

WOMEN FROM A BLOCKED REGION: A PILOT STUDY ON WOMEN'S ROLES IN LIVELIHOOD AND PEACEBUILDING IN PARACHINAR, PAKISTAN

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This pilot study explores women's roles in sustaining livelihoods and peacebuilding in Parachinar, a conflict-affected region of Pakistan. Due to road closures and safety concerns, the study was conducted through an online survey and interviews were conducted on WhatsApp call. The study sample comprised of 29 participants (11 males and 18 females). An online Likert-Scale survey was conducted. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three female participants, through WhatsApp call. The findings revealed strong perceptions of women's informal peacebuilding roles and the gendered impacts of conflict on livelihoods. While the quantitative data provided some insights, a significant gap emerged in the form of polarized and inconsistent responses between male and female participants. Based on these limitations that could impact the generalizability of final project findings, the experience highlights the need for alternative, locally grounded, flexible, context-sensitive qualitative research strategies in volatile areas. It suggests that instead of using mixed method methodologies, purely qualitative approaches may be

more suitable for capturing nuanced experiences in future research.

Keywords: Conflict, Gendered-Agency, Livelihood, Peacebuilding, Women

INTRODUCTION

Parachinar, the administrative capital of Kurram District in northwestern Pakistan, lies at the crossroads of complex geopolitical, sectarian, and tribal fault lines. In spite of its beautiful hilly territory, Parachinar has ended up synonymous with enduring insecurity and recurring sectarian violence. Found along the porous border with Afghanistan, the locale possesses a key position serving as the shortest route from Pakistan to Kabul and has been deeply influenced by decades of regional conflict, especially after the U.S. attack of Afghanistan in 2001.

Parachinar stands out as the only zone within the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with a significant Shia Muslim majority, basically composed of the Turi and Bangash tribes. These communities have frequently been targeted by radical Sunni groups, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), due to their devout character and resistance to Taliban influence (Shah, 2018). Whereas the Pakistani state has made discontinuous endeavours to declare control and mediate clashes, recurring clashes often depicted by authorities as arrive disputes continue to emit along sectarian lines, with devastating humanitarian consequences. The violent episodes, such as the 2007's conflict (Yasir, S. M. 2025), and the incidence of July 2023 in Upper Kurram which resulted in numerous casualties and a breakdown of civil order, emphasize the fragility of peace within the region. These confrontations often result within the imposition of

curfews, bars, and deficiencies with regards to fundamental rights; education (Hussain, 2022; Hussain, Ali & Khan, 2020), access to medical facilities, food and goods supplies, and further confining the community (Rajput, 2025).

Parachinar, a region marked by its strategic location and complex sectarian history, has endured decades of intermittent violence, severely affecting the livelihoods and social dynamics of its inhabitants—particularly women (Chandran, 2017; Qadeer, 2025). This region continues to experience significant instability, with roads of Parachinar remaining blocked since October 2024, further isolating communities and intensifying livelihood challenges. While much research on conflict and peacebuilding in Pakistan, and this region particularly focuses on high-level negotiations and state-led efforts or customary solutions (Abou Zahab, 2011; Chandran, 2017; Bangash, 2022), there remains a significant gap in understanding the local, gendered experiences of recovery in post-conflict settings.

This study highlights the perceptions of male and female respondents about the lived experiences of women in Parachinar, their contributions to peacebuilding, and the ways in which conflict shapes their socio-economic status and roles. Despite its limitations, caused by the sudden escalation of violence on a Shiite convoy on October 12, 2024, and continuous blockade of logistical, technological facilities, the pilot study offers valuable insights.

Significance

This pilot study holds both scholastic and viable noteworthiness by centering on an under-researched and conflict-affected region Parachinar, within the Kurram District of Pakistan with a particular lens on women roles

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in livelihood generation and peacebuilding. The locale has persevered persistent sectarian conflict, socio-economic marginalization, and geographic isolation, however academic consideration remains excessively limited, particularly concerning women's lived experiences and contributions inside this complex context. In conflict zones such as Parachinar, women frequently bear the brunt of precariousness whereas at the same time they play the basic, though undetectable, roles as they support family units, protect community cohesion, and take interest in casual peace processes. Be that as it may, these parts are seldom reported, recognized, or integrated into formal peacebuilding endeavours.

By shedding light on these elements, the considered challenges prevailing accounts that position women as passive victims in conflict and instead recognizes their agency, resilience, and socio-political relevance. Furthermore, the research contributes to mixed-methods scholarship on post-conflict societies by piloting tools and frameworks that center gender within the analysis of peace and business. The findings may give a foundation for larger, more comprehensive studies, enabling future analysts, NGOs, and policymakers to develop gender-sensitive and locally grounded interventions in Kurram and similar locales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of gender, conflict and peacebuilding has gained increasing attention in global development and safety studies. The scholars emphasized on how women, although disproportionately influenced by conflict, are often excluded from formal peace processes (Davies & True, 2018). Recent scholarship in feminist peace and conflict studies has emphasized on the need to understand

female agency after conflict. In his study on Iraqi women's involvement in non-governmental organizations, Henrizi (2017) offers a relational approach to gender agency and claims that the agency's premises are co-produced in intersecting structures of international intervention, local traditions and conflict legacies. This perspective is valuable in the analysis of contexts, such as Parachinar, where women work in complex sectarian and tribal frames, often excluded from formal mechanisms of peace building, but actively contribute to informal reconciliation and strategy.

As with Henrizi's findings in Iraq, women in Parachinar are involved in what could be called "everyday building of peace", navigation of structural restrictions in the formation of an agency that are introduced into local relations and cultural expectations. This relational lens helps to exceed the simplistic reports of female roles and instead of this, build them as critical, although often unrecognized, actors in maintaining peace in post-conflict and conflict-ridden societies. In many cases, their roles remain to maintain families, mediate local disputes and support social cohesion. In the Pakistani context, especially in the tribal regions affected by conflict, such as Parachinar, literature is limited. Research tends to focus on structural violence, sectarianism and failure of the state, while micro-level female contributions in peace building are largely overlooked (O'Reilly, 2013).

Existing studies have shown that women often engage in informal peace efforts through kinship networks, community gatherings, and religious spaces, yet these efforts rarely translate into formal recognition or policy peace initiatives in Pakistan. Such as The Aurat Foundation's "She - The Peacebuilder" Project, Khwendo Jirga in SWAT, and the Paiman Alumni Trust in Khyber

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Pakhtunkhwa and the former Fata. These initiatives at local level show how women, although they face structural inequalities and security risks, actively contribute to maintaining social cohesion, against violent extremism and mediation of local disputes. Such engagement resonates with feminist peace and conflict theory (FPCT), which emphasizes on female agency in monitoring "positive peace" through justice, equality and well-being of the community, not just the absence of violence.

Sagheer's analysis confirms that women's understanding of peace often includes a wider socio-economic dimension, in accordance with the experience of women in the areas affected by conflict, such as Parachinar. In addition to this, these examples show how informal and peaceful efforts of women and community, peace remains largely invisible in formal security and political houses, despite their reconciliation with a global framework such as the UN 1325. and context-specific research that foregrounds local women's agency, particularly in underexplored regions such as Parachinar, where conflict, mobility constrains, and cultural norms continue to shape women's roles in peacebuilding and livelihood resilience. It also deals with methodological limitations of conducting research in fragile environments and the need for adaptive tools that allow richer and more inclusive data collection.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, I have utilized Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory. Though Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory (FPCT) is largely qualitative and interpretive in nature, it also offers a critical lens through which quantitative tools can be developed and interpreted. In this study, FPCT was used not only to inform qualitative exploration of

women's roles in peacebuilding and livelihood sustainability, but also to form survey items for quantitative study. Survey questions were deliberately framed to uncover gendered perceptions, experiences and barriers, in line with FPCT's emphasis on the visibility of women and the interconnectedness of all forms of violence. For instance, items such as "Peacebuilding should involve equal participation of men and women" and "Women's contributions to social cohesion are undervalued" reflect theory's focus on inclusion, recognition, and informal agency. Another item, "Men are the main perpetrators of violence and should be responsible for peacebuilding," was designed to bring dominant gendered narratives to light and test how they are perceived by different groups. By incorporating these FPCT-informed items into quantitative instrument, the study uses the lens of feminist theory for empirical analysis, allowing for identification of gendered patterns in peace-related attitudes and practices in context of Parachinar.

METHODOLOGY

This pilot study employed a mixed-method approach to explore perceived roles of women in peacebuilding and the impact of conflict on their livelihoods in Parachinar. The study aimed to assess the feasibility of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to a post conflict and culturally conservative context. Logistic and Ethical considerations, such as security risks, gender sensitivity, and digital access limitations, were kept in mind in all stages of research.

Sampling Strategy

A convenience sampling approach was employed due to security restrictions, limited mobility, and difficulties in

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accessing broader population. Participants were selected based on availability, willingness to participate, and accessibility through local networks. The sample included 29 participants—both men and women—from various ethnic, sectarian, and tribal backgrounds, including Shia, Sunni, Turi, Bangash, and Pashtun groups. The sample size was apt as per NCSS flat rules of thumb provided in Whitehead, et al. (2016) and Machin et al. (2018). They suggest a single sample size recommendation such as 30 participants _ for all pilot studies regardless of design and outcome type.

Quantitative Phase

A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was developed to assess participants' attitudes toward women's roles in peacebuilding, the impact of conflict on women's economic activities, and perceived gender agency. The survey included items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) and was administered both in person and digitally, depending on the participants' access and convenience. The survey also included demographic questions and items related to perceived types and causes of conflict.

Qualitative Phase

To complement the survey, semi-structured interviews and WhatsApp voice/text chats were conducted with a subset of participants (especially women), who were more comfortable in expressing themselves through private, asynchronous communication. Interview prompts explored lived experiences of conflict, coping strategies, and informal peace initiatives led by women. This approach allowed for flexibility and overcame barriers posed by social norms and limited mobility for women.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using mean scores and frequency distributions to identify trends and differences between male and female responses. Pie charts and tables were generated to visualize demographic distribution and perceived conflict impacts. Qualitative data were reviewed manually and thematically coded to identify recurring narratives and contextual explanations. However, given the depth and relevance of participants' narratives especially regarding displacement, loss of livelihood, and informal peacebuilding roles the qualitative data from the pilot study will be incorporated into the final analysis of the main study.

This decision is also justified by the challenging research environment, i.e., road blocks, security concerns, and limited internet access, which made it difficult to conduct these interviews on a larger scale. The pilot interviews not only substantiate the research design but also contribute directly to the final findings, particularly in highlighting the gendered impacts of conflict and the cultural dynamics of women's agency.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent verbally or through digital confirmation. Confidentiality was maintained, and participants were given the option to withdraw at any stage. Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the location, names and identifiable information were anonymized.

FINDINGS

The following pie chart represents the ethnic and sectarian composition of the respondents in the study. The largest proportion identified as Shia (27.6%), followed by Pashtun (20.7%) and Turi/Toori (17.2%). Other groups include Bangash (10.3%), while smaller segments such as

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Sunni, Muslim, Ghundikhel, Yusof Khel, Khoshi, and those categorized as Other/Unclear each make up 3.4% to 6.9% of the sample. This diversity reflects the complex social fabric of Parachinar, where ethnic and sectarian identity often shapes both community dynamics and conflict experiences.

Ethnic distribution of the Respondents

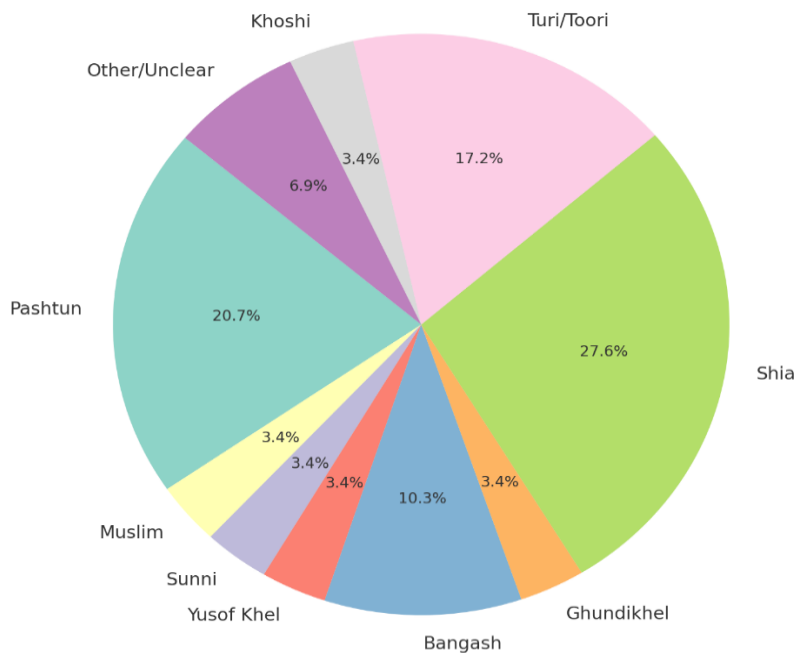


Figure 1: Distribution of Ethnic Groups

Figure 2
Community-Level Conflict Experiences and Observations

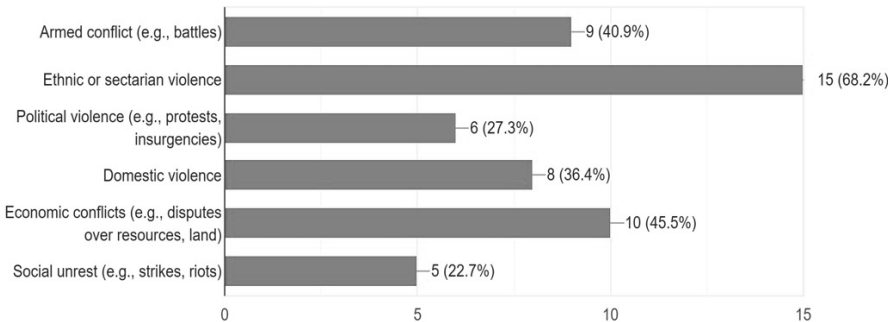


Figure 2: Types of conflict experienced or observed within the community as reported by respondents. (Note: 7 respondents did not respond)

This figure illustrates the types of conflicts experienced or observed by respondents within their communities. The data highlights a range of conflict categories, including land disputes, sectarian tensions, political clashes, and domestic violence. The frequency of responses suggests that while some forms of conflicts are widespread and recurring, others are more localized or issue-specific. These patterns offer insight into the complex and intersecting nature of community tensions, which directly influence women's safety, mobility, and ability to participate in peacebuilding and livelihood activities.

Table 1
Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants on the Perceived Impact of Conflict on Women’s Livelihoods (N = 29)

Item	Statement	Male	Female	Difference (F - M)
		M	M	
1	Damage to property and buildings has	3.22	3.85	+0.63

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Item	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
	significantly affected women's livelihoods.			
2	Women have faced challenges accessing markets, impacting their ability to earn a living.	3.11	3.77	+0.66
3	Many women have lost skills and job opportunities due to the ongoing conflict.	3.33	4.00	+0.67
4	Displacement from their homes has disrupted women's ability to sustain their livelihoods.	3.22	4.00	+0.78
5	Violence and insecurity have severely restricted women's participation in work and business activities.	3.44	3.69	+0.25

Note. Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact. M = Mean score on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = No Impact to 5 = Catastrophic Impact).

LIVELIHOOD

Table 2

Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants' Responses on the Impact of Conflict on Women's Livelihoods (N = 29)

Item	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
1	Damage to property and buildings	3.22	3.54	+0.32
2	Challenges accessing markets	3.11	3.62	+0.50
3	Loss of skills and job opportunities	3.11	3.62	+0.50
4	Displacement from homes	3.22	3.85	+0.62
5	Violence and insecurity restrictions	3.44	3.46	+0.02

Note: Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact M = Mean score on 5-point Likert scale (1 = No

Impact, 2 = Minor Impact, 3 = Moderate Impact, 4 = Severe Impact, 5 = Catastrophic Impact)

Table 1 presents the mean scores of male and female participants regarding the perceived impact of conflict on women’s livelihoods in Parachinar. The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (No Impact) to 5 (Catastrophic Impact). Overall, female participants consistently reported higher levels of perceived impact across most items, compared to male participants, indicating that women may experience and interpret the effects of conflict more intensely. The highest difference between male and female responses was observed for displacement from homes, with a mean difference of +0.62, highlighting that women feel this disruption more severely in terms of its consequences for sustaining livelihoods.

Similarly, notable gaps were found in challenges like accessing markets and loss of skills and job opportunities (both with a +0.50 difference), suggesting that conflict has significantly hindered women’s economic mobility and long-term employment prospects. While both groups acknowledged the impact of violence and insecurity, the gender difference was minimal (+0.02), reflecting a shared concern over safety restrictions that limit women's ability to engage in business and work. The smallest gender gap was seen in damage to property and buildings, with females rating the impact slightly higher than males (+0.32). These findings indicate that while men recognize the negative effects of conflict on women’s livelihoods, women themselves perceive the consequences as more severe. This reinforces the need for gender-sensitive approaches in post-conflict recovery and livelihood restoration efforts.

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Table 3

Perceived Involvement of Women in Reducing Economic Precarity Due to Conflict

Item	Statements	Female M	Male M	Difference (F - M)
1	Women in small business initiatives	2.47	2.27	+0.20
2	Women in agricultural projects like organic farming	2.24	2.36	-0.12
3	Women participating in financial literacy workshops	2.53	2.27	+0.26
4	Women involved in microfinance programs	2.18	2.36	-0.18
5	Women involved in microfinance (repeat statement – merged with above for clarity)	2.18	2.36	-0.18
6	Women managing small economic cooperatives (e.g., dairy, boutique, parlour, catering)	2.59	2.81	-0.22

Note: Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact M = Mean score on 5-point Likert scale (1 = No contribution at all, 4 = Significant contribution).

The data provides insight into gendered perceptions of women's involvement in mitigating economic challenges in conflict-affected communities. Female respondents rated women's involvement in small business initiatives, financial literacy, and community-based economic activities moderately to actively involved, particularly in roles like managing cooperatives (Mean = 2.59) and participating in financial workshops (Mean = 2.53). Male respondents generally reported slightly lower perceptions of women's involvement in small business and financial literacy areas, while rating women's participation in agricultural projects and microfinance slightly higher than females did. Interestingly, the highest male rating (Mean = 2.81) was for women's involvement in managing small

economic cooperatives, suggesting recognition of women's visible roles in practical, community-based ventures. However, for both genders, none of the categories received a mean score of "4 – Actively involved", indicating that while women are involved in economic peacebuilding efforts, their roles are still perceived as moderate or emerging rather than fully recognized or integrated. These insights suggest a need to strengthen support for women's economic agency, ensure visibility of their contributions, and bridge perception gaps to build inclusive peace and resilience in conflict-ridden settings like Parachinar.

Table 4
Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants on Women’s Economic Contributions to Peacebuilding (N = 29)

Item	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
1	Economic support to conflict victims	2.27	2.50	+0.23
2	Creation of communal savings groups	2.00	2.33	+0.33
3	Organizing local markets for women	1.45	2.72	+1.27
4	Providing vocational skills training	2.27	2.50	+0.23

Note: Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact *M* = Mean score on 5-point Likert scale (1 = No contribution at all, 4 = Significant contribution).

The results of the Table 4 indicate that women respondents perceived themselves as playing a more

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significant role in addressing economic challenges through peacebuilding efforts than men acknowledged. The most notable difference was in the area of organizing local markets for women, where female respondents rated the contribution at 2.72, compared to 1.45 by males—a gap of +1.27. This suggests a gendered perception gap, where women recognize their agency and efforts more strongly than men’s perception or acknowledgement of their agency. Such insights highlight the importance of inclusive recognition and support for women's economic initiatives in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding strategies.

Table 5
Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants on Approval or Disapproval of Women's Participation in Peacebuilding (N = 29)

Item	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
1	Men are the main perpetrators and should build peace	3.45	4.12	+0.67
2	Peace-building should involve equal participation	3.55	4.47	+0.92

Note. Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact *M* = Mean score on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

The table presented above gives the mean scores of male and female participants in response to two key statements designed to gauge their approval or disapproval of women's participation in peacebuilding efforts. For the statement “Men are the main perpetrators and should build peace,” female participants reported a higher mean score (M = 4.12) than male participants (M = 3.45),

suggesting that women are more likely to view men as primarily responsible for both initiating and resolving conflict. In contrast, female respondents expressed stronger agreement ($M = 4.47$) than males ($M = 3.55$) with the statement “Peace-building should involve equal participation.”

The gender gap here (+0.92) was more pronounced, indicating that women are significantly more supportive of inclusive peacebuilding processes. These findings reflect a consistent pattern in which female participants show greater approval for shared responsibility and gender equity in peacebuilding, whereas male responses tend to be more cautious or moderate.

Table 6

Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants on Women's Roles in Peacebuilding ($N = 29$)

Note. Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact M = Mean score on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

Items	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
1	Women can play an effective role in peacebuilding in Parachinar	4.50	4.60	+0.10
2	Women’s inclusion in peace efforts helps address the root causes of conflict	4.10	4.30	+0.20
3	Educated women are more likely to contribute to peacebuilding	4.20	4.50	+0.30
4	Religious teachings support women’s involvement in peacebuilding	4.30	4.40	+0.10
5	Cultural barriers hinder women’s participation in peacebuilding	4.00	3.00	−1.00

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Items	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
6	Men are supportive of women's role in peacebuilding	4.10	4.10	0.00
7	Lack of education is a major barrier for women in peacebuilding	3.90	4.10	+0.20
8	Women can mediate conflicts within families and communities	4.40	4.50	+0.10
9	Women have the potential to be peace leaders in society	4.30	4.60	+0.30
10	Security concerns limit women's mobility and participation	3.80	3.70	-0.10
11	Women's perspectives are essential in peace dialogues	4.30	4.60	+0.30
12	Women should be included in decision-making processes about peace	4.10	4.50	+0.40
13	Men and women can work together to build sustainable peace	4.40	4.60	+0.20
14	Women lack platforms to voice their opinions on peacebuilding	3.90	3.00	-0.90
15	Economic dependency affects women's participation in peacebuilding	4.20	3.20	-1.00

Table 6 displays the mean scores of male and female participants regarding various aspects of women's roles in peacebuilding in Parachinar. The responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater agreement. Overall, both male and female participants expressed strong support for women's involvement in peacebuilding.

In several statements, female respondents reported higher mean scores than males, particularly in areas emphasizing women's potential and rights. For instance, women rated this statement, "Women should be included in decision-making processes about peace" ($M = 4.50$)

higher than men ($M = 4.10$), showing a $+0.40$ difference. Similar trends were observed in perceptions of women as peace leaders and the value of their perspectives in dialogues, each with a $+0.30$ difference.

However, notable gender differences emerged regarding perceived barriers. Males were more likely to agree that “Cultural barriers hinder women’s participation in peacebuilding” ($M = 4.00$ vs. 3.00), while women were less likely to see this as a primary obstacle. A similar gap is observed in “Economic dependency affects women’s participation” (Male $M = 4.20$; Female $M = 3.20$), suggesting women may either underreport these barriers or interpret them differently.

Interestingly, both genders showed identical views on “Men are supportive of women’s role in peacebuilding” ($M = 4.10$), indicating shared optimism about male allies. The results suggest that while both genders acknowledge women's role in peacebuilding, women tend to emphasize inclusion and leadership more strongly, whereas men highlight structural barriers. These findings underscore the importance of addressing contextual challenges and promoting gender-sensitive strategies in peacebuilding efforts.

Table 7
Mean Scores of Male and Female Participants on the
Impact of Women-Led Initiatives on Fostering Trust ($N = 29$)

Items	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
1	Women-led interfaith dialogues	1.82	2.72	+0.90
2	Support groups for conflict-affected families	2.36	3.06	+0.69
3	Collaborative women’s skill-	2.64	3.33	+0.70

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Items	Statement	Male M	Female M	Difference (F - M)
	building programs			
4	Women’s advocacy campaigns for peace	2.27	3.22	+0.95
5	Local women’s committees for community safety	2.18	3.56	+1.37

Note: Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived impact (1 = Not impactful at all, 5 = Highly impactful).

Table 7 presents the mean scores of male and female participants regarding the perceived impact of women-led initiatives on fostering trust between conflicting groups. Across all five initiatives, female participants consistently rated the impact higher than male participants. The highest difference was observed in the statement “Local women’s committees for community safety”, where the female mean score was 3.56 compared to the male score of 2.18, reflecting a +1.37 difference.

This suggests that women perceive local committees as significantly more impactful in trust-building than men do. Similarly, women rated “Women’s advocacy campaigns for peace” (M = 3.22) and “Women-led interfaith dialogues” (M = 2.72) as more effective than men (M = 2.27 and 1.82 respectively). These consistent gendered differences may reflect women’s closer engagement with or belief in the transformative role of such initiatives in peacebuilding. Overall, the results highlight a gender gap in the perception of women's initiatives, indicating that female participants place more trust and value in women-led peace efforts compared to their male counterparts.

Table 8
Perceptions of Male and Female participates on Women's Gendered Agency in Peacebuilding

Items	Statement	Female M	Male M	Difference (F - M)
1	Women play a crucial role in resolving community conflicts by mediating between families and groups.	3.94	3.91	+0.03
2	Women's empathy and nurturing qualities make them more effective in facilitating peace talks.	3.78	3.82	-0.04
3	Women are the first to intervene in disputes due to their central role in family and community structures.	3.67	3.27	+0.40
4	Women's peacebuilding efforts are more focused on reconciliation and healing compared to men's.	4.11	3.45	+0.66
5	Women utilize informal networks (such as family and neighbour relationships) to prevent the escalation of conflicts.	3.72	3.73	-0.01

Note: Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived women's gendered agency (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree)

The data reveals generally high levels of agreement amongst male and female respondents on women's significant but distinct role in peacebuilding. Women are widely seen as effective mediators within communities, largely due to their empathy, nurturing roles, and central position in family structures. Both groups acknowledged women's strength in utilizing informal networks to prevent conflict escalation. Critically, however, subtle gendered differences emerged. Women were more likely than men to emphasize on their focus on reconciliation and healing (+0.66 mean difference) and their proactive role in dispute intervention (+0.40). This suggests that

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women see their contributions not just as supportive, but as essential and strategic—challenging the stereotype of women being passive actors in peace processes.

This study explores the lived realities of women in Parachinar, their contributions to peacebuilding, and the ways conflict has shaped their socio-economic roles. The research was initially conceived during a relatively peaceful period, with plans for field visits and direct community engagement in October 2024 (Humera, 2024). However, a sudden escalation of violence—specifically, the incident of ambushing of a Shiite convoy on October 12th, 2024—shifted the security landscape and necessitated a revision of methodology. Despite these limitations, this pilot study offers valuable insights into the feasibility of future mixed-method research and highlights the importance of centering women's voices in peace and livelihood discourses. Alternatively, male responses slightly outweighed responses of females, in spotting women's empathetic qualities as peacebuilding strengths. This reflects a gender-normative perception—wherein men valorise women's roles primarily based on traditional traits (nurturing, emotional labour) as opposed to strategic competence or leadership. In sum, whilst both genders confirm women's importance in peacebuilding, women assert their agency more actively, emphasizing leadership through community-focused approaches, not just emotional labour. This has implications for policy: empowering women in formal peace techniques can go beyond the symbolic inclusion and recognition of the strategic, not just supportive nature in their contributions.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings highlight significant gendered discrepancies in perceptions of women's roles in

peacebuilding and the impact of conflict on livelihoods in Parachinar. Anchored in the Feminist Peace and Conflict Concept (FPCT), which centers on the lived experiences of marginalized groups—in particular women—in knowledge and transformative conflict, the results underscore how gender shapes not simply the reveal in of violence but also access to agency in its aftermath. A striking pattern emerges across the seven survey tables: women respondents consistently mentioned higher levels of perceived impact from conflict on livelihoods than male respondents. This displays women's proximity to the ordinary consequences of conflict—disrupted markets, displacement, and restrained mobility—which disproportionately affect their roles as caregivers and economic contributors. These findings validate FPCT's assertion that women's lack of confidence extends beyond physical violence, and comprise of economic, social, and emotional dimensions which are often overlooked in mainstream protection discourses.

The substantial gap identified in the survey responses lies in the inconsistencies and polarization between male and female perspectives, especially on issues related to women's agency and collaboration in peacebuilding. For instance, while a majority of women strongly agreed that “women collaborate with male elders in peace meetings” and “male leaders support women's struggle mediation at home,” many male respondents either disagreed or marked it as neutral, with several choosing the lowest scale point. Furthermore, when asked whether “men in leadership positions endorse women's involvement in resolving minor conflicts,” male responses were scattered, showing a lack of consensus or clarity. This divergence highlights not just differences in belief but possible gender-based silencing or undervaluation of

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women's roles that may not be fully captured quantitatively. Plassnig (2020) highlights how South Sudanese women war veterans, despite active roles in battle and peacebuilding, were sidelined in national processes because of structural and cultural barriers. Her application of Feminist Peace and conflict theory (FPCT) reveals how patriarchal norms and exclusionary reintegration programs hindered the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

This mirrors the context of Parachinar, where despite grassroots peace efforts, women remain underrepresented in formal decision-making—underscoring the global relevance of gendered challenges in peacebuilding. So, the polarization in perceptions is evident in attitudes towards women's participation in peacebuilding. While many male respondents supported equal participation in principle, some statements revealed hesitancy or resistance rooted in traditional gender norms. Conversely, girls strongly endorsed their right to participate, and more significantly, emphasized on their current contributions through informal roles such as caregiving, community mediation, and education. This tension illustrates FPCT's critique of the binary between "formal" and "informal" peacebuilding—where women's grassroots efforts are vital however often rendered invisible or undervalued. Similarly, in male responses about whether "women collaborate with male elders in peace meetings" or if "peacebuilding tasks are delegated to women," many responses were clustered around "One" (strongly disagree) or "three" (neutral). In other cases, for instance, in questions like, "women are the primary persons to intervene in disputes," responses varied significantly among men and women, displaying each sturdy agreement and disagreement, frequently without

explanation. These variations raised questions on the reliability and interpretability of fixed-choice formats in a context where sensitivity, fear, or political stress may influence how people respond.

Such gaps reflect the limitations of structured survey items to grasp underlying biases or contextual realities. Another critical gap surfaced in the uniformity of extreme responses, particularly among men, where several responses were marked as all “1s” (strongly disagree) or all “5s” (strongly agree) across multiple statements. This pattern suggests a potential lack of engagement, social desirability bias, or a misunderstanding of the statements—issues that quantitative tools are ill-equipped to investigate further. For example, some male respondents rated all peace-related questions with “1,” including statements that are widely observed in community dynamics, such as women using informal networks to prevent conflict. This uniformity undermines the richness and credibility of the data based on the survey responses presented in Table titled as “Involvement of Women in Reducing Economic Precarity Due to Conflict”. Several significant perception gaps between male and female participants emerged regarding women’s involvement in economic activities during conflict.

The most notable gap is observed in Item 3 (Women participating in financial literacy workshops), where females rated women’s involvement higher ($M = 2.56$) than males ($M = 2.18$), reflecting a +0.38-point difference. This suggests that women are more aware of their participation in such educational initiatives, which this may not be equally recognized by men. A similar pattern is evident in Item 1 (Small business initiatives), with a +0.29 difference, again showing higher female

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recognition of involvement. Interestingly, Items 2, 4, and 5—related to agriculture and microfinance—show a negative difference (-0.14), where males perceived higher female involvement than females themselves reported. This inverse gap may point to men overestimating women's visibility or access in these domains or to a mismatch in defining active participation. Lastly, Item 6 (Economic cooperatives) shows a minimal difference (-0.10), suggesting more aligned perceptions between genders in visible, community-based entrepreneurial roles. These gaps highlight the importance of including both male and female perspectives when assessing women's roles in peacebuilding and economic resilience, as perceptions often diverge based on gendered experiences and access to information.

Interestingly, both genders acknowledged barriers to women's participation, though they framed them differently. Male respondents cited practical limitations—such as safety or infrastructure—whereas female participants highlighted structural barriers, including lack of recognition and exclusion from decision-making spaces. This divergence points to different levels of awareness about the embedded patriarchal structures that FPCT critiques, and affirms the theory's call for transformative peace processes that not only include women, but actively dismantle the systems that marginalize them. Moreover, there was a shared recognition of women-led initiatives as fostering trust and rebuilding social cohesion, suggesting a potential shift in attitudes and a pragmatic acceptance of women's roles in sustaining peace. This aligns with Davies and True's (2018) argument that women's peace work—though often informal—is essential to long-term stability and should be integrated into broader security frameworks. Finally, the

data reveals that the conflict in Parachinar is experienced not only as a sectarian struggle but as a disruption to survival and dignity, especially for women.

The response rates echoed concerns about the access to food, healthcare, and education—further evidencing FPCT’s argument that peace is not merely the absence of violence, but the presence of justice, equity, and basic human needs. In summary, the results affirm the core tenets of Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory: that gender matters in every dimension of conflict and peace; that women’s experiences and knowledge are critical to building lasting peace; and that transformative change requires addressing the deeply embedded structures of inequality that shape both war and recovery. These insights call for policies and peacebuilding frameworks that are inclusive, intersectional, and attuned to the voices of women on the frontlines of conflict and reconstruction.

LIMITATIONS

As mentioned earlier, I initially designed this study using a mixed-methods approach to explore women's roles in sustaining livelihoods and peacebuilding in Parachinar. However, after conducting the pilot phase during an active conflict period, I realized that the use of quantitative tools was neither feasible nor effective under the prevailing conditions. The challenges I encountered led me to conclude that a qualitative research approach is more appropriate for the final project. Before the conflict escalated again in September 2024, I was in regular contact with a key informant who was optimistic about helping me collect over 50 responses from educated individuals in Parachinar—especially students and professionals working in schools, hospitals, and banks. Unfortunately, once the roads were blocked and security

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deteriorated, all mobility and outreach possibilities collapsed. I requested the key informant to collect printed responses from her close contacts, but she shared that everything was shut down and printed responses are not possible. She was only able to gather 15 responses by sharing the Google form link through WhatsApp chats, despite her consistent efforts.

In a second attempt, I reached out to a local professor, who shared the online survey with his network and encouraged people to participate. Although this generated a few more responses, it was still insufficient for producing meaningful quantitative findings. In contrast, the few qualitative interviews I conducted—even informal ones over WhatsApp—offered deeper insight into participants' thoughts and emotions. Women spoke candidly about their lived experiences, including stories of mediating family disputes, supporting victims of violence, or quietly contributing to social cohesion. These conversations revealed cultural subtleties and emotional dimensions that the structured survey simply could not capture. Given these challenges—conflict-related shutdowns, poor internet access, low response rates, and the limited expressiveness of Likert-scale data—I have decided to shift my final project entirely toward qualitative methods for the final phase of this research.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study provided critical insights into the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding and livelihood recovery in post-conflict Parachinar, highlighting the central but frequently underrecognized role of women in sustaining social cohesion and navigating economic challenges. The findings revealed both overlapping and divergent perceptions between men and women

participants regarding women's agency in peace efforts, with women emphasizing on informal networks and everyday resilience, and men often aligning with more traditional narratives. The experience of women in Parachinar, a war-affected region where roads are blocked in Pakistan's Kurram District, highlights the intersection of gendered marginalization and spatial isolation. Motion regulations, as said at some stage in the Parachinar avenue blockade (The Voice, 2024), severely restricted women's right of entry to education, healthcare, and peacebuilding forums, echoing what Plassnig (2020) identified in South Sudan. applying Feminist Peace and war theory (FPCT), such spatial and structural constraints are not merely logistical—they are political, reinforcing patriarchal control and silencing women's agency. despite this, Parachinari women have engaged in informal peacebuilding through community support, education, and dialogue, challenging the false binary of passive victimhood versus energetic participation.

Their constrained yet resilient engagement reflects the need to reconceptualize peacebuilding to include the everyday, localized, and gendered experiences of women in such "blocked" geographies. Despite facing major logistical and contextual barriers, most notably the sudden outbreak of violence during the study—the research provides ample insights that while women remain disproportionately affected by conflict's socioeconomic consequences, they are simultaneously vital agents of peace—often working through informal networks and roles that go unrecognized in formal processes. However, it also uncovered data limitations stemming from digital access to issues, security risks, and response inconsistencies, underscoring the need for adaptive methodologies in volatile environments. these preliminary

findings not only inform future phases of research, but also emphasize on the importance of creating safer, more inclusive spaces for marginalized voices in peacebuilding discourses.

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