

## LIVING IN LOVE AND GRIEF: THE UNTOLD STORIES OF ARMY SHUHDA FAMILIES IN DISTRICT CHAKWAL (1999–2010)

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### ABSTRACT

This essay explores the profound and multifaceted emotional journeys of the families of army shuhda (martyrs) in District Chakwal, Pakistan, during the period spanning 1999 to 2010, an era marked by significant military engagements from the Kargil War to operations like Al Mizan and Raah-e-Nijaat. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of memory and trauma, the research investigates the enduring psychological distress, chronic grief, and socioeconomic dislocation experienced by these families following the violent and sudden loss of their loved ones. Chakwal, revered as the 'Land of Warriors,' embodies a unique duality where collective national pride in sacrifice exists alongside profound individual sorrow and the trauma of bereavement. The central argument posits that while community and military support provides crucial initial emotional relief and honour, the long-term financial, educational, and psychological support systems provided by both governmental and non-governmental organisations are structurally inadequate and insufficient to ensure the sustained well-being and successful social reintegration of the surviving family members. Through detailed primary source interviews, this essay illuminates the complex interplays of pride, enduring love, and unaddressed grief that define the post-loss reality of these foundational military families. It concludes by advocating for comprehensive, long-term policy reforms to honour the sacrifices of the fallen with sustained care for the living.

**KEYWORDS:** Love, Grief, Chakwal, shuhda, trauma

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District Chakwal occupies a unique and venerable position within the social and military geography of Pakistan, proudly bearing the title of the 'Land of Warriors' due to its long-standing tradition of military service and the disproportionately high number of personnel it contributes to the Pakistan Army. This cultural legacy of dedication and honour, however, is indelibly linked to a parallel history of profound personal sacrifice, as evidenced by the experiences of the families of soldiers declared shuhda (martyrs). This study focuses on the period between 1999 and 2010, a decade characterised by pivotal conflicts—from the Kargil War and the 2005 Earthquake relief efforts to the complex theatre of the War on Terror, including Operations Al Mizan and Raah-e-Nijaat—all of which contributed significantly to the number of lost sons (Soldier Board Chakwal, n.d.). The experiences of these families represent a crucial, yet often untold, narrative of collective pride interwoven with deep, enduring personal grief and trauma (Rashid 2020).

The research is premised on the critical observation that the supportive systems currently in place, encompassing both governmental compensation and community condolences, exhibit fundamental deficiencies. While the initial financial aid and ceremonies of honour acknowledge the sacrifice, they frequently fail to address the ensuing long-term financial instability, psychological distress, and the complex process of social and familial reintegration faced by the surviving spouses, children, and parents. The abrupt, often violent, nature of military loss complicates the bereavement process, frequently manifesting as symptoms of chronic trauma that require sustained, professional intervention rather than just

immediate monetary compensation (Davis 2020; Everson and Figley 2011). The central argument of this essay is that the prevailing governmental and military support structures for shuhda families in District Chakwal during this period were structurally insufficient, thereby deepening the socioeconomic vulnerability and exacerbating the psychological impact of loss on those left behind.

The examination is structured around the theoretical lenses of trauma theory and memory theory. Trauma theory (Levine 2012; Mambrol 2018) provides the framework for analysing the acute shock, prolonged psychological symptoms, and complex grief reactions that follow a sudden, violent loss. Memory theory (Abrams 2016) allows for the exploration of how these personal traumas are shaped, sustained, and occasionally mitigated by collective, culturally-specific memory-making practices, such as commemorative rituals and the construction of the martyr's narrative as a communal hero. By employing a rigorous qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews with the surviving family members, this study aims to elevate their untold stories, scrutinise the effectiveness of the current support mechanisms, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the sacrifices borne by military families in the pursuit of national defence.

The literature concerning military families, grief, and trauma spans various disciplines, but the specific intersection of these themes within the unique socio-cultural context of Chakwal requires a focused synthesis and critical engagement. Early foundational work on bereavement, such as the classic five stages of grief

described by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), established a useful, albeit often rigid, framework. However, contemporary scholarship, exemplified by Bonanno's (2019) research, underscores that the grieving process is highly individualised, non-linear, and influenced significantly by cultural, social, and relationship factors, cautioning against the imposition of universal grief timelines. This is particularly relevant in the military context, where loss is frequently violent and sudden.

Furthermore, the work of Everson and Figley (2011) explicitly addresses the systemic challenges faced by military families, highlighting that the sudden and often ambiguous nature of operational losses complicates the emotional recovery process significantly more than typical civilian bereavement. They show that military families must contend with unique issues such as service obligation, political context, and a heightened risk of post-traumatic stress among survivors. Maria Rashid's (2020) ethnographic work offers crucial regional context, examining the concept of militarism and sacrifice in the Pakistan Army, particularly noting the cultural roots of recruitment in areas like Chakwal and the complex duality of economic necessity (*pakki naukary*) blending with a nationalistic ethos of dying for the cause. This duality provides the necessary sociocultural backdrop for understanding the pride that coexists with the pain.

Crucially, the essay integrates literature on the role of state and societal responsibility, which is pivotal to the study's main argument concerning the inadequacy of state support. Michael Szonyi's (2019) examination of governance and responsibility, though relating to historical

contexts, provides a theoretical grounding for the moral imperative of the state to adequately care for the families of those who perform the ultimate sacrifice on its behalf. When coupled with studies on long-term care and financial stability (Brown, Goda, and McGarry 2012), the research points towards a systemic failure where initial, temporary financial fixes—such as a plot and a lump sum—cannot substitute for a sustainable, institutionalised strategy to manage the chronic needs arising from the loss of a primary wage earner and caregiver. The literature, while establishing the prevalence of trauma, ultimately identifies a clear gap in detailed, localised research that empirically links insufficient state support to the long-term trauma and socioeconomic vulnerabilities experienced by the shuhda families of Chakwal.

The methodological approach for this research is fundamentally qualitative, designed to capture the complexity and depth of the human experience that quantitative data alone cannot reveal. This method aligns perfectly with the study's objective, which is to explore the subjective emotional, psychological, and socioeconomic struggles of shuhda families (Muneer, interview; Parveen, interview; Usman, interview). The complexity of feelings, social dynamics, and cultural values surrounding martyrdom necessitates a method that allows participants to articulate their perspectives in their own, unfiltered voices (Abrams 2016). The ethical imperative of this research requires that the experiences of these families are not reduced to mere statistics but are presented as authentic narratives of love, grief, and resilience.

Data collection was primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews with

surviving family members, including wives, mothers, and siblings, spanning the various military engagements of the 1999–2010 period. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had a direct, profound experience related to the study's core subject matter, providing rich, detailed, and emotionally authentic accounts that form the bedrock of the empirical analysis. The semi-structured format allowed for a balance between guiding the discussion toward the core research questions—such as coping mechanisms, financial struggles, and community response—while also providing the flexibility for interviewees to raise unexpected themes and elaborate on the intensity of their trauma (Bibi, interview; Khushbakhat Hameed, interview; Naveed, interview). This primary data was triangulated with field observations of commemorative sites, grave visitation rituals, and community events, alongside a document analysis of available records from the Soldier Board Chakwal (n.d.), which provided the essential historical context and verified the sacrifices.

The data analysis phase was rigorously grounded in the dual theoretical frameworks. Memory theory (Abrams 2016) was used to assess the truthfulness and vividness of the interviewees' recollections, particularly regarding the moment they received the news—a prime example of "flash-bulb memory"—and how the passage of time had shaped their narrative of the deceased and their own trauma. Trauma theory (Levine 2012; Davis 2020) provided the diagnostic lens through which symptoms of acute shock, avoidance, hyperarousal, and, most frequently, chronic grief were identified within the narratives. Thematic analysis involved multiple close readings of the transcripts to identify recurring patterns

concerning financial instability, the duality of pride and sorrow, the varying impact of social support, and the persistent gaps in long-term governmental aid, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and compassionate interpretation of the emotional and practical burdens faced by these families.

The socio-cultural landscape of Chakwal, characterised by its martial traditions, provides a unique canvas upon which the universal theories of grief and trauma are enacted. When a soldier from this region falls, the loss is not merely an individual or familial tragedy; it is instantly elevated to a collective, communal trauma that reinforces the district's identity as a source of national sacrifice (Rashid 2020). The concept of shahadat imbues the death with immediate, profound spiritual significance, offering a culturally-sanctioned framework of honour and eternal reward that serves as the community's primary initial coping mechanism, often bypassing or masking the initial stages of denial and anger (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005; Fatima 2021). This cultural framework is essential to understanding the complex emotional reaction, where the private pain of loss is immediately mediated by public pride.

Trauma theory, in this context, helps delineate the acute shock and the subsequent development of chronic trauma, particularly given the sudden and violent nature of the loss. The interviews reveal that the moment of learning the news acts as a flash-bulb memory, retaining vivid, distressing details that contribute to a recurring "reliving the event" symptom (Bibi, interview; Muneer, interview). This sudden breaking of the assumptive world, which assumes stability and safety, is the hallmark

of traumatic experience (Mambrol 2018). Furthermore, the communal environment, while supportive, can also amplify the trauma, as the constant retelling of the sacrifice in public forums may force the family to confront their loss repeatedly, transforming acute trauma into a pervasive, chronic condition that permeates daily life (Abrams 2016).

Memory theory explains how the collective trauma is then integrated into the family's identity. The stories of Captain Farhat Haseeb Haider Shaheed and Colonel Amer Baig Mirza Shaheed, both celebrated heroes, become fixed historical narratives within the community, providing a source of pride for the family (Naveed, interview; Abbas, interview). However, this public memorialisation can sometimes conflict with the deeply personal process of private grief, where the family member yearns for the simple memory of the man, not the hero. The family must therefore navigate the tension between the publicly demanded narrative of "pride" and the privately endured reality of "grief," a duality that defines their existence. The failure of governmental support to address this emotional and psychological burden effectively is what contributes to the long-term maintenance of the trauma (Everson and Figley 2011).

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT: ACUTE SHOCK AND CHRONIC BEREAVEMENT

The narratives of the shuhda families consistently demonstrate that the emotional journey begins with an overwhelming, acute psychological shock that immediately shatters their sense of normalcy and security. The case of Asiya Bibi, the wife of L Hav Muhammad Farooq Shaheed, is

particularly illustrative; she recalls the exact moments of receiving the news of her husband's martyrdom with vivid detail, a classic example of a flash-bulb memory that continues to trigger recurring emotional distress and vulnerability (Bibi, interview; Abrams 2016). Similarly, the family of NK Nisar Ahmed Shaheed, who was killed during Operation Al Mizan, was so engulfed in shock and mental distress that the mother was confined to bed with illness, and the family consciously avoided large commemorative events to prevent further emotional injury (Muneer, interview). These reactions are textbook manifestations of acute trauma, where the mind and body are simply overwhelmed by the suddenness and violence of the loss (Levine 2012).

For many, this acute shock quickly transitioned into chronic, complex grief, often characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, guilt, and a prolonged inability to reintegrate into a functional post-loss life (Bonanno 2019). Khalida Parveen, wife of Sep Zahid Hussain Shaheed, articulated the overwhelming dual burden of struggling with intense grief while simultaneously shouldering the responsibilities of daily life and single parenthood, highlighting the profound psychological stress (Parveen, interview). Arslan Ghafoor, son of Hav Abdul Ghafoor Shaheed, noted that the family's deep sorrow and lasting sense of loss were particularly overwhelming during significant celebratory events like Eid, underscoring how chronic grief is not a process that "ends," but one that is permanently integrated into the rhythm of their lives (Ghafoor, interview).

The family of Hav Shahid Mehmood Shaheed provides one of the most tragic examples of the ripple effect of chronic

trauma. The incident, occurring just before his wedding, triggered such severe mental conditions that his father suffered until his own death, and his sister nearly lost her sight due to continuous weeping (Usman, interview). This not only illustrates the intense psychological toll but also exemplifies the "ripple effect" of trauma, where the distress of one family member profoundly impacts the physical and mental health of others (Davis 2020). The need for sustained, professional mental health support becomes glaringly evident, yet the interviews suggest that while financial aid is available, sophisticated psychological assistance necessary to manage such deep-seated, chronic trauma is conspicuously absent from the standard support packages.

The narrative of Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed's mother, Zaib-un-Nisa, provides a powerful example of spiritual coping, yet even her staunch faith is presented in the context of enduring pain: "It is unexplainable to lose your children, but then I feel proud of being the mother of courageous sons who sacrificed their lives while serving the country" (Naveed, interview). This demonstrates a deep reliance on religious belief to facilitate acceptance and patience, which, while providing spiritual resilience, is a personal mechanism, not a substitute for institutional psychological support (Frankl 1959). The transition from acute shock to chronic grief is therefore navigated primarily through personal faith and familial resources, underscoring the critical gap in systematic, state-sponsored trauma care for the shuhda families of Chakwal.

#### SOCIOECONOMIC DISLOCATION AND THE INADEQUACY OF STATE SUPPORT

The core finding of this research is the stark disparity between the narrative of honour conferred by the state and the practical, material support provided, leading to significant socioeconomic dislocation for the surviving families. The death of a soldier, particularly those of lower ranks like L Havs and Sepoys, frequently meant the abrupt loss of the primary breadwinner, plunging families into financial instability despite the governmental commitment to compensation (Everson and Figley 2011). The standard military package—a plot of land, a lump sum of money, and a subsequent monthly pension—proved universally insufficient to ensure long-term stability and sustainable livelihood, a finding consistent with broader critiques of inadequate long-term care planning (Brown, Goda, and McGarry 2012).

Asiya Bibi, the widow of L Hav Muhammad Farooq Shaheed, faced significant bureaucratic hurdles and delays in accessing her husband's pension and financial aid, forcing her to rely on her own parents and siblings for immediate sustenance (Bibi, interview). Khalida Parveen, whose husband Sep Zahid Hussain Shaheed died in the 2005 earthquake, became dependent on her brothers for financial aid because the military pension alone could not cover her family's needs, directly contradicting the state's implicit promise of self-sufficiency (Parveen, interview). This financial dependence highlights a failure of policy to address the shift in economic responsibility—a structural issue where the one-time compensation is rapidly eroded by the cost of living, education, and the new burden of single-parenting or the loss of agricultural labor previously performed by the soldier.

The problem is compounded in cases where the soldier was unmarried or where technical issues arose. Lnk Afzal Ahmed Shaheed's family could not access his pension because both his parents were deceased and he was unmarried, leaving his surviving siblings to face financial strain without the expected military aid (Ahmad, interview). Khushbakht, the son of Sub Abdul Hamid Shaheed, articulated a common desire for not just immediate funds but for long-term "employment opportunities for family members," recognising that a reliable income stream is the true foundation of long-term financial security and honouring the sacrifice (Hameed, interview). The absence of guaranteed employment, educational scholarships that fully cover expenses beyond basic fees, or comprehensive healthcare for the martyr's aging parents represents a critical ethical and political failure (Szonyi 2019).

The long-term effects of this insufficient financial support cascade into educational attainment and social mobility. Arslan Ghafoor, though supported by his uncles, faced ongoing concerns regarding the funding of his and his siblings' education, which was viewed as both a necessity and a means of honouring his father's legacy (Ghafoor, interview). The resilience shown by these families—such as Asiya Bibi's decision to remarry to find stability and Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed's son, Ahmad Umar, aspiring to join the army—is admirable but should not obscure the fact that their path to recovery was made unnecessarily difficult by an insufficient support system that demanded extraordinary personal sacrifice long after the soldier's death (Naveed, interview; Bibi, interview).

### THE DUALITY OF PRIDE AND SORROW: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES

The emotional landscape of Chakwal is defined by a striking duality where overwhelming national pride in the act of shahadat coexists, and sometimes clashes, with the intensely personal and devastating reality of sorrow. This duality is mediated through the powerful cultural mechanism of collective memory and commemorative practices, which serve as a critical form of community support and trauma processing (Abrams 2016). When a soldier is declared a martyr, the individual life is instantly transformed into a national symbol, a narrative of selfless courage that reinforces the entire community's martial identity (Fatima 2021).

Commemorative rituals, such as the annual Quran khuwani (recitation of the Quran) held by Captain Farhat Haseeb Haider Shaheed's family, or the regular Milad meetings and gravesite visits practiced by Hav Shahid Mehmood Shaheed's family, are vital socio-psychological functions. These events allow the community to collectively grieve, acknowledge the trauma, and transform the pain of loss into a shared, dignified sense of honour, providing a communal buffer against the isolating effects of individual grief (Usman, interview; Abbas, interview). The act of publicly honouring the fallen validates the family's pain while simultaneously elevating their status within society, contributing significantly to their sense of resilience (Levine 2012).

However, this collective memory also exerts a pressure on the surviving family members to maintain the public narrative of 'pride,' sometimes at the expense of their

private 'sorrow.' This tension is felt particularly when a family avoids large public events, as seen with NK Nisar Ahmed Shaheed's relatives, who preferred quieter, private forms of remembrance to avoid the emotional distress of public display (Muneer, interview). The intense focus on the hero's sacrifice can inadvertently suppress the expression of profound personal suffering, forcing the bereaved to perform a role of stoic resilience for the sake of the collective narrative, complicating their individual healing process (Bonanno 2019).

The most powerful demonstration of this duality is the case of Colonel Amer Baig Mirza Shaheed's mother, Zaib-un-Nisa, who had already lost another son, Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed. Her interview reflects a transcendence of personal pain into a powerful, almost ideological, pride: "I sacrificed both my sons for this nation, and I am proud that I made such a big sacrifice for my country" (Naveed, interview). While this extraordinary resilience is moving, it is rooted in a cultural structure that valorises sacrifice to such an extent that it becomes the only acceptable public response to devastating loss. Memory theory highlights how this cultural narrative is deeply encoded, shaping the identity of the next generation, such as Major Umar's son, Ahmad Umar, who was inspired to join the military despite having only vague memories of his father (Abrams 2016).

Ultimately, while the communal solidarity and commemorative practices of Chakwal are invaluable in providing emotional comfort and validating the sacrifice, they cannot, and do not, resolve the tangible needs left unaddressed by the state. The pride is spiritual and emotional; the sorrow is physical and financial. The

insufficiency of governmental support places an undue and excessive burden on the communal fabric to provide for the long-term needs of the families, effectively outsourcing a state responsibility to the local community (Szonyi 2019). The duality of pride and sorrow thus remains an ongoing challenge, with the communal honour providing the moral fortitude to endure, but failing to provide the economic stability needed to thrive.

#### FAMILIAL ADAPTATION AND THE LONG-TERM STRUGGLE FOR REINTEGRATION

The loss of a shuhda initiates a period of profound and challenging familial adaptation, forcing surviving members to renegotiate roles, reconfigure financial strategies, and manage the psychological fallout in an environment of diminished resources and heightened emotional stress. The period between 1999 and 2010 saw a continuous need for this complex reintegration, as families worked to weave the permanent absence of the martyr into the new fabric of their daily lives (Everson and Figley 2011).

The most immediate change is the abrupt shift in family dynamics. Khushbakht, the son of Sub Abdul Hamid Shaheed, provides a clear example of this role reversal, taking on the duties of the family caretaker and primary male figure for his mother and younger siblings immediately after his father's death (Hameed, interview). This sudden burden of responsibility on younger family members is a direct consequence of the loss of the patriarchal provider and necessitates rapid emotional and practical maturity, often at the expense of their own developmental needs. For widows like Khalida Parveen and Asiya Bibi, the challenge

was exponentially greater, facing not only personal grief but also the full, unrelenting weight of single parenthood and the social challenges associated with it (Parveen, interview; Bibi, interview).

Resilience, defined in trauma theory as the ability to adapt successfully to adversity (Bonanno 2019), is evident in the proactive steps taken by the surviving families to ensure their long-term survival and honour the martyr's legacy. Khalida Parveen focused intensely on her son's education as her "new aspiration for life," viewing his success as a form of continued homage to her husband (Parveen, interview). Similarly, Asiya Bibi's decision to remarry and build a new family demonstrates a powerful determination to move beyond the trauma, finding stability and establishing a new normal (Bibi, interview). These adaptations are not signs that the grief has ended, but rather evidence of a deep-seated human capacity to endure and rebuild in the face of immense loss.

However, the path to reintegration is consistently hampered by the structural weaknesses in state support. The long-term financial uncertainty, exacerbated by the policy gaps identified in the previous section, often forces family members into difficult choices or prolonged dependence. The case of Lnk Afzal Ahmed Shaheed's family, who received virtually no military financial support due to a technicality regarding his unmarried status, stands as a stark indictment of the policy's rigidity and lack of compassionate foresight (Ahmad, interview). Their struggle for financial survival after the immediate trauma highlights that state-sponsored honour is only symbolic if it is not matched by material security.

Furthermore, the social environment, while generally supportive, presented

occasional challenges, as noted by Asiya Bibi, who faced "a lot of negativity from people in society," adding an extra layer of emotional stress to her grief (Bibi, interview). This highlights that collective trauma can evoke both supportive solidarity and stigmatising behaviours, demonstrating the complex social dynamics surrounding loss in a traditional community. The ultimate success of familial adaptation and long-term reintegration for the shuhda families of Chakwal is therefore not guaranteed by state policy but is dependent on an unpredictable combination of personal spiritual resilience, strong familial networks, and the varying empathy of the local community, all of which should ideally be supplemented, not supplanted, by comprehensive state resources.

#### TRAUMA MANIFESTATIONS ACROSS THE RANKS (1999–2005)

The initial wave of casualties between 1999 and 2005, spanning the Kargil War (Captain Farhat Haseeb Haider Shaheed, L Hav Muhammad Farooq Shaheed), the 2005 Earthquake (Sep Zahid Hussain Shaheed, Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed, Sep Saeed Ahmed Shaheed), and Operation Al Mizan (NK Nisar Ahmed Shaheed), provides a critical cross-section of trauma manifestations based on rank, circumstance, and existing financial buffers.

The losses during the Kargil War demonstrated the acute trauma associated with combat, particularly when the details were uncertain or delayed. Captain Farhat Haseeb Haider Shaheed was declared MIA before his shahadat was confirmed, a situation that introduces the ambiguous loss factor, prolonging the family's state of shock and denial (Abbas, interview; Kübler-Ross

and Kessler 2005). However, his family's high socio-economic standing—all members were well-educated and held profitable jobs—provided a significant financial buffer, allowing them to focus their coping mechanisms entirely on the emotional and commemorative process, thus insulating them from the common economic trauma (Abbas, interview). Their ability to turn their remembrance into philanthropic acts, such as helping poor children, is a higher-order coping mechanism that requires financial security.

In contrast, L Hav Muhammad Farooq Shaheed's family experienced the full force of combined emotional and socioeconomic shock. His widow, Asiya Bibi, explicitly details the immediate struggle to navigate life without her spouse, coupled with bureaucratic delays in securing the promised financial support (Bibi, interview). Her account is a textbook illustration of how the acute trauma of loss is compounded by systemic, policy-induced stress, converting emotional pain into a chronic, resource-based vulnerability (Levine 2012). The differential impact of the exact same event on the two families, distinguished primarily by their pre-existing financial stability, powerfully illustrates that state financial aid is not merely a courtesy but a crucial tool for mitigating and preventing policy-induced trauma.

The 2005 Earthquake deaths—including Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed, Sep Zahid Hussain Shaheed, and Sep Saeed Ahmed Shaheed—present a distinct type of operational trauma: loss not in combat but while performing humanitarian duty. This category of loss, while equally traumatic, carries an extra layer of collective significance related to service to the nation

in times of natural calamity, which slightly alters the commemorative narrative. Major Mirza's case, involving a helicopter crash during a relief operation, was a spectacular and tragic event, deeply affecting the family (Naveed, interview). Yet, his mother's resilience, rooted in strong religious conviction, became the family's primary psychological scaffolding, demonstrating that spiritual coping is often the most readily available and effective mechanism in the absence of institutional psychological services.

However, for Sep Zahid Hussain Shaheed and Sep Saeed Ahmed Shaheed's families, the trauma was overwhelmingly compounded by financial instability (Parveen, interview; Abrar, interview). Khalida Parveen and Abrar both lamented the insufficient financial support and the subsequent dependency on family for sustenance and their children's education. This highlights a systemic failure to adequately compensate lower-ranking soldiers for the ultimate sacrifice, an oversight that translates directly into long-term socioeconomic hardship for their dependents (Brown, Goda, and McGarry 2012). The persistent lack of long-term planning for educational and medical needs means the state's gesture of honour quickly dissolves into a reality of struggle, forcing the community to absorb the failure of the central support system.

The martyrdom of NK Nisar Ahmed Shaheed in the internal conflict of Operation Al Mizan also reflects the compounding factors of trauma. While his three brothers helped mitigate the financial difficulties, the psychological toll remained high, forcing the family into an avoidant coping mechanism where they deliberately shunned large,

public commemorative events (Muneer, interview; Davis 2020). This conscious avoidance of public memorialisation, a key component of collective healing, underscores the intensity of their unresolved emotional distress and the failure of the institutional system to provide a safe, supported path for their private grief. Thus, the 1999–2005 period reveals a pattern where the severity of long-term trauma is fundamentally determined by the inverse relationship between the soldier's rank/financial status and the adequacy of the state-provided support.

#### THE RIPPLE EFFECT: TRAUMA AND INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT (2006–2010)

The later period of 2006–2010, dominated by counter-terrorism operations like Operation Raah-e-Raast and Operation Raah-e-Nijaat, brought continued loss and increasingly visible evidence of the long-term, intergenerational "ripple effect" of trauma on shuhda families (Davis 2020). The sudden, violent nature of these losses amplified the need for comprehensive support, a need that the existing structures continued to fail to meet adequately.

The case of Hav Shahid Mehmood Shaheed, who died in Operation Al Mizan just before his wedding, demonstrates the power of acute trauma to cause immediate and severe familial breakdown (Usman, interview). His father's subsequent death and his sister's near blindness due to incessant crying are somatic and psychological manifestations of the trauma's intensity (Levine 2012). The disruption of a future event—a wedding—compounded the loss, leading to a state of complex, acute grief that transitioned quickly into chronic

distress. The financial aid provided by the army, while present, could not halt the immense emotional toll that led to the death of one parent and the severe medical condition of a sibling, proving that emotional and psychological care is the greater unmet need in such violent and sudden losses.

Rect. Rashid Minhas Shaheed's death in a 2006 terrorist attack also underscores the acute shock of an unexpected, violent loss during routine training (Ramzan, interview). However, like Captain Haider's family, the Minhas family benefited from pre-existing financial stability due to the father being a retired army officer, which insulated them from the immediate economic fallout (Ramzan, interview). This further reinforces the finding that pre-existing wealth acts as the most effective buffer against the state's inadequate long-term financial planning, allowing the family to focus purely on the management of their emotional trauma and the maintenance of their spiritual resilience.

The story of Colonel Amer Baig Mirza Shaheed, the second brother to fall after Major Umar Baig Mirza Shaheed, is perhaps the most profound illustration of intergenerational sacrifice and trauma burden. His family's experience highlights how a commitment to military service, which is a source of immense pride, also carries a devastating and sustained burden of grief (Naveed, interview). While the mother found ultimate solace in the ideological pride of sacrificing her sons for the nation, the loss fundamentally shaped the lives and career trajectories of the remaining family members (Abrams 2016).

The survival and subsequent career success of the elder brother, Lt. Gen. Shahid Baig Mirza, provided a powerful, high-profile example of resilience and continued honour

to the family. However, the emotional cost of this public legacy is immense, placing the remaining family members in a constant state of public mourning and celebration (Naveed, interview). The repeated public funerals, commemorations, and media attention, while intended to honour, also force the family to repeatedly relive the traumatic events, potentially hindering the quiet, individualised healing process required by trauma theory (Bonanno 2019). Their financial stability mitigated the economic trauma, but the psychological exposure to sustained, high-profile grief became their primary challenge, a policy concern that needs to be addressed through sensitive, tailored support for high-profile shuhda families.

The challenges faced by the families of Sub Abdul Hamid Shaheed and Lnk Afzal Ahmed Shaheed during this later period solidify the critique of the state's financial support. Sub Hamid's son, Khushbakht, though committed to his new role, explicitly identified the crucial need for employment opportunities over simple lump sums, signalling a clear understanding that a sustainable income is the only true long-term solution to financial insecurity (Hameed, interview). Lnk Afzal Ahmed's family, who received virtually no aid due to technicalities, faced severe financial instability, highlighting a policy failure that punishes the bereaved based on marital or parental status at the time of death (Ahmad, interview).

Similarly, the family of NK Muhammad Ishaq Shaheed, who died in a road accident during a Swat operation, relied heavily on the existing military background of the surviving brother, Muhammad Iftikhar, to navigate the shock and care for the children

(Iftikhar, interview). The interviews from this period consistently indicate that while the community and military units provided emotional check-ins and condolences, the institutional mechanism for providing *sustained economic empowerment* was either non-existent or failed due to bureaucratic rigidities, confirming the central argument of the research. The ripple effect of trauma is therefore inextricably linked to the policy failure to guarantee post-loss economic continuity.

## CONCLUSION

This study of the shuhda families of District Chakwal between 1999 and 2010 confirms the central thesis: the existing governmental and military support systems, while culturally significant and emotionally necessary in the immediate aftermath, are structurally insufficient to address the long-term financial, educational, and psychological needs arising from the sudden and violent loss of a loved one. Drawing upon a detailed analysis of primary source interviews and grounded in trauma and memory theory, the research demonstrates that the policy of honouring sacrifice with a nominal package often transforms a personal tragedy into a prolonged socioeconomic struggle for the surviving family members.

The emotional and psychological narratives reveal a pattern of acute trauma—characterised by vivid flash-bulb memories and profound shock—that rapidly transitions into chronic, complex grief, frequently manifesting as physical illness, persistent emotional distress, and familial breakdown (Levine 2012; Everson and Figley 2011). While the collective memory and commemorative practices of Chakwal

provide a powerful, culturally-sanctioned mechanism for coping and expressing pride, this communal support cannot substitute for the necessary professional psychological intervention or the material resources required for a stable life. The resilience shown by widows and children, though admirable, is a testament to extraordinary personal fortitude, not the success of state policy, as their recovery path was made unnecessarily difficult by resource scarcity and bureaucratic delay.

Moving forward, the state's commitment to the families of its martyrs must transition from symbolic, temporary gestures to sustainable, institutionalised care. Based on the empirical evidence gathered from the families, this requires three critical policy improvements. First, financial aid must be re-evaluated to reflect the long-term cost of living, with a focus on providing guaranteed employment opportunities for eligible surviving family members rather than solely relying on fixed pensions and lump sums. Second, a comprehensive, confidential psychological support network must be institutionalised and maintained, moving beyond initial condolences to address the chronic trauma and intergenerational effects observed in the interviews. Finally, bureaucratic rigidities, such as those that denied aid based on marital status, must be eliminated to ensure that all families, irrespective of the soldier's rank or relational status, are treated with the dignity and material security that their sacrifice warrants (Szonyi 2019). Only through these sustained, material commitments can the nation truly honour the love, grief, and sacrifices of the shuhda families of Chakwal.

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