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Publisher: Routledge  
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Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Terrorism and Political Violence

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713636843>

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C. Christine Fair<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> RAND Corporation, Washington, D.C., USA

Online Publication Date: 01 January 2008

To cite this Article: Fair, C. Christine (2008) 'Who Are Pakistan's Militants and Their Families?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:1, 49 - 65

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/09546550701733996

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546550701733996>

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# Who Are Pakistan's Militants and Their Families?

C. CHRISTINE FAIR

RAND Corporation, Washington, D.C., USA

*This article presents results of a survey of 141 Pakistani families of slain militants. This survey collected data about the militants and their households. While derived from a convenience sample, these data are unprecedented and offer a glimpse into the backgrounds of militants and the families who (mostly) supported their decision to join the jihad. Most militants served and died in Kashmir and seem to be “high quality” militants in that they, like their heads of household, are well educated and not predominantly coming from seminaries, as is often claimed. This analysis suggests that while the militants merit attention, so do the families that produce militants.*

**Keywords** Afghanistan, insurgency, Kashmir, madrassahs, militancy, Pakistan, terrorism

## Introduction to Militancy, Pakistan, and Its Import

As is well known, Pakistan is home to numerous militant organizations or “*askari tanzeemat*” (henceforth “tanzeems”) that operate—or have operated in the past—with relative impunity.<sup>2</sup> This is true despite the state’s episodic efforts to ban key groups since 2001 and the growing recognition that Islamist militancy is the most significant risk to Pakistan’s internal security. Pakistan’s militant landscape include groups that have traditionally focused upon Kashmir, such as the Deobandi *tanzeems* Jaish-e-Mohammad, Harkat-ul-Ansar/Harkat-ul-Mujahidin; Ahl-e-Hadith organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba; as well as groups operating under the influence of the Jamaat-e-Islami such as Al Badr and Hizbul Mujahidin. Other *tanzeems* have been traditionally sectarian in nature and include the anti-Shi’a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> Both are under the sway of the Deobandi organization Jamiat-e-Ulema Islami (JUI) and are funded by wealthy Arab individuals and organizations. Notably, many of these Deobandi *tanzeems* have overlapping membership and they also have strong connections to the JUI.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, Pakistani Islamist militants are self-referring as Taliban not only in Pakistan’s tribal areas, but also in the settled areas as attested to by the Taliban supporters who were ensconced in Islamabad’s Lal Masjid until the Pakistani security forces launched Operation Silence in July 2007 to oust them.<sup>5</sup> In the past, Shi’a sectarian groups were also lethally active. These groups targeted Sunni Muslims and obtained funding from Iran, although these groups have largely disappeared.<sup>6</sup>

This work was done while the author was a Senior Research Fellow with the United States Institute of Peace. The author is now a Senior Political Scientist with RAND. This article reflects the views of the author and not those of USIP or RAND.

Address correspondence to C. Christine Fair, RAND Corporation. E-mail: fair@rand.org

These various groups and their sympathizers pose grave risks to Pakistan's domestic security as well as regional security, with significant impacts in India and Afghanistan. Pakistan has served as a transit and training destination for international terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, and Pakistan's Deobandi groups retain close ties to Al Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>7</sup> Despite the preponderance of *tanzeems* in Pakistan and their various levels of import, relatively little is known about the various militants themselves operating in Pakistan, their motivation for joining their respective "*jihads*," or the support that they enjoy within their family structures and within their community.

Many scholars, relying upon highly selective interviews in Pakistan, have argued that Pakistan's *madrassahs*<sup>8</sup> are the weapons of mass instruction that indoctrinate Pakistan's poor and prepare them to join the ranks of militant groups. Such scholars and analysts have also contended that Pakistan's militants are generally poor, with little or no education and radicalized in the aforementioned *madrassahs*.<sup>9</sup> (These claims generally are *inconsonant* with the consensus within the terrorism literature that militants are not overwhelmingly poor and uneducated.) The belief that poverty and lack of education undergirds terrorism is pervasive within policy circles. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, commentators frequently opined that there was an urgent need for increased education and expanded aid programs that would, they reasoned, curb terrorism as reflected in the statement by U.S. President George W. Bush who proclaimed that "we fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror."<sup>10</sup> With respect to Pakistan in particular, *The 9/11 Commission Report* claimed that "Pakistan's endemic poverty, widespread corruption, and often ineffective government create opportunities for Islamist recruitment. Poor education is a particular concern."<sup>11</sup> These views persist despite the lack of evidence supporting their validity.

Given the importance of Pakistan and the conflicting opinions about the nature of militancy there, there have been surprisingly few systematic efforts to gather information about Pakistan's militants and even fewer systematic efforts to characterize the backgrounds from which they are drawn. Notable exceptions include work done by Mariam Abou Zahab as well as Mohammad Amir Rana.<sup>12</sup> While the former relies upon *tanzeem's* published biographies of militants and the latter's work focuses upon the groups, rather than the individuals and their families.

To glean some insights into the background, motivation, and family structure of militants, the author worked with a Pakistan-based research team to identify and survey 141 families whose male members joined *jihadi tanzeems* and eventually became *shaheeds* (martyrs) fighting in Kashmir or Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Respondents provided extensive personal information as well as information about the *shaheed's* household and about the *shaheed* himself. The respondent answered numerous questions about the *shaheed's* educational, work, and family background. They furnished information about where the *shaheed* was recruited, the group he joined, where he was trained, and where he served and died. This essay presents the results of the first level of analyses of these data and serves as an important reference point for subsequent analyses of these data. It is hoped that a better understanding of the militants, their motivations, and their support structure will better enable Pakistan and the international community to devise policy interventions that will over time mitigate in such groups and community support for such volunteerism.

After detailing methodological aspects of this survey, this essay exposts basic information about the households' geographical distribution, structure, and size. This exercise permits one to benchmark the sample to Pakistan generally. This section also presents information about the household's knowledge of the aspiring *mujahid's* decision to join a *tanzeem* and the degree of support they offered him. (A *mujahid* is one who fights in a *jihad*.) While the survey queried respondents about household income, assets, and expenditures, very few respondents provided this information. Due to missing data, it is not possible to benchmark respondent families accordingly. This essay next details respondent information, which in most cases was the head of household. (One cannot assume that the person who was the head of household on the day of the survey was the head of household when the family member joined a *tanzeem*.)<sup>14</sup> The following section describes information gathered about the *shaheeds* themselves. Next this essay presents information garnered about the material and immaterial benefits that the households derived from the *mujahid's* death and attainment of martyrdom (*shahadat*). The final section of this article will conclude with a number of policy-relevant implications of this article.

## Research Design

To cast light both on militant characteristics as well as upon family structure and support for militant activities in Pakistan, the author commissioned a survey of 141 families in Pakistan under the auspices of the United States Institute of Peace, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention. Working with two team-leaders in Pakistan, the team fielded a comprehensive questionnaire to a convenience sample of families mostly concentrated in the two provinces of the Punjab and the North-west Frontier Province. However, families from Sindh, Baluchistan, and Pakistan-administered Kashmir were also included. Figure 1 compares the geographical distribution of the USIP convenience sample to that of the sample for the most recent census of Pakistan (1998).

These data were collected over a period of approximately eight months between August 7, 2004 and April 12, 2005, with most being completed by the end of 2004. Surveys were administered to households who lost at least one male to his respective *jihad*. Efforts were made to exclude those households with *mujahids* from the Soviet-era and to focus upon those households who lost male family members from 1990 onward (e.g., during the Taliban and warlord periods in Afghanistan and during the onset of the Kashmir insurgency).

To collect these data, the Pakistan-based research team began with *tanzeem* reports of their martyred *mujahids*<sup>15</sup> or *shaheeds*. It is important to note that "*shaheed*" does not mean "suicide operative." In the Pakistan case—as elsewhere—a *shaheed* simply denotes one who died in a struggle considered at least by some to be sanctified. Not all *shaheeds* are *mujahids* (e.g., civilians killed by security forces) and not all *mujahids* become *shaheeds*. In this sample, only slain *mujahidin* are included. Militant reports of their *shaheed* were used to identify families. In some instances, the team worked with former militants to obtain access to families. While the team aimed to recruit 150 families, they succeeded in obtaining only 141 families.

The survey instrument collected personal information about the respondent (e.g., marital status, age, educational attainment (secular and religious)), who in almost all cases was the male head of household. The survey also asked respondents about the household, including its size, the number of families, and a complete

family roster with the educational attainment (both secular and religious) for each person identified on the roster. It collected data on the affiliation of any household member with an array of police and armed services; employment of all males and females in the household; household income, expenditures, and assets; family religiosity and attendance of religious study circles; family sectarian membership (Shi'a vs. Sunni, Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandi, Barelvi, etc.); and the degree of religiosity before and after the *mujahid's* martyrdom.

The instrument included questions about the militant including where he obtained militant training; where he served and where he died; where and how he was recruited; his work and educational background; his marital status at the time of recruitment and death. The respondent also answered questions (both long form and multiple choice) about the degree of support that the militant enjoyed from within his household.

This article draws upon other published studies to benchmark these data, such as the 1998 Pakistan Census, the Population Council's *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001–2002*, and work conducted by Tahir Andrabi *et al.* for the World Bank. Of course it must be embraced up front that this is a convenience sample of *shaheed* families. Because it is not a random sample, it is not possible to say to what degree this sample resembles the distribution of all militants in Pakistan. Indeed such a survey of all known militants is likely impossible to execute. Similarly the sample suffers from various kinds of selection bias in that the families were not randomly recruited and that the families agreed to participate in a study funded by the United States Institute of Peace. Surely this limits the generalizability of these results.

## Household Characteristics

The geographic distribution of families in this sample varies dramatically from that of Pakistan writ large (see Figure 1). The majority of respondents were concentrated in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) (55 percent) and the second largest fraction of respondents came from the Punjab (26 percent). Using mother tongue as a proxy for ethnicity, 55 percent claimed Pashtu, 13 percent claimed Punjabi, 12 percent claimed Urdu, and 11 percent claimed Kashmiri. Small numbers also claimed Hindko, Saraiki, and Pothwari. Figure 1 underscores the degree to which this sample *does not* resemble the population distribution writ large in Pakistan.

In many respects, households in this sample resemble Pakistani households generally. For example, nearly half (53 percent) of the households were nuclear families. Among all households in Pakistan, about 49 percent are nuclear and among urban households, 53 percent are nuclear.<sup>16</sup> Sampled *shaheed* households tended to be larger than Pakistani households on average. The mean *shaheed* household size was about 12 persons, whereas overall in Pakistan, the average household size is between 7 and 8 persons.<sup>17</sup>

Together the 141 surveyed households yielded 200 members who became *mujahids*, averaging about 1.4 per household. The majority of households (90) had only one *mujahid*; 28 households had two; 12 had three; and there were two households with four and five *mujahids* respectively. Of these, 150 became *shaheed*. (Details of the *shaheed* are explicated later in this essay.) Because several households

Region	Census (Percentage of Total Population =133M)	Distribution of Sample (Percentage of Total Sample=141)
NWFP	17,743,645 (13%)	78 (55%)
FATA	3,176,331 (2%)	--
Punjab	73,621,290 (56%)	37 (26%)
Sindh	30,439,893 (23%)	3 (2%)
Baluchistan	6,565,885 (5%)	5 (4%)
Islamabad	805,235 (1%)	--
Azad Kashmir	Not in Pakistan Census	18 (13%)

**Figure 1.** Geographical distribution of sample by province.

had more than one *shaheed*, respondents were asked to reflect upon the first or only household member who became a *shaheed*.

This survey found that generally, households were aware that their family member embraced *jihad*. For the first (or only) member who joined a *tanzeem*, the vast majority knew (110 of 141 or 78 percent) of this decision. For those households with more than one *shaheed*, the respondents were asked about their knowledge of the *most recent* member who became a *shaheed*. Among those households, *every* one knew that the family member joined a *tanzeem*. If the respondents spoke truthfully, this suggests that the household environment may have become *more* accepting or permissive for the second (or most recent) *mujahid*. Had the household felt aggrieved or harmed by the decision, the second member may have tried to hide his intentions. This finding could also suggest that only those households that are permissive produced multiple *mujahids*.

Respondents were asked two separate questions to gauge *active support* for and *active resistance* to the *mujahid's* decision. To measure support, they were asked whether the respondent or someone else in the household gave permission or blessing for his participation in *jihad*. To measure resistance, respondents were asked whether

anyone in the household refused to give such permission or blessing. While *prima facie* these should be comparable variables, there is reason to believe that families may “over report” giving blessing while choosing to “under report” refusal. This could arise due to, *inter alia*, the general support that militant families receive in Pakistan. For instance, it is not uncommon that local communities will have wells or other public facilities dedicated to a particular militant in a locality. Moreover, in Pakistan, families of militants receive approbation—not opprobrium—from their communities for their family member’s sacrifices. Bearing in mind that the introduction to these families was often facilitated by current or former members of *tanzeems*, families may have been reluctant to report refusal (perhaps out of embarrassment or fear) and may have been over-zealous to report giving blessing or approval.

Overall 70 percent of all households gave permission (answered affirmatively to the consent question) and 41 percent reported refusal (answered affirmatively to the refusal question). Because these are two distinct questions, they do not sum to 100 percent and respondents could answer both independently of each other. Because these are households, it is entirely likely that someone gave permission while someone else may have refused to give permission. Indeed this was the case. Many households were mixed in that someone gave the *mujahid* permission while someone else in the household refused to do so. Of the consent households, only 63 percent of the households were “pure” permission households in which someone gave permission while no one refused to do so. The remaining households were mixed, simultaneously refusing and consenting. Of the refusal households, over half (52 percent) were pure refusal households in that someone actively refused permission and no one provided permission. The remainder of the “refusal households” was mixed as well. This suggests that households were conflicted in their decision to support the family member’s decision to join a *tanzeem*. These findings underscore the fact that these households are not univocal in their support for family member’s decision to join *jihād*. Subsequent analyses of these data concentrate upon the determinants of family support and the characteristics of these different kinds of households.<sup>18</sup>

### Respondent Characteristics

In Pakistan, as elsewhere in South Asia, heads of household have significant influence over household members and household decision making. For this reason, the survey collected background information about the respondents including *inter alia* the location of residence, ethnicity, age, gender, and educational background.

The survey respondents were typically married, male, heads of household. Only 17 (12 percent) respondents attended a *madrasah* among whom only 7 percent obtained a certificate (*sanad*) from the religious school. Generally, attaining such a certificate requires full-time attendance for at least two years. (The highest certificate requires at least 8 years of *madrasah* study.) This suggests that overall only about 4 percent of the respondents attended a *madrasah* full-time. It’s worth noting that the World Bank’s overall estimate of full-time enrollments in Pakistan is on this order of magnitude (between 1 and 3 percent).<sup>19</sup> Among this sample, the prevalence of *madrasah* attendance does not appear to be substantively different from the intensity of *madrasah* utilization across most of Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

With respect to secular education, respondents were also well educated, compared to Pakistani males in general. While 27 percent had no formal education, 22 percent had less than a matriculation (a.k.a. “matric” or 10th grade), 22 percent

had a matriculation but less than intermediate degree (12th grade), 16 percent had an intermediate degree but less than a degree (14 years, the equivalent of a BA), and 13 percent had some sort of post-secondary education. This suggests that overall, more than half of the respondents were matriculates. Completion of matriculation (a.k.a. "matric") is a major educational benchmark in Pakistan, which requires students to complete ten years of education and pass an exam.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, among Pakistani males generally, only 32 percent are matric graduates.<sup>22</sup> Compared to these national standards, the respondents in the sample are considerably more educated than the average Pakistani male. This finding undermines the common aphorism that militants come out of environments of ignorance.

Because of the long-standing ties to militancy and the security and intelligence forces in Pakistan, it is reasonable to hypothesize that military households may in some measure be receptive to *jihadi* activism.<sup>23</sup> To test this, the survey asked about respondent and household participation in a wide array of security forces. Overall, about 14 percent of the respondents in the sample had some form of military experience: 10 (14 percent) served in the army, 1 (1 percent) served in the navy; 2 (1 percent) served in a national guard component (e.g., Janbaz, Ansar, *Mujahidin*, Azad Kashmir Regiment, or Mehran Force); 1 (1 percent) served with the police and 5 (4 percent) served in some other (unspecified) security force.

Unfortunately, there are no publicly available statistics on the prevalence of military service for Pakistan. However, in Pakistan, there are 620,400 (estimated) active-duty personnel in the Pakistan army, air force, marines, and navy and another 302,000 estimated to be in active paramilitary (e.g., the Frontier Corps, Pakistan Rangers, and the National Guard). With a total population of 84,199,259 males, overall about 1 percent of all men are employed in the Pakistan armed forces in some capacity. Of the 29,428,747 men who qualify for military service, about 3 percent are currently engaged in some form of armed service.<sup>23</sup> These figures are not directly comparable to the prevalence of military service in the sample because the respondents' military engagement reflects "lifetime" service and includes veterans as well as those currently in service. As such one would expect the prevalence of military experience within the sample to exceed that of the fraction of men currently in uniform. Moreover, the sample includes forces (such as the police) that are not included in the above-noted order of battle. However, Ayesha Siddiqi (renowned expert on the Pakistan military) estimates that perhaps 7–8 percent of the population (mostly male) has served at any given time in the Pakistani armed forces.<sup>24</sup>

Respondents also provided information about the interpretative tradition of Islam they embrace. (There were no Shi'a in the sample.) Sixty percent indicated that they are Deobandi, 22 percent indicated "Ahl-e-Sunnat" (which means simply "Sunni" and suggests an affiliation with Jamaat Islami), 11 percent indicated that they are Barelvi and 6 percent indicated Ahl-e-Hadith. While there are no reliable statistics on how representative these figures are of the nation overall, it is widely suspected that Barelvis are the majority in Pakistan.

Respondents also provided information about their household's religiosity. Respondents were asked, 'How religious are the members of your household relative to other families you know?' (The respondents were not prompted in their answers and thus, this question reflects a subjective opinion of their relative religiosity.) Nearly 75 percent (105) of the respondents replied that their household is "about the same" as other families they associate with. Twenty-one percent believed that their household is "more religious than most," and only 5 percent believed they are less religious than most.



To further probe the religiosity of the households, the survey asked respondents whether any male or female members of the household attend (currently) *dars-e-qur'an* (Qur'anic study circles) or *deeni majlis* (religious gatherings). A significant number of respondents answered in the affirmative with 97 percent reporting that males attend such gatherings and 82 percent for females. Again, there is no known survey with which to benchmark this nationally. However, the 2001 wave of the World Values Survey asked Pakistani respondents about their attendance of religious service, according to which 50 percent attend such service more often than once a week, 23 percent report doing so once a week and 17 percent report doing so once a month. In total more than 91 percent report such attendance at least once a month. (Only 8 percent do so either once a year or on special occasions.)<sup>25</sup>

Respondents also discussed their household's religiosity after their male member's death. While most respondents (58 percent) replied that the level of religiosity in the household remained "about the same," nearly all of the remaining respondents (41 percent, or 58 respondents) answered that their household's religious activity had *increased* following their family member's *shahadat*.

### Shaheed Characteristics

While most surveyed households (70 percent, or 99 of 141 respondents) had only one *mujahid*, one in five had two *mujahids*. Fewer than one in ten had three *mujahids* from their household, and one household each had four and five *mujahids*. Respondents provided information about where these *mujahids* served. As shown in Figure 2, most of the *mujahids* served in Kashmir rather than Afghanistan. (Because they could serve in more than one theatre, they need not total to 141.)

Respondents identified which *mujahids* became *shaheed* and where his death occurred, to the best of their knowledge. It is reasonable to expect them to know something as militant leadership often comes to the *shaheed's* family to congratulate them and provide compensation of some kind. Of course, the groups may not provide accurate information to the family. As Figure 3 shows, most of the militants are believed to have died in Kashmir. (Responses do not total to 141 either because some respondents did not answer the question.)

Muj. In Household	Kashmir	Afghanistan	India
<i>Mujahidin</i> #1	122	36	1
<i>Mujahidin</i> #2	34	7	--
<i>Mujahidin</i> #3	11	3	--
<i>Mujahidin</i> #4	1	1	--
<i>Mujahidin</i> #5	--	1	--

**Figure 2.** Location of where each *shaheed* served (percentage of sample).

Location	<i>Shaheed</i> #1	<i>Shaheed</i> #2	<i>Shaheed</i> #3
Kashmir	118	13	1
Afghanistan	18	0	0

**Figure 3.** Location where each *shaheed* was martyred (not all who served).

Respondents were asked about the age of death. Overall the militants were young when they died. While the average and median age of death was 22 years of age, the youngest was 12 and the oldest was 52 years of age. The bulk of these fighters (79 percent) died between the ages of 17 and 25, as shown in Figure 4. (Data are missing for 17 records.)

Respondents also answered questions about the militants' organizational affiliation. No respondent identified the anti-Shi'a sectarian organizations Lashkar-e-Jhangvi or Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan and, as noted, there were no Shi'a in the sample and thus, there were no members of Shi'a militant groups. The largest portion (57 percent) of the sample was comprised of Jamaat Islami-backed groups operating in Kashmir: 54 from Al Badr and 27 from Hizb-ul-Mujahidin. About one quarter of the sample was affiliated with a Deobandi *tanzeem*: 18 served with Harkat-ul-Mujahidin and 6 with Jaish-e-Mohammad. Ahl-e-Hadith *tanzeems* accounted for 13 percent with 13 from Lashkar-e-Taiba and 5 from Tehrik-ul-Mujahidin. The Jamaat-Islami dissident group with Deobandi and Wahhabi leanings, Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, accounted for another 6 percent with 9 *shaheeds*. Barelvis accounted for a mere two percent of the sample, with two *shaheeds* from the Sunni *Jihad* Council and one from Tehreek-e-Jihad. (See Figure 5.)

While it is reasonable to assume that persons join *tanzeems* of their own masliq (sectarian belief, such as Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandi, Barelvi, Jamaat Islami), previous analyses suggest that this is not always the case.<sup>26</sup> For example, Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is Ahl-e-Hadith, engages in proselytization among Muslims to "convert" them to the Ahl-e-Hadith tradition both through their "*jihad*" program and through their other social outreach programs, which include health clinics, schools and, of course,

Age range	Distribution of Sample (Percentage of Total Sample=141)
12-16	8 (6%)
17-25	98 (79%)
25-52	18 (15%)

**Figure 4.** Age range of *shaheed*.

Name of <i>tanzeem</i>	Distribution of Sample (Percentage of Total Sample=141)
Al Badr (Jamaat-e-Islami)	54 (38%)
Hizb-ul-Mujahidin (Jamaat-e-Islami)	27 (19%)
Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (Deobandi)	18 (13%)
Lashkar-e-Taiba (Ahl-e-Hadith)	13 (9%)
Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (Deobandi and Wahabbi inclined)	9 (6%)
Jaish-e-Mohammed (Deobandi)	6 (4%)
Tehrik-ul-Mujahidin (Ahl-e-Hadith)	5 (4%)
Sunni Jihad Council (Barelvi)	2 (1%)
Tehreek-e-Jihad (Barelvi)	1 (1%)
Don't know	1 (1%)

**Figure 5.** *Tanzeem* affiliated with *shaheed*.

*madaris*. In fact Lashkar-e-Taiba will send many more recruits through their training camps than they will ever actually deploy to Kashmir or India. This is because Lashkar-e-Taiba's leadership anticipates that a trained "*mujahid*" will return to his village and proselytize and recruit on behalf of the organization and promote its sectarian agenda and its social objectives.<sup>27</sup> When non-Ahle-e-Hadith adherents join Lashkar-e-Taiba and undertake training with the organization, they are taught to disavow their past tradition and embrace the practices and beliefs of the Ahl-e-Hadith masliq.<sup>28</sup> To determine how often recruits joined *tanzeems* that are of sectarian traditions other than their own, the instrument asked respondents whether the *shaheed* belonged to the *tanzeem*'s masliq before joining. While the majority (78 percent) joined a *tanzeem* of their own masliq, 16 percent did not. (These do not sum to 100 percent because some respondents did not answer the question.)

Respondents provided data about the places and means through which the *mujahid* was recruited. Despite the popular press accounts that *madaris* are the primary route of militant recruitment, in this sample the largest fraction of *shaheed* (35 percent) were recruited into their *tanzeem* through a friend. Relatives were identified

as the means of recruitment for 9 percent of the *shaheeds*. Mosques were identified as the place of recruitment for about one quarter of the sample. *Tabligh*, or small itinerate proselytizing groups, accounted for 19 percent of the *shaheed's* recruitment. *Madaris* and public schools each accounted for 13 percent of the militants. (No respondent identified private schools as the place of recruitment.) (Twenty-eight respondents did not know or did not identify the means of recruitment.) In sum, this suggests that religious gatherings (mosques, *tabligh*) account for about 44 percent of the *shaheeds'* recruitment, 42 percent occurred through friends or family, and only 26 percent occurred through an educational institution (*madrassah*, public school).<sup>29</sup>

Prior to concluding that *madaris* are irrelevant to militant recruitment in the region or otherwise unimportant, there is strong evidence that many—but by no means all—of Pakistan's suicide attackers and sectarian militants do come from *madaris*. In fact, many of the Pakistan-recruited suicide attackers who operate in Afghanistan appear to be recruited in large measure from *madaris*, in contravention to the conventional wisdom about suicide attacks. This may be due to historical reasons: the Taliban who now use suicide missions were in their origins based in Pakistan's *madaris*. Similarly, Deobandi sectarian militant groups in Pakistan also have been historically tied to Deobandi *madaris*. Suicide terrorism in Pakistan began as a Deobandi phenomenon perpetrated by groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jaish-e-Mohammad.<sup>30</sup>

Respondents were asked whether or not the *mujahid* received some form of training before formally joining the *tanzeem*. (For example, some *tanzeems* permit college students to come and “practice” while on school breaks.) Respondents reported that 117 (out of 141 or 83 percent) had attended some sort of informal training, such as visiting the camps, before joining the *jihad*, and at least one *shaheed* had prior experience with the Pakistani Air Force before joining. Respondents were asked about the rank of the *shaheed* before his death: 30 (21 percent) of the *shaheed* in the sample achieved the rank of commander while the remaining were cadres.

Respondents revealed considerable details about the *shaheed's* education and work experience. One of the most important findings of this study is that on the main, the *shaheed*—like the respondents—are actually better educated than the average Pakistani. Only 6 percent had no formal education, 35 percent had some primary education but were not matriculates, 40 percent were matriculates but had not attained their intermediate degree (FA), 13 percent had their FA but not their BA; and 6 percent had some sort of post-secondary education. In other words, some 58 percent of the *shaheeds* in the sample were matriculates and of those many had obtained further education. When one considers that throughout all of Pakistan, fewer than one in three males are matriculates and when one considers further that the bulk of this sample was derived from the NWFP where educational attainment is among the lowest in Pakistan, the males in this sample are extremely well educated, again underscoring the need to interrogate common assumptions that Pakistan's militants are all uneducated, *madaris* products.

In addition to secular education, the survey queried respondents about the *shaheed's* *madrassah* attendance. Overall, fewer than one in four *shaheed* had attended a *madrassah* (23 percent). Of the 33 *shaheed* that attended a *madrassah*, 13 attained a religious certificate (*sanad*). This represents about 9 percent of the overall sample and 40 percent of all who attended a *madrassah*. The *sanad* attainment rate is double that for respondents. Such a direct comparison is not really

possible however. As noted, there are four kinds of sanads. The lowest requires only two years (Thanviya-e-Ammah) and the highest (*Alimiyah*) requires eight years. Without knowing which sanad the respondent and *shaheed* received, one cannot say definitely who attended *madaris* more intensively. Of those *shaheed* who attended a *madrassah*, the median years attended was three. The vast majority (93 percent) attended five years or fewer.

Taken together, the militants in this sample are well educated and not preponderantly educated at a *madrassah*, although one quarter of them were and nearly one in ten obtained a sanad. Given that most served and died in Kashmir where operational requirements are demanding, one would expect these operatives to be reasonably well educated.<sup>31</sup> These findings are consonant with other studies examining the relationship between human capital and “quality of terror” perpetrated by militant groups.<sup>32</sup>

Respondents also provided information about the *shaheed's* employment the year prior to his recruitment. The largest fraction (50 percent) of *shaheed* did not work at all the year before he joined the *tanzeem*. About one in four *shaheed* worked part time and another one in four worked full time. Taken together, about three-quarter of the sample was either unemployed or under-employed. In contrast, throughout Pakistan between 2002 and 2006, the unemployment rate averaged somewhat below 8 percent; throughout the 1990s the average unemployment rate was slightly above 5 percent and for the last half of the 1980s, it was 3.3 percent.<sup>33</sup> By any measure, the unemployment rate of these males was quite high particularly given the fact that overall, this was a very well educated sample.

Part of the unemployment rate seems to stem from the fact that many joined the *tanzeem* right out of school. When respondents were asked about the kind of job that the would-be *mujahid* had prior to joining the *tanzeem*, 33 (23 percent) of the *shaheed* were studying at a public school or *madrassa* prior to joining the *tanzeem*. If one deducts those 33 from the 70 who were unemployed, one in four were unemployed rather than one in two. This still suggests a high unemployment rate conditional on being well-educated. Respondents provided information about the kind of employment in which the would-be *mujahidin* were engaged. The jobs held by these men varied considerably: While many were shopkeepers, farmers, or day laborers, several were highly skilled and worked as doctors, paramedics, auto mechanics, and X-ray technicians. One of the *shaheeds* was a member of the Frontier Constabulary. Of those 69 *shaheeds* who were employed (full or part time), 81 percent (56) had been employed for a period of just under a year to four years. The high degree of unemployment or underemployment conditional on being relatively well educated is worth noting.

The survey also inquired about the *shaheed's* marital status, both at the time of their death and at the time of their recruitment, and whether he had children. Consistent with the popular belief that militants tend to be young and unmarried, only 20 (14 percent) were married at the time of their recruitment and one was separated. Nineteen (13 percent) were married and one was separated from his wife at the time of their deaths. Of those who were married, 15 (11 percent) had children.

### Benefits of Shaheed and Perceived Community Status

Pakistan, like Palestine and other theatres for Islamist conflict, has a rich martyrdom culture wherein the community confers an important status to families of *shaheed*.

These benefits can be material in that the community provides financial assistance to the family of the *shaheed*. Wells, murals, or other public testament to the *shaheed*'s sacrifice may be erected. During author fieldwork in Pakistan over the last thirteen years, the author has also heard that families who have lost a family member to *jihad* enjoy better marital alliances for surviving sons and daughters. This can manifest in the form of marrying their children into higher status families than they would otherwise or it may take the form of increased dowry payments for boys (for those ethnic groups who practice dowry) and decreased amounts given in dowry when they arrange weddings for the daughters of a *shaheed* family. To query the degree of material and social benefits arising from the *mujahid*'s martyrdom, the survey asked respondents about a range of potential benefits.

Respondents were questioned about various aspects of household status following the *mujahid*'s death and attainment of *shahadat* (becoming a *shaheed*). Contrary to expectation, only 17 (12 percent) households believed that their status in the community had improved as a consequence of becoming a *shaheed* family. Most (75 percent) respondents believed that their status in the community remained "about the same as before" and 10 households reported that their status was "worse off than before." (Nine declined to answer the question.)

Respondents were also asked about the impact of their *shaheed* status on marital alliances for other males and females in the household. For those households who practice dowry (i.e., as in the Punjab but not in NWFP where brideprice is practiced), respondents answered questions about dowry payments for girls' weddings following the *mujahid*'s *shahadat*. Among the 67 respondents who answered the question (i.e., who had a wedding for a daughter and practice dowry), the majority (58) reported no change while 6 reported paying less and 3 reported paying more. However, more families reported having access to better families. Of the 90 households that had a female marry since the family member became a *shaheed*, 23 (26 percent) said they had married into better families, while 66 (73 percent) reported no change. Only one respondent felt they arranged the girl's wedding to a worse family as a consequence of becoming a *shaheed* household.

Respondents also discussed the impact upon marital alliances for boys arranged upon becoming a *shaheed* household. These patterns were similar to those of female marital alliances. Of the 64 households who had a marriage and who practice dowry, 5 (8 percent) reported getting more dowry for boys' weddings following the *shahadat* and an equal number reported receiving less dowry. The majority (54) reported no change in dowry received. As with female marital alliances, while dowry was not a huge benefit for most families, somewhat more respondents believed they had access to better families following the *shahadat*. Of the 76 families who had arranged a boy's wedding following the family member's *shahadat*, 18 (24 percent) reported marrying into better families while the majority (58) reported no change in status of family alliances.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan many foreign *mujahids*, the so-called Arab-Afghans, began to settle down in Pakistan and married local women, especially in the Pashtun areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Respondents were asked whether any foreign *mujahids* married into their family following the boy's *shahadat*. Only 2 respondents (1 percent) responded that a foreign *mujahid* had married into their family after their relative became *shaheed*.

Respondents also reported any financial assistance they received from the community, *shaheed*'s *tanzeem*, and even the Pakistani government. While it was

expected that most families would demur from answering this sensitive question, 19 respondents (13 percent) reported receiving financial support from the government and 61 (43 percent) admitted financial assistance from the *tanzeem* after the *mujahid* died in action. These payments varied in size, frequency (one time, monthly, annual, on special occasions like Eid), and by the number of family members a household sacrificed to the cause.

## Conclusions and Implications

Contrary to popular belief that militancy in Pakistan emerges from milieus of ignorance, the households from which these *mujahids* come and even the *mujahids* themselves were very well educated by Pakistani standards. The relatively high degree of education held by these *mujahids* is probably due to selection bias imposed by the groups themselves. Most served and died in Kashmir where the operational environment is very challenging. Groups need reasonably talented persons to infiltrate, maintain operational security while preparing for the attack, and then to successfully launch attacks.<sup>34</sup>

Had this sample included more *mujahids* who served in Afghanistan, one would have perhaps seen militants who were less educated and, depending upon their mission, more likely to have been educated in *madaris*. (Note that many of the *mujahids* who served in Afghanistan also served in Kashmir. This sample had few *mujahids* who served only in Afghanistan.) As noted, the preponderance of suicide attackers in Afghanistan who come from Pakistan appears to be recruited from *madaris* in Pakistan's tribal belt. These suicide bombers—unlike these Kashmir-based militants—tend to be impoverished, extremely young (as young as 15 and younger), impressionable, poorly trained, and with little or no education.<sup>35</sup> These findings, taken together, suggest that depicting Pakistan's militants as “poor” or “uneducated” misrepresents the diversity of their backgrounds and the diversity of the missions for which they are employed. Most disturbing in this sample is that conditional on a high degree of education, they have much higher than average rates of unemployment and this deserves policy attention.

As noted, these militants are not primarily recruited through *madaris*; rather, mosques, tabligh, friends and family seem to be critical channels for these militants' recruitment even though *madaris* may be more important for other kinds of militants such as sectarian terrorists and suicide attackers.<sup>36</sup> These findings again underscore that singular focus upon *madaris* as recruiting grounds for militants is inadequate. This survey also underscores that public schools are equally important as *madaris* when it comes to militants operating in Kashmir and other challenging terrain. When one considers that public schools educate about 70 percent of Pakistan's full-time students—compared to three percent or less for *madaris*—public schools likely deserve more scrutiny than they receive at present. Moreover, surveys of students in public, private, and religious schools demonstrate that while *madaris* students are more likely to support *jihad* and outright war with India, public school students also show propensity towards the same attitudes.<sup>37</sup>

This survey also suggests a new locus of attention: the household. The vast majority of the households knew of their family member's decision and many within the household actively refused to grant permission. More research is needed to understand the dynamics of household decision-making and how families may be mobilized to discourage such actions by family members. This may involve social

marketing campaigns to mitigate the status of being a *shaheed* household. Clearly, more research into the backgrounds of households that produce *shaheeds* is needed. The data from this survey suggests that while these households are as likely as others in Pakistan generally to be nuclear, they tend to be larger and their heads of household tend to be much more educated on average. Because the households declined to provide income, asset, and consumption data, their relative socioeconomic status cannot be ascertained.<sup>38</sup> However, other analyses of these data suggest that families who own assets are less likely to support the *mujahid's* decision to join a *tanzeem* and more likely to oppose this decision.<sup>39</sup>

## Notes

1. This work was done while the author was a Senior Research Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). The author is now a Senior Political Scientist at RAND. This essay represents the views of the author and in no way reflects the views of either USIP or RAND. The author thanks Amir Rana who led one team of Pakistan-based interviews and the other leader who wishes to remain anonymous. Husain Haqqani and Suzanne Perry provided enormous assistance in drafting the questionnaire and Ms. Perry facilitated various technical aspects of this study. Marika Suttorp provided critical statistical programming assistance. Amir Rana, apart from leading a team, helped facilitate the translation of the instrument and was otherwise invaluable in the conduct of this research. Nicholas Howenstein was a constant source of assistance throughout this and other projects at USIP.

2. *Tanzeemat* is the plural of *tanzeem* or "organization." This essay will simply use "tanzeem" (sometimes they are called "askari tanzeem") which is the colloquial term used in Pakistan for these groups.

3. Note that many of these groups have been proscribed numerous times only to re-emerge again. Many of the groups now operate under new names; however, this essay uses the names which are likely to be most familiar to readers.

4. Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004) and C. Christine Fair, "Militant recruitment in Pakistan: Implications for Al-Qa'ida and Other Organizations," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (November/December 2004): 489–504.

5. Zahid Hussain, "The Battle for the Soul of Pakistan," *Newsline*, Karachi, July 2007. [www.newsline.com.pk/NewsJul2007/cover1july2007.htm](http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsJul2007/cover1july2007.htm)

6. Since the onset of sanguinary sectarian violence in Iraq and Iran's 2006 victory in Lebanon, it has been suspected that Iran may once again be involved in inciting anti-Sunni violence in Pakistan. Indeed throughout 2007 Pakistan has seen a sharp increase in sectarian violence compared to 2006 or previous years. However, the overwhelming preponderance of those attacks have been perpetrated by anti-Shi'a militias. Thus, the allegations of Iran's involvement are not supported empirically at this point.

7. Seth G. Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," *Survival* 49 (Spring 2007): 15–32; C. Christine Fair and Peter Chalk, *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (Washington D.C.: USIP, 2006); Steven Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

8. The plural often used for *madrasah* is *madaris*. This essay will use the Anglicized plural for simplicity.

9. Abigail Cutler and Saleem Ali, "Madrasah Reform Is Key to Terror War," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2005; International Crisis Group, Pakistan: Madrasahs, Extremism and the Military, *Asia Report* 36 (Brussels, Islamabad: ICG, July 29, 2002); Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2000): 115–126; Jessica Stern, "Meeting with the Muj," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 57 (January/February 2001): 42–50; and Peter Singer, *Pakistan's Madrasahs: Ensuring a System of Education Not Jihad*, Brookings Institution Analysis Paper, no. 14 (Washington D.C.: Brookings, November 2001).

10. U.S. President George W. Bush, "A New Compact for Development in the Battle Against World Poverty" (presented at The International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, N.L., Mexico, 18–22 March, 2002).



11. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2004), 367.

12. See Mariam Abou Zahab, "I Shall Be Waiting For You at The Door Of Paradise": The Pakistani Martyrs Of The Lashkar-E Taiba (Army Of The Pure)" in A.Rao, M. Böck, and M. Bollig, eds., *The Practice of War: The Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence* (Oxford/New York: Berghahn, forthcoming 2007), 133–158; Amir Mohammad Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistani* (Saba Ansari, Trans.) (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2004).

13. The researchers associated with this effort requested to remain anonymous.

14. This was an oversight in the survey design. The instrument should have asked whether the respondent was the head of household when the person undertook the decisions.

15. Plural of mujahid is "*mujahidin*." As with other plurals in this essay, the Anglicized plural is used throughout.

16. Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001–02: A Nationally Representative Survey* (New York/Islamabad: Population Council, July 2003), 22, 135). [www.popcouncil.net/projects/TA\\_PakNationalSurvey.html](http://www.popcouncil.net/projects/TA_PakNationalSurvey.html).

17. Ibid.; Population Census Organization, "Population by Sex, Sex Ratio, Average Household Size and Growth Rate." [statpak.gov.pk/depts./pco/statistics/pop\\_sex\\_ratio\\_growth\\_rate/pop\\_sex\\_ratio\\_growth\\_rate.html](http://statpak.gov.pk/depts./pco/statistics/pop_sex_ratio_growth_rate/pop_sex_ratio_growth_rate.html).

18. For an analysis of the determinants of consent and refusal, see Victor Asal, C. Christine Fair, and Stephen Shellman, "Consenting to Jihad: Insights from A Survey of 140 Militant Families in Pakistan," (paper presented at the International Studies Association forty-eighth annual meeting, Chicago, IL). [archive.allacademic.com/one/isa/isa07/index.php?cmd=isa07](http://archive.allacademic.com/one/isa/isa07/index.php?cmd=isa07)

19. Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Tristan Zajonc, "Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data" (March 2005). KSG Working Paper No. RWP05–024; World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 3521. [ssrn.com/abstract=667843](http://ssrn.com/abstract=667843). Using the Pakistani Integrated Household Survey, they found that full-time enrollments in madaris across Pakistan is less than 1 percent. When they correct for errors associated with household data (e.g., undercounting madrassah students who are not in households) and for population growth, they estimate about 3 percent of Pakistani children to attend madaris full time.

20. For several caveats and discussion of the empirical limits of the study by Andrabi et al., see C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection," *Asia Policy* 1 (Summer 2007): 107–134.

21. Matriculation is a prerequisite for many jobs in Pakistan as well for admission to colleges and universities.

22. State Bank of Pakistan, *Handbook of Statistics on Pakistan Economy 2005*. See Chapter 11, "Education and Health." [sbp.org.pk/departments/stats/PakEconomy\\_HandBook/Chap\\_11.pdf](http://sbp.org.pk/departments/stats/PakEconomy_HandBook/Chap_11.pdf). According to the Population Council's interview of youth, among all youth in Pakistan, only about 33 percent of young men and 18 percent of young women are matriculates. On average, Pakistanis attain only 6 years of education. Population Council (see note 16 above), 16.

23. The most comprehensive inventory of manpower is given in The International Institute for Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance 2007* (London: IISS, 2007), 322–324. However, there are errors in this volume. They count the Northern Light Infantry as "paramilitary" when in fact it was inducted into the regular army in the fall of 1999. It also seems to omit several paramilitary organizations. As of July 2007, Pakistan's population is estimated to be 164,741,924, according to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook* (updated July 2007). [cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html](http://cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html). Pakistan does not publish the gender breakdown of its armed forces, however the vast majority are male. Thus it is reasonable, as a first order approximation, to assume for purposes of calculation that the total estimated manpower are male.

24. Ayesha Siddiq, personal e-mail communication, September 18, 2007.

25. World Values Survey, Online Data Analysis. [worldvaluessurvey.org](http://worldvaluessurvey.org).

26. Fair (see note 4 above).

27. Ibid.

28. Saeed Shafqat, "From Official Islam to Islamism: The Rise of Daawa-ul-Irshad and Lashkar-e-Taiba," in Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation?* (London: Zed Books, 2002/2004).

29. Respondents were also asked whether their mujahid was recruited through a public service or through some armed forces organization. No one identified these options.

30. See United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, *Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan* (UNAMA; Kabul, 2007).

31. This argument has been elaborated at length in Fair (see note 20 above).

32. This phrase "quality of terror" needs some explanation. Some groups are able to target high-value, high-opportunity cost targets very effectively, including hard military targets, heads of state, high-value civilian structures. These are examples of "high quality terror." Other groups are only capable of pursuing low-value targets, which are typically soft targets such as markets, mosques, etc. Some groups try to target high-value targets but do so ineffectively. An example of this would be Afghanistan's suicide bombers, who in nearly half of all cases only manage to kill themselves. For a lucid discussion of this issue, see Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, "The Quality of Terror," *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (July 2005): 515–530.

33. See ECONSTATS, "Data on Pakistan" (n.d.). econstats.com/IMF/IFS\_Pak1\_67R\_.htm.

34. For a thorough discussion of these selection effects, see Fair (see note 20 above).

35. The author conducted research on Afghanistan's suicide attackers for the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan from June to August 2007. These findings are detailed in United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (see note 30 above).

36. For a description of the connections between sectarian violence and madaris, see International Crisis Group, *The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan*, Crisis Group Asia Report N°95 (Brussels, Islamabad: ICG, 18 April 2005).

37. Fair (see note 20 above).

38. This is an area of ongoing research by the author. These data are being cross-walked to the Pakistani Integrated Household Survey, which has income and asset information. Hopefully this exercise will cast some light onto the general socioeconomic condition of the locality in which the family lives.

39. Asal et al. (see note 18 above).