

Editorial

Misleading and Biased Lancet Editorial on Kashmir: What are the Authors Hiding?

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A lot of people with vested interests have suddenly become experts about the health of Kashmiri natives.^[1] Most of them have not even visited the place, which they now want to preach about.

1. WHY WE HAVE INSIGHT INTO GROUND REALITIES

We have collectively been deeply involved in the health of Kashmiris for more than 20 years and have spent more than 365 days being physically present across various parts of the erst while state of Jammu and Kashmir.^[2] Besides popular places in the Kashmir valley like Srinagar, Gulmarg, and Pehelgam, we have spent significant time in Anantnag, Kishtwar, Baramulla, and Bandipura.^[3] In fact we have forayed deep into places like Gureiz, which many Kashmiri natives of Srinagar would not even have heard of. Some of our most memorable times were with the poorest-of-poor Kashmiri Muslims living on the banks of the beautiful Wuller lake.^[3]

We have treated innumerable Kashmiri patients over prolonged periods of time.^[4] This has given us the opportunity to become part of their families, attend close knit wedding functions and even get to know their inner thoughts and feelings. Being part of international not-for-profit organizations providing medical relief during normal times as well as during disasters (earthquake, landslides, floods), we had the privilege of seeing ground realities – insights that armchair critics can't even imagine about.^[2-4]

2. HEALTH ISSUES AND REAL CAUSE

We appreciate that the health issues in Kashmir have been studied and published for dissemination of the information globally. Mental health issues here have been documented since decades.^[5,6] In fact, earlier publications (including from 2007 and 2009) have documented much higher incidence of such issues (up to 55%) as compared to that mentioned in the Lancet editorial. In fact, even Pakistan has reported such incidence being as high as 48.9% (where article 370 is not applicable).^[7] WHO has stated that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.^[8] Do the authors of the Lancet editorial attribute conflict in Kashmir and article 370 to be responsible for depression across the globe?

Let us remind everyone that the most important cause of depression and mental health issues are marital discord and domestic violence between husband and wife.^[9] And natural disasters also contribute significantly – evidence of which we have seen firsthand.^[2-4]

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So our question is, how did the Lancet editorial jump to the conclusion that “protracted exposure to violence has led to a formidable mental health crisis” and then go on to imply that this violence is solely due to military conflict?^[1]

The plight of the common man on the streets of Kashmir valley was due solely to the autocratic and high-handed manner by which three local political families from this area have functioned. They have looted the state as well as the funds received from central government of India assistance, while suppressing their general public. They have sponsored unrest to maintain their political dictatorship by insulating Kashmir from the progress that the rest of India is leading, at the global level.

This is the fundamental reason for the Kashmiri people to have significant health issues – article 370 was being used as an excuse to prevent the Kashmiris from benefiting from several Central Government (of India) legislations like right to education, right to have benefits while serving in government jobs, reservation for the underprivileged, gender equality, right to information, and so on. The three local political families of Kashmir valley have actively prevented their own people from getting the benefit from such legal stipulations.

In confidence, the common man on the ground in Kashmir has time and again confided in us about this fact. Knowing that we were neutral and having seen for themselves that we are selflessly working for their health, including during disasters, they had no hesitation in sharing their inner feelings with us without any fear of repercussions.

Thus, it was clear that the mental (and other) health problems faced by the Kashmiri, and as pointed out by misleading and biased Lancet editorial, refer to the period when restrictions and limitations imposed by article 370 existed. And why did this happen? The local politicians have let the problem fester and grow, by preventing aid and regulations from the rest of India being applicable in Kashmir. This has been reaffirmed by Lt Gen (Retd) Syed Ata Hasnain, who is currently serving as chancellor of the Central University of Kashmir and therefore is in the best position to understand ground realities.^[10]

In fact, the 104 page report from Medicines Sans Frontiers has clearly outlined the steps necessary to tackle the mental health problem in Kashmir.^[11] Why then did the state government not take necessary steps while under Article 370?

3. ABOLITION OF ARTICLE 370 WILL JUMPSTART IMPROVEMENT IN HEALTH AND HAS OTHER BENEFITS

We conclude that the damage to health of Kashmiris, as a result of decades of state political mismanagement, needed to be dealt with as a matter of top priority. Abrogation of article 370 will

serve to tackle this head on. Kashmiri people will now have the same right as the rest of the Indians (including Muslims) living in the rest of India.

No wonder, abolition of article 370 has been upheld internationally. When China and Pakistan took it up with the UN, the informal meeting refused to take any action or make any statement.^[12,13] And a few weeks later, Honorable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi received Order of Zayed, the highest civilian award from UAE.^[14]

That Asia Pacific Group of the FATF has firmly put Pakistan in a terror “blacklist” for its failure to curb funneling of funds to groups responsible for scores of attacks in India, lays bare the truth.^[15]

We therefore congratulate the Indian government for taking this important step and hope that the armchair sceptics will now open the eyes to real facts on the ground.

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