

**Journal of Religion & Society (JR&S)**

Available Online:

<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>

Print ISSN: 3006-1296 Online ISSN: 3006-130X

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Rebuilding Social Capital in Post-Conflict Societies: A Women-Centered Perspective  
The Case of Darra Adamkhel****Saiqa Bibi**

Lecturer, Kohat University of Science and Technology, KUST

[saiqabibi@kust.edu.pk](mailto:saiqabibi@kust.edu.pk)**Muhammad Zakriya**

Research Assistant, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

[m.zakariya@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:m.zakariya@awkum.edu.pk)**Abstract**

*This study explores the transformation of women's status and their contribution to rebuilding social capital in the post-conflict context of Darra Adamkhel, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with women from different age groups and educational backgrounds. Findings reveal that while patriarchal norms continue to limit women's mobility, education, and economic participation, notable shifts have occurred in women's roles, agency, and decision-making. Women have increasingly accessed education, entered the workforce, and engaged in social decision-making processes. However, deeply rooted traditions such as arranged, cousin, and underage marriages persist, as do gender-based restrictions and practices like honour killing. The role of women stood positively changed particularly their access to education which is a good gesture towards their empowerment. However, they showed concern regarding their direct participation in important matters and jirgas' decisions about them. They complained of no share in coal profit distribution and division of property. The strong clutches of patriarchy, conservatism and orthodoxy about local women started getting loosen. They were still in favour of preferential, early and arranged marriages, with opposition from students of both genders. The elderly women of Darra Adamkhel favoured the practices of the past, but conversely the youngsters particularly the educated ones supported the merger of FATA and changes occurred after the conflict. Female Student's response was positive towards changes in the region. The study recommends creating a conflict-free situation in the area towards speedy development of the area and reconstruction of the damaged educational institutes on priority basis to provide the education to the women. The paper argues that empowering women in post-conflict societies is central to rebuilding social capital and fostering sustainable peace.*

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Women's Empowerment, Darra Adamkhel, Gender, Militancy.

**1. Introduction**

Post-conflict societies face multifaceted challenges in rebuilding social cohesion, trust, and community networks collectively referred to as *social capital* (Colletta & Cullen, 2000; Putnam, 1993). Although social capital is a broad concept, it gained significant traction in academic discourse and policymaking in the 1990s. Putnam (1995) describes social capital as the connections among individuals that foster social relationships, facilitate the exchange of goods and services, and build trust within communities through ongoing interactions. Social capital is further characterized by social relations, interactions, norms, value-based behaviours, and institutions that enhance individuals' capacity to

promote solidarity and cooperation, thereby enabling collective action for mutual benefit. It is a multidimensional construct, encompassing various forms, functions, and levels of measurement (Ramia et al., 2017).

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) aims to rebuild nations in the aftermath of war to achieve sustainable peace through strengthening security, governance, economic growth, gender equality, and justice. Effective PCR requires active community participation and must address critical challenges such as displacement, vulnerability, and institutional or administrative barriers (Cox, 2001). Viewing the post-conflict phase as a transitional period, integrating social capital with indigenous recovery approaches can yield more sustainable and context-specific reconstruction strategies. In regions affected by armed militancy, the destruction of physical infrastructure is often accompanied by the erosion of trust, community ties, and equitable participation in social life. Women who are central actors in the social fabric play a pivotal role in restoring interpersonal and institutional relationships. Darra Adamkhel, located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has experienced severe militant activity, resulting in restrictions on women's education, mobility, and economic participation. This paper explores the evolving role of women in rebuilding social capital following the decline of militant influence, with a particular focus on education, economic empowerment, and community engagement.

## **2. Literature Review**

Social capital is among the most debated concepts in the social sciences, emerging as a prominent academic field in the 1990s. Despite extensive scholarly engagement, a universally accepted definition has yet to be established, with researchers offering varied interpretations. According to Russell (2009), ethics and shared values form the essence of social capital. Coleman, in his definition, emphasized the institutional dimension, highlighting trust between individuals and institutions as a fundamental element. Putnam conceptualized social capital as a civic virtue that underpins participation in political activities, adherence to the law, and cooperative behaviours. The most distinguished scholars in the field have distinguished between two types of societies: those rooted in patriarchy and kinship ties, and those characterized by high levels of trust. In both cases, interaction between individuals and groups is founded on trust. Ramia et al. (2017) define social capital as the shared norms, values, beliefs, social relations, cooperation, and reciprocity that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit.

The term "capital" in social capital parallels other forms of capital, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert D. Putnam, who argue that social capital possesses qualities similar though intangible to conventional capital. Coleman (1990) contends that social capital, like other types of capital, is productive because it enables the achievement of goals that would otherwise be unattainable. Unlike other forms of capital, however, social capital resides within the interactions among actors rather than in physical resources or human attributes. Putnam (1993) further describes social capital as comprising social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust, in contrast to physical capital, which refers to tangible assets, and human capital, which refers to individual attributes.

The literature classifies social capital into several types based on distinct characteristics and functions, including:

- Structural and cognitive social capital

- Bonding, bridging, and linking social capital
- Strong and weak social capital
- Horizontal and vertical social capital

The relationship between conflict and social capital may be bidirectional. On one hand, conflict can heighten stress and erode trust. As news of violence spreads, individuals may become more cautious toward others, decreasing collaboration and creating divisions within communities (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). On the other hand, conflict can compel individuals to rely on one another, fostering unity in the face of external threats. Consequently, while bridging social capital may diminish, bonding social capital within specific groups such as neighbourhoods, villages, ethnic communities, or religious groups may increase (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). Empirical evidence supports these dynamics. For example, De Luca and Verpoorten (2011) found that associational membership and self-reported trust declined during the war in Uganda, though these measures rebounded afterward. Such declines may not signify a deterioration of the social structure but rather reflect logistical barriers to meeting during conflict, the suspension of group activities due to security concerns, and individuals' preoccupation with immediate survival needs.

### **2.1 Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Social Capital**

In post-conflict contexts, policymakers must understand the factors that foster societal cohesion. Key areas of focus include demilitarization, damage assessment, and prioritization of rebuilding sectors to promote peace and sustainable development through appropriate processes. This thesis posits that challenges in reconstructing societal micro-frameworks linked to the macro-level structures should be prioritized after militancy, drawing on established theories of social capital. Policies and programs implemented by both international and local actors can significantly influence reconstruction outcomes, as seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where initiatives aimed at restoring social capital have been central (Cox, 2001). Post-conflict rebuilding operates at the intersection of international norms and regional realities, with the normalization of life, economic growth, and democratic institution-building as primary goals. This process serves as both a component of conflict management and a strategy for conflict prevention. However, this study critiques the wholesale adoption of pre-designed policies and practices, advocating for context-specific approaches to ensure sustainable peace. The effectiveness of post-militancy recovery hinges on rebuilding social capital alongside other structural reforms. Efforts are more likely to succeed when conditions conducive to civil structures characterized by trust, reciprocity, and cooperation are established. In many post-conflict settings, state institutions have either collapsed or been severely degraded, undermining their ability to provide basic safety, services, and infrastructure. In such circumstances, the absence of trust and collaboration can lead to a hostile societal environment. Citizenship, trust, and cooperation must be restored to prevent renewed instability. In this context, the terms “(re-)construction” and “(re-)building” refer to both the restoration and the creation of social capital in the aftermath of conflict. Reconstruction aims to normalize life, though a return to pre-conflict conditions may be impossible if the war has fundamentally altered the social fabric. In such cases, reconstruction entails building a new, more inclusive and sustainable societal framework on the remnants of the old. The prefix “re-” signifies expansion within an established political entity, while “construction”

refers to the creation of new systems to support social, economic, and political development. Social capital, comprising networks, norms, and trust, enables coordinated societal action (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). In post-conflict settings, rebuilding social capital is essential for reconciliation, peacebuilding, and community resilience (Varshney, 2001).

## **2.2 Women's Role in Social Capital Formation**

Women contribute to social capital through both formal mechanisms such as education, employment, and political participation and informal networks, including kinship ties and community caregiving (Chant & Sweetman, 2012). In post-conflict contexts, women's agency often expands as traditional gender norms are renegotiated (Mazurana & Proctor, 2013). In conservative tribal societies, patriarchal norms have historically restricted women's access to resources and decision-making processes (Moghadam, 2004). However, post-conflict reconstruction can create opportunities to reshape gender relations, particularly when women gain access to education and economic resources (UN Women, 2015).

## **3. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore women's status in pre- and post-militancy contexts. Data was collected through: In-depth interviews with male and female participants (educated and uneducated, young and elderly). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) segregated by gender to ensure openness in responses. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from different localities in Darra Adamkhel. Interviews were conducted in Pashto, recorded (with consent), transcribed, and translated into English for thematic analysis.

## **4. Findings**

Analysis of narratives revealed several key themes:

**Women's Status Before Militancy** Patriarchal Structure Society was strictly male-dominated; women had limited autonomy. Restricted Mobility: Women could not leave home without a male escort. Lack of Education & Economic Participation: Access to schooling and jobs was minimal. Invisible Contributions: Women's skills and advice were valued informally but unrecognized in public decision-making.

**Women's Experiences During Militancy** Double Vulnerability Fear from both insurgents and security forces. Educational Disruption: Schools for girls were destroyed; insurgents banned female education. Violence & Honour Killings: Jirgas sanctioned extreme punishments for perceived dishonour.

**Post-Conflict Changes** Educational Progress Women are now pursuing higher education, including religious studies. Economic Empowerment: Some women have entered jobs and assumed responsibilities like managing wedding arrangements. Shifts in Marriage Practices: Marriage age has increased from early teens to twenties for some, though underage and cousin marriages remain common. Persistent Inequalities: Women still face exclusion from property rights (e.g., coal mining profits) and decision-making.

**Marriage Norms and Social Capital** Arranged and Cousin Marriages: Seen as a means to preserve family honour, economic stability, and reduce domestic violence. Underage Marriages: Justified by some for reproductive reasons and to regulate sexual behaviour. Parental Authority: Strong parental control in partner selection, though some youth now voice preferences.

Honour Killing and Customary Justice: Cases of honour killing sanctioned by local jirgas indicate the persistence of gender-based violence. Women's resistance to imposed marriages is met with severe consequences

## 5. Discussion

The findings illustrate a complex picture: while women's access to education and certain economic roles has improved post-conflict, patriarchal traditions and gender-based restrictions persist. Education emerges as a key driver for women's empowerment, enabling them to participate in both household and community decision-making. In terms of social capital, women contribute to bonding capital (strengthening intra-community ties) through kinship networks and bridging capital (connecting across groups) when engaging with educational institutions and markets. However, linking capital relationships with formal institutions remains weak due to limited representation in governance and decision-making forums.

## 6. Conclusion

Rebuilding social capital in post-conflict societies like Darra Adamkhel requires addressing the structural gender inequalities that limit women's agency. While notable improvements in education and mobility have occurred, entrenched patriarchal norms and harmful practices continue to restrict women's full participation in social and economic life. Preferential, arranged, underage, and forced marriages are standard practices in Darra, supported by both genders of educated and elderly participants. Women showed concern regarding the decision taken by Jirga about honour killing, distribution of coal profits and property division. Women's status improved as the old patriarchal fabric, conservatism, and orthodox approach were shaken, and significant changes were observed. This research study has attempted to discern possible solutions based on justice, equity and the development of alternative institutions. This study has presented a new approach to social capital in light of Darra Adamkhel's conflict design, general-level qualitative research to analyze social capital in a post-conflict scenario. It enables an exit from the conflict and will begin social development. It will realize the importance of social structure and informal ways of life that provide a bridge to different groups.

## 7. Recommendations

To strengthen the sociocultural system and promote inclusive development, it is essential to expand secondary and tertiary educational facilities for girls while ensuring safe transport and security. Women's economic participation can be enhanced through the establishment of vocational training and microfinance programs specifically designed to meet their needs. At the same time, reforms in customary justice are necessary to ensure that jirga decisions align with human rights standards and protect women's legal rights. Parallel to this, awareness campaigns using media should be launched to challenge harmful practices such as underage marriage and honour killings. Furthermore, women's inclusion in governance must be encouraged by increasing their representation in local decision-making bodies. Overall, building a strong institutional environment is crucial to enabling effective and inclusive participation of all members of society.

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