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TITLE : MODERATING EFFECT OF MINDSET ON AGGRESSION, EMOTION REGULATION, HOPE AND OPTIMISM AMONG YOUTH EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE IN KASHMIR

ABSTRACT

Exploring the socio psychological correlates of exposure to violence in protracted intergroup conflict is an essential step towards developing appropriate models of mental health intervention, facilitating reconciliation and conflict transformation. Kashmir has been a site of protracted conflict for close to three decades now with multiple issues of identity, political subversion, militarization and human rights violation resulting in long lasting social-psychological consequences.

The present research was conducted to explore, analyze and describe how different forms and types of exposure to violence is related to cognitive and affective aspects of youth behavior. The main objectives were to understand if and how direct and collective exposure to violence predicts aggression, emotion regulation, hope and optimism among the youth in Kashmir and whether dimensions of an extremist mindset, namely, support for violence, idea of a vile world and belief in divine power, moderate the relationship between exposure to violence and outcome variables.

Method

The study was done from a theoretical standpoint that is critical of a purely PTSD based psychiatric framework and one of the main objectives was to highlight the complex psychosocial factors that maybe influencing mental health variables in a context like Kashmir. 160 male and female university students self-reported on a composite questionnaire that comprised of pre- validated scales measuring the variables. The data was quantitative and purposively collected. The sample was diverse enough to represent a range of income and regional differences, while educational qualifications ranged from undergraduate to PhD scholars. Multiple regression technique was used to understand the relationship between direct vs collective exposure to violence and outcome variables of aggression, emotion regulation,

hope and optimism. Three dimensions of an extremist mindset, namely, support for violence, belief in divine power and idea of a vile world, were used as moderators in the study.

Findings

The results showed that the relationship between both direct and collective exposure to violence and physical aggression was significantly moderated by gender and support for violence, with collective exposure being a stronger predictor of physical aggression for men and direct exposure for women. Direct exposure to violence was also associated with emotion regulation and the relationship was moderated by the idea of a vile world and support for violence. Hope was not predicted by any form of ETV though there was a significant moderation effect between collective exposure to violence and belief in divine power on the dimension of interest and perspective. Collective exposure to violence had a significant predictive association with optimism, even though the relationship was not very strong. Limitations and future directions were laid out underscoring the need to explore qualitative, community based, longitudinal research in similar areas.

Conclusion and implications

The present research brings forth novel and important elements with regard to youth experiences with violence and consequent emotional and behavioral outcomes. The findings from the research contribute to a greater understanding of psychosocial factors that are influencing youth's orientation and behavior in the context of protracted conflict in Kashmir. The findings highlight the role of collective experiences and the essential place that witnessing violence may hold in ongoing conflict. Secondly the significant role of mindset calls for attention to individual beliefs, perceptions and attitudes in a context of conflict and the need to explore aspects of extremism and what it implies in these contexts. Lastly the findings emphasize the debilitating effects of violence exposure on important aspects of youth's affective and cognitive personalities (aggression, hope) that determine how and in what ways these significant members of a population will act and react. It emphasizes that violence and traumatic experiences in political conflicts not only push people towards mental health conditions of anxiety and depression, but it also affects everyday emotions as well as long term orientations- towards the self, each other, and society in general.