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Exploring the Impact of Traditional Masculinity on Peacebuilding Approaches among Youth in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Traditional norms of masculinity remain deeply embedded in many societies, particularly in Pakistan, where cultural, religious, and patriarchal values strongly shape gender roles. These norms portray men as independent, emotionally restrained, dominant, and primary decision-makers, while women are expected to be nurturing, subordinate, and primarily responsible for domestic roles. Such expectations reinforce gender inequality and discourage emotional expression and help-seeking among men. This study examines the social construction of traditional masculinity and its influence on gender roles, emotional expression, and gender equality in the Pakistani sociocultural context. A qualitative research design was employed to explore participants' lived experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 participants selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Interviews were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings indicate that family, culture, religion, and media are the primary influences shaping traditional masculine identities. Participants commonly associated masculinity with strength, authority, financial responsibility, and emotional control, reinforcing men's roles as providers and decision-makers while positioning women as caregivers. Emotional suppression emerged as a major theme, with many participants reporting pressure to conceal emotions and avoid seeking support during stress. Cultural expectations also continue to restrict women's participation in employment and leadership, sustaining gender inequality. However, younger and more educated participants expressed more egalitarian views, supporting shared family responsibilities, greater emotional openness among men, and increased opportunities for women. The findings suggest that while traditional masculinity continues to shape gender relations, changing social attitudes indicate a gradual shift toward more inclusive and flexible understandings of masculinity. Gender-sensitive education, public awareness, and supportive policies are essential to promote emotional well-being and gender equality.

Introduction

Peacebuilding has become a key process in the context of the presence of social, political and cultural tensions in societies, to bring peace, harmony and sustainable development (John Paul Lederach, 1997; United Nations, 2018). Youth are a large share of the population in Pakistan and have a vital role in defining community and national peacebuilding processes (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). But the attitudes, behaviour and identity of youth is heavily influenced by socially formed gender norms and traditional conceptions of masculinity (Raewyn Connell, 2005). Traditional masculinity is defined by traditional conceptions of male behavior that correlate men with behaviors that include dominance, emotional control, authority, aggression, and strength. Helms and perpetuates how young males think about conflict, communication, leadership, and social relationships. In many patriarchal societies, like Pakistan, the traditional notion of the masculine is indeed entrenched in the framework of families, schools, religious convictions, and media imagery (James W. Messerschmidt, 2019; Raewyn Connell, 2005). As a rule, boys are taught to shut off their affects, be tough and control personal interactions and relationships. Social expectations may also give men power and privilege, but may also contribute to rigid stereotypes of gender, intolerance, aggressive behaviour and a preference for men's forceful and individualistic approaches to conflict and peace making. The way in which men are traditionally encouraged to act, therefore, may impact a young person's capacity and motivation to participate in positive peacebuilding activities, including dialogue, empathy, negotiation, inclusion, and non-violent communication (Raewyn Connell, 2005; United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Meanwhile, peacebuilding involves a range of values that clash with the dominant masculine norms, such as emotional intelligence, cooperation, compassion and respect. This becomes a key research question around how traditional masculine discourses may enable or affect the involvement of the youth in peacebuilding processes (Raewyn Connell, 2005; Michael Kaufman, 1999). It is significantly relevant in Pakistan because there is more and more involvement of young people in social activity and community work and in combating extremism, violence and social polarization (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations are increasingly realizing that unhealthy traditional male role models have a negative impact on social wellbeing, the prevention of violence, mental health, and peace building (Raewyn Connell & James W. Messerschmidt, 2005; United Nations, 2018). Increased attention on gender-transformative approaches which contest rigid masculine norm and involve positive male engagement in peaceful and inclusive societies has been put forward by WHO and other global institutions like the United Nations, United Nations Women. Key policy recommendations include focusing on educational reforms, as well as establishing awareness campaigns, community-based interventions, and youth engagement programs that emphasize gender equality and respectful social relationships between boys and young men, and promote the development of emotional intelligence and nonviolent communication (James W. Messerschmidt, 2019; Michael Flood, 2019). Around the world, numerous countries and development bodies have launched interventions to shift the harmful masculine norms embedded in their school curricula, mental health projects, conflict resolution training programs and youth leadership programs. All of these strategies are becoming more incorporated into structures of peacebuilding, as there is evidence that positive masculinity can help to curb violence, to drive better relations in communities, and to engage more with youth in peace processes (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Such internationally recommended practices are closely allied to tackling extremism, social polarization, gender-based violence and enhancing sustainable peace building processes in the case of Pakistan

when applied to youth. In addition, the adoption of gender transformative policies by various countries has accentuated in the last few years and the relationship between masculine project, prevention of violence and sustainable peacebuilding is becoming recognized by researchers and policy makers (United Nations Women, 2015; Michael Flood, 2019). International agendas, in particular, Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions and Goal 5 on gender equality of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), call on member States to challenge harmful gender norms that help to create social inequalities and conflict. Around the world, there are now multiple efforts that include men and boys as agents of change in promoting peaceful behaviours and equitable social relations, both within the field of peacebuilding and the field of public health (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2022). They are initiatives that are seeking to reimagine masculinity in terms of shared responsibility, cooperation, empathy and respecting diversity. Research has indicated Academic Insignificant gestures can have a positive impact on the attitudes of youth participants to conflict resolution, decrease aggressive behavior and increases participation in peacebuilding activities of the community. Accordingly, the global institutionalization of transformative approaches to masculinity is a sign of change of traditional male hegemonic power to new social models which are more inclusive and peaceful. Adopting these global recommendations in the policies on youth development and peace-building, could improve the social stability, lessen conflict-related behaviors and foster peaceful civic engagement of youth in Pakistan (James W. Messerschmidt, 2019; United Nations, 2018)..

Consequently, the efforts of national programming in Pakistan for shifting traditional masculinity and building peacebuilding capacities of young people are challenged with some structural, cultural and institutional challenges. Scaling up the use of gender-transformative approaches is a major challenge due to the entrenched patriarchy that informs gender identities and social expectations (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; United Nations, 2018). The dialogues around masculinity and gender equality can be seen as sensitive to the norms of the culture and/or exogenously imposed, and as such, community leaders, parents and even institutional actors can be resistant (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021; United Nations Women, 2015). In addition, the entry of gender transformative content into formal educational systems remains weak, and the impact of awareness-based interventions in formal education is further thwarted by missing deliberate focus on critical reflection of gender norms, and on conflict resolution competencies. Trainers, teachers and program facilitators also have limited capacity, which hinders the effective delivery of the peace building and gender sensitization modules (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021; United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Further, weak funding, disjointed policy diffusion and policy mixes and policy implementation by provinces lower the overall impact and scope of national policies. Participation in these programs is also undermined by social and economic hardship, unemployment and the violent influences from the media and the Internet, that solidifies the strict masculine version. These challenges in turn, reduce the potential of national programs to change the traditional masculinity and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes among youth in Pakistan (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). Beyond this, gaps in monitoring and evaluation significantly deter effective evaluation of the impact of the national initiatives to tackle issues of traditional masculinity and peacebuilding in Pakistan. There are few programs with strong, evidence-based evaluation strategies to assess youth behaviour changes, especially in terms of changes in masculine attitudes, conflict resolution styles, and participation in peace-oriented activities. This makes it hard to measure the longer-term effects and viability of these interventions. Moreover, there is still little interfacing among government institutions, CSOs and academic researchers which deprives the chances of knowledge exchange and enhancement of

programs (United Nations Population Fund, 2020; Michael Flood, 2019). There is also lack of local and context specific approaches limiting the relevance of the programme because of the "diversity" of Pakistan in terms of regions, culture and language. In addition, the taboo connected to the gender norm based discourses and on masculinity limit young men to actively engage with the programme and limit the scope and reach of the programme (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). This has led to gaps between policy and practice in realizing the importance of addressing gender concerns in the process of peacebuilding, and the need for greater institutional buy-in, participatory design, and evidence-based implementation strategies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the social construction and reinforcement of traditional masculine norms among Pakistani youth through the lens of social institutions like family, education, media and culture.
2. To examine how the traditional concept of masculinity is related with youth perception of conflict, violence and peacebuilding methods.
3. To explore the effect of traditional conceptions of masculinity around engagement in dialogue-based, inclusive and non-violent approaches to peace-building by young men.
4. To understand the obstacles that traditional notions of masculinity throw in the path of youth engagement in peacebuilding and social cohesion processes.
5. To screen the awareness and perception of youth about gender transformative approaches and positive masculinities in relation to peacebuilding.
6. To recommend measures to mainstream gender sensitive and masculinity aware approaches in Peacebuilding programs in Pakistan for youth development and social harmony.

Research Questions

1. How masculine norms are formed and perpetuated among young people in Pakistan.

2. How do traditional notions of masculinity affect a young person's perspective on peacebuilding and conflict resolution?

3. What are some traditional conceptions of masculinity that affect the involvement of young people in peacebuilding work and in non-violent action?

What are the challenges of the traditional notions of masculinity in effective peacebuilding processes for youths in Pakistan?

5. What are youth in youth representative organizations' views on gender and positive masculinity for peacebuilding?

6. What tools can be used to positively shift the traditional concepts of men and to increase the positive interest of the youths in sustainable peace building?

Literature Review

The idea of traditional masculinity has received significant attention and been explored in both the gender and social sciences literature as being a social construction of the norms, values, and behavioral expectations of men as "men" in a particular cultural or historical context. Traditional masculinity often correlates with the emotionless, dominant, authoritative, competitive, physically strong and aggressive nature of men within the context of a conflict (James W. Messerschmidt, 2019; Michael Flood, 2019). Loetje is not a biological gender disadvantage, but it is acquired and constantly reinserted in the mechanisms of socialization in important institutions like family

systems, education, religious language, media images and peer group interactions. In the South Asian context as well as many other patriarchal cultures, the image of masculinity is tied to notions of power, pride and control and powerfully influences the construction of male identity and their understanding of their role in society (Raewyn Connell & James W. Messerschmidt, 2005; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). Gender studies research further highlights that victims of rigid masculine patterns may be unable to express their emotions, to be vulnerable, and are unlikely to engage in a reciprocal and responsible communication with the other, thus failing to develop the necessary capacities for peaceful co-existence, specifically inter-personal skills like empathy, dialogue and working together (Michael Flood, 2019; James W. Messerschmidt, 2019).

There is significant evidence of the link between traditional masculinity and the higher incidence of violence, participation in conflict and resistance to peace-oriented interventions from empirical studies across various regions around the globe. Research on conflict affected and post conflict societies shows that rigid masculine norms strongly internalised by young men increase the risk of engagement in violence or other coercive forms of social interaction, in the support for aggressive ideologies and in risk taking activities (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Meanwhile, new research on "transformative" or "positive" masculinities shows that, as men's roles evolve away from rigid stereotypes of emotional transparency, rapid thinking and decisiveness, active participation in peacebuilding projects leads to greater youth involvement (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). The importance of tackling harmful masculinities in violence prevention and peace promotion efforts is increasingly recognized by international organizations like the United Nations, UNESCO, and WHO, which stress the need for community- and nation-level peacebuilding to address and prevent the proliferation of violence and harmful social norms.

Existing literature in the South Asian/Pakistani context shows that the ethos of 'traditional masculinity' is still pervasive both in rural and urban areas, deeply rooted in socio-cultural and religious norms and institutional structures and directly affecting the behavior of youth (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021; Michael Kimmel, 2017).. Research indicates that Pakistani society strongly perpetuates male-dominated norms and values related to power, family dignity, decision making authority and emotional resilience that, together, lead to the normalisation of extreme reactions to interpersonal and intra-community conflicts. Further this is bolstered by educational experiences, media images of men, community processes of socialization that allow for the glorification of strength and dominance, and shame around emotions or non-confrontational conduct in men (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Women, 2015). Despite the slow uptake of the participation of young people in peace building and civics projects through civil society, NGOs, and education interventions, the latter are hindered by continued gender stereotypes and limited critical discussion of masculinity. Additionally, empirical and context-specific studies which systematically investigate issues of traditional masculinity and their impact on youth's peacebuilding attitudes, skills and practices remain very limited in Pakistan (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). This gap highlights the need for continued research to explore the relationship between gender norms and youth behavior in conflict and how this can be integrated into culturally appropriate and gender-responsive peacebuilding approaches.

In South Asia, especially amongst the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members, ideas of masculinity have been deeply entrenched as a socio-cultural phenomenon, having a strong impact on the behaviours of young people, gender relations and the way of peacebuilding in both urban and rural settings. In Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives (and other countries), masculinity is expected to be closely

linked to notions of power, control, mastery, virility, decisiveness, and dominance within both the household and the community spheres (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). These norms are reinforced and passed on by traditional gender-based narratives in religion and culture, customary laws, the structure of the families and community expectations, in which the male plays a central role in leadership and which are associated with hierarchical gender relations and traditional family systems over time. Therefore, men are often socialized from their childhood to only demonstrate toughness, competitiveness and resilience, and to avoid being emotional, being able to empathize and relying on dialogue to resolve disputes. Similar gender socialisation can create a regional atmosphere of the social reward of aggression and assertiveness, and lessen the acceptance and action of inclusive, participatory and non-violent peacebuilding among young people across the region (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021; World Health Organization, 2002). Empirical evidence from various South Asian countries shows that entrenched masculinity norms are strongly linked to a wide range of violence and social unrest, such as interpersonal violence, domestic violence, school and street violence, communal violence and youth participation in politically and ideologically motivated violence. In fragile and conflict-affected states in the SAARC region, notions of masculinity are often linked to notions of honour and reputation, and tend to fuel cycles of retaliation, revenge-based justice and collective punishment, which undercuts formal and informal mechanisms of reconciliation and mediation (United Nations Women, 2015; Michael Flood, 2019). Additionally, rigid gender norms, insufficient gender-responsive educational and counselling spaces, and lack of formal peace education training in South Asian regions also hinder opportunities for the critical evaluation and change of harmful gender norms among young people. Despite the introduction of peace education, youth empowerment and gender equality programs by various civil society organizations, international development agencies and regional cooperation initiatives, the overall impact of these activities is not equal because of socio-economic inequality, political instability, cultural resistance and inconsistent policies in various member states in the SAARC region (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021; World Health Organization, 2002).

Traditional conceptions of masculinity in Pakistan are a strong socio-cultural phenomenon, which significantly influences the identity construction, inter-social practices and ways of peacebuilding among young people in both informal and formal social spaces. At local level, masculinity implies power, superiority, social status and honour (izzat), emotional-suppression, physical strength and autonomy of decision-making in family structures but also broader community hierarchies (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; United Nations Population Fund, 2020). They are not merely cultural and are reproduced and promoted by institutional practices – such as discourses within the family and in other social circles and spaces (school, religion, peer groups, media portrayals) – which in many cases continue to assign one specific role to men: to protect, lead and enforce moral and social norms. Boys are socialized into a culture of toughness, competitiveness, independence, and a minimized emotional vulnerability from youth and into age with minimized empathetic communication and cooperative conflict resolution (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; Raewyn Connell & James W. Messerschmidt, 2005). This is also supported by the societies' acceptance of the male, assertive and dominant behaviour, which is then regarded as a good sign of respectability and standing in society. As a result, these entrenched norms affect how young men view conflict, authority and social responsibility and are often found to constrain young men's abilities to undertake inclusive, dialogue, and nonviolent peacebuilding at community and institutional level. Based on empirical research in Pakistan, there are several interrelated social, psychological and behavioural outcomes related to rigid masculine norms that could

undermine peacebuilding processes and perpetuate conflict cycles (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). These include greater acceptance of the use of violence as an "appropriate" way of resolving conflict, a more encouraged communication style which is oriented towards aggression, and less adopted participation in cooperative and consensus oriented communication processes. In many communities, a strong sense of honor (izzat) is attached to masculinity, and infusion of personal or familial honor may inspire countermeasures and be a disincentive to mediation, forgiveness or reconciliation (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Furthermore, the circumstances of structural inequalities, political instability, joblessness and the dynamics in the local situations of violence and conflict strengthen among some young people the conviction that to gain power and control means to survive and be recognized.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach was used, as this allows an in-depth and interpretive understanding of masculinity and the social construction of peacebuilding, and subjective meanings as they relate to lived experiences. Instead of concentrating on measurement for numbers, this design will enable the researcher to observe the way that young people perceive masculine norms, how they internalize those norms, and how they relate to attitudes around conflict, violence and nonviolent peacebuild-ing. Particularly valuable for advancing sensitive social discourse, such as on the topic of gender identity, power dynamics and cultural expectations, the design is well suited to the extent that the perceptive and narrative accounts participated in by the subject yields valuable insights. Moreover, this method also provides flexibility in collecting and analyzing the data, enabling the identification of any new theme that arises during the study that would not have been thought of prior to data collection.

Study Area

The study is being carried out in selected urban and semi-urban areas with diverse socio-economic, cultural, education and media influences of the youth in Pakistan. The areas are selected in view of their different levels of observance of traditional gender expectations for men and extent of involvement in peacebuilding and civic engagement initiatives. Urban contexts give information on more modern or changing gender norms, as people are more likely to be exposed to education, and digital media in urban areas, whereas more traditional gender norms and values of patriarchy are maintained in semi-urban settings. This comparative perspective contributes to the understanding of the ways in which geographical, cultural and social context contributes to the formation of masculine identities and peacebuilding practices of young people.

Target Population

The population for this study is youth of Pakistan between 18 and 30 years of age both male and female. This age group is chosen because it marks an age when children and youth are actively forming their social identity, gender and civic behaviours. At this age, youth are likely to be pursuing university degrees, entering the labor force, or participating in community-based activities and can serve as point persons when it comes to social norms and peacebuilding practices. The participation of both men and women can provide a greater understanding of the perception of traditional masculinity and how that affects intergender relations. Furthermore, the population is significant as those young men are the ones who will likely be socialized into the dominant masculine roles that will have direct impact on their attitudes towards conflict resolution, leadership and social responsibility in their community.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Purposive sampling is used to choose participants who have experiences, knowledge or an involvement with gender norms, masculinity and/or peacebuilding efforts. Individuals can join the workshop including university students, youth activists, civil society members and those who work in community development and social work. In this way, the information gathered would be rich and relevant and directly tied to the research questions. Sample size is based on saturation principle, this happens when there is no emergence of new themes or insights in the new interviews. In deep interviews like this, 20 is usually a good number for saturation to achieve; there is flexibility depending on the richness and diversity of the responses.

Data Collection Method

This data is first and foremost, and is collected through a semi-structured interview technique, that involves a combination of open and guide questions. A thematic approach that would allow participants to freely share their ideas, reflections and perceptions with the main themes pertinent to masculinity and peacebuilding at the core of responses. Based on the research objectives and theoretical frameworks, an interview guide is created, which includes questions on themes like gender socialisation, masculinity perceptions, conflict experiences, bias towards violence, involvement in peacebuilding and so on. Each of the interviews is conducted through an environment that is safe for the person and allows them to be in-depth, honest and to give us their full replies. Interviews will be audiorecorded with the consent of the interviewees, to be transcribed later in order to verify accuracy. Field notes are also maintained that include extra data relative to the data that are not verbally recorded and observations of context.

Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis is used to systematically analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews. This process consists of a number of steps namely data familiarization, transcription, coding theme identification and interpretation. Firstly, the transcripts of the interviews are examined in detail and patterns and important statements on traditional masculinity and peacebuilding are identified. These are then grouped into general themes that perhaps capture main themes: aggression, suppression of emotions, masculine and feminine roles, style of dealing with conflict and transformative manhood. The analysis is of inductive and deductive nature to enable themes to emerge from the data but also guided by the theoretical structures. The results are then analyzed in context with past literature and theories for a much deep insight of the ways in which masculinity would contribute into the overall process of peace building in young people of Pakistan.

Ethical Considerations

The dignity, safety and rights of participants are respected throughout the research process by adhering to ethical principles. All participants provide informed consent before data collection, making them fully aware of the study, their role in the study and that they can opt out of the study at any point without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity will be protected by removing the identification from any transcripts or from any report. Participants will be assured that their answers are for academic only and no other person or organisation will access the answers. To prevent any psychological discomfort, and/or cultural insensitivity, special care is provided when discussing topics that may be very sensitive for a particular group with regard to gender identity, feelings of masculinity and conflict experiences. The researcher also guarantees in compliance and neutrality during the interview procedure.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a qualitative nature, focusing on gaining depth of understanding rather than generalizability. Thus, the results and conclusions of this study may not necessarily apply to all the youth groups of Pakistan. Cultural sensitivity of the topic at hand (masculinity and cultural roles these cans and knock-off issues are discussing) may also account for social desirability in reporting, particularly by the male participants. In addition, the geographic constraints and the available resources might restrict the size of the area and/or the number of the participants of the study.

Conclusion of Methodology

In general, the methodological framework used in this study is rigorous, systematic, and context-specific while studying the traditional masculinity and peacebuilding behaviour among these youth in Pakistan. Qualitative design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interview and thematic analysis are used to ensure a rich and nuanced understanding of the research problem. Considering this method helps the study to reflect the complexity of the gender norms and the effect they have on the youth behaviour in real-life social contexts. While there are a few shortcomings, the methodology is appropriate for accomplishing the goal of the study and uncovering ideas that could be useful for gender studies and for peacebuilding.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, as a widely-used form of qualitative analysis of identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning within textual data, was used to analyze the data gathered in this study. This approach seemed to be suitable for the current study as it enables an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences and perceptions of participants relating to traditional masculinity and its link with peacebuilding among youth in Pakistan. All interview data was transcribed and then "re-done" to familiarise with the information to see the big picture of what participants are saying.

After familiarizing with the data, coding was done by systematically identifying meaningful segments of data pertinent to the aims of the study to form initial codes. These codes reflected some of the major concepts of masculinity and gender socialisation, as well as conceptions of conflict behaviour and peacebuilding processes. The construction of the codes was done by hand and careful consideration given to how each statement was coded and sub-coded, to avoid losing meaning of text in their context. Following coding, similar codes were clustered together to make up larger categories that were subdivided into possible themes and sub-themes by noticing the patterns throughout the data set.

The themes were then examined and streamlined for internal homogeneity and external differentiation. After that the themes were checked with original data to ascertain whether they were found to be truthfully representing participants' perspective. These were iterated and given rise to five main themes, depicting the essence of the study findings. These themes were subsequently coded to sub-themes (when discussing the various aspects of masculinity and the place of peacebuilding behaviours). The use of quotations from the participants themselves are provided here where they support the themes and to give greater validity and authenticity to the analysis.

Lastly, comparison of the themes to the existing theories was performed stressing the theories of Hegemonic Masculinity and Social Learning. This interpretive phase comprised the findings from

the research contrasting and connecting with relevant literature to give a better understanding of the construction of masculinity and how this affects conflict and peacebuilding behaviour. Where possible, rigour, credibility, and the trustworthiness of the analysis process was upheld via transparency in making decisions regarding coding, and interpretations repeated that were rooted in the data. A thematically focused analysis was therefore used to provide a way of uncovering the culture and meanings of participant experiences in a flexible manner yet retaining a structured approach to allow for meaningful insights regarding the research problem.

Theme 1: Traditional Constructions of Masculinity

Findings of the participants' responses indicated that traditional notions of masculinity are still very much pervasive in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. It was found that participants always related masculinity to strength, authority, leadership, emotional control and independence.

Sub-theme 1.1: Strength and Toughness as Masculine Ideals

The results indicate that young men are socialized to not show their vulnerability, to be confident, and tough even if they don't feel that way. These ideals are often evident in how youth deal with their issues and challenges in social situations, as well as within conflict.

This is apparent in the words of Participant 7: "A man in this society is supposed to be strong and never yield even in the very hard times.

This quote indicates that society expects men to project strength no matter what feelings and issues affect them. This participant's answer illustrates the cultural attitude that for male people to show vulnerability would put pressure on their position in society and identity as men.

Likewise, Participant 16 said, "Boys are taught that they should cope with problems on their own and do not need to rely on others. The present quotation illustrates the way old manly values are passed on through the early socialization processes. The norm of self-reliance gives the boy the freedom to deal with problems himself, or at least makes him reluctant to contact people for assistance. These characteristics can be conducive to resilience but can also hinder one's ability to connect on an emotional level and undermines opportunities for solving problems together, all of which are essential to peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes.

Sub-theme 1.2: Authority and Leadership Expectations

A further theme that emerged from the data is that of authority and what was expected of leaders. Men were identified as household and community leaders and decision makers. These results finds that there does seem to be substantial association between responsibility (and control) and traditional notions of masculinity and exercising of authority. In a patriarchal system of social arrangements men have been expected to lead the way in property management, to be the providers for and leaders of the family. Expectations like this perpetuate a hierarchical gender divide and put men at the centre of decisions.

In the participant's quote above, no.12, informs that it is the job of a man to lead his family and make decisions for them.

This answer also shows the cultural norms in which men, especially older male family members are expected to be the protector/caregiver and the decision-maker. These may foster being responsible and accountable, but also unequal power dynamics and opportunities for co-decision-making. Leadership which is top-down, rather than participatory, can impede inclusive and participatory ways of addressing conflict in peacebuilding.

Sub-theme 1.3: Emotional Suppression

Emotional suppression is the third sub-theme that comes from the analysis. Men are expected to take on a tough approach to controlling their emotions and keeping feelings of sadness, fear, or vulnerability, as examples, close to the vest," said the participants. Emotional restraint was said to be a hallmark of masculinity and a prerequisite for sustaining one's social worth and male standing. The results show differences in the expression, or lack thereof, of emotions between men and women: often men are not encouraged to show emotions and are pressured to suppress their psychological pain and personal struggles.

Participant 3 noted, "People say if a boy ever lets out the tears or talks about how he feels he is weak. As seen in this quote, there are negative social attitudes towards emotional expression in males. A participant's response can highlight the cultural message that boys are discouraged from expressing their feelings and, thus, that it is not possible to be both vulnerable and masculine.

Likewise, Participant 18 said: "Men should be in control of their emotions regardless of what goes on. This is a testament to the high norm of being emotionally composed in all situations, especially for men. Emotional regulation can be seen as an important behavioral characteristic of an older, more disciplined individual, but being overly controlling can have a negative impact on empathy, communication and interpersonal understanding. They are all characteristics necessary for conflict resolution and effective peacebuilding activities to occur peacefully. This can lead to a more rigid attitude towards emotions and diminish young men's desire to talk through conflict and learning peacebuilding skills in a positive manner.

In summary, the results of Theme 1 show that idealised traditional masculinity for the Pakistani youth is commonly characterised as strong, authoritative and emotionally reserved. Although these attributes can be advantageous for social standing and feel of duty, it can additionally impede emotional expression, teamwork and the capability to resolve nonviolent arguments. The results are congruent with literature that suggests the importance of the norms of traditional masculinity in shaping the attitudes and practices of youth in peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Theme 2: Gender Socialization and Formation of Masculine Identity

Analysis found that gender socialization is playing a foundation role in developing the masculine identities amongst the youth of Pakistan. During the analyses all the participants emphasized the acquired nature of masculinity and the process of its formation through relations with family, peers, community and the media. So the findings suggested that, the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that boys have regarding masculinity are learnt when they are exposed to the social norms and expectations repeatedly. All such socialization is already started in childhood and extended to adolescence and adult years affecting the way young men see themselves and their position in society. Different social institutions were being identified as reinforcing masculinity, with values such as bravery, responsibility, domination, emotional control being instilled. The results indicate that these concepts of socialisation have a significant impact on the formation and reinforcement of the traditional masculine values that in turn influences perceptions of conflict, leadership and peacebuilding.

Sub-theme 2.1: Family Influence

The family was found to be one of the biggest factors which foster the development of masculine identity. As a rule, often the question was asked: what is a man? and it was answered in terms of the family, in which boys learn first. Parents, especially fathers were seen as significant role models for passing on cultural values, gender expectations and norms behaviour to their sons. The

results suggest that in the early childhood, the boys are encouraged to be ‘courageous, ‘independent, ‘responsible' and ‘a leader'. These expectations are factors that help to internalize traditional masculine expectations and provide boys with a definition of what it means to “be a man.”

This can be seen from the words from Participant 15: Up in the childhood, it was taught for boys to be brave and responsible. The importance of early childhood socialization in setting gender-specific expectations is pointed out in this quotation. We learn that the participant's response reflects thinking about what one "should" be—a brave, responsible citizen—and that this is especially so about the "should be" of boys to be socially a masculine citizen in order to construct a masculine identity. It reinforces the stereotype of the man as protector and provider in the society.

Participant 11, for example, said: "Most of what boys learn about manhood is from their father. There is discussion of the importance of fathers in socialization in this quote. In most cases, boys learn attitudes, behaviours and values from their fathers and they learn this by observing and interacting with them. In the participatory situation, this was evident in the participant's statement, where masculine norms seem to be transmitted from one generation to the next and become rooted within families. For this reason the family can be a key means of perpetuating traditional ideas of masculinities among young men.

Sub-theme 2.2: Peer and Community Pressure

A further subtheme which came to light in the data analysis was the role of peer and wider community in forming masculine identity. Participants stated that there is a pressure on young men to keep up with social expectations of how they are to behave as men to gain positive reinforcement and not be criticized. Peer groups were terms used to identify significant social environments, in which masculine behaviors are reinforced, rewarded, and monitored. The results indicate that young men could alter their behaviour when they wish to do so in order to conform to the behaviour of others, even if such behaviour goes against their personal beliefs or preferences.

The situation can be seen in Participant 8's account in which he said, "Young men will often act in line with what they think it means to be a man in the eyes of their friends. This quote demonstrates the important influence of peer approval in relation to the behaviour of "manhood. The participant's answer indicates a need to follow group norms in order to be accepted and have status in the group. Thus, the tough, unpredictable and emotionally suppressing behaviors of many young men can be a means to protect their masculinity. Likewise,

Participant 2 said: If they don't do what other boys do – they are afraid others are going to judge them. In addition, this quote shows more of the social pressures between masculine conformity. The participant emphasizes the anxiety and stigma people may experience if they are not following along with the gender norm. These pressures help keep the traditional definition of masculinity alive and drive other masculine identities out of the frame and uphold the collective expectations of masculine behaviour.

Sub-theme 2.3: Media Representation

Results also showed that the media has a tremendous influence on youth's masculinity image. Participants cited sources of information on gender roles and masculine behaviour – television, films, social media platforms and digital influencers were identified as powerful sources of information. Media images were frequently referred to as creating stereotyped images of emotionally controlled, successful, strong, dominant men. These images help to legitimise the traditional male role models and shape young men's self- and others-perceptions.

Participant 4 said, "In the movies, there are a lot of times when men are strong and dominant. In this quote the participant gives an expression of dissatisfaction with the media's tendency to portray masculinity as something that is strong, authoritative and controlling. Such images could unwittingly perpetuate in society a picture of what it means to be assertive and dominant for males in their daily lives. These repeated experiences of representations can contribute to the beliefs young men have about what is successful or desired masculinity.

In turn, Participant 20 noted, "You can also watch the way social media influencers deal with masculinity, as that affects how young men view masculinity. This indicates that digital media is a dominant source of communication in today's world. Social media interactions with influencers or the public figure in general offer continuous exposure, which is not the case of the traditional media. The participant's answer indicates that young men tend to seek guidance and inspiration from these individuals, thereby further perpetuating notions of masculinity. Thus, the medium holds the potential to be a strong socialisation tool which helps in the construction and reproduction of overly masculinised youth identities.

The overall results on Theme 2 indicate that construction of masculine identity is a complex process of gender socialisation with family, peers, communities and media being important factors implicated in this process. Traditional masculine norms are the norms upheld by each of these social institutions that influence the definition of masculinity amongst young men. The results indicate that gender socialisation is important when it comes to upholding traditional notions of masculinity and how this has an impact on the attitudes young people have towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It is important to discern these processes of socialization, and work on these is necessary to find ways to foster more peace-oriented and inclusive masculinity among Pakistan's youth.

Theme 3: Traditional Masculinity and Conflict Behavior

The results showed that there was a positive correlation between TMM and conflict behavior of youth in Pakistan. Participants often shared their opinions of the relationships between dominant cultural norms about masculinity and how young men experience, react to, and deal with a conflicted situation. Strength, dominance, authority and protection of personal and family honor were often thought of as traditional aspects of masculinity. Many times, these expectations can foster a confrontational way of acting and a deprecation of cooperative conflict resolution strategies. All those involved voiced frustration with the messaging young men receive regarding being aggressive, which equates with being strong, and being non-confrontational, which equates with being weak. Conventional masculine models consequently influence individual behavior and the overall dynamics of social interactions and aspects of conflict resolution behavior.

Sub-theme 3.2: Protection of Honor and Reputation

Honor and reputation was another key sub-theme in the data having to do with conflict behaviours. Respondents constantly noted that one aspect of traditional masculinity is the importance of preserving one's personal dignity, family honor and reputation within society. Questions of honor were a common term used when someone was challenged. The result is that when people feel that their credibility or that of their family is called into question or compromised, conflicts often are exacerbated.

Participant 19 spoke up, "People become aggressive when their honor is called into question. In this quote, the author shows that the values of a culture based on honor are very strong, and this shapes the individuals' behavior. This seems to suggest that acts of aggression - “reacting” to the challenge of masculine identity and social status - can be a response to insults, criticism or

disrespect of any sort, as long as they can be made to seem that way. They may be a factor in sustaining a futures spiral of reciprocity and conflict escalation in communities.

Likewise, Participant 17 mentioned that "The young men have to uphold their surname as well".

The quotation emphasizes the communal aspect of the male role, for which the importance of actions given to the reputation and honour of the family is frequently vital. Young men may feel it is his job to protect the honor of his family, and may become confrontational when he thinks his family is being dishonored. These expectations can elicit responsible, loyal behaviour, as well as conflict prone behaviours that can affect peaceful conflict resolution and social harmony.

Sub-theme 3.3: Resistance to Dialogue

The third sub-theme that was identified from the findings was a resistance to dialogue and compromise to resolve conflict. Traditional masculine norms were found to hinder the ability to communicate freely, express emotion, and negotiate; reasons given by participants to support this. Dialogue approaches seem incongruous for masculine ideals of strength and authority, to many young men. As a result, non-aggressive and non-confrontational forms of communication might be demeaned or not used at all.

This attitude is reflected by the view that Participant 1 said: "Some young men do not think it's good to speak too much or they appear weak. This is a quotation which supports the thought that extended conversation/emotion could compromise a man's manliness. The participant's answer indicates that in some cases, communicating and talking about it could be seen as an admission or a weakness, and so dis-incentive their active involvement in the conflict resolution processes.

Similarly, Participant 14 said “Compromise is seen as a form of surrender”. This is a telling quote about some young men and the negative connotation of compromise. Compromise is not viewed as a effective means of settling disputes but rather as a sacrifice of power and control, or of social prestige. These attitudes can impede the acceptance of mutually acceptable solutions and can help exacerbate conflicts. The results reveal that dialogue and compromise resistance is a major setback for peacebuilding which is highly dependent on dialogue, cooperation and understanding.

Considering all this the results in Theme 3 has shown that in Pakistan there was a meaningful impact of Traditional notions of masculinity on the conflict behaviour of youth. Dominant masculine norms emerged as important patterns linked with aggressive conflict resolution, protection of honour/reputation and resistance to dialogue. These behaviours can not only have positive social consequences in some cultural settings, but also can escalate situations of conflict and can be consequences for a failure to engage peacefully. The results correspond with literature, indicating that the conflict dynamics are affected by traditional conceptions of masculinity and that this influences the capacity to develop an effective peace building process amongst youth. It is therefore critical to tackle these norms in order to foster nonviolent conflict resolution, social cohesion and sustainable peace.

Theme 4: Impact of Traditional Masculinity on Peacebuilding

This study revealed that there is a strong influence of the traditional masculinity on peacebuilding approaches of Pakistan youth. Often, the discussion about the effect of prevailing masculine ideologies was heard, and how these influence attitudes toward conflict resolution and community engagement as well as taking part in peace-related programs. Subjects who took part in the study also linked traditional encullyurization of men to attributes like domineering, competitive, authoritarian and lacking in emotion which was believed to be a setback to good peaceful conflict

resolution and harmony in society. The results echo the idea that rigid notions about what it means to be a man could have a large and negative effect on how likely young men are to engage in talking, compromising and collaborative problem solving. This means that there is a negative effect from the traditional masculinity towards work on peacebuilding from individual and collective point of view. Participants further recognised that the perpetuation of such gender norms has a significant impact not only on how people behave, but also on broader consequences of behaviours interpersonally and for social stability.

Sub-theme 4.1: Barriers to Peaceful Conflict Resolution

An important aspect of the results is the existence of traditional notions of gender and masculinity that hinder in peaceful conflict solution. Participants highlighted the need to impart awareness and reconciliation issues to many young people in lieu of dominance and self-win. Hence, conflicts are often viewed as 'winnable' meaning that they do not have to be resolved together. But this attitude can also prevent space for communication, empathy and understanding to occur, all of which are key to good peacebuilding.

This is reflected in participante's 11's words, "When in conflict, it is hard to hear the voice of others based on the traditional thinking. This quotation alludes to this going against active listening and open communication. In this participant's answer, there is the assumption that people with traditional male role models may not feel the need to listen to other peoples' ideas, and can sometimes express their opinions. These attitudes can intensify conflict and lessen the chances of successful peace building.

Similarly, Participant 8 pointed out that "There are lots of young guys who would rather win the battle than settle the issue.

This quote demonstrates that sometimes people see conflict as a demonstration of strength, status and authority. Participant's response suggests dominance is a measure of success in conflict and not conciliation. This competitionist method can affect peaceful interaction in conflict resolution negatively, because it usually makes it difficult to find compromises in conflict resolution processes and encourages the adversarial relations. The results thus indicate that mainstream concepts of masculinity might obstruct youths from developing positive conflict management skills.

Sub-theme 4.2: Reduced Participation in Peacebuilding Activities

Another sub-theme which came out of the data was on the involvement of young men in peace building activities, particularly because of the masculine beliefs. Peacebuilding experiences were at times described as contradictory to prevailing masculinity norms which focus on dialogue, cooperation, empathy, and engaging with the community. Therefore, a certain number of young men can eschew these activities and preserve their masculinity as well as social standing.

Participant 6 provided an explanation: Some boys believe that Peacebuilding activities are not boy activities. This is a quotation that reflects an impact of gender stereotypes on involvement in community-based peace processes. This participant seems to be describing peace building as an activity that feels less the number of one or not as trendy among themselves as being associated with authority, strength and competition.

Sub-theme 4.3: Community-Level Consequences

Participant 9 explained, "If people will not talk nicely, then the communities split up.

This quotation emphasizes the importance of dialogue and communication in maintaining social harmony. Rejection or disrespect towards peaceful communication can lead to social fragmentation, lack of understanding and a deterioration of the relationships between members of the community, as indicated by the participant. Importantly, these findings indicate that the traditional masculine norm could have repercussions on a broader societal level in terms of decreased opportunities for working together and for collective problem-solving.

Overall, the findings under theme 4 particularly reveal that traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity can play a considerable role in shaping peacebuilding discourses and practices amongst the young people of Pakistan. Dominant masculine norms were identified as significant impacts on barriers to peaceful conflict resolution, decreasing participation in peacebuilding activities, and negative consequences for the community-level. Traditional conceptions of masculinity can help instill a new sense of identity and social status for young men but can also discourage meeting, talking, cooperating, and respecting each other and the environment, which are essential to sustainable peace. The findings thus indicate the need to encourage other more inclusive expressions of masculinity beyond the ones seen in the violent incidents, which can involve them in more positive aspects of peacebuilding and help to foster social cohesion within communities.

Theme 5: Transforming Masculinity for Sustainable Peacebuilding

While the existence of traditional masculine norms that can be difficult for peacebuilding processes was observed, participants also identified masculinity's transformative potential for peacebuilding and social unity. Many of the responses referred to the fact that the idea of what masculine is is not a set and unchanging idea, but rather a socially-derived role that can change over time with the help of education, awareness and community involvement. Participants advocated for positive images of men who model respect, empathy, cooperative and non-violent solutions to problems. These approaches indicate that youth are gaining an awareness around breaking down traditional notions of gender, and developing new ideas about what it means to be a man. The results suggest that a change and positive attitude with respect to traditional masculine norms can have a great impact on sustainable peacebuilding if it empowers young boys and men to be active agents of dialogue, tolerance and social harmony in their communities.

Sub-theme 5.1: Positive Masculinity

Positive masculinity is one of the main sub-themes that emerged out of the data. Participants described the characteristics of positive masculinity as a type of manhood that demonstrates a feeling of respect, sense of responsibility and caring and non-violent conflict rather than feelings of dominance, aggression and controlling behaviors. The results indicated that a lot of young people perceive that strength involves not threatening people but learning how to deal with conflict positively and interact with people in a respectful manner. This is certainly a shift from the phallogocentrism of “old” masculinity – was a lot of strong and aggressive – to one that is more peaceful and understanding.

This attitude is evident from the comment of Participant 18: "A real man should solve problems peacefully. Here they are reinterpreting how masculinity is defined, and how peace in resolving conflicts is a sign of maturity and strength. In participant studies the role of aggression and masculinity in today's society and calls for the virtues that masculinity values dialogue and cooperation.

Sub-theme 5.2: Role of Education and Awareness

Schools have the opportunity to convey the message to boys, 'empathy is also a strength', said participant 9. The quote demonstrates that education organizations can call into question the male stereotype. Rather, empathy should be recognized and celebrated as a desirable trait, and not a deficiency, that is specifically a manly trait. Ongoing instructions of aspects of emotional intelligence, communication and respect for diversity can make schools a space for promoting peaceful and socially cohesive attitudes among young men.

In the same manner, Participant 15 said “Education can challenge the negative stereotype of man.” This is just one example of how education can approach gendered, harmful norms in a comprehensive manner. The key finding in the participant responses is the ability of an education programme to provoke the young people and motivate them to contribute a more inclusive approach towards the concept of masculinity rather than the traditional one. This can help to diminish aggressive behaviours and involve young people in peacebuilding activities. The results hence indicate that education can play a crucial role in developing positive masculinity and ensuring positive conditions for sustainable peace.

Sub-theme 5.3: Youth Engagement and Policy Support

It also highlighted the need to involve young people and provide policy support in advancing transformative masculinity and enhancing peacebuilding processes. The participants emphasized that structures and interventions in the social environment need to be ensured if change is to be sustainable. The noted drivers for the development of Youth focused programmes, community level initiatives, and government policies to promote positive masculine identities and engagement of Youth (young men) in peace building processes.

This is seen in the observation of Participant 13: "More youth program encouraging youth to become peace ambassadors. This quotation emphasizes the importance of working towards decolonizing young males (dis-empowerment) through youth engagement programmes and empowering them to be agents for positive social change. The participant believes that the participation of youth in peacebuilding activities can promote the creation of leadership, awareness of social responsibility and an inclination to peacebuilding using nonviolent methods. These programs can be a way for young men to explore alternate forms of masculinity through learning about working cooperatively and volunteering in the community.

Similarly, Participant 7 stated that "Government policies should stimulate positive masculinity in youth". This quote reflects the impact of policies on structural considerations for the entrenchment of "masculine norms. The participant states that governments must ensure that programmes, campaigns and educational projects are promoted which will raise awareness and awareness of gender equality, emotional values and peaceful social involvement. Policy support can work to establish an enabling environment that values and promotes positive masculinity from multiple domains of society. The conclusion is therefore that this meaningful change can only be achieved through the partnership of different actors in the education landscape, communities, civil society organizations and policy makers.

Overall, the results of Theme 5 show that a change in masculinity is an integral part of the sustainable peacebuilding process as imagined by the participants. Positive masculinity, education and awareness, and youth engagement backed by effective policies were identified as main avenues for change. The research shows that the more one fosters alternative masculine roles/influences that are grounded in empathy, respect, responsibility and nonviolence, the more it is possible to include young people in peacebuilding and support their greater social cohesion.

These findings contribute to the current discussions about the need to include youth men in the ongoing work of creating peaceful and inclusive societies.

Findings of the Study

The results of this study indicate that traditional norms surrounding masculinity continue to have a strong influence on peacebuilding strategies amongst young people in Pakistan. Five major themes emerged in the qualitative interviews: the traditional construction of male images, socialisation and formation of masculine identity, the traditional male identity and conflict behaviour, masculinity and peacebuilding, and transforming masculinity for sustainable peacebuilding. Together, these themes highlight the socially-constructed nature of masculinity and its powerful impact on how young men see themselves and act and react to situations of conflict. The findings are described in a way that uses participants' narratives to highlight their experience and voices.

The first theme suggests masculinity is a quality more related to strength, authority and emotional restraint. Chemical dopamine produced by exercise also helps regulate temperature, and before starting the study, participants said their society taught them to consistently expect a man to be strong, emotionally controlled and responsible for making decisions within his family. Emotional expression, especially showing feelings of vulnerability, is usually discouraged and regarded as weakness. The results point towards the predominance of the social roles of young males as beings oriented towards dominance, independence and self-control, which defines the understanding of masculinity.

The second theme stresses that process of becoming a man is a continual one of socialization. Family, peers and media were identified as three main factors in determining masculine behavior among participants. Often cited as primary models for fathers' behaviour were fathers, and behaviours were reinforced by peer groups through approval and pressure, thus reproducing the socially accepted patterns of masculine behaviour. Media was also revealed to have a substantial effect since men in the media are shown as powerful, dominant and emotionally non-expressive. The results indicate that masculinity is taught since childhood and nurtured as one goes along with the help of several social institutions.

The third theme, suggests that masculine norms have a strong impact on the ways that young men react to conflict. The often times adopted methods of solving conflict situations were aggression, dominance and honour protection, as reported by the participants. A great number of the participants indicated that "backing down," "compromising," or expressing feelings was seen as a sign of weakness. Conflict is often perceived as a struggle for status and respect, and an absence of understanding. Such results indicate that old-fashioned masculinity is associated with conflict resolution styles that are confrontational and don't involve dialogue.

The fourth theme identifies masculine norms as a hindrance towards peaceful conflict resolution and in peacebuilding activities. Participants reported that peacebuilding is seen to be incompatible with masculinity for many young men. Consequently, youth girls' involvement is limited in peace related activities. Socially, the sense of aggression learned at the community level leads to a low level of social cohesion, mistrust and social divisions. In summary, these findings indicate how masculinity is influencing individual behaviours as well as the community-level peace dynamics.

The fifth theme shows that participants acknowledge that there is potential for change in masculine norms. A large number of the respondents endorsed the concept of the positive male role model – happy, supportive, empathetic, respectful and responsible, and not violent. Key steps to advance this change were put forward such as education, awareness, youth initiatives, and policy put

measures in place. They spoke strongly about the need to transform masculinity in a social structure, and to move away from unfavourable gender values and norms to more open/intolerant definitions of being a man.

Exploring the overall analysis of the present study, it appears that there is a strong influence of traditional masculinity on conflict behaviour and peace-building practices among youth in Pakistan. Although dominant masculine norms still foster aggression, emotional suppression and avoidance of communication, there are indications at the same time that a new consciousness exists about alternative, and more positive, conceptions of masculinity. From these findings, it is inferred that masculinity is a contextualised and 'plastic' rather than unchanging phenomenon and that it can be different with targeted educational, social, and policy-level interventions undertaken for sustainable peacebuilding.

Discussion

The current research paper focussed on the influence of traditional masculinity on peacebuilding practices among the young people of Pakistan. Overall, the findings offer a valuable look into the processes of masculinization of norms, maintenance and enactment of such norms in everyday social contexts, and the ways these norms affect young men's interpretations of issues of conflict, authority, emotion expression and civic involvement. All in all, the findings suggest that masculinity is not a trait which merely belongs to the individual, but a product of socio-cultural conditioning which affects the behaviour and decision-making processes. The five themes discussion notes reflect on: continue the discussion about the continuing prevalence of traditional masculine ideals but how there are space, imagination and opportunity to redefine masculinity in ways that are more inclusive and peace oriented.

The first theme showed evidence that being masculine is strongly linked to being strong, powerful, emotionally in control, and being self-reliant. These findings support the theory of hegemonic masculinity which states that accepted cultural notions of manhood favour masculinity that is dominating, tough and emotionally contained and that other masculinities are marginalized. In the case of Pakistan, these expectations are also strengthened with the help of day-to-day social values which promote the robustness of males and give low priority to emotional weakness. This focus on “not showing weakness” instills a tremendous amount of pressure in young men to suppress emotions, even in a stressful or violent scenario. This is very important in peacebuilding because emotional awareness and empathy is the prerequisite of nonviolence in communication and conflict resolution. The findings indicated that these are deeply held norms that not only help to develop identity but also limit the emotional and relational capacities needed for positive involvement in peace processes.

The second theme, further elaborates on how these masculine norms are learnt and internalised. Results show that family configuration, peer group and media settings combine for traditional masculinity to be produced. The significance of fathers for socialization processes was also cited as a particularly important factor that is transmitted from parents to children, and is associated with issues of authority, discipline and emotional restraint. Peer groups are a powerful influence on affirming these norms through social approval and imposing pressure, as are media imagery on legitimating dominant and aggressive norms of masculinity. This is related to Social Learning Theory which suggests that behaviours are learnt by observing, copying and reinforcing. Interestingly, the results revealed that masculinity was being produced at various levels of the social, meaning that masculinity was very resilient to change. Thus, interventions must be comprehensive and address the social contexts that help to reinforce gender norms, as well as individuals.

The third theme focuses on how masculine norms more directly affect youth's conflict management practices. The results suggest that in some cases the conflicts are presented as a "road to victory" and a "road to honor, respect and a male sense of identity", and that winning an argument becomes more important than trying to understand each other. More aggressive responses are rewarded at the societal level, and compromise is thought of as weakness or giving up. It mirrors broader aspects of cultural ideology that are linked to honor-based systems, in which the identity of the individual is tied to the construction of his (and by extension his family's) honors. These patterns tend to restrict the use of dialogue, negotiating and mediation in effect reducing the opportunity for peaceful conflict resolution. The study thus provides evidence that traditional masculinity can act as a determinant of attitudes as well as active forces in shaping behavioural responses in conflict contexts.

The fourth theme, extends these insights to the broader social and institutional level. Traditional masculine norms are found to be structural barriers to peacebuilding because they discourage involvement in peace-related activities, and they restrict the openness towards dialogue-based conflict resolution. Widespread misperceptions among the young men about peacebuilding as weakness or femininity create a diminishment in their willingness to take part in peacebuilding processes. The fact that this engagement is done without the participation of men is especially noteworthy since sustainable peace is impossible without the engagement of all gender groups. At the community level it becomes accepted that aggression is normal and that people are not communicating, leading to mistrust, fragmentation and reduced social cohesion. The results corroborate previous peace and conflict studies that stress the importance of gender norms for civic participation and social tranquility. Hence, a manliness is not only a particular personal identity, but a social power that has an impact in communal peace.

Nevertheless, there are significant opportunities for change and intervention which are highlighted in the fifth theme. The participants noted that masculinity is a socially constructed phenomenon, and thus changeable. Positive masculinity" has been identified as a trend in participant narratives towards the development of more inclusive definitions of manhood which see respect, empathy, responsibility and emotional intelligence as desirable attributes rather than fault. Education was recognised as an important instrument to address negative stereotypes and raise awareness on gender norms. Also projects on youth participation and policy interventions were seen as important in order to internalize these changes. This aligns with the notion of gender transformation – that's the idea that sustainable peacebuilding means to reframe the idea of what it means to be a man or woman to support peace, equality and non-violence. At the very least, this means that the young men include the potential for being agents of change in the process of change — since they themselves are also the ones being socialised.

Finally, It is possible to observe that there is a reality that is complex and dual. The traditional masculinity on the other hand still endorses the re-electing of aggression as well as emotional suppression and refusal to accept dialogue which restricts the peace building process amongst the youth in Pakistan. On the other hand, the results reveal how the participants are increasingly alive to the fact that there is a need for a different – and more positive and flexible – form of masculinity. These are important for the youth engagement in Pakistan's peace efforts and also play a key role in social cohesion, conflict reduction and sustainable peace.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have theoretical, practical and policy implications for understanding of relationships between the dimensions of traditional masculinity norms and peace building among youth in Pakistan. The study contribitions a lot to the knowledge base because masculinity - even

as a psychological construct - is a system not just the mindset of a person that can be socially created/cultural and reified in many ways and has impact on the way young guys understand conflict, authority, emotions and social responsibility. It highlights issues of patriarchy in the lives of young people on a daily basis (aggression, honour, and feelings). Thus results of the study are presented regarding placing masculinity in a socio-cultural context of Pakistan, thereby adding a depth of discussion among the scholars regarding ideology of hegemonic masculinity and its implication in reproducing or rupturing a cycle of violence and conflicts. In addition, it builds on the understandings of how gender norms are embedded in the processes of youth development and peacebuilding.

The study practically helps to increase the applicability of Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and Social Learning Theory in explaining the gendered behavior in the non-western context. The results demonstrate that dominant masculine norms (including strength, dominance, emotional suppression and authority) are not inherent but are instead continually shaped and created through social structures like family, peers, school and in the media. This helps to validate the perspective that masculinity can be taught and practiced by way of observing, imitating and reinforcement processes. Further, the study offers a theoretical perspective by incorporating a theory of 'transformative masculinity' as a major lens for exploring how to change and re-imagine entrenched gender norms. It argues that masculinity is not solely a binary concept and that any opposition to guns and war doesn't automatically imply that it is a foregone conclusion that they are no longer “men.” It takes for granted the possibility of change over time, and that other perspectives and experiences of “man” can be gained through such exposure.

Practical implications are that organized interventions are needed to reduce the negative masculine norms among young people in society. The educational sector is indicated as potentially important environment for intervention, since it may be utilized for the disruption of stereotypes and the development of empathy and communication skills – without violence – in early years. For young men, an understanding of ‘strength' and of ‘leadership' can be changed through efforts of gender integrated curricula and the presence of peace education elements in formal educational curricula. Further, extracurricular programmes, debating club, youth club and peer mentoring programmes can provide boys an opportunity to push back against dominant notions of masculinity and be introduced to other ways of being masculine. The importance of civil society organisations to organise focused youth participation programmes, and to reimagine peacebuilding as a desired and prestigious way of civic participation to increase participation and impact, is also important.

There are also serious implications for public policies and models of governance in the study. National policies on youth development, education and peace building are encouraged to be gender responsive and incorporate gender transformative measures to the mainstream of the policies. This involves establishing policies which explicitly challenge negative portrayals of masculinity and encourage positive models of masculinity, based on empathy, cooperation and nonviolence. Media regulation and awareness campaigns are quite necessary, too, because representations of masculinity in media have a great impact on the perception and enactment of masculinity. Policymakers can contribute to a broader rethinking of social perceptions by creating alternative narratives that showcase emotional strength, peaceful leadership and community responsibility. In addition, there is a need to invest in providing mental health care and counselling services targeted at both young people and the younger age groups: rigid masculine norms tend to discourage young men from accessing emotional help.

The findings at the community level indicate that linking up with local cultural and religion-based institutions is an important way of influencing gender norms and moral values for sustainable

change. If we can develop peacebuilding programs that engage parents, teachers, religious organizations and youth groups at a community level, we can encourage inter-generational conversations about masculinity and peacebuilding. Men, fathers and male elders in particular, have the power to act as agents of change by demonstrating positive male role models which emphasise respect, emotions and peaceful communication. This kind of participation is crucial in the effort to sustain attitude shifts in the community environment, outside of formal institutions, and to make these shifts a normal part of community life.

To conclude, the study emphasizes the need for a multi-level, comprehensive and gender transformative approach to peacebuilding in Pakistan. Changing the expectations of traditional masculinity is not only a key strategy to lower the incidence of conflict and peaceful behaviour, but also a key factor when considering improving emotional well-being, social cohesion and the civic engagement of young people.

Conclusion of the Study

This paper placed an investment in the impact of traditional masculinity on peace-building strategies of youth in Pakistan. The results indicate that masculinity is a phenomenon that is socially and culturally created and consolidated, that is, it is an issue nurtured from the daily life of people particularly within the life of the family, amongst peers, in educational systems and in the media. Traditional male roles (strength, dominance, avoidance of emotions, protection of honour, authority) emerged as being significant predictors of the responses of young men to conflict and their appropriate action. Often these norms make aggression "the status quo," do not allow discussing emotions, and emotional expression is seen as a weakness. Old masculinity discourses are therefore not only a means of "doing identity," but also an institution, meaning that they are an organizing force in inter-personal and decision-making processes for all young people.

The study also finds that these manly norms can be perpetrated as a form of gender socialization. Boys are brought up from very early on to 'be tough, independent and a leader' with a lot of this happening through their parent(s) role-modelling, in particular fathers. From peer groups, these expectations are reinforced, through rewarding of those who conform to the dominant masculine behaviours, or through social consideration of those who deviate out of the group and the ousting of these persons. Furthermore, such stereotypes and media portrayals of focused, tough and emotionally distant men help to marginalize these traits and make them normal in the realm of pop-culture. This socialisation plays a role in the perpetuation of traditional versions of masculinity which can become internalised, overlooked and be slow to change. This can lead to youth, in particular males, unconsciously enacting behaviours to uphold the dominance of the man, competition over collaboration, and thereby impact their engagement with peacebuilding practice.

Though the culture of masculinity appears to be the dominant one, the study also entails important areas of potential change and transformation in the society. It was recognised by the participants that masculinity is not essential but is a product of society and thus amenable to re-construction and re-formulation. Increased awareness that good masculinity (empathy, respect, emotional intelligence, responsibility and non-violent communication) are signs of strength – participant's story tells. Education was seen as an important medium to break through the harmful stereotypes and encourage critical thinking on gender norms. Similarly, youth engagement projects, civil society and enabling policy are seen as pivotal to places where alternative masculinities can be learnt, practised and recognised as the norm. These findings have suggested the prominence of traditional notions of masculinity while a shift towards more accepting and peacebuilding masculinity is taking place among youth.

Finally, the research calls for a need to reflect on the traditional masculinity in order to reinforce peacebuilding and sustainable social cohesion in Pakistan. Marshall, who is a young man and the mother of three children, is the victim of these dominant norms of masculinity that define conflictual behavior whilst excluding women, limiting emotions and limiting young people's participation in peace-related activities. This can be changed by establishing an empathetic, responsible and cooperative young man through a more gender responsive and more peace-centred approach to masculinity where we work together to raise such a young man. In conclusion, these efforts are crucial to promote a sense of peaceful coexistence, minimize conflict, and contribute to the development of a more accepting and socially stable society in Pakistan.

Recommendations of the Study

In light of the research findings of this study, following recommendations are proposed to combat the impact of traditional masculinity on approaches in peace building practices among youth in Pakistan: These recommendations highlight a gender transformative, multi-sectoral and long-term strategy which addresses attitudes, social institutions and dominant discourses. The goal is to reduce harmful masculinities and enhance capacities of the younger generation to do dialogue, empathy and nonviolent conflict resolution.

1. Integration of Gender-Transformative Education in Curriculum: There is a high call to action for educational institutions starting secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education which should strive to mainstream gender transformative education systematically in the formal education curriculum. It should not only be coincidental but there must be some practical training on emotional intelligence, critical thinking and communication skills and how to tackle the conflict situations by non-violent means. Pupils should be encouraged to critically examine the effects of gender norms on behaviours and social expectations, such as masculinity and aggression. Educate teachers to be able to act as facilitators of open discussion in a culturally-sensitive manner pertaining to gender roles. The wholehearted change in curriculum can lead to transformative in attitude changing at an early childhood, reducing the tolerance of violence and promoting inclusion and reflective identity for young men.

2. Youth-Centered Peacebuilding Programs: Government institutions, NGOs and IDPs should create systematic youth-centred peacebuilding initiatives with the active participation of youth particularly young men. Importantly, however, peacebuilding efforts need to be reframed in a masculinity-positive way, where peace-filled leadership, responsibility and social service is seen as masculine. Additional peer-led youth networks and peer mentoring can contribute to increased participation and sustainability. These can assist to change perceptions that peacebuilding is passive or weak, into an empowered and respected form of social engagement.

3. Family and Parental Awareness Interventions: Since the concept of family is crucial to the formation of male identity, specific awareness and capacity development exercise for parents especially fathers and male guardians is recommended. Such interventions should focus on fostering positive parenting behaviors, such as modeling open expression of emotions, communicating respectfully with one another, and disciplining with nonviolence. Community-based parenting workshops, religious group meetings, and community forums can serve as forums in which to address negative intergenerational messages about masculinity. It is particularly crucial to encourage fathers to take positive steps to demonstrate empathy, co-operation and respectful behaviour, since children can often internalise these behaviours. It is therefore important to build on these interventions at the family level, in order to provide a nurturing environment for sustained behavioural and attitudinal changes to occur among youth.

4. Media Regulation and Positive Representation Campaigns: Media institutions such as TV networks, film industries, digital platforms etc should be encouraged to actively promote positive and diverse masculinity. Guidelines by regulatory bodies should be set to decrease the portrayal of violence, aggression and stifling of emotions as a valued male characteristic. Meanwhile, public education can be undertaken to showcase alternative male role models who show sensitivity, strength, cooperation and peaceful leadership. Punching a hole in the stereotypical and Artificial Intelligence-generated content that can drive positive action in young people is something that social media influencers should also be doing. Media plays a significant role in identity formation particularly for the young and changing the media narrative is crucial in creating a lasting impact on culture.

5. Policy Development for Gender-Transformative Peacebuilding: Policy advice is provided for the incorporation of gender transformative approach in national level youth development, education and peacebuilding policies. This involves developing new strategies that specifically consider patriarchy and the role of masculinity in the production of violence, conflict behaviour and Civic engagement. Governments must designate and fund specific programmes for community-level interventions, research and training in working towards the behavioural change of harmful gender norms. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should also be set up to measure their effectiveness over the years. Incorporating gender-transformative strategies into policy frameworks will guarantee that institutions are held accountable and will create sustainable gender peacebuilding.

6. Community Engagement and Religious Leadership Involvement: To ensure interventions are culturally relevant and acceptable at the community level, achieving this at that level is important. Community elders, respected persons, teachers and local leaders, as well as religious scholars, are encouraged to play an active role in delivering Peace, Respect and Responsible Masculinity messages. These stakeholders have a strong influence over how attitudes are shaped within the public sphere and have the potential to transform cultural discourses related to gender and conflict to an important degree. Facilitate community dialogues and awareness building activities and participatory workshops nationally as a way of offering community-level reflection on negative practices and peaceful alternatives. Local community members' direct authority helps create effective and legitimate peacebuilding processes. Finally, as a result of the foregoing it is advisable that masculinity should be approached at all levels of the State, in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Under the leadership of educational institutions, families, media, policies and community groups, real change will take dedicated efforts.

Limitations of the Study

The results can be interpreted only with the following caveats, and a boundaries must be specified for interpreting the result. The study is primarily based on themes, context, and provides no attempt to make general conclusion on ‘young people anywhere in Pakistan'.

An important limitation of the study was the use of a qualitative research design which although very effective in exploring lived experiences, perceptions and understandings, did not afford the possibility of statistical generalisation of the results to the broader population. The study uses a depth-first approach, so there are no measures of trends in the overall population of any type. This methodology has a potential of making it difficult for the findings to be generalised in other contexts in Pakistan, across regions, cultures and demography groups, while it offers wealth of narrative evidence and a fine-grained analysis of masculinity and peace building. The findings, therefore, are meant to be exploratory and/or interpretative and are not meant to be viewed as definitive or as a reflection of all youth.

An additional significant limitation is the sampling technique and sample size. Participants were selected using purposive sampling method, which is suitable for qualitative thematic analysis and the number of participants was 20, thus the variety of the perspectives represented was limited. An attempt was made to involve a broad spectrum of relevant participants who had knowledge or experience on the issue, but the size of the sample might not have covered the full heterodoxity of experiences, from urban to rural, from different socioeconomic levels to various educational backgrounds. A broad sample with participants from other provinces and other cultural contexts could have helped in rendering a comparatively comprehensive understanding of how masculinity perpetuates and/or influences peacebuilding behavior in Pakistan.

Another restriction is that there may be a response bias in the interview. Social desirability bias may have been operational in participants' response to the questions in the study, as sensitive issues like masculinity, gender roles, aggression and conflict behavior were addressed. Respondents might have been reluctant to openly speak about behaviors or attitudes in culturally conservative environments that might have been felt to be socially disrespectful or inconsistent with prevailing norms and values of honor, male-hood and reputation. Some responses may therefore be representative of socially validated narratives and not necessarily an actual personal experience, nor necessarily their true opinions, beliefs and feelings, and this may have an impact on the amount and quality of data gathered.

Also, this study is cross sectional in nature and data is gathered at an instant point in time. Since this design does not track attitude, perception, or behavioral changes over time, or with changing social norms, levels of educational exposure, policy interventions, etc., it cannot answer questions about these changes. Men's masculinity is seen here as a fluid and dynamic one, which can vary from one stage of life to another, and in different social settings; but this study is but a snapshot as far as the participants' perspectives are concerned. Different, longitudinal research would be more appropriate to explore changes in the development and changes in masculine identities over the course of over time and how these changes affect peacebuilding behaviour in youth.

Finally, the study is particular to the culture and geographical region of the participants and only focus on youth segment of Pakistan. This provides a certain understanding of how it is organized within a cultural context with an honour-based, patriarchy-centred value system, but not all of the findings can simply be imported to other national/cultural contexts where gender norms and conflict situations are very different. Even in Pakistan, there may be some variations and differences with regard to ethnicity, religion, language and regional culture, which may affect the qualities of effect (masculine) differently and are not as much elaborated upon in this study. So one should be wary of extrapolating these results and making application out of the scope of the study.

Overall, whilst the study has a number of limitations, they do not detract from the overall value of the study. Instead these are used to provide background to the results and an indication of the exploratory nature of the research. The constraints also suggest potential avenues for further research, such as mixed method studies, broader and more varied samples and longitudinal studies for further in-depth and expanded insights into masculinity and peacebuilding in various contexts.

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