sacrifices and services by previous generations in building and protecting the nation were used as reinforcements to justify remaining in Pakistan and demanding protective policy from the state.

An important macro level finding was that beyond their own community’s persecution, victims comprehended the critical challenges facing Pakistan and expressed their distress about the uncertain future for all the citizens of the country. The interviews reveal a strong thread of collective pathos over the instability and pernicious foreign influence in Pakistan, due to which minorities like Hazara Shias bear the brunt. The geopolitical location of the country and machinations by ‘known and unknown enemies’ have been fuelling intolerance and disunity for many years. Victims knew that they were not the only minorities facing hardships, and that other minorities in Balochistan were also being targeted. Finally, from a transcendental tangent it was also argued that the illness, death, and lockdown brought by the pandemic had become ‘spiritual lessons’ for people of the nation, and also the world. Death from coronavirus and death from violence were juxtaposed to highlight the victimhood and helplessness of sufferers and the movement towards better protection for public health and public safety. Ultimately, it was hoped that the pandemic would improve protective policy for minority people, with respect to health and wellbeing, and violence and social vitality.

Conclusion

In the face of years of persecution, the Hazara Shias of Pakistan face great insecurity due to state negligence and wider society acting as bystanders. Fear that they may face violence and killing at any time, is compounded by the abandonment and segregation by kin and other community members, who as oppressed victims themselves are too weak to provide substantial support. Lived realities include ghettoisation, normalising violence, and accepting ‘martyrdom’ as their ‘fate’ through religious lessons from the event of *Karbala*. For some migration to another country is perceived as an escape, but with its own problems of secondary citizenship or illegal status. Other survival techniques that the Hazara Shia have adopted include self-isolation, life abandonment, drug abuse, and possibly suicide. There is no doubt that for many years the Hazara Shias of Pakistan are facing killing and exclusion with resilience, and without any community and state support. However, it is also evident that the Hazara Shias face ‘social death’ due to loss of education, employment, culture, and identity. Unless the violence against the Hazara Shias is stopped, it will have to be accepted as an ‘extension of genocide’, which deprives living members of the community from essentially continuing with life beyond pure survival or finding meaning in life after the loss of significant others. Critical and immediate mobilisation by civilians, social media, the international community, and research scholars is needed to secure safety and protective policy for the Hazara Shias of Pakistan.

Notes

1. Male participant Miqdad Ali, Quetta, February 23rd, 2022. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity
2. Annual day of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (peace be upon him), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
3. Saikal, ‘Afghanistan: The status of the Shi’ite Hazara’.
4. Hazara Research Collective, ‘Written evidence’.
5. He, et al., ‘A comprehensive exploration of the genetic legacy’.
6. Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan*; and Hussain, ‘The Hāzaras of Afghanistan’.
7. Saikal, ‘Afghanistan after the Loya Jirga’.
8. Ibrahim, *The Hazaras and the Afghan state*; and Phillips, ‘Wounded memory of Hazara refugees’.
9. Phillips, ‘Wounded memory of Hazara refugees’.
10. Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi, ‘Socio-cultural adaptation of second-generation Afghans’.
11. Hakimi, ‘Relentless Atrocities’.
12. Verma, ‘US – Taliban peace deal and regional powers’.
13. Hakimi, ‘Relentless Atrocities’.
14. Ibrahim, ‘Shift and Drift in Hazara Ethnic Consciousness’.
15. Ibid.
16. Hakimi, ‘Relentless Atrocities’.
17. National Commission for Human Rights, ‘Understanding the Agonies of Ethnic Hazaras’.
18. Hazara Research Collective, ‘Written evidence’.
19. Ibid.
20. National Commission for Human Rights, ‘Understanding the Agonies of Ethnic Hazaras’.
21. Devasher, ‘Pakistan: The Unabated Killings of Hazaras’.
22. He et al., ‘A comprehensive exploration of the genetic legacy’.
23. Ibrahim, ‘Shift and Drift in Hazara Ethnic Consciousness’.

24. Ali, 'The spectre of hate and intolerance'.
25. Goodall and Hekmat, 'Talking to water'.
26. Wani, 'Political Indifference and State Complicity'.
27. Dawn News, 'I am Hazara'.
28. Guardian, 'Every year we dig mass graves'.
29. Husain, 'Simmering Shia Genocide in Pakistan'.
30. National Commission for Human Rights, 'Understanding the Agonies of Ethnic Hazaras'.
31. Verma, 'China's new security concept'.
32. Kiran and Chawla, 'Countering Sectarian; Qurban and Ali, Impact of Sectarian Violence'.
33. Grare, 'The evolution of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan'.
34. Zahid, 'Baluch Raji Ajohi Sangar'.
35. Siddique, 'Pakistan's future policy towards Afghanistan'.
36. Fair, 'Militant recruitment in Pakistan'.
37. Irfani, 'Pakistan's Sectarian Violence'.
38. Tankel, 'Beyond the double game'.
39. Human Rights Watch, 'We are the Walking Dead'.
40. Dawn News, 'Hazara Miners' Slaughter'.
41. Human Rights Watch, 'We are the Walking Dead'.
42. Business Standard, '800 bodies found in Balochistan'; Amnesty International News Reports, 'Hazara killed by Taliban fighters'.
43. Open Democracy, 'Genocide of the Pakistani Hazara'.
44. Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 'Shia Genocide'.
45. Friday Times, 'Killed In Dark Alleys'.
46. Zaidi, 'The Shias of Pakistan'.
47. The Print, 'This is the Shia sect'.
48. Yusuf, 'Sectarian violence'.
49. Human Rights Watch, 'We are the Walking Dead'.
50. ANI News Agency, 'Pak Army involved in genocide'.
51. Gier, 'The Genocide of the Hazaras'.
52. Wani, 'Political Indifference and State Complicity'.
53. Van der Maat and Holmes, 'The Puzzle of Genocidal Democratisation'.
54. Human Rights Watch, 'We are the Walking Dead'.
55. Dawn News, 'PM Imran draws ire for suggesting 'blackmail'.
56. Wani, 'Political Indifference and State Complicity'.
57. Khan and Amin, 'Minority Ethnic, Race and Sect Relations'.
58. Sarkar, 'Religious discrimination is hindering the COVID-19 response'.
59. The USSD Human Rights Report, 'Pakistan 2020'.
60. Card, 'Genocide and social death'.
61. Patterson, *Slavery and social death*.
62. Thomas, *Vessels of evil*.
63. Margalit, *The decent society*.
64. Fein, 'Genocide and gender'.
65. Van Wijk, 'Who is the little old lady'.
66. Karstedt et al., 'Genocide, Mass Atrocity, and Theories of Crime'.
67. Seedat et al., 'Ethics of research on survivors of trauma'.
68. Urquiza et al., 'Clinical interviewing with trauma victims'.
69. Smith, 'Content analysis and narrative analysis'.
70. Kornbluh, 'Combating challenges to establishing trustworthiness'.
71. Male participant Safdar Ali, Quetta, March 10th, 2022.
72. Male participant Shezad Muhammad, Quetta, March 15th, 2022.
73. Male participant Muhammad Fida, Quetta, March 23rd, 2022.
74. Male participant Haider Ali, Quetta, April 06th 2022.
75. Male participant Muhammad Fida, Quetta, March 23rd, 2022.
76. Male participant Muhammad Hussain, Quetta, February 16th, 2022.

77. Female participant Fatima Abbas, Quetta, March 14th, 2022.
78. Male participant Shabbir Hussain, Quetta, April 11th, 2022.
79. Male participant Muhammad Hussain, Quetta, February 16th, 2022.
80. Male participant Khyzer Safdar, Quetta, May 4th, 2022.
81. Male participant Hussain Ali, Quetta, February 19th, 2022.
82. Male participant Saleem Ali, Quetta, May 2nd, 2022.
83. Male participant Haider Ali, Quetta, April 06th 2022.
84. The city of Karbala is considered holy land for many Muslims as this is where Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) and his companions were martyred.
85. Male participant Safdar Ali, Quetta, March 10th, 2022.
86. First month of Islamic calendar.
87. Male participant Akbar Ali, Quetta, April 10th, 2022.
88. Male participant Sher Mohammad, Quetta, May 18th, 2022.
89. Female participant Chaman Ali, Quetta, March 14th, 2022.
90. Male participant Saleem Ali, Quetta, May 2nd, 2022.
91. Male participant Akbar Ali, Quetta, April 10th, 2022.
92. Male participant Shabbir Hussain, Quetta, April 11th, 2022.
93. Fallot, 'Spirituality and religion'.
94. Bezo and Maggi, 'Living in survival mode'.
95. Cilliers and Siddiqi, 'Reconciling after civil conflict'.
96. Kalayjian et al., 'Coping with Ottoman Turkish genocide'; Barel et al., 'Surviving the Holocaust'.
97. Gasparre et al., 'Cognitive and social consequences'.
98. Weddle, *Sacrifice in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.
99. Dawn News, 'PM Imran draws ire for suggesting blackmail'.
100. The Print, 'Why Hazaras in Pakistan have been victims'.
101. Silina, 'Genocide by attrition'.
102. Parkes, 'Afghan-Hazara Migration'.

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Author contributions

Sara Rizvi Jafree designed and supervised the study. She analyzed the data and prepared the manuscript. Nudra Malik and Amna Khawar collected the data and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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