

Psychological Assessment Report of Red Mosque Students

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Abstract

The present documentation details the psychological assessment and debriefing report of madrasa students at the Sports Stadium, Islamabad, prepared by the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS). At the directive of the prime minister of Pakistan, a team of 11 mental health professionals was set up for psychological assessment and debriefing of madrasa students at the Sports Complex on Sunday, July 8, 2007. The team was divided into four groups and was supervised and briefed by the head of the department of psychiatry, PIMS. More than one hundred and thirty students were assessed. They were between the ages of 15 to 20 years, and most were from the NWFP and a few from AJK. Nearly all were from a poor background with large families. On site we were facilitated by the Islamabad commissioner's office. Analyses showed that these students were comfortable in their present scenarios. Yet, they remained somewhat oblivious of their surroundings and also to new information.

Introduction

All madrasas provide free education and offer free boarding and lodging to students who come mainly from the poorer strata of society and not necessarily from the surrounding communities. Some rich and middle-class families also send their children to madrasas for Quranic lessons and memorization; however, these are usually day students.¹

Akbar S. Ahmad regards madrasas to be a "cheaper, more accessible and more Islamic alternative to education."² Singer calls them a "displacement of the public education system,"³ Jeffrey Goldberg terms them a means of "education of the holy warrior,"⁴ Jessica Stern, while describing them as emblematic of "Pakistan's jihad culture,"⁵ uses epithets and sub-headings like: "schools of hate", "Jihad International Inc."

Why do parents choose a madrasa education? Three factors need to be evaluated. The first is employment. Critics are right in saying that madrasa education does not prepare for a wide range of jobs. The curriculum is often narrowly focused on religious subjects, although self-discipline, an important life skill, does potentially follow from the highly

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regulated and intense environment of an urban madrasa. A madrasa graduate is unlikely to be able to become a doctor, an engineer, or a pilot. When competing with a student from a government school, the madrasa graduate is unlikely to prevail.⁶

A second major issue is teacher motivation. In government schools, teacher motivation is largely inadequate across the developing world. Detailed studies show that most teachers prefer urban schools; that the status of teaching as a profession is on a decline (and is increasingly seen as employment of last resort), and that teaching jobs serve as crucial sources of patronage. These factors can lead to a sense of insecurity - demotivating teachers and further reducing the quality of education. Teacher absenteeism is often as high as 50 per cent, although studies differ as to how much of this is authorized (teachers can be expected, for example, to spend some of their time administering elections).

There is no data on the motivation levels of madrasa teachers, but salaries are often lower than those in government schools, although principals can make more. In some instances, madrasa teachers claim to work for bed and board only. But the local nature of many madrasas may increase community-based accountability, leading to higher motivation levels. One study, funded by the Department of International Development, suggests that "the high level of accountability of non-formal 'community' schools to parents and the host communities is the single most important reason for their success." This accountability may contribute to the parental choice of sending children to madrasas.

The third factor is literacy. One of the biggest global challenges is illiteracy: some 781 million adults were estimated to be illiterate in 2007, according to UNESCO, and many of them live in South Asia. Parents appear to value education and want their children to be educated, but the first priority tends to be ensuring shelter and food. The trend lines in South Asia are positive since a higher percentage of the population is becoming literate. But still much needs to be done in order to improve young peoples' opportunities. Any assessment of madrasas needs to explore their role in increasing literacy and this appears to be a gap that could render much future research useful. Even if madrasas do little more than make thousands of young people literate, that is an educational achievement on its own.

Most comments on madrasas focus on extremism. Critics assail madrasas as places that foster extremist views, either due to narrow curricula or because those who run them are affiliated with militant or sectarian groups. Mandatory reform, they insist, is one necessary path

forward. William Dalrymple is not alone, however, in arguing for better government education provision rather than an exclusive focus on the reform of religious schools.

Despite that, there is evidence that in some madrasas a tolerant and inquisitive approach to life is not encouraged. And, as Vali Nasr has noted, an increasing number of both conservative and radical madrasas in Pakistan since the 1980s has contributed to a more volatile political environment.

Few who talk about madrasas listen to those from within the madrasa system. Many rely on a few visits to form a view or subscribe to received and frequently recycled wisdom. As Yoginder Sikand has sadly observed, those within the madrasa system are often marginalized when it comes to public comment and debate about the system they are part of.

Method

In this explanatory study of madrasa students, the debriefing team comprised 11 mental health professionals. Students of northern areas, that is, NWFP and AJK were taken in the study sample which was selected randomly.

Results

The total number of students was more than 130, and nearly all belonged to lower socio-economic backgrounds. The study highlights the psychological and physical adjustment of such students to their present scenarios. All the students were aged between 15 and 20 years as shown in Table 1. The area-wise selection of the sample is presented in Table 2.

The assessment which was carried out provides a glance at the undernourished minds of young ones due to little previous exposure to the external world since life for them had been limited to the four walls of their madrasa.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis of the study showed that there are many positive and negative outcomes which help us in examining further the conditions of madrasa students. The reasons for studying and living in the madrasa were their poor socio-economic backgrounds and the will to acquire religious education. It appears that they are presently flexible in their views; however, it is likely that within a few years of remaining in the same system, their views could change. Most of them denied any interest in or affiliation with extremist elements. They were quite relaxed in their current situation due to the fact that the administration and security personnel had treated them with dignity and respect. While at the Sports Complex, they had shown a keen interest in sports.

Yet, negative aspects were also seen in this documentation. They seem to have sworn allegiance to their religious teachers because of the closed system in which have been groomed and the fact that all their basic needs were being provided for by the madrasa system. They seem to have a myopic view of the world and had little tolerance for the views of others.

Recommendations

After compiling the whole documentation, there are many proposals suggested by our professionals. Some of them relate to the educational

setup of madrasas along with their accommodation and employment strategies. The first step which is recommended for the rehabilitation of the students is to establish the madrasa under the supervision of the education department. There is also a strong need to offer them free education other than what is taught at madrasas. Regular and random inspection of institutes by inspectors of education or society should be done. The curriculum should be balanced between religious and formal education. They should be provided with internet facilities in order to have access to information and to achieve a broader perspective on life. Periodic assessment should be carried out so that students with potential could be offered scholarships for studying in major universities of Pakistan.

The influence of extremist elements needs to be neutralized and they should not be allowed to influence young minds. Teachers need to be educated and briefed in order to have a balanced and tolerant view of the country and the world. Those who do not wish to undergo a formal education, need to be offered a skills training programme; this is essential so that they have a means of earning a living and do not rely on the institution for economic support. Along with educational and guidance setups to be overviewed, co-curricular bench marks also need to be re-established since students need to follow balanced and tolerant lifestyles.

If government resources allow, students should stay in general hostel accommodation where they can mix with other students from different educational institutions. There is also a need to provide other outlets like sports in which they have shown an interest. Free educational institutions with residential facilities need to be set up in deprived areas of NWFP and AJK from where the majority of students come. Since economic factors are an important reason for them to adopt this kind of living, employment opportunities need to be created and induction in the military, constabulary and rangers needs to be encouraged. If a system can be devised wherein they only spend a certain number of years in the madrasa, that would help improve their outlook. On this important issue, the government needs to take the media on board and utilize its help in projecting a tolerant view on the subject. The eventual aim is to inculcate a sense of patriotism and national pride. Also, if we want to make this study more reliable, we should focus on larger population samples in future.

Conclusion

It is evident that what we are seeing is just the tip of the iceberg and important steps need to be taken to tap and utilize the potential of these young men and women who can contribute to the progress of Pakistan; and at the same time protect them from the damage of polarized elements

of society. The cult culture needs to be discouraged by reducing the influence of one person over the entire student community in an institution .The key to this problem is assimilating this population into the mainstream rather than letting it remain marginalized.

Notes & References

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- ¹ Evans, Alexander, 2008, "Madrasa Education: Necessity or Rational Choice", <http://www.allbusiness.com/society-social/families-children-family/11779685-1.html>
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 - ³ Singer, P.W., 2001, *Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad*. Washington DC: Brookings Institutions Analysis Papers #41
 - ⁴ Goldberg, Jeffrey, "Inside Jihad University: The Education of a Holy Warrior", *New York Times Magazine*, June 25, 2000
 - ⁵ Stern, Jessica (2000), "Pakistan's Jihad Culture", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 6.
 - ⁶ Evans, Alexander, 2008, "Madrasah Education: Necessity or Rational Choice", <http://www.allbusiness.com/society-social/families-children-family/11779685-1.html>

Table-1
AGE-WISE BREAKDOWN

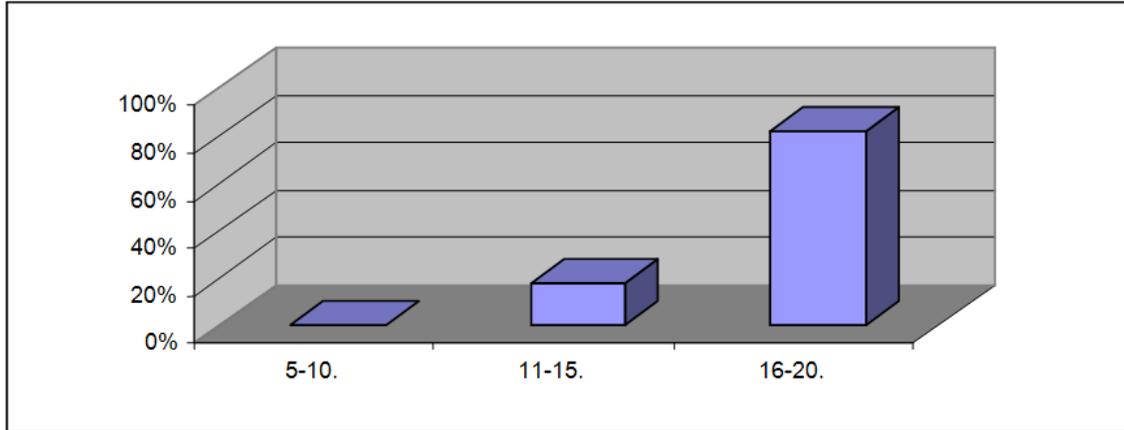


Table-2
AREA-WISE BREAKDOWN

