



3. Terrorism

The Impact of Terrorism on Children

The 2014 terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar has left an indelible mark on the psyche of the Pakistani nation. One cannot even begin to comprehend what the children must have gone through in those harrowing moments when the terrorists burst into the school premises and opened fire, mercilessly killing more than 140 of them.

Neither can one comprehend the anguish and turmoil their families must be going through now. Needless to say, terrorism and violent acts have become a way of life in Pakistan today and no one is suffering from this more than the children of this country.

What effects do such acts have on children? Are there any long-term consequences of being brought up in such a violent environment? And what can be done to prevent not just a terrible tragedy like that at APS Peshawar but other acts of violence and terrorism that our children are subjected to on a daily basis?

Pakistan has been going through a perpetual state of low- to medium-intensity war for the last couple of decades. And this state of affairs is unlikely to end anytime soon. Many children and young people have been affected personally by terrorism, either by being at the scene of an attack, by knowing someone injured or killed by militants or watching graphic scenes on their television screens.

In several surveys carried out on children who have witnessed violence in conflict areas around the world, almost three quarters of those surveyed reported increased subjective fear of hopelessness. One would find similar rates in Pakistan, if not higher, because terror exposure is not just a one-time event, but has become a way of life in Pakistan.

These high figures have prompted many mental health professionals to ask how children are affected by growing up in the midst of violence, and how these Pakistani children can best be helped to cope