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Examining the Drivers of Sectarianism and their Impact on Rural Infrastructure: Implications for Rural Women's Plight

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### Abstract

The study titled "Examining the Drivers of Sectarianism and their Impact on Rural Infrastructure: Implications for Rural Women's Plight" revealed that during sectarian clashes women's educational institutions, and hospitals were either damaged or fully destroyed. Further, women skills oriented centres and NGOs were forced to close their operations in Kurram. Likely, storage facilities for agriculture production and agro-based markets were also closed in the area. With reference to infrastructure development initiatives, women's voices are less acknowledged which in turn reduces women's participation in affairs pertaining to their socio-economic development. The study recommended devising holistic strategies while taking into consideration women's distress along with recurrence and insurgency through questioning the conventional gender role divisions and implementation of sustainable development interventions in conflicted areas that should be prioritized for women's empowerment and gender equality.

**Keywords:** Sectarianism, Infrastructure, Women Plight, FATA, and Kurram Agency

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Cite Us



## Title

### Examining the Drivers of Sectarianism and their Impact on Rural Infrastructure: Implications for Rural Women's Plight

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## Abstract

The study titled "Examining the Drivers of Sectarianism and their Impact on Rural Infrastructure: Implications for Rural Women's Plight" revealed that during sectarian clashes women's educational institutions, and hospitals were either damaged or fully destroyed. Further, women skills oriented centres and NGOs were forced to close their operations in Kurram. Likely, storage facilities for agriculture production and agro-based markets were also closed in the area. With reference to infrastructure development initiatives, women's voices are less acknowledged which in turn reduces women's participation in affairs pertaining to their socio-economic development. The study recommended devising holistic strategies while taking into consideration women's distress along with recurrence and insurgency through questioning the conventional gender role divisions and implementation of sustainable development interventions in conflicted areas that should be prioritized for women's empowerment and gender equality.

## Keywords:

[Sectarianism](#),  
[Infrastructure](#), [Women Plight](#), [FATA](#), and  
[Kurram Agency](#)

## Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Methods and Procedures](#)
- [Conclusions and Recommendations](#)
- [References](#)

## Introduction

Sectarianism is prevalent in Pakistan with a grim pace of violence based on rhetoric or some external forces. Such forces influence this hegemony and let innocent people become the victims of the consequences (Abduallah, Iqbal & Skindar, 2024). In this regard, Manzoor, Rehman, and Razaq (2023) opined that sectarianism has a great impact on people and their implications pose great threats to the peace process in

the country. The effects of sectarianism are not only limited to human losses but it also drastically affected infrastructural arrangements in many ways. Such effects are not only confined to men but also enlarge the web of women's vulnerabilities. Sectarianism resulted in enormous damage to women's infrastructure that hindered women's ability to secure essential services and resources like healthcare, education, and economic opportunities (Sharma,



2020). The presence of sectarian violence and subsequently destroyed infrastructure restrict women's income streams, resulting in isolating women from income-generating endeavors that further aggravate their poverty. In this regard, Khan et al. (2018) concluded that the substantial effects of sectarianism on female educational institutions resulted in extensive destruction during the conflict that further restricted women from learning opportunities. Likely, sectarian militancy also contributed to the closure of women's professional and training institutions resulting in women's deprivation from economic prospects and skills development (Ahmed, 2009). Additionally, sectarianism impacted the ongoing operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specifically involved in women empowerment initiatives (Parashar, 2014). Parashar further illustrated that the elevated level of violence and instability and violence in war-affected areas usually compelled NGOs either to cease or reduce their operational initiatives designed for women's empowerment. Moreover, Abbasi (2013) observed that hospitals and medical centers are frequently subjected to premeditated targeting and subsequent destructions that worsen the existing perilous health conditions in violence-affected areas. This loss of healthcare infrastructure additionally obstructs women's access to basic medical treatments required for mother and child health and wellbeing. Rashid (2015) revealed about dire consequences of sectarian violence on safeguarding food production and added that the destruction of agricultural productions and storage facilities further intensified farmers' poverty, food insecurity, and livelihood difficulties, particularly for women folk engaged in farming. During sectarian clashes, agriculture-based markets usually experienced disruptions and closures. That in turn deprived women of essential sources of income and livelihood required for women's survival and financial independence (Haq et al., 2022). External observers often misinterpret and misunderstand the significance and nature of indiscriminate violence that drives displacement (Bakkour and Stansfield, 2024). Women also possess limited authority over rural infrastructure and its management resulting in reduced capacities of

women in terms of decision-making procedures (Winthrop and Graff, 2010). In addition, Khan, et al. (2021) highlighted that in war-affected areas, usually certain prevalent tendencies operate for women exclusion in matters pertaining to infrastructural growth. The upsurge of sectarian violence in the past notably deteriorated women's infrastructure in all domains encompassing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Varley, 2015). In consonance with the above, Lakshman (2020) opined that sectarian strife leads to infrastructural destruction that diminishes women's involvement in socio-economic accomplishments including women's mobility, employment prospects, and market accessibility, etc., thereby; strengthening their vulnerabilities and exploitations. The effects of sectarianism are not limited to the physical infrastructure of warring parties, but government buildings, banks, vehicles, and business places are fired and destroyed which causes a loss of millions to the state economy (Graeme, 2010). According to the Institute for Economics and Peace Report (2018) losses to the economy are linked to the destruction of properties, agricultural land and production, damaged health infrastructure, loss of productivity (human as well as non-human), security costs, and many others. In the specific context of the study area (District Kurram), it is believed that the geographical location of Kurram created a sound base for increasing sectarian violence, wherein; the unequal distribution of resources further fuelled sectarian clashes in the region time and again. The areas belonging to the Shia community are mostly plain and fertile which attracts business while Sunnis residing on the Pak-Afghan border lead to outsiders exploitation and subsequent sectarian violence eruptions (Zahib, 2009; Syed et al., 2015).

## Methods and Procedures

The study at hand was carried out with the sole objective of investigating the relationship of rural women's plight with their infrastructure while considering the last wave of sectarianism in the area. The study was carried out in the tribal district Kurram erstwhile known as Kurram Agency of Federally

Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The nature of the study was quantitative and for drawing conclusions and generalization, a sample size of 335 female respondents was proportionally selected from the wars-affected villages notified by the government vide No. CSF/L&O/03/2343-46. After the determination of the proportionate sample size, a simple random sampling approach was adopted. Likert scale-based questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The collected data was analyzed at

univariate and bivariate levels of analysis. In univariate analysis, the data was described with the help of frequencies and their respective percentages. While at bivariate analysis, the association between the dependent variable (rural women's plight) and independent variable (rural infrastructure) was established while considering the last wave of sectarianism in the area. The application of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and chi-square test statistics were applied for drawing results.

**Table 1**

*concerning univariate results and the association between rural infrastructure and rural women's plight*

Rural Infrastructure	Responses	Sectarian militancy			Total	Statistics	
		Yes	No	Don't Know			
Female educational institutions were damaged during sectarian militancy in the area.	Yes	228(85.39%)	39 (14.61%)	0(0%)	267 (79.7%)	28.836	P=0.000
	No	32(68.09%)	14(29.79%)	1(2.13%)	47 (14%)		
	Don't Know	10(47.62%)	10(47.62%)	1(4.76%)	21(6.3%)		
Sectarian militancy contributed towards the closer of women's vocational institutions.	Yes	156(87.64%)	22(12.36%)	0(0%)	178 (53.1%)	16.093	P= 0.003
	No	94(74.02%)	32(25.20%)	1(0.79%)	127 (37.9%)		
	Don't Know	20(66.67%)	9(30%)	1(3.33%)	30 (9.0%)		
NGOs working for women's empowerment restricted their activities due in the area to sectarian militancy.	Yes	148 (88.10%)	20 (11.90%)	0 (0%)	168 (50.1%)	20.114	P= 0.000
	No	99 (77.34%)	28 (21.88%)	1 (0.78%)	12 (38.2%)		
	Don't Know	23 (58.97%)	15 (38.46%)	1 (2.56%)	39 (11.6%)		
Hospitals were destroyed due to sectarian militancy in the area	Yes	161 (82.52%)	32 (17.48%)	0 (0%)	193 (57.6%)	14.852	P= 0.005
	No	101 (78.4%)	27 (20.7%)	1 (0.9%)	129 (38.5%)		
	Don't Know	8 (61.76%)	4 (30.88%)	1 (7.35%)	13 (3.9%)		
Storage facilities of agriculture production	Yes	191 (85.86%)	31 (14.14%)	0 (0%)	222 (66.3%)	35.645	P= 0.000

*Examining the Drivers of Sectarianism and their Impact on Rural Infrastructure: Implications for Rural Women's Plight*

Rural Infrastructure	Responses	Sectarian militancy	Total	Statistics	
were affected due to sectarian militancy.	No	71 (78%)	19 (20.9%)	1 (1.1%)	91 (27.2%)
	Don't Know	8 (36.36%)	13 (59.09%)	1 (4.55%)	22 (6.6%)
	Yes	199 (85.29%)	34 (14.71%)	0 (0%)	233 (69.6%)
Agriculture-based markets were shut down during sectarian militancy	No	62 (72.60%)	22 (26.03%)	1 (1.37%)	85 (25.4%)
	Don't Know	9 (52.5%)	7 (40%)	1 (7.5%)	17 (5.1%)
	Yes	200 (86.54%)	29 (13.46%)	0 (0%)	229 (68.4%)
Women have less control over rural infrastructure	No	51 (65.22%)	26 (32.61%)	1 (2.17%)	78 (23.3%)
	Don't Know	19 (67.92%)	8 (30.19%)	1 (1.89%)	28 (8.4%)
	Yes	153 (81.01%)	36 (18.99%)	0 (0%)	189 (56.4%)
Women's voices were never heard by men about infrastructural development	No	97 (81.36%)	21 (17.80%)	1 (0.85%)	119 (35.5%)
	Don't Know	20 (74.19%)	6 (22.58%)	1 (3.23%)	27 (8.1%)
	Yes	192 (89.65%)	21 (10.35%)	0 (0%)	213 (63.6%)
After the last sectarian conflict, women's infrastructure declined in all respects in your area.	No	56 (62.94%)	32 (36.47%)	1 (0.59%)	89 (26.6%)
	Don't Know	22 (67.11%)	10 (30.26%)	1 (2.63%)	33 (9.9%)
	Yes	165 (86.60%)	24 (13.40%)	0 (0%)	189 (56.4%)
Infrastructural destruction due to sectarian clashes reduced women's participation in socio-economic activities in your area.	No	83 (74.75%)	26 (24.24%)	1 (1.01%)	110 (32.8%)
	Don't Know	2210 (61.11%)	13 (36.11%)	1 (2.78%)	36 (10.7%)
	Yes	205 (89.6%)	24 (10.4%)	0 (0%)	229 (68.4%)
Overall women's infrastructure was highly damaged during sectarian militancy.					

Rural Infrastructure	Responses	Sectarian militancy	Total	Statistics		
Sectarian militancy decreased women's source of revenue due to infrastructural destruction.	No	49 (63.6%)	27 (35.1%)	1 (1.3%)	77 (23.0%)	
	Don't Know	16 (55.3%)	12 (43.3%)	1 (3.4%)	29 (8.7%)	
	Yes	191 (86.8%)	29 (13.2%)	0 (0%)	220 (65.7%)	26.613 P= .000
	No	43 (60.6%)	27 (38%)	1 (1.4%)	71 (21.2%)	
	Don't Know	36 (81.8%)	7 (16%)	1 (2.2%)	44 (13.1%)	

### Explanation of Assessing Rural Infrastructure at Univariate and Bivariate Levels of Analysis

Infrastructure plays an important role in the development of an area, particularly in rural areas. It helps the rural dwellers quench mobility and also entails opportunities for locals to transport their production well in time to the market. Thus, its relation to social development and economic growth is cognizable and undeniable. Further, the development of rural infrastructure also signifies the speed of growth of the local rural communities. It entails the operational definition of the development of roads, services, and other modes of communication like transportation which ensure the smooth and unabated mobility of human and respective agriculture products to the market. The above table indicated that the majority of 267(79.7%) respondents revealed that female educational institutions were damaged during sectarian militancy in the area, 47(14.0%) respondents negated the statement while 21(6.3%) respondents remained uncertain in this regard. At the bivariate level of analysis, a highly significant association (P=0.000) was found between rural women's plight and the statement that female educational institutions were damaged during sectarian militancy. Female educational facilities had always the chance of being hit by terrorists as these are deemed the soft target and carry forward their religious agenda, which has been portrayed as having no room for the provision of formal education to females. Female institutions of learning might be perceived as symbolic representations of distinct

cultural or ideological frameworks, putting them vulnerable to being targeted by individuals who hold opposing viewpoints towards such ideals. Extremist parties may perceive the learning opportunities of females as a challenge to their strict understanding of societal and cultural conventions, resulting in acts of aggression towards educational facilities that specifically target female students. From these results, it could be deduced that incidents of attacks on educational institutions had taken place in the tribal district Kurram. These attacks were preplanned and deliberate with the sole aim of disrupting institutional deliverance and also implying women's denial of access to education. This could also be the probable outcome of declining women's education in the area. Further, women's education is a challenge to the existing cultural patterns devoid of accommodating women with equal opportunities at par with men. These results were amply supported by Khan et al. (2018) that female educational institutions being a primary target of extremists were worst hit by sectarian militancy with the sole aim of restricting women from formal education which is being deemed as foreign philosophy imposed on local, to betray their ancestral values. That in turn forced women to relinquish their education. This targeting was specifically aimed at restricting women and keeping them illiterate. Societal efforts of rehabilitation of these institutions are vital to enable women to have equal access to resources.

Likewise, the majority 178(53.1%) of the respondents asserted that sectarian militancy



contributed towards the closure of women's vocational institutions, 127(37.9%) respondents negated the notion while the rest of 30(9.0%) respondents uncertain. In consonance with the majority responses, a significant association ( $P=0.003$ ) was established between rural women's plight and the notion that sectarian militancy contributed towards the closer of women's vocational institutions. The forced closure of female vocational institutes could be associated with sectarian violence since it collides with fundamentalist beliefs that resist the advancement of women. Vocational training can be perceived as a mechanism for uplifting women by equipping them with abilities and potential that extend beyond societal expectations regarding gender roles. The closure of such facilities by militants could be motivated by their desire to avoid something they regard as a threat to their religious paradigm. Such institutes, specialized to women, could be subject to specific attention due to their function as places where women get together, engage in social interactions, and acquire skills that may enhance their autonomy and freedom. Further, the forcible closure of female vocational institutions could also be the obvious cause associated with the rise of religious extremism with the philosophy of damaging women's advancement, rather than believing in her dependency. Vocational education could be viewed as a strategy for empowering women by providing them with skills and the potential to encounter sociocultural barriers and averting gender-based orientations. Militants take reference from religious philosophy i.e. forcing these institutions and depriving women segment of their basic rights. Previous studies also suggested that female vocational training institutes along with educational institutions had been destroyed by militant insurgency. Their major objective was to desist the internalization of foreign values within the prevailing social system. Moreover, it was also pointed to strike down any opportunity for women empowerment in order to enjoy their freedom and autonomy (Parashar, 2014; Khan et al., 2018). Further, Ahmed (2019) also pointed out that militancy usually leads to the closure of women's training and skills centers, hampering the chances of boosting their skills. Re-opening these centers may help women take on the path of

development through the consistent involvement of women.

Similarly, the majority of respondents i.e. 168(50.1%) disclosed that NGOs working for women empowerment restricted their activities in the area due to sectarian militancy, 128(38.2%) respondents opposed the statement while the remaining 39(11.6%) respondents uncertain about the notion, while at bivariate analysis a highly significant association ( $P=0.000$ ) of the statement was found with rural women plight. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting female empowerment had encountered limitations on their operations as a result of sectarian violence, as emanated from these results. These restrictions frequently led to an environment characterized by instability and insecurity including serious threats, acts of violence, or instances of terror perpetrated by violent groups, which significantly impeded their capacity to carry out their operations in a safe environment. The presence of security issues for both staff members and beneficiaries resulted in a decrease or temporary halt in operational activity. Sectarian militancy had badly damaged the initiatives taken up by NGOs for women's empowerment. They have either closed or temporarily halted their activities due to the threat of violence against the organization and their staff. Further, sectarian violence often creates an unstable and insecure atmosphere, limiting the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to promote women's empowerment. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) usually face major threats of harm, violence, or fear by extremist organizations, which might hinder their ability to operate safely. NGOs are being targeted by sectarian militant organizations, if they disagree with their hardline values. Militants considered these organizations as perpetual threats to furthering their agenda. These findings were similar to the earlier inferences where militants mainly targeted educational and vocational training centers. However, all these, they also focused on restricting NGOs, working for the uplift of women as disclosed by Parashar (2014) that militants used to target these NGOs to deny women knowing about their empowerment.

In addition, the majority 193(57.6%) of the respondents recognized that hospitals were destroyed due to sectarian militancy in the area, 129(38.5%) respondents negated the statement whereas 13(3.9%) respondents remained undecided, while associated the statement with rural women plight was significant ( $P=0.005$ ). Sectarian extremist organizations deliberately targeted the masses relief providing services in areas like hospitals to create a sense of horror and terror among the locals. The primary objective has been determined to disrupt the health care services by damaging the infrastructural facilities (hospitals). Such violent groups purposefully targeted hospitals as strategic objectives in order to undermine healthcare facilities of opposing ideological or ethnic sects. The closure of medical facilities could cause fear and anxiety with an imminent threat to needy patients. Targeting and harming hospitals additionally added to a psychological warfare approach, to subdue the opponents. The presence of this fear has the potential to increase people's perceptions of vulnerability, making them more vulnerable to extremist forces' control and deception. Abbasi (2013) has rightly observed with his inferences, which were also in support of the aforementioned findings that medical facilities like hospitals and other healthcare service centers are targeted to further make the conditions worsen. These attacks left these centers vulnerable and put at stake the health and well-being of mothers and children.

Further, the majority of 222(66.3%) respondents agreed with the statement that storage facilities of agriculture production were affected due to sectarian militancy, 91(27.2%) respondents negated the statement while 22(6.6%) respondents were uncertain. Likely, at bivariate analysis, the association of the statement was highly significant ( $P=0.000$ ) with rural women's plight in the study area. An outbreak of sectarian extremism often gives rise to a state of instability. Farmers and landowners working in such areas could face difficulties in the transportation of their crops to storage centers as a result of the potential threat of violence or disruption posed by militant organizations with a vivid threat to life. The presence of this vulnerability impedes the smooth transportation of agricultural commodities to storage

facilities. In locations affected by violence, limitations on mobility and market accessibility might hinder the transportation and commercialization of agricultural commodities. People may encounter challenges in accessing storage spaces and selling their agricultural products, resulting in the loss of their precious commodity being wasted. Agriculture products' non-access to the market, frequent market disclosure, and threat to life and property by insurgents had marked the financial strength of the farmers. It has also endangered their life and property with maximum women exclusion, causing huge deprivation and devastation to their fortes (Haq et al., 2022). Further, the emergence of sectarian radicalism often emanated a condition of unrest because farmers and land owners in such areas often encounter difficulty in transporting their produce to storage facilities due to the possible danger of aggression or disruption of the smooth deliverance by making these unsafe. The existence of this vulnerability disrupts the uninterrupted transportation of agricultural produce to the storage sites. In turbulent areas, restricted movement and market accessibility are extremely difficult tasks rendering the whole process uncertain and non-productive in solid returns. Rashid (2015) also found that food production is also under the threat of elimination due to sectarianism. Consistent disruption of access to the market and non-access to storage facilities not only weakened the financial strength of the farmers but also triggered the issue of food security and challenges to livelihood with particular reference to women.

In consonance with the above, the majority 233(69.6%) respondents affirmed that agriculture-based markets were shut down during sectarian militancy, 85(25.4%) opposed the statement while the remaining 17(5.1%) respondents were uncertain. Likely, a highly significant association ( $P=0.000$ ) was identified between rural women's plight and the aforementioned statement. These findings were similar to the preceding outcomes and alluded to the inconsistency in access to storage centers but also led to the closure of markets. These closures rendered opportunities for almost every segment of society including women. Further, all the economic activities are down to a halt, and the chain of provision of food

and services is destroyed by directly hampering the local economy while overshadowing the livelihood opportunities as well. Haq et al., (2022) also intimated that sectarianism usually forces them to close the agriculture market, depriving farmers of their means of survival and tarnishing the women's chances of economic empowerment as well. Women's autonomy in the economy is based on the sustenance of consistent agriculture market functioning. Further, sectarian militancy also poses a significant threat to agriculture-based marketplaces, leading to their closure, mostly attributed to attacks, stealing, and acts of violence. The presence of road closures, inspection points, and other kinds of interruptions can impede the transportation of goods, hence causing obstacles for farmers in delivering their crops to marketplaces and for merchants for distribution. Militancy not only endangers the life and property of the locals but also cripples their financial strength. Rural economy, primarily, based on agriculture products when faced with frequent closure of markets, leading to losses to farmers in monetary terms. It also put at stake the food security dynamics of the locals (Rashid, 2015).

Similarly, the majority of 229(68.4%) respondents asserted that women have less control over rural infrastructure, 78(23.3%) negated the notion while the rest of 28(8.4%) respondents remained uncertain. Analogously, a highly significant association ( $P=0.000$ ) was divulged between rural women's plight and the notion that women have less control over rural infrastructure. Conventional gender standards and duties typically stipulate that women's major obligations revolve around childcare, domestic tasks, and familial affairs. Being a patrilocal society, males are supported in leading the local infrastructure mostly manned with male power, leading from the front and having little room for females to intervene rather, than in a secondary role performance. In tribal societies of Pakistan, traditional gender roles also put childcare, domestic responsibilities, and family matters on women's shoulders. The distribution of work involves men's choices in the selection and implementation of roles, suggesting women stay at home. Lack of formal education may also prevent women from participating in decision-making processes, limiting their ability to influence or manage community

infrastructure projects. On the other hand, recognizing gender-based land ownership results in a reduction in the prevailing stereotypes about women's property freedom. These results were also inconsonant to the conclusion of Lakshman (2020) who found that women's social and economic participation is brought to a halt due to the rise in sectarian terrorism. The consequences of these outcomes are significant as women's mobility, access to the job market, and employment opportunities are eroded with a high rate of susceptibility to women. Further, sectarian clashes completely destroy the local infrastructure, inflicting enormous damages to women-related centers, like basic health units, skills provision centers, etc. This negatively affects rural women's accessibility and ability to establish their access to these basic amenities of life, making them unable to enjoy economic prosperity and independence.

Likewise, the majority of 189(56.4%) respondents agreed with the notion that women's voices were never heard by men about infrastructural development, 119(35.5%) respondents disagreed with the notion while 27(8.1%) respondents were undecided. Gender stereotypes and norms govern the conventional societal expectations for individuals based on their gender, resulting in the assignment of conventional responsibilities to both men and women. These societal conventions usually establish the notion that women's viewpoints hold less significance in areas such as the construction of infrastructure, hence perpetuating the belief that men serve as the predominant decision-makers. Similarly, a restricted opportunity to acquire education can be a contributing factor to a deficit in self-confidence and self-reliance among females to express viewpoints in public arenas, particularly when engaging in conversations that pertain to technical or policy-related matters. It is also possible that women may encounter restricted information access pertaining to construction projects, procedures, and processes of decision-making, which drastically hamper their abilities to foresee the long-lasting effects of such endeavors. These findings had support from Winthrop and Graff (2010) who discussed the tasks encountered by women residing in rural areas, having

no access to infrastructural development, rather men enjoying the authority to access these projects. Women's exclusionary trends have badly damaged their welfare and decision-making prospects (Khan, 2011). However, in contrast, a non-significant association ( $P=0.197$ ) resulted between rural women's plight and the conception that women's voices were never heard by men about infrastructural development at the bivariate level of analysis. The variation in univariate and bivariate levels of analysis might be the reason that traditional norms and duties often state that women's primary responsibilities are childcare, household chores, and family issues. The division of labor involves the allocation of men to carry out jobs such as infrastructure construction, decision-making, and administration, while women are limited to household duties as pointed out by Khan et al., (2021) women are usually excluded by taking their viewpoints pertaining to development and rehabilitation initiatives in infrastructure. However, it is worth mentioning that active participation in decision-making is essential to make success stories about women's growth and development in social and financial terms.

Moreover, the majority 213(63.6%) respondents disclosed that after the last wave of sectarianism, women's infrastructure declined in all respects in the area, 89(26.6%) respondents opposed the notion while the rest 33(9.9%) of respondents remained undecided in this respect. The association of this statement was highly significant ( $P=0.000$ ) with rural women's plight. Sectarian battles usually result in large-scale migration of populations. Being deprived of homes, means of survival, and opportunities to avail resources could lead to deterioration in the total infrastructure, which includes financial and social support systems for women. The deterioration of social infrastructure can potentially have lifelong implications for the overall welfare of women. Their health and welfare prospects have deteriorated due to the eruption of violence negatively affecting their participation chances in different walks of life. Women's restrictions coincide with violence which could damage their infrastructure like their health facilities, schooling, and access to the market. All these factors crippled women's participatory abilities and pushed them to

extreme vulnerabilities (Varley, 2015; Lakshman, 2020). Further, in tribal areas stereotypes and norms give men and women customary obligations in accordance to their gender. These social norms reinforce the idea that males make decisions in areas like physical infrastructure and that women's opinions are less important in this regard as evident from the above results. In the same way, lack of education can lower women's self-confidence and make them hesitant to speak up in public, especially on technical or policy-related issues. The destruction of women's educational institutions by sectarian militants further aggravated the women's fragile status in the study area. Infrastructure damages had limited their chances of making a comeback to deliver at par with men. Winthrop and Griff (2010) also found that dilapidated educational infrastructure had reduced women's mobility in attending schools. This prospect of deliverance in social and economic domains is diminished due to non-access to education.

Furthermore, the majority 189(56.4%) respondents agreed that infrastructural destruction due to sectarian clashes reduced women's participation in socio-economic activities in the area, 110(32.8%) respondents negated the notion while 36(10.7%) respondents remained uncertain. In addition, a significant association ( $P=0.001$ ) was recognized between rural women's plight and the above-mentioned notion i.e. infrastructural destruction due to sectarian clashes reduced women's participation in socio-economic activities in conflict-affected areas. Infrastructural loss compels women to flee their homes causing disruptions in economic engagements especially in small-scale women's enterprises or agricultural activities. This usually deteriorated the welfare system, childcare services, healthcare, and education-related provisions. These findings were similar to the inferences of Sharma (2020) who concluded that the loss of infrastructure has significantly demolished the chances of getting a socio-economic revival. This revival is basically embedded into the different kinds of services and resources essential for their uplift. Socio-economic endeavors are directly affected by the rise and perpetuation of violent tendencies in an area (Lakshman, 2020). Further, the destruction of

infrastructure i.e. schools, residencies, and other institutions certainly serve as deterrence in psychological and economic terms. When women lose their jobs and have no access to employment and have less access to livelihood due to its destruction followed by a preventive fear of threat to life and property, forces the women segment of the society to abandon their activities and flee. Ahmed (2019) found closure of institutions either destroyed or forcefully denied access to them, the dissension of NGOs by asking them to relinquish their services, and frequent attacks on healthcare units turned the situation altogether non-feasible for leaving (Abbasi, 2013; and Prashar, 2014).

Likewise, the majority 229(68.4%) respondents agreed that overall women's infrastructure was highly damaged during sectarian militancy, 77(23.0%) repudiated the notion, and 29(8.7%) respondents were undecided. Similarly, a highly significant association ( $P=0.000$ ) was disclosed between rural women's plight and the conception that overall women's infrastructure was highly damaged during sectarian militancy. Sectarian disputes typically include acts of aggression targeting civil buildings and structures including educational institutions, medical facilities, and community organizations. During times of conflict, infrastructure that is specifically intended to respond to the needs of women, including shelters for women, medical centers, and vocational education institutions, may become intentional and soft targets of this offense. The presence of sectarian insurgency contributes to a rise in instances of violence based on gender, involving acts such as sexual assault and violence by specifically targeting women. As a result, the availability of crucial services for females may be significantly constrained. Such interruption has a negative impact on women's ability to obtain essential healthcare treatments as disclosed by (Varley, 2015; and Sharma, 2020). During the fieldwork, the researcher also observed that either the physical infrastructure of the area was in destroyed condition or recently constructed. This scenario was the outcome of sectarianism, as all captured infrastructure was destroyed by the opponents without taking care of public and private ownership. Even though, religious and sacred places like mosques, etc. were not

an exception. These findings were similar to the preceding outcomes and rightly pointed to a non-viable environment for living for both genders, particularly for women. The insurgency has fuelled gender disparities and has turned the environment hostile to honor, life, and property (Abbasi, 2013; Khan and Adnan, 2018).

Moreover, the majority 220(65.7%) respondents affirmed that sectarian militancy decreased women's source of revenue due to infrastructural destruction, 71(21.2%) respondents negated the notion while 44(13.1%) respondents were undecided about the statement. The association of rural women's plight was also significant ( $P=0.001$ ) with the statement in bivariate analysis. Huge displacement of both men and women, leaving behind their homes and property due to threats to life had always diminished the chances of their smooth access to basic amenities of life. Women are found as the primal segment suffering from these agonies. Their mobility, health requirements, and skill-oriented learnings are the first victims of such miss endeavor. Their chances of earning are completely led to a halt with little means of survival. This change also affected the preexisting financial operations, especially for women who had numerous income-generating sources. Destroying academics and workplace settings further hindered women's ability to acquire new skills and work, reducing their income potential. Deteriorating legal systems and social institutions further put women's safeguards at a halt. Likely, the needed support to participate in the economy was withdrawn/disappeared due to sectarianism in the area. Women are the most vulnerable segment in the face of sectarianism due to limited access to resources and lowest participation in education lagging behind in initiatives essential for development. These initiatives are in the form of certain safeguards to push them onward by acquiring the growth initiatives. However, the rise and prevalence of sectarianism severely damaged their chances of growth and rather questioned their very survival in physical, economic, and social terms. Varley (2015) also pinpointed such situations by drawing a conclusion about their exclusion in terms of access to health, education, and economic efforts. Lakshman (2020) also found their miseries as an

outcome of sectarian violence like a halt to the socio-economic uplift of women folks. Their access to basic services is comprehensively curtailed due to prevailing uncertainties (Sharma, 2020).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study concluded that sectarianism in the area negatively affected rural infrastructure in the form of damaging and destroying female educational institutions and hospitals. Likely, women's vocational institutions and NGOs working for women's empowerment were closed due to sectarian militancy. Further, the destruction of storage facilities for agriculture production and the closure of agriculture-based markets, etc. contributed to a decline in women's participation in the socio-economic activities of the area. Women's voices in the study area were neither heard by men in terms of infrastructure development initiatives nor did they have control over the rural infrastructure at par with men. After the last

sectarian conflict in the area, women's infrastructure declined in all respects which in turn added to women's inability to generate revenues. Effects of sectarian strifes were highly damaging for the overall women's infrastructure, resulting in reduced women's participation in socio-economic activities of your area. These situations not only affected the loss of billions of rupees but also restricted women's plight in the area which further contributed to women's exploitations and vulnerabilities. To devise holistic strategies for exploring and addressing the underlying socioeconomic issues pushing women into increased vulnerability, community-based programs aimed at challenging sectarian ideas and promoting secularism should be given top priority through active participation and leadership of women, and sustainable development interventions in conflicted areas should be prioritized to women's empowerment and gender equality was forwarded some of the key recommendations in light of the study findings.

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