Perceptions of Female University Students about Peace Negotiation and Conflict Management Skills

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This study examined the perception of female students about peace negotiation skills and conflict resolution strategies. For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used for data collection from 12 female students enrolled in two public universities in Lahore. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was used to extract major themes. The findings revealed that most participants resolved their conflicts through active engagement (i.e. communication, firm stand, guidance, and support from others). Participants also reported different types of conflicts that they had experienced in their lives. They further emphasized political engagement, strengthening local structures, having political dialog, gender sensitization, development of social skills, and launching targeted development programs for people living in areas known as conflict zones. Government, NGOs, and university management should take measures to overcome the challenges faced by students. Educationists should design modules that enhance student's social and conflict-resolution skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict and security impact men and women differently, and women are frequently marginalized from decision-making roles in post-conflict settings due to social and economic exclusion and structural injustices (Mullally, 2011). Security Council Resolution 1325 emphasizes the need for adding gender perspective in peace settlements, and legal, political, and reconstruction processes. In Pakistan, a country prone to conflict, women face immense challenges during and after conflict. Women experience displacement, violence, trauma, and restricted economic opportunities because of unstable environments during and after conflicts (Khan, 2022).

Despite several government policies, such as the National Action Plan (2015) and the National Internal Security Policy (2014-2018), gender concerns have not been effectively integrated into Pakistan's security strategies, as evidenced by the country's low ranking on the Global Women's Peace and Security Index (ranked 158 out of 177) (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023). In many regions, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, women face severe restrictions. In KP, for instance, imposed restrictions limited women's access to healthcare and economic opportunities (Faraz, 2017). In Balochistan, Hazara women face unique challenges because they are targeted

based on their ethnic identity, which curtails their mobility and participation in public life (Brohi & Gul Khatak, 2017).

Evidence suggests that increasing women's representation in decision-making can reduce state-led violence and human rights abuses. Moreover, women's involvement in peace processes significantly improves the longevity of peace agreements and reduces a state's likelihood of resorting to violence. However, between 1992 and 2011, women constituted only 9% of peace negotiators and 2% of mediators globally, receiving only 2% of funds allocated for peace and security efforts (Khawaja, 2017). This represents a missed opportunity for peace-building through the inclusion of women (Abbas, 2016).

In Pakistan, women activists, such as Begum Kulsoom Saifullah Khan and Mukhtaran Mai, have played pivotal roles in advancing women's rights. Kulsoom Saifullah, despite losing her husband at a young age, entered politics and became Pakistan's first female federal minister. Mukhtaran Mai, a survivor of gang rape, led a movement that resulted in legal reforms for protecting women (Khan, 2016). It is imperative to underscore the significance of women-led organizations in rural parts of Pakistan that prioritize the development of women, children, and strong families. Women's organizations are also working toward social development, peace, and security, emphasizing the importance of women's empowerment and community involvement in these areas.

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Notably, 49% of Pakistan's population is female.
Pakistan's youth, representing 64% of the population, is a
potential force for peace but faces ideological confusion
and exposure to radical narratives. Some educational
initiatives, such as the Peace and Education Foundation
(PEF), promote tolerance and interfaith cooperation
through youth engagement and curriculum development in
madrassas. However, Pakistan's youth, especially women,
are not fully utilized in peace-building roles. This limited
involvement undermines potential contributions to
national stability (PIPS, 2019). Youth programs focused
on peace and harmony should consider socio-political and
religious factors and young people should be included in
policy discussions, especially when implementing the
National Action Plan.

While Pakistani youth are eager to contribute, systemic
neglect in policymaking has led to challenges in realizing
their potential. Encouraging young women to develop
skills in peace negotiation and conflict resolution can pave
the way for their active roles in sustainable development
(Jan 2023). Overall, engaging both youth and women in
peace-building is essential to Pakistan's future stability.
Negotiation skills and conflict resolution are crucial for
academic and professional success. Understanding
differences in negotiation behaviors and conflict
management strategies among students in Pakistan is
essential for promoting inclusive learning environments
and fostering effective interpersonal relationships. This
study contributes empirical evidence to the existing

literature about negotiation and conflict resolution in the Pakistani context and provides guidelines to design educational policies that can enhance students' interpersonal skills and address disparities in academic settings.

Objectives
1. To understand the perceptions of young females enrolled in universities about experiencing and managing conflicts
2. To explore the factors that might influence the practice of peace negotiation and conflict resolution skills among students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many misconceptions exist about women's 'peaceful nature,' suggesting that they are more inclined towards non-violence and conversation-based conflict resolution than men. For example, many people feel that women are more prone to using conversation to solve problems or that they have a more relational perspective on people. Women have certain advantages in peace talks which contribute to a more favorable negotiating environment. Some of these advantages include their propensity to identify themselves through their relationships, which they work to preserve and safeguard throughout negotiations. In addition, women, in contrast to men place more emphasis on procedures than on final results, favoring exchanges that foster a cordial negotiation environment. The idea that "the very

stereotype portraying women as more peace-oriented than men, regardless of its validity, may grant women with an increased capability of waging or promoting peace, through their higher ability to elicit support for peace proposals" is supported by authors (Maoz, 2011).

The act of "gendering peace processes" involves increasing women's participation and addressing gender-specific issues within negotiations. This inclusion helps broaden the perspectives and challenges the legitimacy of those responsible for conflicts. For instance, Burundian women's organizations, granted observer status in the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreements, strategically included diverse representatives to ensure that voices from civil society, rural areas, and the diaspora were heard. These organizations also held public information sessions to involve and inform the rural population, reflecting the importance of inclusive peace negotiations to shape a society that goes beyond merely identifying winners and losers (Féron, 2017). Women's engagement in peace-building spans activism, community leadership, and advocacy against militarism.

They serve as powerful agents of peace by transcending boundaries to bring communities together, as seen in Rwanda's post-genocide efforts (Issifu, 2015). However, despite their pivotal role, women's participation in formal peace processes is minimal. Their exclusion undermines the potential for lasting peace, as they experience unique challenges, including economic dependence and lack of resource control, which further

limits their participation (Moore & Talarico, 2015; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Women's exclusion from decision-making in peace processes is a symptom of broader gender-based inequalities and structural violence rooted in social dominance theory, where male power prevails in public spheres, leaving women with limited influence in peace-building (Björkdahl, 2012). Although evidence supports the positive outcomes of women's involvement, gender-based disparities continue to restrict their contributions and perpetuate subordination relative to men.

Women often experience heightened economic vulnerability because of conflicts, which further increases inequalities (Mazurana et al., 2005). For sustainable peace, the substantial inclusion of women is essential—not just as token representatives but as active participants in all stages of policy and program development. Their involvement challenges entrenched masculine norms, raises women's income, and enhances their public and political engagement (Milimu, 2022). Moreover, enhancing the number of women leaders and their representation across various levels of society is imperative for promoting peace and gender equality. Various primary and secondary research has been conducted in Pakistan to examine the conflict resolution/management strategies of individuals in various settings (Basit et al., 2010; Chaudhry, 2011; Din et al., 2012; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Dildar & Amjad, 2017). The major gap identified was that the conflict resolution strategies of individuals, particularly women living in

conflict zones, were not examined. Different theories in the realm of peace and conflict studies also propose that when women assume key positions in decision-making, they typically resist extremism within their societies.

Theoretical framework

Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory highlights the crucial role of women in conflicts and enhances the understanding of security by recognizing the interconnection of various forms of violence—interpersonal, societal, state-based, and interstate—while also emphasizing its gendered aspects. This framework suggests that men and women experience conflict differently because of societal norms and power dynamics, revealing how traditional gender roles influence participation in conflict and peace processes. It also points to structural inequalities, such as economic disparities and political marginalization as the underlying causes of conflict. Advocating for transformative peacebuilding, this theory seeks to address root issues and promote social justice, gender equality, and human rights by challenging patriarchal systems and fostering inclusive decision-making (Ishwar, 2023).

Research questions

1. How do female university students perceive their experiences of facing conflict in their private and social lives?

2. What are the strategies used by female university students in peace negotiations and conflict management during their social interaction and group

work and which factors shape their attitude towards using peace negotiations and conflict management skills?

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research approach to understand university student's perspectives on peace negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

Population and Sampling

The sample consisted of 12 female university students enrolled at two universities in Lahore. Lahore is the capital of Punjab province and is considered the hub of universities, as students from different backgrounds (ethnicity, religious, socioeconomic) in Pakistan come here to study. Therefore, two public-sector universities were selected purposively, keeping in mind students' enrollment rate and diversity. A purposive sampling strategy was also used to select participants as for this study, only those participants were contacted who belonged to the areas considered conflict zones in Pakistan due to experiencing terrorism. Female respondents were contacted through student affairs and student councils in both universities. By adding the voices of female students with different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, students were approached from different disciplines of bachelor's and master's programs. For this study, data was gathered till the saturation point (Creswell, 2013). University female students enrolled in any degree and belonging to an area or community with a history of

experiencing security conflicts (ethnic, religious, political,
or gender-related).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	*n*	*%*
Area of residence		
Balochistan	2	16.7
Gilgit Baltistan	2	16.7
Hunza	3	25
Kashmir	5	41.7
Age		
18-20	4	33.3
21-23	5	41.7
24-26	3	25
University		
Women only university of Lahore	6	50
Coed university of Lahore	6	50
Qualification		
BS	10	83.3
MS	2	16.7
Discipline		
Social Sciences	9	75
Natural Sciences	3	25
Semester		
2nd	3	25
4th	2	16.7
6th	2	16.7
8th	5	41.7
Family Type		
Joint	3	25
Nuclear	9	75
Employment Status		

Working	2	16.7
Non-working	10	83.3

Data collection tool

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with female students (minority, different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds). The interview protocol was developed following guidelines from previous literature.

Procedure

All ethical guidelines were followed regarding data collection (anonymity, informed consent, debriefing) and storage. The pilot study was conducted to mitigate potential research loopholes. All steps suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1986) were followed to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the findings. All interviews were conducted online (Zoom meeting/audio calls), except one. The reason for this was that the students did not have time; some had final exams, while others had returned home for the summer vacation. Therefore, they felt comfortable conducting online interviews at night or on weekends. During the data collection phase, hesitation and reluctance were initially observed among students during interviews regarding sharing their views about political and religious conflicts, as some of them considered touching this area controversial and were socialized to avoid talking about those issues. Therefore, no student was forced to participate. Participants from different regions were approached through gatekeepers (teachers, student council members, local student groups) and interviews

were conducted after the repo building and explaining the
objectives of this research.

FINDINGS

This study followed the thematic analysis framework
given by Braun & Clarke (2013) for analysis and used
interview questions to emerging themes. The analysis was
performed by following six phases from reading to
extracting initial coding, identification of similarity, and
following patterns to find emergent themes (Clarke &
Braun, 2013).

Main Themes	Connecting Themes	Codes
Participant's perceptions and experiences about conflicts	Conflict faced by respondents in their community	• Sectarian violence • Shelling at border line • Internal and external sponsored violence (bombing)
	Conflicts in private life	• Child marriage • Forced marriage • Domestic violence • Polygamy • Adjustment problem in the hostel and university • Privacy issue • Mobility issues • Alienation (unfriendly behavior,

		language barrier, weather and food issues)
	Reasons of failures (to counter conflicts)	• Government incompetency • Political instability • Male dominance in politics • Negligible female political involvement • Lack of budget for development
Conflict countering strategies observed and practiced by the students	Countering strategies adopted by the inhabitant living in conflict zones	• Protest for the protection of basic rights • Dialogue with local political representative • Temporary migration • Acceptance and adaptability • Use of private vehicle • Support from local private sector • Female's attempt to understand the conflicts dynamic through research
	Private and social life active countering conflicts	• Guidance from people around them • Communication skills

strategies shared by respondents	
Passive strategies used in private life by respondents	• Compromise • Maintaining silence • Ignore, avoid and escape (avoid)
Perceived Influential Factors	• Tolerance • Support of teachers /friends • Family support • Engagement in local platform(societies) available for the students of other provinces • Resilience
Countering private life conflicts in future	• Firm stand • Complaint to authorities • Strong interpersonal abilities • Political awareness and engagement of females in the politics • Awareness through education • Financial independence

The first theme was related to participant's perceptions and experiences about conflicts, which consisted of conflict faced by the community and in private life. Respondents reported different types of conflict that they and their community had to experience such as sectarian violence, political conflicts, gender-based violence, terrorism, shootings, and bombing on the border in their community. One participant from Balochistan said, "There is a Hazara community in Quetta. Frequently, we heard about their killing just because they belong to the Shia sect."

Some other students found suspicious about the role of political parties in supporting religious and political conflicts. As one of the participants from Balochistan quoted, "Every tribe is kind of supported by a political party in our area. They support their people. They use and sometimes support religious and political conflicts for their good in our area". Similarly, another respondent from Balochistan said, "We did not understand who was doing these blasts. Nobody knew. Life was like living in fear". This statement highlighted the extent of uncertainty and fear that people living in conflict zones were feeling without knowing the reasons for their suffering.

Few respondents reported gender-based conflicts, such as child marriage, forced marriage, domestic violence, and polygamy in their areas. One of the respondents from KPK said, "Domestic violence, forced marriages, and polygamy are common practices in our community". Another issue reported was shelling at the border, which reflects the constant geopolitical conflict

between Pakistan and India regarding Kashmir. Participants described the consistent fear and threat of living close to the border, where civilian lives are occasionally disturbed or affected by selling. Some of the students reported facing conflicts in their student life/private life because of adjustment problems, including various issues such as lack of support, privacy issues, language barriers, and unfriendly behavior of people.

One participant from Hunza said, "It took me a long time to adjust here due to weather issues and the language barrier. I had to face conflicts during group assignments and group work because of the communication gap". Another shared" In the beginning, it was difficult for me to make friends and trust people... it might be due to my background. I could not find the confidence to talk to even teachers. I was not sure if my class fellow was helping me or making fun of me.One participant highlighted the serious concern over privacy in hostels. In particular, when sharing a room with many students, less or no personal space and the other's continual presence often led to a sense of invasion of privacy. Another issue highlighted was stealing belongings from the hostel room.

While sharing their perception about possible reasons for these conflicts, many respondents blamed the government. They also mentioned that political instability and a lack of government support for peace worsened the situation. Additionally, underdevelopment and poor infrastructure in those areas are contributing factors to the

community's suffering as sometimes conflicts occur over resources. Poor socioeconomic background and lack of political awareness made them more vulnerable. One participant from Hunza said, "The reason behind this is that the government hasn't done much there…The government's contribution is very minimal, which is why we are suffering.". Furthermore, one participant mentioned that non-political agencies possess resources and power in their area and the rest of the public is helpless in front of them. One participant from Hunza said, "All development is for the security forces…common people do not have the right to use it"

Moreover, in politics, male dominance was highlighted, and respondents also pointed out that the limited political inclusion of females in their areas put them at the risk of suffering in silence without raising their voices regarding their gender-related issues. The second theme of this study was conflict countering strategies observed and practiced by the respondents which included strategies adopted by residents living in conflict zones, private life active countering strategies, and passive strategies. This theme also reported the influential factors that shaped students' strategies for managing conflicts in their lives. The participants in the study revealed various countering strategies adopted by residents living in conflict zones, such as protesting to demand their rights from the government, and they conducted dialogues with local political representatives to address their concerns.

One participant from Kashmir said, "You can get a 20-kilo sack of flour, but you have to give a copy of your

ID card to get it. And you can only get it twice a month. People have to protest their rights to get food and water. This is a price we have to pay due to living in that area". The second reported strategy is getting accustomed to circumstances and learning to adapt accordingly. In conflict situations, residents in borderline areas often limit travel during shelling; however, some have temporarily migrated to safer locations. The uncertainty prompts individuals to stockpile food and groceries, demonstrating their planning and preparedness for such conditions. Due to insufficient transportation options, people typically rely on private cars for safe travel instead of public transportation. One respondent noted that.

One participant from Kashmir said, "Yes! It is difficult, as you are saying, but we have experienced it, and we know that it will be like this, so it becomes easier to understand the situation. One thing is if you have to move permanently from one place and never return. But when you know that you must live in the same place then you have to face all these problems." Another participant from Kashmir said, "A person living on the borderline has become accustomed to these things, they are used to the shelling. They are always ready." Another strategy reported by the participants is getting support from the local private sector and civil society and joining efforts to bring change through education and cultural events such as sports to bring mental peace to people's lives. One participant appreciated the efforts of a private organization that is doing some work in her area regarding education

and sports to revive life in their areas, but she also mentioned that the pace of progress is slow.

A participant from Gilgit Baltistan shared, "There are private organizations there (AKRSP), which are working not only on sports but also providing health and education services as well… like Agha Khan schools we have in Ghizer and entire Gilgit, all belong to them. Local people trust them and cooperate with them to improve their living situation". While sharing the strategies for countering conflicts in private life, most respondents said that they took guidance from people around them, i.e., siblings or friends, to resolve various problems in their personal lives. Some of them stated that in the difficult situations, they faced after coming to Lahore, such as traveling issues, they took help from friends; for example, moving with friends because, in the beginning, this area was new to them, so they found it difficult. While traveling, they all used to go out together. Some of them also shared that they learned bargaining skills from their friends (how to reduce the rent).

One participant from Gilgit Baltistan said, "Yes... I never went out alone at the beginning. I used to go with my friends. They had a good understanding of this. They would stop the rickshaw driver and when discussing the fare, they would bargain well. I learned a lot of things from them…..".Some participants stated significant support from their siblings during their adjustment period. For instance, one student who relocated from Hunza to Lahore stayed with her married sister for a couple of months, receiving invaluable guidance that helped her

navigate various challenges. Participants also mentioned facing difficulties independently, such as seeking assistance from relevant authorities when struggling to find accommodation. A respondent shared, "I came to Lahore with my father. On the first day, we tried a lot but couldn't find a hostel. We were sitting there at night, and my father said, 'If you don't find a hostel, I won't leave you in a private one; we'll go back to Gilgit together.' That night, I was so worried and didn't know what to do, so I started using my negotiating skills. I went to my HOD, explained the issue, and requested her to help me, that's how I managed." This shows the resilience on the part of the respondent for not giving up.

Some respondents reported, using communication skills to resolve conflicts and arguments in their private lives. They also gave the same advice to the youth to resolve their problems through dialogue. One participant from Hunza said, "Yes! That's what I do. First, no matter how much we argue, I listen to them quietly. Then later, when everyone was relaxed, I calmly explained that this was a mistake, and this mistake was made by this person. Because when someone is angry, they don't listen. But when they are calm and you explain things with love, they understand what was wrong".In contrast, several respondents reported using passive strategies, such as maintaining silence, tolerating/ignoring conflicts, or making compromises to prevent escalation. One participant from Kashmir said, "It often happens with the girls here, I stay quiet usually because I don't want to

argue with people" Some participants also shared that they admit when they are wrong and seek an apology, and in their opinion, this is a better way to resolve arguments. While talking about future conflicts in their personal lives, some of them said that they would stick to their word and take a firm stand. Participants highlighted varying approaches to handling private life challenges, with some opting to file complaints to authorities rather than addressing issues directly. One individual expressed the importance of discussing future marital compatibility with her father, suggesting that women often navigate their relationships with men from a position of negotiation. The development of strong interpersonal abilities, such as efficient communication and empathy, was reported as critical for maintaining healthy relationships and resolving conflicts. Education was cited as a strong instrument for shifting cultural norms regarding gender and encouraging people to advocate for their rights. Increased political understanding and involvement of women were believed to result in more inclusive policies addressing gender-specific challenges. Finally, financial independence was viewed as important for resolving private life conflicts and giving people, particularly women, freedom to make decisions and demand their rights. One participant from Gilgit Baltistan said, *"Girls must have education and financial independence…this will give them a better position to negotiate"*. Another respondent highlighted the need for women's political awareness and participation to manage conflicts with peace. One respondent from Gilgit shared "Women need to join politics, they need to have

awareness of what is going on …. this education and
political participation can give them the understanding to
fight for their rights and security in their private and social
lives". This reflects the broader socioeconomic
implications of gender dynamics and the importance of
financial empowerment in achieving personal and societal
liberty in resolving private and public conflicts.

DISCUSSION

The respondents reported experiencing and
witnessing sectarian violence, political conflicts, gender-
based conflicts, terrorism firing, and bombing on the
border due to living in conflict zones. This result was
corroborated by earlier research. The infrastructure,
houses, and means of subsistence have been destroyed by
wars and peace operations in conflict-prone areas;
terrorism and violent extremism have made matters worse
for women and further limited their access to legal
assistance. The unique conditions in conflict-prone areas
have significantly altered the socioeconomic status of
women residing in these areas (Khattak, 2024 & Faraz,
2017). Especially, Balochistan has become a highly
dangerous region as a result of conflicts such as military
operations, Baloch insurgency, forced abductions, target
killings, and sectarian violence (Tahir & Niaz, 2016).
Furthermore, sponsored activities, particularly bomb blasts
and abductions, highlight the diversity and complexity of
conflicts. The reported government's incompetence in the
development of those affected areas was also reported in

previous literature (Javed and Nabi, 2018) which created the distrust between public and the government (Khetran, 2011).

The respondent also reported facing conflicts in their students' lives supported by the literature. Previous literature has reported that multiple factors are associated with adjustment issues, such as living away from home, communication barriers, new living arrangements, dormitory, less social support, and difficulty in managing time (Gerensea et al., 2017; Anbesaw et al., 2022). While sharing countering strategies to resolve conflicts, respondents reported protesting and having dialogues, getting support from local private civil society, communication, assertiveness, resilience, compromise, avoiding arguments, and getting guidance/support from friends and family as conflict resolution strategies their communities have used to resolve conflict. These findings are also supported by previous literature which highlighted that communication, protest, and dialogue are essential components of conflict resolution because they allow parties to voice their concerns, have productive conversations, and strive toward amicable solutions (Schultz et al., 2018; Bista, 2016; Ploss, 2011; Kuttner, 2012). Additionally, some other researchers (Kiralp et al., 2009 & Brewer et al., 2002) revealed that university students mainly use compromising strategies, especially female, to avoid arguments for conflict resolution.

The conflict resolution styles employed by respondents were significantly influenced by their personal experiences, family support, parental guidance,

and respondent's socialization. In both public and private
conflicts of their lives, respondents used different
strategies like learning new skills or adjusting to a new
place, getting help from family, friends, teachers, and
student councils formed within the university. Family
characteristics have been linked to conflict resolution
strategies for children. Individual differences in children's
abilities for negotiation and peace may be influenced by
their early relationships with their parents, according to
attachment or social-learning perspectives (Baumrind,
1973; Parvin, 2016).

According to Bandura and Walters (1977),
individuals learn through observation and imitating that
action. Social skills, in general, and conflict resolution, in
particular, are learned at home through engagement and
observation, such as participating in social interactions
within the family and observing conversations between
parents. Apart from these, a resilient personality also
affects resolution skills as respondents shared that they
learned different skills from their surroundings, and some
of them revealed that they learned bargaining skills from
their friends. In the end, for women to be able to resolve
conflicts in both their private and public lives, the
respondents stressed the importance of political
knowledge, decision-making participation, education, and
financial independence. This is also consistent with
feminist peace and conflict theory, which highlights the
need to promote gender equality and ensure social justice

as necessary conditions for achieving peace (Ishwar, 2023).

This study contributes to the literature by citing female students' perceptions of the types of conflicts they experience in their private and social lives. Moreover, this study also reports the strategies used and highlighted by respondents to counter those conflicts. This study also reports the influential factors that play an important role in shaping respondents' attitudes and perceptions toward experiencing and responding to conflicts. The findings of this study open new horizons for future researchers to explore further by adding more variables and extending the scope of this study. This study will also benefit educators when designing courses or training programs that enhance students' interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills. Likewise, governments can design specially targeted programs to cater to the needs of people living in conflict zones, as highlighted in this study.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study was conducted to understand the experiences and perceptions of female university students belonging to conflict zones about facing conflicts and using negotiation skills to counter those conflicts, either in their social or private lives. The respondents, due to their particular backgrounds, shared their active and passive strategies with which they were socialized or learned gradually to counter conflicts in their lives. Additionally, they also reported their perceived social or individual factors, which played a significant role in shaping their

behavior or strategy to experience and counter conflicts in their private or social life. Moreover, they emphasized that to cater to gender-biased and discriminatory environments and political/religious or ethnic conflicts in their areas, a comprehensive program and policy are needed for the gender sensitization of the parents, development of conflict resolution skills, development of the area and mental health and the promotion of peaceful culture through political dialog and engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a critical need for developmental projects in conflict zones; therefore, governments and nonprofit organizations should design their projects to develop and console the population living in conflict zones.
- The participants emphasized the need to strengthen and promote the political engagement of females to counter the conflicts in their areas. Therefore, the government should design targeted programs to promote female leadership in the political process.
- The need for effective conflict resolution skills has been highlighted in this study; therefore, the development of social skills should be part of the curriculum at different levels of education to build the capacity of the young generation, especially females, to resolve conflicts in their social and private lives.
- Based on these findings, it is also proposed that a national gender framework policy is needed to target gender discriminatory practices in areas highlighted by

female students living in conflict zones to counter the conflicts they are at risk of experiencing in their private lives.

- Mental health program was also emphasized in this research, especially for those living in conflict zones.

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