

## The Resurgence of Militant Groups in Pakistan's Borderlands: Analyzing Shortcomings in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Strategies

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### Abstract

The rise of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan has had profound implications for Pakistan's border regions, particularly in terms of the resurgence of militant groups. This study investigates the potential policy failures of the Pakistani government in effectively utilizing its resources for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former militants. While some ex-combatants have undergone rehabilitation, a significant majority have been left without adequate support, possibly due to resource constraints. Notably, the rehabilitation process has been exclusively under the control of the military, with no civilian involvement allowed. This approach has created a substantial gap between the community and the ex-combatants attempting to reintegrate into society. Consequently, the ex-combatants have often encountered unwelcoming communities and stigmatization, leading many of them to opt for recidivism. This study employs a micro-ethnographic approach, with the researcher spending considerable time collecting primary data from the affected communities, administrators of rehabilitation centers, and the ex-combatants who have undergone rehabilitation. The findings suggest that a community-based approach to rehabilitation, involving the local community in the process, holds significant promise for successful reintegration. By assessing the consequences of current rehabilitation and reintegration approaches, this study sheds light on the urgent need for a more inclusive, community-driven strategy to address the issue of ex-combatant reintegration in Pakistan's border regions. Implementing such an approach could potentially mitigate the resurgence of militant groups and foster long-term stability in the region.

### Article History

Received Nov 13, 2023

Accepted Feb 18, 2024

Published Mar 29, 2024

**Keywords:** Resurgence of Militants, Rehabilitation, Deradicalization, Reintegration, Community-Based Approach

### Introduction

In post-conflict situations, processes like rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants play a crucial role in establishing and sustaining peace. The effectiveness of a rehabilitation program can directly influence the duration and sustainability of peace (Boyce, Koros &

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Hodgson, 2002). However, implementing these programs presents significant challenges, particularly in developing countries (Knight, 2008). Recognizing these challenges, the United Nations (2006) provides support to states in developing comprehensive ex-combatant rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

States facing post-conflict scenarios often employ 'soft' or 'smart' counterterrorism strategies to address the radical tendencies of ex-combatants. These strategies, which include non-coercive methods, aim to deradicalize individuals or groups, offering them an opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration (Nilsson, 2005). Individual rehabilitation focuses on the deradicalization of ex-combatants who have either surrendered or been apprehended by security forces during or after a conflict (Hoeft, 2015). These efforts are vital in the context of Pakistan's borderlands, which have been grappling with the resurgence of militant groups in the wake of the Taliban's return to power in neighboring Afghanistan.

The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the subsequent takeover by the Afghan Taliban had profound consequences for Pakistan's border regions (Khaliq, 2022). Pakistan has experienced a surge in terrorist attacks following these events, with notable militant groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) becoming increasingly active (Ahmed, 2022). The TTP's resurgence and intensification of terrorist activities have raised concerns about the security and stability of the region. While the release of TTP leadership from Afghan jails may have contributed to its resurgence, a critical factor that often goes overlooked is the shortcomings in the rehabilitation and reintegration programs meant to facilitate their return to society (Helf et al, 2021).

One case that illustrates the shortcomings in Pakistan's rehabilitation efforts is the rehabilitation of former militants in the Swat Valley. This initiative began after the conflict ended in 2009 when the valley was under the control of the Pakistan army, operating under the legal framework of 'The Actions (in Aid of Civil Power) Regulations' (Institute of Social Justice, 2011). This legal framework empowered the army to organize rehabilitation programs for ex-combatants in Swat, a region deeply affected by militancy. However, the program was implemented in a "controlled" setting, where only military personnel had authority, and external organizations had limited access. This approach led to the isolation of former combatants from the general community, both during rehabilitation and after their

reintegration into society. This form of rehabilitation, termed "controlled rehabilitation," is characterized by seclusion behind thick walls, guarded rooms, and strict security measures (Yumna, 2015).

The controlled rehabilitation approach in Swat raises important questions that this research seeks to address. What are the defining characteristics of rehabilitation programs run in a controlled setting? How do they compare to open rehabilitation programs? Is a civilian-led rehabilitation program a viable and effective alternative, and what are the prospects of its success? The resurgence of militant groups in Pakistan's borderlands following the Taliban's emergence in Afghanistan highlights the pressing need to reevaluate the rehabilitation and reintegration strategies employed by the Pakistani government. In the wake of recent events in Pakistan, especially since August 2021, the matter of Taliban influence has taken center stage. Demonstrations by residents in regions such as Swat, where governmental rehabilitation initiatives are in place, highlight the deficiencies in existing rehabilitation and deradicalization endeavors (Hussain, 2022; Khaliq, 2022). These protests, coupled with the escalating presence of the Taliban in the area, shed light on the inadequacies of the rehabilitation programs, prompting questions about the effectiveness of such efforts. The paradox arises when considering that, despite efforts to rehabilitate ex-combatants, the Taliban continues to gain manpower and influence, as evidenced by their emergence in Swat.

This research aims to investigate these shortcomings, with a particular focus on the rehabilitation and deradicalization programs in Swat Valley. It is crucial to understand the intricacies of the rehabilitation process, from controlled settings to the role of civilians, and the impact on the ex-combatants' reintegration into society. By addressing these issues, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into how more inclusive and community-driven strategies can enhance reintegration efforts, potentially reducing the resurgence of militant groups and fostering long-term stability in Pakistan's border regions. To better comprehend the situation, this study employs a micro-ethnographic approach. The researcher spent considerable time collecting primary data by engaging with affected communities, administrators of rehabilitation centers, and ex-combatants who have undergone rehabilitation. By doing so, this research seeks to bridge the gap between policy and the

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ground realities, shedding light on the urgent need for a more community-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration in Pakistan's border regions.

### Research Methodology

This paper is a component of a broader PhD project, during which the author conducted interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) between 2016 and 2020. The primary data from this period has been integrated into this research, focusing on the emergence of TTP in Pakistan, particularly in border regions such as Swat Valley. This surge in militant groups raises significant questions about Pakistan's rehabilitation and deradicalization programs. This study is of a qualitative nature as it focuses on post-conflict rehabilitation initiatives in Swat valley of Pakistan. The author chose a qualitative methodology in light of the possible obstacles and hazards linked to conducting a quantitative inquiry within a delicate environment. This includes a socially enclosed setting where research activities are viewed with suspicion, the presence of militants who may perceive a researcher as a spy, and the existence of security forces that prohibit any research activities. To explore the organizational structure, nature, and methods of rehabilitation programs in Swat, the author chose an ethnographic study method at a micro-level. Despite the researcher's efforts to immerse himself in the local culture, certain variables did not pose significant challenges. However, the sensitivity surrounding the subject matter made even well-known locals and key informants hesitant to share information. Relevant government departments prohibited access to sensitive information and rehabilitation facilities, citing concerns about potential security threats associated with the study.

This participant observational study incorporated key informant interviews and focus group discussions to provide a comprehensive analysis of rehabilitation and reintegration programs in Pakistan, with a special focus on Swat Valley. Collecting sensitive information in a post-conflict situation is always a daunting task, potentially posing risks to both the interviewer and the interviewee. Data collection involved various tools, including focus group discussions (FGDs), questionnaires, interviews, and personal observations. Semi-structured interviews employed open-ended questions, covering a range of topics, such as general

information about rehabilitation facilities, the type of education and vocational training offered, sources of income after rehabilitation, social integration of graduates, perspectives on the conflict, community attitudes toward the graduates of rehabilitation centers, and related subjects. These inquiries allowed the researcher to assess the effectiveness of rehabilitation facilities and the level of reintegration achieved by the respondents.

The study also conducted four FGDs with community members, each comprising 6 to 8 participants. These discussions focused on participants' opinions about ex-combatants, rehabilitation facilities, and post-conflict developments in rehabilitation and reintegration. They also explored the degree of integration of graduates into their societies after rehabilitation. These FGD questions paralleled the questions posed to the other sample groups. The research sample encompassed various stakeholders, representing three categories: community members, NGO practitioners, and government officials. Officials were questioned about rehabilitation centers and associated procedures, while the other two stakeholder groups were queried about graduates of rehabilitation centers, their perspectives on rehabilitation and reintegration, and graduates they were familiar with.

Creating questionnaires is a vital yet challenging aspect of such sensitive research. In this study, questionnaires were adaptive to accommodate interviewers' concerns and ensure their active participation. Questions were adjusted in consideration of the context, societal norms, security considerations, and sensitivities. Number of participants in the interviews are 33. The target demographic was subdivided into four groups: community members (6 men+ 4 women), nuclear families of ex-combatants (4), and ex-combatants (12). Likewise, stakeholders (9), including rehabilitation center staff, government officials, academia and NGOs, and civil society members interested in rehabilitation and reintegration, were divided into four key informant groups. Each questionnaire was flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt questions as needed to gather valuable information.

Ethical considerations have been a cornerstone of this research throughout its duration. All primary data, such as interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), were obtained with the informed consent of the participants, who provided their consent through signed agreements. For those individuals who did not wish to have their real names published

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alongside their statements, pseudonyms were used, and they were represented as Respondent #1, Respondent #2, and so forth.

### **Conceptualizing Rehabilitation and Reintegration in DDR Framework**

Rehabilitation and reintegration within the framework of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) are multifaceted processes that are essential for transitioning from conflict to sustainable peace and stability (Boyce, Koros & Hodgson, 2002). These processes are integral components of post-conflict peacebuilding and involve a complex interplay of policies, initiatives, and programs (Knight, 2008). The engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local and international humanitarian groups, and multilateral organizations, is crucial to their success. Moreover, it is essential to view rehabilitation within the broader context of transforming society from an outdated form of government to a new, modern, democratic, and pluralistic structure, where not only former combatants but all sectors can collaborate for nation-building (United Nations, 2006).

Rehabilitation, in the DDR context, signifies a comprehensive process that addresses the needs of individuals or groups who have disengaged from armed conflict or resistance against the state (Hoeft, 2015). These individuals or groups, often motivated by ethnic or religious tensions, socioeconomic inequalities, or political marginalization, require a systematic approach to help them transition back into civilian life (Boyce, Koros & Hodgson, 2002). Rehabilitation encompasses physical, psychological, educational, and vocational training to equip individuals with the necessary skills and mindset for successful reintegration into society (Aprile et al., 2011). This phase often takes place in specialized rehabilitation centers, where individuals undergo structured programs to address their specific needs, which can range from three to twelve months, and sometimes up to two years, depending on the complexity of rehabilitation requirements.

Reintegration, on the other hand, represents the broader process of facilitating the smooth and sustainable return of ex-combatants into society. It aims to create an environment that encourages social acceptance and fosters the rebuilding of relationships between former

combatants and the community (Dudouet, Giessmann, & Planta, 2012). Reintegration initiatives focus on promoting social cohesion, economic stability, and the restoration of trust within the community (Hoeft, 2015). This phase often involves the implementation of various social and economic programs, such as skill-building workshops, job training, community development projects, and reconciliation efforts, with the goal of fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility among all members of society (Boyce, Koros & Hodgson, 2002).

The terminological complexities within the DDR framework often lead to the conflation of various stages, including reinsertion, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Reinsertion, often likened to 'first aid' for ex-combatants, involves initial short-term support provided in military detention centers, focusing primarily on immediate stabilization and basic needs (Knight, 2008). The rehabilitation phase follows, focusing on the comprehensive and long-term process of addressing the physical, psychological, and social aspects of the individual's reintegration journey. In the broader context of DDR, disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, rehabilitation, reconciliation, reconstruction, and reintegration are critical post-conflict measures combined into a comprehensive framework (Nilsson, 2005). The primary goal of DDR is to not only disarm and demobilize armed groups but also to ensure the successful reintegration of former combatants into society, promoting sustainable peace and stability (Ball, 2006). This complex process often conceptualized as a five-stage approach, including disarming, assembling, discharging, short- to medium-term reinsertion, and long-term reintegration, emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and inclusive strategy to address the multifaceted challenges of post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration (Muggah, 2009).

In the ever-evolving landscape of DDR, the involvement of the community has gained prominence. Understanding the social and political context of a region before executing DDR programs is crucial, as it serves to identify the differences in social dynamics and ensures that DDR complements the political process (Knight, 2008). This shift toward community involvement is essential in building a stronger relationship with the community and achieving a more effective reintegration process. The conceptualization of rehabilitation and reintegration is crucial for understanding their roles within the DDR framework.

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Rehabilitation encompasses the process of addressing the psychological, physical, and social needs of disengaged individuals or groups, equipping them for reintegration into society (Muggah, 2009). Reintegration, on the other hand, represents the ultimate outcome of successful rehabilitation, where individuals are smoothly reintegrated into the community, fostering sustainable peace and stability (Hoeft, 2015). Understanding and distinguishing between these terms is vital for implementing effective post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration programs that contribute to the broader goal of peace building.

### **Deradicalization Efforts in Pakistan**

Pakistan's history is marked by various asymmetrical conflicts, many of which are rooted in ethnicity or religion. While these conflicts often remain concealed, some regions have experienced the emergence of militancy and terrorism. The primary actors in these conflicts are typically individuals who harbor grievances related to inclusion, religious or ethnic matters, and resource distribution (Dudouet, Giessmann, & Planta, 2012). To resolve such disputes, it is imperative to address the underlying grievances of the affected population before embarking on the rehabilitation of those who engaged in militancy against the government. This necessitates the formulation of a comprehensive national rehabilitation policy.

However, a comprehensive review of the existing literature and field data reveals a critical gap in Pakistan's approach to rehabilitation and reintegration. The country lacks a detailed and context-specific program for addressing the multifaceted challenges arising from these conflicts, taking into account the diverse social and cultural landscape (Ratnayake, 2012). Drawing inspiration from countries like Sri Lanka, which have adopted locally-driven rehabilitation and reintegration programs, Pakistan should develop a distinct, context-sensitive strategy that aligns with its unique conflict dynamics (GoSL, 2013, pp. 39-40). One notable deficiency in Pakistan's current approach to rehabilitation and reintegration is the absence of a comprehensive and well-informed framework. The policies predominantly revolve around security concerns, leaving the underlying issues of conflicts unaddressed. The National Action Plan (NAP) and the National Counter-terrorism Authority (NACTA) primarily focus on



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security-related matters without adequately considering the root causes of these conflicts (Knight, 2012).

Remarkably, Pakistan boasts one of the largest rehabilitation programs globally, with numerous rehabilitation facilities nationwide. The Saudi Arabian government even enlisted the assistance of Pakistani professionals in developing its rehabilitation program.<sup>2</sup> While various provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Punjab, and erstwhile FATA, host active rehabilitation programs, the lack of coordination under a unified national policy framework hinders a cohesive and efficient approach. Several rehabilitation initiatives have also been initiated by the Pakistani Army in regions like Swat, using centers such as *Sabawoon*, *Mashal*, and *Sparlay* (Rana, 2011). However, many of these initiatives have ceased operations due to financial constraints, highlighting the need for sustainable funding. Although some programs, like those in North Waziristan and Khyber, have achieved positive outcomes in rehabilitating ex-combatants, these successes need to be replicated on a broader scale.

While the literature mentions various rehabilitation initiatives with names such as *Sabawoon*, *Mashal*, *Sparlay*, *Rastoon*, *Nwe Sahar*, and *Heila*, the reality on the ground suggests that only a few of these programs are operational (Khan, 2022; Khan, 2017). The dearth of funding and resources has led to the suspension of many initiatives.<sup>3</sup> The significant influx of terrorists and terrorist organizations in Pakistan, as reported by Abdul Basit (2015), necessitates comprehensive measures against radicalization and extremism. Pakistan has taken both hard and soft measures, with military and state security services implementing the former, while government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are actively engaged in the latter. One common perspective among government officials and experts in peace and conflict studies is that the identification of terrorists is a complex task, as extremist narratives have deeply permeated society. This challenge requires a more comprehensive deradicalization effort for the entire society (Basit, 2015). While provincial police agencies are concentrating on deradicalizing ex-combatants, NGOs have initiated research projects and programs aimed at deradicalizing society as a whole. Unfortunately, the government has yet to devise a comprehensive national deradicalization or rehabilitation strategy for former

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<sup>2</sup> Respondent # 1, in-person interview, Swat, April 2, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Respondent # 2, in-person interview, Lahore, March 27, 2020.

combatants, opting instead for the creation of a few institutions and a counterterrorism strategy.

*Swat Valley: An Example from Pakistan's Rehabilitation Program*

The Rehabilitation Program in Swat Valley was structured around three rehabilitation centers. These centers catered to distinct categories of detainees, including juveniles, adult combatants, and families of former combatants.

Detainees within this program were divided into two primary groups: those who had been apprehended and those who had voluntarily surrendered. The former were individuals apprehended after engaging in conflicts with security personnel or during routine searches. In contrast, the latter comprised those who were handed over by their community or family or who willingly surrendered to the security forces.<sup>4</sup> Upon detention or surrender, militants underwent a comprehensive evaluation involving psychiatric assessments and interrogations conducted by intelligence agencies. This evaluation consisted of two stages: initial interrogation upon capture and subsequent assessment by a Joint Interrogation Team (JIT).<sup>5</sup> The JIT was composed of various civil and military security agencies, including the military, police, and intelligence. During this process, detainees were classified as either "hard-core" or "soft-core," and further categorized into "black," "grey," or "white" based on their level of involvement. In most cases, this assessment process occurred within the security forces' internment centers and typically lasted for the duration of six to fifteen days. If a detainee was found to have participated in terrorist activities, attacks on civilian targets, government institutions, or the destruction of public infrastructure, they were labeled as "black" and subjected to internment in facilities or jails as part of their punishment. This punitive approach served to address public demands for accountability and deter potential radicalization.<sup>6</sup>

The "grey" combatants, known for their fervent promotion of militant ideologies, did not engage in acts of violence but rather advocated for these ideologies. They were subsequently referred to rehabilitation facilities. The "white" category encompassed individuals who provided logistical or material support to militant groups without direct

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<sup>4</sup> Respondent # 2

<sup>5</sup> Respondent # 3, in-person interview, Swat, 11 July, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Respondent # 6, in-person interview, Islamabad, 13 April, 2020

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involvement in violent activities. In most instances, "white" detainees were released after a week, as their cooperation with militant groups was typically coerced.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the classification of rehabilitation centers, Swat Valley's three centers administered by the Pakistani army were named *Mashal* (the light), *Sabawoon* (the dawn), and *Sparlay* (the spring). Swat Valley's significant Pashtun community influenced the nomenclature of these facilities (Rana, 2011). Each center had a distinct focus:

Project *Sabawoon* specialized in the rehabilitation of juveniles.

Project *Mashal* was tailored for adult captives.

Project *Sparlay* was dedicated to the rehabilitation of family members of individuals held captive.

However, it is essential to note that during the researcher's fieldwork, the existence of the *Sparlay* rehabilitation center could not be verified. Graduates and key informants identified were associated with the *Sabawoon* and *Mashal* facilities, despite the researcher's visitation of the first two centers, where entry was not permitted. A response indicated that *Sabawoon* is located in Peerano, Malakand, while *Mashal* is situated in the Paithom Hotel in Wali Bagh, Mingora.<sup>8</sup> The existence or location of *Sparlay* remained unknown to the researcher. Teaching staff is employed by civil authorities, with eight teachers currently working at the facility. The duration of stay varies for each rehabilitee, typically lasting from three to six months, depending on their psychological assessment.

## Rehabilitation Process at the Centers

### *Management and Staffing*

The Swat Valley rehabilitation facilities are under the supervision of the Pakistan Army, with the majority of the educators within these centers being civilians. The civilian staff comprises experts in various fields, including psychiatrists, teachers, technical and vocational instructors, and religious scholars, while military personnel oversee the general administration. Shams Mohmand, a senior journalist who visited *Sabawoon* and interacted with staff and rehabilitees, highlighted the stringent security measures, emphasizing the

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<sup>7</sup> Respondent # 3

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Ihsan, in-person interview, Swat, 12 February, 2020

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military's role in these facilities.<sup>9</sup> Gaining access required a lengthy two-month approval process.<sup>10</sup> *Sabawoon* mainly houses juveniles and is focused on formal education, and upon visiting, Shams Mohmand noted the absence of amenities like televisions or movie theaters. It has been observed in discussions with the graduates and experts that clergy and psychiatrists play pivotal roles in education, leaving a profound impact.<sup>1112</sup>

### *Psychological Assessment*

The assessment process commences with the military's evaluation of a combatant's level of involvement in militancy, followed by an evaluation by a psychologist. This evaluation determines the rehabilitee's length of stay, as well as the specific educational and vocational training they receive. Former combatants who voluntarily surrender are placed directly in the rehabilitation center, while those detained during conflict are first sent to jail before rehabilitation. Progress is continuously monitored, with assessments conducted every three months to evaluate the level of vocational, psychological, and religious training and to assess their readiness for reintegration into society.<sup>13</sup>

### *Education and Curriculum*

At *Sabawoon*, a formal education system registered with the regional Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) exists for children. While the center initially maintained a morning class and afternoon vocational training schedule, this has since evolved due to a decrease in rehabilitees and instructor shortages. Individualized instruction is provided when students require additional support. Special classes are arranged for children, with government instructors from colleges and schools teaching subjects equivalent to grades 7, 8, and 9. At *Mashal* rehabilitation center, vocational training, as well as lessons on Pakistan's philosophy, national anthem, and the recitation and translation of Quranic verses

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<sup>9</sup> Shams Momand, in-person interview, Abbottabad, July 22, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Shams Momand.

<sup>11</sup> Shams Momand

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Arshad Ali.

<sup>13</sup> Respondent # 7, in-person interview, Peshawar, 9 March 2020.

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focusing on Jihad and peace, are offered.<sup>14</sup> The facility has also hosted musical events and other extracurricular activities (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

### *Physical Training*

Rehabilitees begin their day with physical activities and an assembly parade. Following the assembly, juvenile rehabilitees attend classes resembling traditional school, while adults participate in vocational training. Lunch is scheduled for 1:00 PM, followed by opportunities for recreational activities, mainly cricket and football.

### *Religious Training*

Morning sessions involve religious scholars reciting and interpreting the Quran, focusing on the memorization of specific chapters and *Kalmas*. Rehabilitees also study Quranic texts related to Jihad and nonviolence, and scholars clarify any misconceptions.<sup>15</sup> Some of the graduates were praising provision of religious education. They added that this religious education leads to a transformation in the understanding of Islam, with formerly radicalized individuals embracing moderation and participating in various extracurricular activities, including singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments.<sup>16,17</sup>

### *Vocational Training*

Adults receive vocational training in fields such as electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, and auto mechanics. Those aged over 50 are trained in agriculture and related professions. Additional skills like tailoring and computer proficiency are also provided, and daily psychological assessments guide each individual's progress. Rehabilitees receive toolkits upon leaving the center, equipping them to start their own businesses upon reintegration.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Respondent # 8, in-person interview, Mingora, 3 August 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Respondent # 1

<sup>16</sup> Respondent # 6

<sup>17</sup> Respondent # 11

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Nazakat, in-person interview, Swat, 15 August, 2020.

### *Community Engagement*

Community involvement is a crucial aspect of rehabilitation, fostering trust between the community and former combatants. While Sri Lanka involved former combatants in community activities and official visits, Swat has legal processes in place for family members to meet inmates, with the government's authorization and commander referral. Rehabilitees visit their homes on weekends, and the center assists with their reintegration into society (GoSL, 2013, pp. 39-40).

### *Post-Rehabilitation Assistance*

Upon completing rehabilitation, rehabilitees are equipped with various skills. The center may provide laptops, sewing machines, toolkits, and other resources to aid in their reintegration into society. However, there have been limited instances of direct financial support. Despite initial promises, many rehabilitees receive no financial or material assistance upon leaving the facility.<sup>19</sup> A graduate concurred, "I know some have received auto-rikshaws, and to some, the center has extended assistance in running small businesses."<sup>20</sup>

### *Monitoring and Surveillance*

Establishing an effective monitoring system is essential to curbing recidivism; however, direct oversight by state security organizations can introduce complications. An instance of concern arises in the form of stigmatization when security forces closely monitor individuals who have completed rehabilitation, potentially exacerbating the risk of relapse. Drawing insights from Sri Lanka's experience, a less intrusive supervision method involves the integration of former combatants into the Civil Defense Force (CDF).<sup>21</sup> This approach enables rehabilitees to actively contribute to their communities, participate in diverse activities, and foster connections with the local populace, fostering a sense of inclusion and trust (BCGR, 2017). While this approach may not be applicable to Swat due to its specific risk factors for recidivism, a more discreet monitoring strategy could yield superior results. Rehabilitees could find employment in government services or engage in private businesses,

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<sup>19</sup> Respondent # 8.

<sup>20</sup> Respondent # 10.

<sup>21</sup> Brigadier Jayanath (SL), in-person interview, Islamabad, November 12, 2019.

providing financial assistance to the graduates while being subject to the watchful eye of security agencies. This dual benefit not only supports the economic well-being of the individuals but also ensures a level of oversight that is less overt yet effective.

### Critical Analysis of Reintegration

As reintegration is an intangible concept that cannot be practically measured, this study took the approach of evaluating the reintegration of ex-combatants by assessing the quality of rehabilitation provided at the center. The following discussion will offer a comprehensive understanding based on interviews with ex-combatants, community members, nuclear relatives, and officials responsible for the rehabilitation center. The questions aimed to assess the social assimilation of ex-combatant graduates.

The Swat rehabilitation program has successfully reintegrated former combatants, as indicated by available studies (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Ahmed & Rafique, 2013). However, these claims primarily rely on the number of ex-combatants who have completed rehabilitation programs, raising questions about their credibility (Afridi, 2016). The *Sabawoon* center in Swat alone has successfully rehabilitated over 200 adolescents (McCarthy, 2015), and among the 2,500 ex-combatants who have undergone rehabilitation, 200 of them come from *Sabawoon* (Basit, 2015). While the authorities at rehabilitation centers reported a 99% success rate, the lack of independent assessments makes these figures uncertain (Khan, 2022). Moreover, there's no reliable source for estimating the total number of ex-combatants housed or graduated from these facilities.

It's important to note that the success of the program should not be solely based on the completion of rehabilitation. A more effective indicator is the reintegration of former combatants into society, which cannot be quantified but can be assessed qualitatively.

### *Social Integration*

Reintegrating ex-combatants into society is the primary goal of rehabilitation. Social integration is a crucial component as it significantly reduces crime rates (Curt et al., 2007). However, fieldwork in Swat revealed conflicting opinions about the rehabilitation of

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graduates who have been reintegrated into society. Based on personal observations by researchers, a significant number of community members (responding at a rate of six out of eight during interviews) exhibited reluctance to welcome back rehabilitation program graduates, citing concerns about the harm caused by the presence of former combatants within their local communities. Yet, a military respondent argued that rehabilitees would not pose a threat to the community because their fight was primarily against the army and was not against the civilians, and the region's disarmament has made them less of a danger.<sup>22</sup> The military continues to provide protection to the rehabilitees to shield them from potential community hostility (Khan, 2022). While the majority of residents believed that the community's losses were inflicted by militants, they also concurred that the presence of the military ensured the safety of the rehabilitees. However, if the military withdrew, there could be a risk of inter-communal conflict.<sup>23</sup> In interviews, ten out of twelve graduates rejected the officials' claims about the rehabilitation center's support for program graduates post-completion. In response, one graduate provided their perspective, expressing that, "The rehabilitation center looks great on paper, but in practice it offers no financial or material assistance."<sup>24</sup>

### *Reactions of the People towards Rehabilitees*

Families of rehabilitees have shared their experiences and perspectives on the social interactions of the graduates. Some rehabilitees, despite maintaining contact with their cousins, tend to isolate themselves from society. Others have successful stories of reintegration, like Janan, who has a family and was accepted by his father-in-law. However, not all graduates find immediate relief; some experience setbacks in their attempts to reintegrate. As an example, researchers noted instances where families (responding at a rate of two out of four during interviews) disowned individuals undergoing rehabilitation due to apprehensions about their ongoing connections with former combatants, highlighting the

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<sup>22</sup> Lt. Col. Atif, in-person interview, Islamabad, 16 June, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Ihsan.

<sup>24</sup> Respondent # 07



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challenges of reintegration.<sup>25</sup> Stigmatization and lingering radical views remain challenges in the reintegration process.

#### *Vocational and Technical Training: Public and Rehabilitees' Views*

Vocational and technical training is a vital component of rehabilitation, along with social integration, religious instruction, and psychological education. Different training programs tailored to the needs and interests of ex-combatants are provided at each facility. Graduates praised the training's quality and the certification they received, which improved their employability. "Technical and vocational trainings are conducted in *Paitham/Mashal*, where they impart contemporary knowledge and patriotism. In Paitham, a decent citizen actually comes prepared."<sup>26</sup> A rehabilitee revealed, "I have experience in carpentry, but I currently work as a cab driver since I lack the funds to open my own business. I have not received any support, either material or financial."<sup>27</sup> However, all interviewed graduates (n=12) faced difficulties in starting their enterprises and finding jobs after leaving the rehabilitation center. The lack of financial and material support hampered their reintegration (Ahmed & Rafique, 2013). The rehabilitees are also rejected by the community in the provision of jobs or labor because of the stigma associated with them.

#### *Community Perception*

Community members generally support rehabilitation programs but question the effectiveness of short training courses for preparing ex-combatants to compete in the job market. They believe that these individuals need support in finding jobs or establishing businesses. While some rehab centers offer tools and instruments for starting enterprises, financial support is limited. This disparity between the available resources in different countries impacts reintegration outcomes; for example, in Saudi Arabia, the graduates were provided full support from the government (Ahmed & Rafique, 2013). One way to enhance reintegration is for the government and local communities to provide venues for rehabilitees to apply their acquired knowledge. Engaging them in productive activities that contribute to

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<sup>25</sup> Respondent # 9, in-person interview, Peshawar, 19 April, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Respondent # 11, in person interview, Swat, 21 November 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Respondent # 10

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the community can help reduce stigma and demonstrate that former combatants can be productive members of society.

### *Post-release Assistance*

Post-release assistance is critical for successful reintegration. Providing vocational training alone is ineffective without material, financial, and moral support. A study found that the Mashal Rehabilitation Center gives one-time financial and material support to graduates (Azam & Fatima, 2017). This support, primarily facilitated by donor organizations like USAID and FID via the Pakistani army, enables graduates to launch businesses and lead stable lives. Continuous support is necessary for preventing recidivism and maintaining reintegration. However, this claim of the officials is rejected by both the community and by the graduates as well. Most of the graduates (n=10) declined any post-release support offered by the center. One of the graduates further stated, “In start, they promised that they would help us start enterprises and support the graduates in getting employment, but afterwards, they did not offer any assistance in this regard.”<sup>28</sup> A community member commented, “With the training he received at the rehabilitation center, I have never heard of a rehabilitee operating a business.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Recidivism*

The risk of ex-combatants rejoining militant groups should be considered. Four out of ten of community members expressed the belief that the trend towards militarization in society has diminished, thereby lessening motivations for recidivism. However, additional measures, like monitoring hate speech and literature, are essential to ensure sustained reintegration. Rehabilitees should also be discouraged from returning to previous areas, like madrassas, and be supported in avoiding illegal activities that can lead to militant involvement. In Swat Valley, the cases of recidivism questioned the effectiveness of the rehabilitation program.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Respondent # 10, in-person interview, Mingora, 04 August, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Fayaz Zafar, in-person interview, Mingora, 13 June, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Arshad Ali, in-person interview, Swat, 22 July 2019.

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*Surveillance and Monitoring*

Post-release surveillance is a debated issue. It involves cooperation between the local community, security forces, and rehabilitation authorities. Rehabilitees are initially observed by the Pakistani Army and intelligence services. They are then integrated into the community and required to maintain regular contact with the military or police. Monitoring lasts up to two years post-release, with support and guidance provided. The surveillance has garnered criticism from both the community and the rehabilitated individuals due to its association with stigmatization. This stigmatization affects not only the rehabilitated individuals themselves but also their families. They perceive it as akin to being confined, unable to venture beyond their district without prior permission from the security forces. A graduate claimed, “I didn't know I was being watched, but when I went to Mardan (another district), I knew I was being followed. The facility called me after I got home and inquired about my visit.”<sup>31</sup> Twelve respondents, all of whom were graduates of rehabilitation centers, provided descriptions of their situations: “we were certified clear and peaceful by the security forces, hence, there should no longer any monitoring, accusations or arrests.”<sup>32</sup>

*Public Acceptance and Employment*

Rehabilitated graduates face public acceptance issues. While these rehabilitees are set free by the security forces, however, detained by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on various charges, causing frustration and setbacks. This highlights the need for improved coordination between civilian and military departments to ensure the successful reintegration of rehabilitees through employment opportunities.<sup>33</sup> The respondent expressed his concern that it would be extremely difficult for these former combatants to reintegrate into society. He added, “How can I bear and let him into the community?”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Respondent # 11

<sup>32</sup> Respondent # 02

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Ihsan.

<sup>34</sup> Respondent # 5.

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*Stigmatization*

Stigmatization remains a primary barrier to reintegration. Some community members are reluctant to have any contact with rehabilitees. Though a military official downplays this issue, rehabilitees face denigration through songs, poems, and derogatory names. Some popular derogatory names are: *Tasleem bibi* a lady name for surrender, another is *Salender* for surrender; one name associated with these graduates is *Saleete* which denotes the tag number during their release.<sup>35</sup> Stigmatization hampers their reintegration and can lead to harassment.<sup>36</sup> Bridging the trust gap between the community and former militants is essential for ensuring successful reintegration.

**Reintegration**

The previous discussion has highlighted a significant deficiency in the rehabilitation and reintegration of former militants into Pakistani society, with profound implications for the resurgence of militancy. Major shortcomings within the rehabilitation programs have contributed to this concerning phenomenon.

One of the primary shortcomings in the existing programs is the lack of emphasis on social integration for rehabilitees. It is crucial that these individuals not only undergo rehabilitation but also seamlessly reintegrate into society. However, social integration appears to be absent from the rehabilitation equation.<sup>37</sup> This neglect leads to rehabilitees facing stigmatization within society, exacerbating their sense of isolation and potentially driving them back to extremist activities. A respondent from *Mashal* center commented, "Every civilian access to the center was prohibited, although there were occasions during my three months there as inmate when I communicated with my family three times. Additionally, we were permitted to contact home once each week. We were not permitted to leave the center or even access to the market."<sup>38</sup> The statement made by the respondent was echoed by eight graduates from the *Mashal* rehabilitation center.

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<sup>35</sup> Respondent # 7, in person interview, Swat, 21 November 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Arshad Ali.

<sup>37</sup> Respondent #4 & 6.

<sup>38</sup> Respondent # 4.

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Another critical issue is the absence of post-release assistance for these individuals. Without proper support systems in place, rehabilitees are left to fend for themselves in a society that often rejects them. The lack of business opportunities and means to earn a living can push them toward recidivism as a survival strategy.<sup>39</sup>

Strict monitoring and surveillance during and after rehabilitation are also problematic. While these measures aim to ensure security and prevent relapse into militancy, they might inadvertently have the opposite effect. The controlled nature of these programs might not deradicalize the individuals but could redirect their radical tendencies. For example, some ex-combatants have reportedly shifted their perspective to see themselves fighting alongside the Pakistan army rather than against it, indicating that they may still harbor radical inclinations, albeit potentially aligned with state interests.<sup>40</sup>

An additional concern is the recent "victory" of militant groups in Afghanistan, which has emboldened and encouraged former militants in Pakistan to resurge. The belief in their cause and ideology remains intact, and with a favorable environment across the border, there is a real risk that these individuals might actively rejoin extremist ranks.

It is imperative to reevaluate and enhance the rehabilitation and reintegration of former militants in Pakistan. The current approach, marked by social isolation, a lack of post-release support, and controlled rehabilitation, has inadvertently contributed to a resurgence of militancy. The influence of external factors, such as developments in Afghanistan, further complicates the situation. Addressing these shortcomings and adopting a more comprehensive, community-based approach that emphasizes genuine social integration and support may be the key to preventing the resurgence of militants and ensuring a safer future for Pakistan.

## Discussion

The management of rehabilitation in Swat Valley, under the Pakistan Army's control, presents a unique case. However, it restricts access for data collection and external evaluation by civilian entities. The study has revealed inadequacies in the existing facilities, notably their

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<sup>39</sup> Dr. Husnul Amin, in-person interview, Islamabad, 09 April 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Respondent # 10, in-person interview, Mingora, 04 August, 2019.

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limited capacity to accommodate ex-combatants effectively. Furthermore, it's crucial to monitor the unrestricted movement and social interactions of "self-integrated"<sup>41</sup> ex-combatants, as these individuals may still be susceptible to recruitment by violent groups.

Financial constraints hinder the full reintegration of rehabilitees into society, as graduates from these centers often receive minimal to no financial support to start their businesses. Additionally, the growing presence of radicals and extremists in the community, who also require rehabilitation, presents a challenge.<sup>42</sup> The community's mixed support for rehabilitation programs and the ongoing stigmatization and discrimination faced by rehabilitees, particularly in the job market, highlight the need to involve the community in the rehabilitation process. Bridging the trust gap between the community and former militants is essential for successful reintegration.<sup>43</sup>

Recognizing these shortcomings in the existing centers, there's a pressing need for a more viable and cost-effective alternative strategy. It's essential to balance security measures with a focus on human and community aspects. The involvement of civil institutions and a community-based approach could be a more satisfactory solution, drawing upon traditional methods of negotiation and conflict resolution. Restorative justice, which aligns with the traditional *Pashtunwali*, could offer a more effective and community-centered approach to rehabilitation in Swat Valley.

## Conclusion

The resurgence of militancy in Pakistan, particularly in Swat Valley, is a complex challenge with deeply rooted causes. While several factors contribute to this resurgence, the most significant are the potential presence of militant narratives within society, the concealed existence of militants, and the inadequately assimilated graduates of rehabilitation centers.

The rehabilitation programs, while well-intentioned, suffer from a fundamental flaw: the lack of differentiation among rehabilitees based on their specific needs and grievances. The uniform and generic rehabilitation process does not adequately address individual issues.

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<sup>41</sup> The combatants resettled in society without passing through rehabilitation.

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Husnul Amin

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Husnul Amin

Additionally, access restrictions for civilian and humanitarian organizations hinder the availability of necessary resources.

The study also investigates the concept of reintegration in a controlled society, using Swat Valley as a case study. Social integration emerges as a vital metric for rehabilitation effectiveness, and the study reveals mixed responses from both the community and former militants who have undergone rehabilitation. Post-release support and income generation based on vocational training are crucial components. Stigmatization as a barrier to social integration and the lack of political education and awareness are other pressing issues.

The absence of community engagement in the rehabilitation process is a significant concern. Involving the community in the program can foster ownership and enable the community to build connections with the ex-combatants. The community-based approach is considered a more cost-effective and appealing strategy that may hold the key to addressing the complexities of rehabilitation and reintegration in Swat Valley and similar contexts.

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ISSN: 2363-9849

Editor in Chief: Daniel Koehler