

Lived Experiences of Psychological Despair among War Victims in Pakistan: A Qualitative Study

SANAM KHALID
(Corresponding Author)

Ph. D Scholar (GCUL), Clinical Psychology UNIT (CPU), Department of Psychology, Government College University (GCU) Lahore, Pakistan. ORCID ID: 0009-0000-3821-3413
sanamkhalidphd@gmail.com

Dr. MAHWESH AROOJ NAZ

Assistant Professor, Clinical Psychology Unit Department of Psychology, Government College University Lahore. (GCUL), Lahore /Punjab/Pakistan. mahwesharooj@gmail.com

Abstract

Present study aims to ascertain the lived experience of psychological despair among people from the Ex-FATA region of Pakistan affected by extended conflict and displacement. A purposive sample of 12 individuals (6 males and 6 females) age ranges 25–35 ($M = 27.8$, $SD = 2.16$) participated in semi-structured interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the participants' data. IPA revealed four superordinate themes from participants' data such as Pervasive Experiences of Hopelessness and Psychological Defeat, Living under Chronic Uncertainty and Instability, Despair Arising from Broken Hopes and Perceived Neglect, and Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity. Results indicate that despair in war victims is a multidimensional and dynamic psychological progression, including emotional hopelessness, existential insecurity, disappointment with institutional support, and adaptive strategies such as habituation, tolerance, and nostalgic meaning making. Resilience among individuals seemed to contain continuous functioning alongside enduring despair, rather than reflecting the absence of suffering. These results indicate the need for clinical interventions that directly deal with hopelessness, together with structural improvements ensuring consistent humanitarian support, for populations affected by persistent conflict.

Keywords: Psychological despair, Hopelessness, War victims, Ex-FATA, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Introduction

Psychological despair is one of the most halting effects of protracted exposure to conflict and adversity. Despair is characterized by a predominant loss of hope, lack of perceived control over one's surroundings, and a deep erosion of one's sense of future prospect (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2024). Despair reflects a deeper existential rupture in which individuals come to perceive their suffering as inevitable and their efforts to change their surroundings as impractical. Despair precisely understood as a negative, sceptical alignment toward the self and the future in which difficulties are evaluated as unbearable, unlike momentary sadness or situational distress (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2024).

Despair is constantly linked with diminished motivation, withdrawal and a unique cognitive bias toward negative future thinking that increases vulnerability to depressive and anxiety related problems. By keeping its role in mind, it has long been recognized as an essential factor of hopelessness related to psychopathology (Han & Midorikawa, 2024).

The idea that despair has significant and consistent association with depressive symptoms, lack of quality of life and higher level of anxiety in both clinical and non-clinical population, existing literature also support this notion (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2024).

Prior researches also investigated that people who have faced unresolved and persistent hardships experienced despair not as a temporary emotional reaction, but rather as psychological state having clinically significant long-term effects on mental health (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2024)

Communities being exposed to prolonged conflict, rather than from a single traumatic event, despair results from the growing and collective impacts of ongoing insecurity, displacement, and interruption to daily life. People who have went through recurring cycles of disruption showed frequent progressive deterioration in their feeling of agency and future orientation. Existential aspects of despair closely resemble these conditions that are defined within professional frameworks (Han & Midorikawa, 2024).

Individuals in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) region of Pakistan have experienced years of insistent insecurity, widespread displacement, and disruption to social and economic life (Baig et al., 2024). People still face unsettled issues of resettlement along with hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced from their homes. People also facing loss of livelihood, and inadequate institutional support even after they have eventually returned (Baig et al., 2024).

Researches on internally displaced communities show that long term displacement is linked with significant insufficient psychological and psychosocial health needs. In larger humanitarian and health system this also results in limited access to appropriate mental health services and insufficient integration of psychosocial support (Cantor et al., 2021). According to Hyland et al. (2023), prolonged war exposure causes higher levels of psychological suffering, depression and anxiety in civilian population in the time after the start or increase of conflict related danger. Longitudinal research findings highlighted that when conflict conditions continue severe psychological issues can significantly worsen (Brugger et al., 2025).

According to systematic research in low and middle-income countries on displaced individuals' structural and systemic hindrances that limit the provision of suitable care, restricted access to mental health and psychosocial support services often worsen the psychological impact of displacement (Cantor et al., 2021).

Previous studies carried out in Pakistan have mostly studied trauma, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder in conflict affected individuals. According to research, there are still gaps in the accessibility of trained mental health professionals and prearranged psychosocial reintegration services in the former tribal districts and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These communities suffer severe psychological effects from ongoing insecurity and conflict-related violence (Fayyaz & Chitrali, 2025). Researches relatively less focused on how people interpret depressing experiences in the context of conflict and displacement (Fayyaz & Chitrali, 2025).

Similar research from other low-resource, conflict-affected places demonstrates that trauma and distress are not experienced or articulated consistently, but rather are interpreted and expressed through culturally unique frames and representations of suffering (Cikuru et al., 2025). This illustrates that cultural and environmental factors influence psychological responses to conflict. Consequently, if despair is only studied through quantitative research the difficulty and emotional implications related with these experiences may be missed.

The current study intends to fill this gap given the enduring and evolving nature of conflict-associated despair in triable areas of Pakistan. To explore how people interpret and give meaning to their lived experiences of despair, researchers utilized Qualitative approaches, mainly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). It is especially suitable for exploring complex psychological phenomena because it emphasises participants' own meaning making processes and offers deep insights into their subjective worlds (Smith et al., 2022). Current study intends to analyse the lived psychological experiences of despair among war victims in Pakistan's Ex-FATA region.

Method

Research Design

The lived psychological experiences of despair among people from Pakistan's former FATA territory were examined in this study using a qualitative phenomenological research design. The study focused on the participants' individual experiences of psychological despair, uncertainty, helplessness, and hopelessness brought on by extended exposure to conflict and displacement. The primary goal of using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was to obtain a thorough grasp of how people who were either directly or indirectly impacted by ongoing conflict explained and made sense of their experiences of psychological despair, as well as how they had managed to endure and adjust to these experiences over time.

Research Question

- What are the lived experiences of psychological despair among individuals from the Ex-FATA region of Pakistan impacted by protracted conflict?

Objectives

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- To investigate lived experiences of despair of individuals who have been impacted by extended conflict and displacement in Ex-FATA territory of Pakistan.
 - To comprehend how participants understand, cope, and adjust to feelings of despair, insecurity, and supposed abandonment carried on by continued exposure to conflict.

Sample

Total 12 participants from Ex-FATA region of Pakistan were recruited through purposive sampling. Sample was divided into two groups (6 males and 6 females). The age range of the participants was 25 to 35 years ($M = 27.8$, $SD = 2.16$). Purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit the sample. The justification for employing a purposive strategy is based on the notion that, given the aims and objectives of the research, specific types of people may have important and distinctive perspectives concerning the concepts and phenomena under study, and as such, should be persistently represented in the sample (Dahal et al., 2024).

Instruments

Socio-demographic form. A socio-demographic form was utilized to obtain information. Age, gender, education, occupation, marital status, number of family members, experience of displacement, and length of displacement were all recorded using a sociodemographic questionnaire.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide. Open-ended questions from a semi-structured interview guide were used to gather data. In order to generate rich verbal conversation pertinent to the research goals, questions were created in Urdu. The purpose of the interview guide was to investigate participants' subjective experiences of despair and related concerns. Key elements of the current literature on psychological hopelessness and despair, conversations with the study supervisor, and the fundamentals of IPA-informed interview design served as the foundation for the analysis.

Procedure

Participants were identified through informal interactions with friends and co-workers. Twelve out of the fifteen people contacted accepted to participate in the study. Written informed consent was taken from all of the participants before data collection. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews in Urdu Language that lasted about 40 to 50 minutes each. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed for data analysis since the current study sought to explore participants' lived experiences of despair. Interviews were audio recorded, verbatim transcribed, and then subjected to IPA processes for analysis. Before identifying cross-case patterns, each transcript was thoroughly investigated using an idiographic, case-by-case methodology. Every transcript was carefully and frequently read by the researchers. Emergent themes were found and highlighted in the transcripts' margins, along with preliminary observations and exploratory remarks. The major coding was done by the researchers. Subordinate themes were created in the second stage by grouping emergent themes that shared contexts, conceptual connections, and related meanings. In order to create larger, more abstract superordinate themes that captured the psychological core of participants'

experiences of despair, these subordinate themes were further merged across instances in the third stage (Smith & Dunworth, 2003). To maintain confidentiality, participant identities were substituted with pseudonyms.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, participants were informed about the goals of the study and provided signed informed consent. Throughout the study, privacy and confidentiality were thoroughly maintained. Due to the nature of subject's emotional delicacy particular attention was paid to ensuring that participants felt secure and supported during the interview process. Every participant gave their consent and was made aware of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any moment without facing any consequences. Furthermore, participants were given the option to get psychological counselling support in the process that remembering challenging memories instigated them distress. Researcher built empathetic and trustworthy connection with participants before each interview given the delicate nature of the material being discussed.

Result

The interpretative phenomenological analysis yielded four super-ordinate themes that capture lived psychological experience of participants' prolonged adversity: (1) Pervasive Experiences of Hopelessness and Psychological Defeat, (2) Living under Chronic Uncertainty and Instability, (3) Despair Arising from Broken Hopes and Perceived Neglect, and (4) Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity. Each super-ordinate theme is consisted of subordinate and emergent themes that are described below, supported by illustrative verbatim from participants.

Table 1

Master Themes for all the Participants (N=12)

Super-ordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Illustrative Verbatim
			ایک مکمل مایوسی (P1) ہے۔ مایوسی بھی ہے۔ (P2)
1. Pervasive Experiences of Hopelessness and Psychological Defeat	Emotional Experiences of Despair	Persistent Feelings of Hopelessness and Despair	ناامیدی تو بہت زیادہ ہے۔ (P4); مایوسی بہت ہے ہم میں۔

Super-ordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Illustrative Verbatim
			(P12)
			بے بسی بھی ہے
			(P2)
	Feelings of Helplessness	Perceived Inability to Influence One's Circumstances	ہم کچھ کر تو نہیں سکتے تھے۔
			(P10)
			اس ملک میں
			ہوتے ہوئے ہم نے جو
			فیس کیا۔
	Psychological Defeat	Experiences of Demoralization and Loss of Motivation	(P3)
			ساری امید ختم
			ہو گئی۔
			(P2)
			کس طرف
			جانا ہے، کیا ہونا
2. Living under Chronic Uncertainty and Instability	Uncertain Future	Ambiguity Regarding Life and Future Prospects	ہے میرے مستقبل (P1) کا۔
			اپنی زندگی کا نہیں پتا۔
			(P12)
			اچانک سے
	Unpredictable Living Conditions	Experiences of Persistent Instability and Unpredictability	حالات دوبارہ
			خراب ہو گئے۔
			(P2)

Super-ordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Illustrative Verbatim
			جنگ تو ختم ہی نہیں ہوتی۔ (P9)
			آج زندہ ہوں گے نہیں ہوں گے اپنی (P12)
		Living with Constant Threat to Survival	Uncertainty about Life and Safety زندگی کا کوئی بھروسہ نہیں۔ (P12)
			کاش جنگ نہ ہوتی اور ہمیں وہاں امن ہوتا۔ (P2)
3. Despair Arising from Broken Hopes and Perceived Neglect	Diminished Expectations for the Future	Erosion of Hope for Peace and Normalcy	اگر میں امن کی بات کروں تو آج کل تو بالکل ہے ہی نہیں۔ (P7)
	Restricted Life Opportunities	Perceived Lack of Opportunities for Personal and Social Development	کیونکہ نا تو مواقع ہوتے ہیں وہاں پر۔ (P1)
	Inadequate External Support	Experiences of Institutional Neglect and Lack of Support	ہمیں مالی مدد کی بجائے گی لیکن اس کا دس پرسنٹ بھی نہیں ملا۔ (P4)

Super-ordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Illustrative Verbatim
4. Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity	Adjustment to Chronic Adversity	Habituation to Ongoing Hardship and Suffering	اب ہم تو یوز ٹو ہو گئے (P12)
			اب عادت ہو گئی ہے۔ (P9)
	Tolerating Persistent Distress	Enduring Adversity through Tolerance and Acceptance	ہم لوگوں نے اس کو برداشت کیا برداشت ہی کرنا تھا۔ (P10)
			آپ کو وہ چیزیں یاد آ رہی ہوتی ہیں۔ (P7)
	Longing for a Peaceful Past	Nostalgic Reflections on Life before Conflict	

Note: P=Participant

1. Pervasive Experiences of Hopelessness and Psychological Defeat

A pervasive sense of psychological despair and unpleasant reactions resulted from extended experience to violence and displacement. In addition to psychological pain, their experiences indicated an existential fight typified by emotions of despair, powerlessness, and limited agency. Participants categorized their experiences as emotionally demanding and stressful, suggesting that insistent challenges had profoundly affected their understanding of the world and their outlook on the future.

Emotional Experiences of Despair, the subordinate theme, portrayed the participants' tireless emotional distress and cynicism. Many times, participants described despair as an unavoidable part of their daily survival.

One male participant described experiencing,

"A complete hopelessness and despair prevail, as you are unable to see any future, where you are heading or what will be your future." (Male Participant 1)

While another stated,

"When circumstances are not favorable, we become hopeless." (Male Participant 3)

Further participant mentioned,

"There is a great deal of hopelessness. This hopelessness is based on the fear that if terrorism returns again, education, business, and everything else will come to a halt. Even

now, just hearing news about the operation has already disrupted business and education.”
(Male Participant 4)

Another female participant shared,

“All my friends were sitting together, and we were in a fun mood in the morning, but suddenly I saw a post on my mobile, and I became so hopeless and so sad.” (Participant 1)

Such encounters demonstrated that pessimism had become profoundly conventional in individuals' lived experiences, piercing their emotional worlds and affecting their objectives for the future.

Closely connected, the subordinate theme, *Feelings of Helplessness*, indicated apparent incapacity of participants to take effect over their circumstances. Rather than active agents in their own lives participants often constructed themselves as unreceptive observers.

For example, one participant commented,

“We experienced helplessness; it can also be described as frustration because we could not do anything. We simply had to endure it.” (Female Participant 4)

While female participant simply stated,

“When people say, you are from (District name), so there must be terrorists there, it makes us very angry, but we cannot do anything about it.” (Female Participant 5)

Participant further shared,

“Whatever is meant to happen will happen; we cannot do anything about it.” (Female Participant 5).

According to these accounts, sense of agency of participants had been debilitated by prolonged exposure to conflict, leaving them stranded in the face of persistent suffering.

In conclusion, *Psychological Defeat* recorded perceptions of discouragement and demotivation in participants. Participants, describing a deep feeling of despair they repeatedly expressed feelings of emotional fatigue and acceptance.

As one participant mentioned,

“The hope people had for peace and development in our areas has completely disappeared.” (Male Participant 2)

Further, participant shared,

“We have faced so much, while living in this country.” (Male Participant 3)

Accentuating how shared experiences of sorrow had contributed to sentiments of psychological defeat and reduced morale. Overall, these three subordinate themes show that pessimism was not an impermanent emotional state but a deeper, more engrained loss of persons' emotional resilience and capability for provision.

2. Living under Enduring Insecurity and Instability

Participants described that living in a challenging and tense environment was marked by ongoing insecurity and instability as well as emotional pain. According to their narrative, unpredictability had infused every domain of their lives, impacting how they perceived the present and anticipated the future. They also described that living in a situation of perpetual

insecurity, which impacted every part of their lives and enormously increased their sense of hopelessness.

Each participants' reflective uncertainty about their future and life paths was summarised in the secondary theme, *Uncertain Future*. Participants required to figure out what they voiced anxieties, and expressed apprehensions about their individual, and articulated matters about their personal futures.

Participant mentioned,

"What will happen to my future, I'm not sure which direction should I take." (Male Participant 1)

Likewise, another participant stated,

"I am not sure about my life goals." (Female Participant 12)

These narratives suggest an inability of participants to imagine a steady and probable future. Further, these accounts of participants specify that incessant exposure to conflict had damaged the sense of steadiness and future orientation of individuals'. It made impossible for them to assertively predict or plan for the future.

The secondary theme, *Unpredictable Living Conditions*, reflected the feelings of ongoing uncertainty carried out by recurrent conflict in participants. They also assessed their living conditions as particularly unpredictable marked by repeated violent incidents and sudden drops in safety.

For instance, one participant mentioned that,

"The Peace condition suddenly worsened again." (Male Participant 2)

While another shared that,

"The war never ends." (Female Participant 9).

Participants' narratives emphasized that they view conflict as continuous reality that continually jeopardized their feeling of security and routine. The subordinate theme *Threat to Survival* was demonstrated by their apprehensions and safety. The individuals talked of being frequently conscious of their helplessness and life.

Another participant expressed that,

"We are not sure whether we will be alive or not." (Female Participant 12)

Participant further highlighted,

"There is no surety about our lives." (Female Participant 12)

These narratives emphasize how constant exposure to violence had shaped a widespread sense of existential anxiety, whereby ambiguity went beyond the future to comprehend the fundamental persistence of life itself.

3. Despair Arising from Broken Hopes and Perceived Neglect

Number of elements such as continuing uncertainty, shattered hopes for peace and limited opportunities, and perceived negligence by external institutions were significantly impacted experiences of despair. Additionally, shattering their dreams for steady and peaceful life, constant fighting has left number of participants feeling let down and abandoned. According

to their narratives, the lack of opportunities and support heightened their sense of social marginalization and segregation making them feel even lonelier.

The subordinate theme that emerged from the data was *Diminished Expectations for the Future*. It highlighted that individuals hope for peace and stability was fading. They often recognized that their ideal of a world lacking of violence and conflict would never materialize. One participant expressed that,

"I wish that we had peace there." (Female Participant 2)

Similarly, another participant mentioned,

"Peace, it basically does not exist anymore." (Female Participant 1)

According to participants narratives hope for lasting peace seemed to be lost. This reduced their prospects for the future and added to their persistent feelings of despair.

Individuals limited prospects for individual, socioeconomic and scholastic was highlighted in *Restricted life opportunities*, subtheme. They discussed that how conflict had stopped them from following and achieving significant life goals.

Another participant stated,

"There are simply no opportunities there." (Male Participant 1)

Participants further expressed lack of opportunities for growth and improvement. Their identity extension and sense of determination appeared to be delayed by this perceived lack of opportunities. It went beyond outward drawback, and suggested that limited opportunity was experienced as both psychological and practical loss by the participants.

Conclusively, the subordinate theme, *Inadequate External Support*, highlighted experiences of institutional disregard and insufficient support from significant authorities. Participants also showed distress with unmet promises and inadequate help. This contributed to emotions of rejection and uncertainty. It further impaired the despair among the conflict affected societies.

One participant explained,

"We were promised financial assistance, but we did not even receive get it." (Male Participant 4).

These narratives highlighted that participants' psychological distress was made worse by apparent institutional disregard, which deteriorated their faith in outside provision networks and reinforced feelings of marginalization and being ignored.

4. Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity

Unlike the despair and helplessness portrayed in the earlier themes, participant experiences demonstrated that continued exposure to violence and displacement required constant adaptation to adverse situations. Regardless of the fact that participants still tolerated severe psychological suffering, their instances revealed that enduring hardship had gradually become the norm. Participants further described that how the enduring, accepting and being habitual to long term adversity became the part of their life. However, this version did not suggest that there was no suffering; rather, it showed an ongoing attempt to sustain and make sense of existence in the midst of ongoing suffering and unforeseen circumstances. The subordinate

theme, *Adjustment to Chronic Adversity*, showed how participants progressively adjusted to prolonged hardship and misery. Participants discussed how they had become used to living in dangerous and challenging situations, suggesting that continual acquaintance to conflict had normalised pain as a part of everyday life.

One participant mentioned that,

“We have now become used to it.” (Female Participant 12)

While another stated,

“We have become accustomed to it.” (Female Participant 9)

According to these testimonies, individuals used habituation as a psychological strategy to deal with persistent hardship and re-establish a feeling of routine in otherwise insecure situations.

Subordinate theme Tolerating Persistent Distress, expressed their efforts to endure hardships through patience and acceptance. Endurance was reflected as a requirement rather than a choice. This emphasized their limited capability to alter their environments.

One participant stated that,

“We endured it; we simply had to tolerate it.” (Female Participant 10)

These narratives backing the idea that participants saw endurance as an essential tactic for surviving such situations. Although the significant emotional strain associated with prolonged fighting. Conclusively, the subordinate theme, *Longing for a Peaceful Past*, seized participants' sentimental reflections on life earlier to the conflict. Participants often recollected about their lives before conflicts, suggesting memories of peace, stability, and social connectedness.

One participant shared that,

“You keep remembering peaceful memories.” (Female Participant 7)

This narrative reflecting an enduring longing for the past. Such sentimental reflections appeared to serve as a prompt of the losses brought about by violence and displacement as well as a foundation for emotional comfort. Memories of a peaceful past had a foremost influence on participants' ongoing attempts to address current problems and their processes of creating meaning.

In summary, these four super-ordinate themes depict a complicated psychological landscape in which people's lived experiences of prolonged adversity are shaped by the combination of hopelessness, enduring insecurity, and disillusionment with both situations and institutions. The fourth theme demonstrates that participants were more than just passive recipients of grief. They established adaptive psychological approaches like habituation, acceptance, and yearning reflection to endure environments that remained mainly outside their control. On the other hand the first three themes, emphasized the severe emotional and existential expenses of prolonged conflict and displacement. These results propose that resilience in this case was not the lack of pain but rather the competence to carry on and find determination despite it.

Discussion

The current study focuses on the lived experiences of psychological despair of people from Ex-FATA region of Pakistan. Individuals who have been impacted by ongoing conflict and displacement. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis suggested Pervasive Experiences

of Psychological Defeat and Despair, Living under Continuing Uncertainty and Insecurity. The data from the individuals revealed four superordinate themes: (1) Pervasive Experiences of Hopelessness and Psychological Defeat, (2) Living under Chronic Uncertainty and Instability, (3) Despair Arising from Broken Hopes and Perceived Neglect, and (4) Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity. These themes provide an inclusive, contextually grounded view of how people deal with the long term impacts of prolonged exposure to conflict. It also highlights how it generates, maintains, and sometimes controls despair. Current research places these findings in the larger body of empirical research on psychological flexibility in people obstructed by displacement and conflict.

A deeper loss of personal agency and future orientation than would be expected from present discomfort alone is revealed by participants' expressions of widespread despair psychological defeat, and helplessness. These results are in line with neurobiological and cognitive models of learned helplessness (Tafet & Alonso, 2025). The model proposed that uncontrollable and repeated contact to hostile, threatening, or unresolvable circumstances can increasingly reduce an individual's apparent capacity to influence their environments. It can further lead to passivity, depression, and a widespread loss of inspiration that spreads well beyond the initial cause of threat (Tafet & Alonso, 2025).

These models aid in the description of why participants' despair appeared as a more engrained and widespread psychological state. Rather than as an isolated emotional response to a single event, repeated prolonged exposure to uncontrollable adversity gradually reshaped their broader sense of agency and capacity to act (Tafet & Alonso, 2025).

Modern theories of helplessness supported the idea that despair among this group of people represents a persistent, deeply rooted psychological pattern rather than a temporary reaction to circumstances (Kienzler et al., 2025).

Persistent uncertainty and instability emerged from the second superordinate theme. It stressed on this idea by situating despair within a continuing and unresolved historical setting. Participants' inability to plan or anticipate the future and their ongoing sense of insecurity about their basic safety are in line with recent systematic review. Findings investigated that augmented psychological distress is associated with extended and unresolved insecurity, mainly uncertainty related to conflict, displacement, and interrupted life paths. A reduced ability to plan for the future, and an extensive loss of control over one's life conditions is also linked with psychological distress (Kienzler et al., 2025).

Moreover, the third superordinate theme represented despair by unfulfilled expectations and supposed institutional negligence. It highlights a significant organisational aspect of participants' psychological experience that spreads beyond individual understanding into their relationships with proper support systems. These findings are aligned with research on refugee populations shows that exposure to armed conflict and institutional collapse is directly linked to decreased trust in political and organisational institutions (Hall & Werner, 2022). This is in line with the participants' feeling of abandonment after unfulfilled help promises. The current findings contribute to the corpus of literature by showing how such institutional disappointment

is observed not just as actual hardship but also as a deeply felt sense of betrayal that appears to actively composite and adhesive participants' greater experience of despair.

The fourth superordinate theme, Enduring and Adapting to Prolonged Adversity, shows that participants were not just passive victims of pain, in contrast to the themes that focused on despair. Their narratives of gradually becoming adapted to suffering, putting up with hardship out of need, and finding comfort in memories of a more peaceful past point to an adaptation progression that enabled functioning to continue in spite of ongoing suffering. These results are largely in line with previous qualitative research on coping among populations affected by conflict and forcibly displaced people elsewhere, which has also found that people use personal and spiritual resources, acceptance, and habituation as key strategies to deal with prolonged hardship and precarity related to relocation (Tesfai et al., 2023).

Findings of current research are also in line with resilience among populations that have been forcibly displaced also highlight that coping in such situations is rarely marked by the absence of distress. But rather by a constant, dynamic interaction between susceptibility and adaptive functioning shaped by individual, interpersonal, and broader related factors (Alamgir et al., 2024). The study participants' nostalgic yearning for a peaceful past may be one such adaptive approach that allows people to maintain steadiness of identity and worth even if their current conditions remain marked by despair (Alamgir et al., 2024).

Generally, the findings of current study suggest that despair among individuals of Ex-FATA should not be understood as a solitary, stagnant emotional state. The multifaceted psychological process of despair is influenced by inconsistent attempts of participants to tolerate and find perseverance despite their conditions. These results increase the body of existing research on despair and hopelessness by locating these ideas within the lived, socio-political reality of a population whose hardship is chronic and continuing rather than acute and totally resolute.

Conclusion and Implications

Current study offers a detailed, interpretive description of psychological despair among longstanding displaced and conflict affected people from Ex-FATA territory of Pakistan. It portrays despair as a multidimensional experience that comprehends psychological defeat and hopelessness. Despair also includes chronic uncertainty, disillusionment coming from perceived institutional neglect, and a continual process of enduring and adjusting to hardships. This suggests that rather than the absence of despair, resilience in these individuals represents ongoing functioning alongside it.

These results have important implications: at the clinical level, interventions for conflict-affected populations should address despair and hopelessness as distinct treatment targets rather than as secondary symptoms of depression or anxiety. At the policy level, treatment should be focused on rebuilding agency and future orientation. Given that exasperated expectations seemed to actively exaggerate psychological misery. It is imperative that promised financial and humanitarian support be distributed consistently and openly. Community based psychosocial therapies may benefit from building on participants' pre-existing adaptive skills. Such as tolerance and meaning making, rather than adapting entirely

peripheral resilience frameworks. Future studies are needed to track how coping and hopelessness progress over time and among numerous Pakistani populations impacted by conflict.

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