

Prevalence of exposure to organized violence among refugees from Kashmir

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Abstract

Since 1989 there has been an armed conflict in Indian-held Kashmir between Indian security forces and militant Muslim resistance groups, and grave human rights violations against civilians have previously been reported. In this study we want to assess the extent of exposure to human rights violations among refugees from that area.

Some 10,000 people are living in 10 refugee camps near Muzaffarabad.

In November 1994 we visited refugee camps for Indian Kashmiris near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. We performed the interviews and examinations in the camps with assistance from 2 interpreters.

A structured interview form was used. Those who told of marks after torture or maltreatment were physically examined.

We interviewed 94 representative heads of families (all males) from 4 camps. $\frac{2}{3}$ of them (group A) fled their home village in 1989-92, while $\frac{1}{3}$ (group B) fled in 1993-94.

The extent of killings, torture, maltreatment and arrests of members of the family before their escape was measured. In addition torture forms and torture sequelae were noted.

Exposure to torture among the interviewed men was 67% in group A and 77% in group B. Exposure to maltreatment of families with children was 32% in group A and 45% in group B. The overall family exposure to killings and/or torture was 89% in group A and 84% in group B. There were no significant differences between the two groups in the frequency of exposure to various forms of organized violence.

Conclusions: Our results showed that the refugees had been heavily exposed to human rights violations, those recently escaped to the same extent as the others.

Key words: Kashmir; Refugee camp; Torture; Killings.

Introduction

Since 1947 the national attachment of Kashmir has been the subject of conflicts between India, Pakistan, and groups wanting an independent Kashmir. There has been an armed conflict in Indian-held Kashmir for the past five years. Indian security forces are fighting against armed resistance groups,

some claiming independence for Kashmir, others wanting union with Pakistan.

A large number of severe violations of human rights have been reported, e.g. torture, terrorist shooting of civilians, custodial death, arson of sections of towns or villages, disappearances and rape^{1,2}. Most of these violations are attributed to the Indian security forces. A number of Kashmiris have fled Indian-held Kashmir and are now living in refugee camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Physicians for Human Rights/Denmark visited Kashmir several times during 1993 and 1994. Srinagar, in Indian-held Kashmir, was visited in April and June 1993. We examined a number of torture survivors and victims of arbitrary shooting and we collected data on human rights violations from local lawyers and doctors. A summary of the report from the mission in June 93 has previously been published³.

In June 1994 we visited Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. We interviewed and examined 55 persons in refugee camps near Muzaffarabad who had fled from Indian-held Kashmir, and we reported on torture and other violations against adults⁴. We also examined and reported on Kashmiri children who had been exposed to torture and maltreatment⁵. During that mission we examined selected groups of people and therefore could not assess the extent of exposure to human rights violations among the refugees from Indian-held Kashmir. To remedy that, Physicians for Human Rights/Denmark revisited refugee camps near Muzaffarabad from 14-18 November 1994.

Material

Some 2300 families from Indian-held Kashmir live in 12 camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. Most of them arrived during 1990-1992. During the past 2 years, only about 50-60 families have arrived each year. We interviewed 94 heads of families, who were divided into group A and B (table 1).

Group A comprised 63 of the 87 (72%) families that were housed in the 2 small camps of Domishi and Hirkotli. Some

Table 1. Number and composition of examined families, profession of family head and year of migration.

	Group A	Group B
No. of families	63	31
No. of adults	187 = 3.0 per family	98 = 3.2 per family
No. of children	166 = 2.6 per family	79 = 2.5 per family
Head of family		
– profession	Farmers: 56 = 89%	Farmers: 29 = 94%
	Others: 7 = 11%	Others: 2 = 6%
Year of migration		
– no. of families	1989: 1	1993: 8
	1990: 61	1994: 23
	1992: 1	(June 93-Sept. 94)

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heads of families were not interviewed, mainly because they were away visiting relatives in other camps. All the group A families had fled during 1989-92, 61 of them in 1990.

Group B comprised 31 families, all housed in 4 camps, 27 of them in the two relatively large camps of Brarkot and Hattian, and the remaining 4 in the above mentioned camps of Domishi and Hirkoti. The group B families had all fled during June 93-September 94. They comprised about 40% of the refugee families who were registered as coming from Indian-held Kashmir during that period.

The family pattern in groups A and B was more or less the same, i.e. on average about 3 adults and 2½ children per family; about 90% of both groups were farmers.

Methods

To obtain a picture of the exposure to human rights violations among the refugee population we decided to focus on individual families by interviewing the heads of the families.

On arrival at the camp, we informed the inhabitants, in particular the elders, about the intended interview and examination. It was stressed that participation was voluntary and that the results would be published. The interviews took place via interpreters.

The interview form included questions about reasons for emigration, about detention, maltreatment and torture of the interviewed person and his family, and about deaths within the family caused by violence.

The persons who stated that they had scars and/or other sequelae of torture were examined. Scars and marks were measured and described. Remarkable scars were photographed.

We wanted to give a representative description of the exposure to violence among the refugees, but for practical reasons it was not possible to examine all households in all camps. We therefore decided to interview all heads of the families in two small camps, since we were told that the refugees had been exposed to the same extent in all the camps.

In addition, we decided to examine families who had fled within the previous 1½ years, and compare their statements with those of families who had fled Indian-held Kashmir during the first years of the conflict. In this way we would be able to describe a possible recent change of conditions in Indian-held Kashmir.

Results

Table 2 shows the extent of killings, torture, maltreatment,

and arrests in the families of groups A and B. Table 3 shows remarkable clinical findings.

We were informed about 28 named torture centres and approximately 20 defined torture methods, of which we shall mention only a few. Chili and/or salt put in the eyes, nose or wounds. Beatings with barbed wire. Forced abduction of the legs until dislocation or fracture of thigh bone. "The Roller" used on the back; a sort of large rolling-pin that can cause severe traumatization of skin and muscle tissue. The two latter torture methods have previously been described from India^{3,6,7}.

Sexual violation of women was indicated in several interviews, although we did not systematically ask about this delicate subject. In 1 case, rape was reported; in 2 cases, the interviewed men said that female members of the household had been separated from the men during house searches and had been alone with the soldiers for a while; finally in 2 cases, it was mentioned that female members of the household were "teased" by the Indian soldiers. The interpreter explained that this could mean anything from verbal assaults to rape.

Case

A 36-year-old farmer who fled with his family in January 1994. He reported that he had been in prison for a month just before the flight. He was burnt with cigarettes, and boiling water was poured over his lower legs. In a forced prone position, gravel was strewn over his back and a pole rolled over it ("The Roller"). He also underwent electrical torture to his forearms and wrists. He had two wives; the younger, aged 19, died in June 1993 after being beaten by army troops at home. His second wife and two children, 12 and 10 years old, were beaten and kicked while the house was searched. His brother, brother-in-law, and nephew were imprisoned in January 1994; their fate is unknown.

Examination showed numerous linear scars running longitudinally on the upper part of the back, 0.5-1.5 cm long and 2-3 mm wide. There were several round, dark scars on both lower legs 0.5-1 cm in diameter. Both shins showed several lighter, oblong, irregular linear scars. There was a 3 × 6 cm scar on the right forearm, and a 0.5 × 2 cm scar at the left wrist.

Comments: testimony of torture, of arbitrary violence against children, fatal violence against a woman, imprisonment and disappearance of relatives. The location, number, and appearance of the scars on the back were remarkable, entirely consistent with the testimony. The circular scars on the lower

Table 2. Results - the numbers indicate the number of family heads who confirmed the posed questions.

	Group A N = 63	Group B N = 31	Chi-square test
A. Killed first degree relatives	10 = 16%	7 = 23%	NS
A. Killed other relatives	19 = 28%	6 = 19%	NS
B. Torture of family head	42 = 67%	24 = 77%	NS
B. Torture of first degree relatives	14 = 21%	5 = 16%	NS
C. Maltreatment of family head	10 = 15%	4 = 13%	NS
C. Maltreatment of children of family	20 = 32%	14 = 45%	NS
C. Maltreatment of other relatives	23 = 37%	14 = 45%	NS
D. Arrest of family head	41 = 65%	29 = 94%	p<.01
D. Arrest of relatives	23 = 37%	12 = 39%	NS
E. Overall family exposure to killings and/or torture - A and/or B above	56 = 89%	26 = 84%	NS
E. Overall family exposure to killings, torture and/or maltreatment - A, B and/or C above	60 = 95%	29 = 94%	NS

NS: No Significant difference between the two groups.

Table 3. Remarkable clinical findings.

Described traumas	Clinical findings
Beatings and kicks or combined traumas	1 case of a deformed finger (5th right). 1 case of amputation of distal phalanx (1st right) covered by irregular scar 3 cases of irregular scars on lower leg with underlying deformity of the bone (e.g. fig. 3) 1 case of 2 missing teeth 1 case of scar on the skull with underlying 4 mm excavation of the bone
The "roller"	see - case
Cuts/stabs with bayonets	1 case of a 4 × 1.5 cm biconvex scar on the medial aspect of knee 1 case of a 4 × 0.2 cm scar on the dorsal aspect of the left hand 1 case of 2 triangular scars 4 × 4 mm on the dorsal aspect of right hand 1 case with a 0.3 × 12 cm scar below left nipple 1 case with numerous small, regular scars on both hands and forearms 1 case with an irregular L-shaped scar 2 × 4 cm above right eyebrow 1 case with a 1 × 3 cm scar on right thigh and a 1 × 2 cm scar on right calf 1 case with a 3 × 9 cm irregular scar on left calf; a 0.2 × 10 cm linear scar on left ankle; a 1.5 × 8 cm scar above right knee (fig. 1); a 0.5 × 5 cm scar on right foot; a 0.5 × 4 cm scar on the scalp; a small scar on left thumb
Strike with an axe	Exarticulation of the right foot (injury treated in a surgical clinic)
Burns with cigarettes, fire or electrical devices	1 case of 3 small round scars on left arm and leg 1 case with 6 round 1 cm big scars on left shoulder and both knees, and 1 round 2.5 cm big scar above the navel 1 case with a 5 × 5 cm irregular atrophic area on left elbow
Insertion of a steel rod	1 case of a 12 mm circular scar on the lateral aspect of left lower leg
Insertion of pins under the nails	3 cases of longitudinal deformities of one or two nails involving the matrix (e.g. fig. 2)

legs were consistent with burns from cigarettes⁸. The other scars were nonspecific, but their number was striking.

Discussion

It has previously been documented that Indian Kashmiris in general¹⁻³, and refugees from Indian-held Kashmir living in camps in Pakistan in particular⁴, including children⁵, have been exposed to torture and other kinds of violence by the Indian security forces. Therefore we have not evaluated in depth all the statements about torture of the groups examined in the present series. Our programme did not include obligatory physical examination. When the interviewees mentioned that they had scars and marks from torture/mal-treatment, we compared their history about torture with the objective findings. In all cases the findings were consistent with the histories. Most findings were unspecific but some scars and marks were remarkable, and most of them indi-

cated very severe and unnatural traumatization, far from every day events. The 3 cases with deformities involving the nails seem to be highly specific and are beyond much doubt due to torture as described; it has not been possible to locate photos of such nail deformities in the accessible medical literature. The many remarkable findings indicate that the torturers in Indian-held Kashmir do not care whether they inflict "specific" lesions on the victims. The observations described in the present study are thus additions to the previously reported evidence of torture in Indian-held Kashmir.

Group A consisted of a sample of refugees who escaped from Indian-held Kashmir during 1989-1992. There was no reason to believe that the refugees had been "sorted" into different camps according to their injuries or exposure, and we were informed that there had been no special allocation procedures. Since we examined 72% of all the households in



Fig. 1. Scars on legs - allegedly from bayonet thrusts.

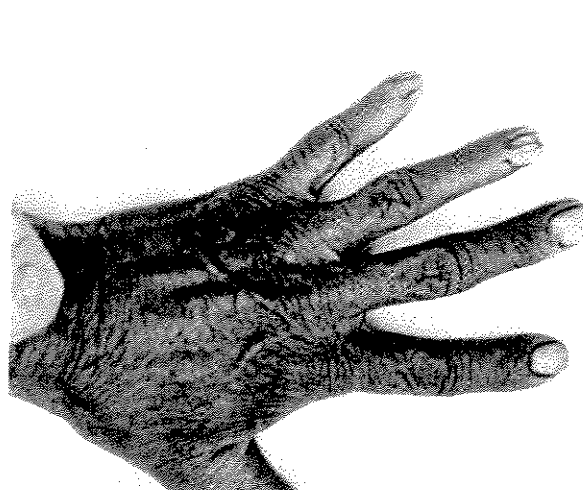


Fig. 2. Longitudinal deformities of the nails of the 4th and 5th fingers of the left hand - allegedly from pins forced up under the nails.

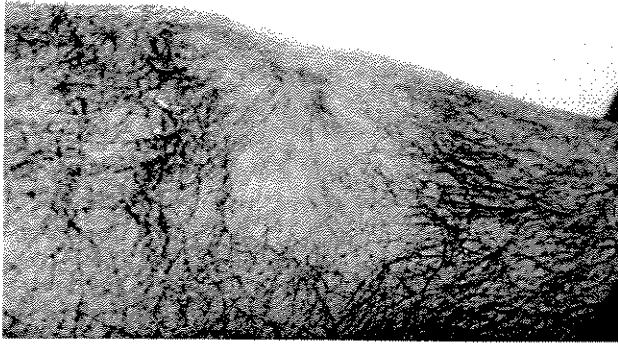


Fig. 3. Larger scar on left shin covering bone deformity – allegedly from a severe kick followed by burning with a red-hot iron bar.

the 2 camps, they should be a representative sample of refugees from the first years of the ongoing conflict.

Group B comprised approximately 40% of the households that arrived at the camps during the past 1½ years. In our opinion, this participation rate indicates that the examinees were representative of the refugees from that period (June 1993-September 1994). We had no access, however, to the lists of arrivals and could not therefore evaluate the "response rate".

It is clear from our findings that almost all the families had been exposed to ill-treatment, torture, and/or killings before their escape from Indian-held Kashmir. These findings agree with the information from previously published reports concerning this area, describing widespread torture and a large number of arbitrary killings and custodial deaths¹⁻³.

First and foremost it was the heads of the families who had been tortured, namely 2/3 of those interviewed. It is not surprising that the most influential person with respect to decisions and opinions should be the most exposed. This is in agreement with previous findings that men more frequently than others are victims of torture⁹. The figures of our study could be compared with figures from Denmark, where 55% of male refugees living in camps were found to be torture victims¹⁰. This may indicate a generally high prevalence of exposure to organized violence among refugees from conflict areas, who have no other possibility of refuge than a temporary camp. We are not aware of other similar surveys carried out in refugee camps describing prevalence of exposure to torture.

There were a large number of households, 32-45%, in which children were said to have been maltreated. This agrees with a previous report concerning maltreatment and

torture of children under the age of 15 years inflicted by the Indian security forces⁵. We regard children as representing the civilian population, and their exposure to maltreatment reflects a systematic terrorization of civilians.

Some interviewees suggested that women from the household had been exposed to sexual violation. Our examination procedures did not allow exploration of these suggestions, one of the reasons being that this subject is very much taboo in the Muslim society. Therefore we assume that the information we received about sexual violations to women represents minimum figures on the matter².

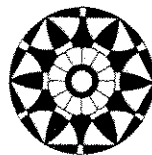
There were no significant differences between groups A and B in the frequency of exposure to various forms of organized violence. We were told that the decrease in the number of refugees registered over the last couple of years was a result of strengthened border control by the Indian security forces. Our results therefore do not indicate a recent improvement in the human rights situation in Indian-held Kashmir.

Conclusion

Refugees from Indian-held Kashmir living in refugee camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir have been heavily exposed to human rights violations. Our results are in agreement with other reports underlining that civilians are highly affected by the ongoing conflict, and they do not indicate a recent improvement of the situation in Indian-held Kashmir.

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