

NATION, CURRENT AFFAIRS

## Conflict tears into Kashmir's mental health, says survey

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | SANJIB KUMAR BARUAH

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The survey conducted between October and December 2015 included 399 villages and 5,428 households. (Representational Image)

**NEW DELHI:** The explosion of violence in the Kashmir Valley beginning from the late 80s and early 90s has left an ugly scar on the minds of the local population. With more than 70% of adults having experienced or witnessed the sudden or violent death of someone they knew, it is no wonder that 45% or 18 lakh of the adult population in the Valley's ten districts show symptoms of significant mental distress.

These are summary findings of the first-ever comprehensive survey conducted jointly by global health NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) (MSF), Department of Psychology, Kashmir University and the Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience (IMHANS) across all the ten districts.

The final report will be released on Wednesday. The survey conducted between October and December 2015 included 399 villages and 5,428 households. The mental health study included symptoms of depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

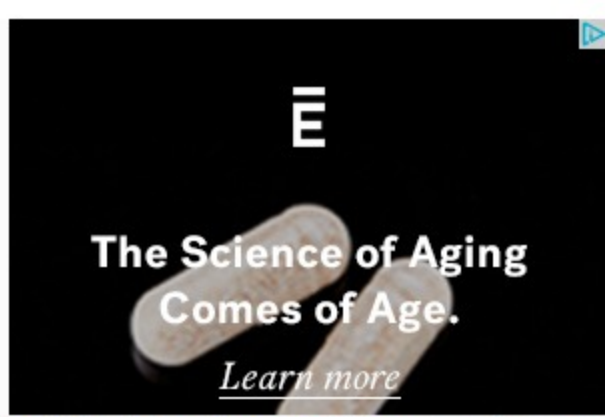
"These results are totally on expected lines. And this is mainly due to very high stress levels which are again due to the ongoing conflict. Firings, blasts, killings, mysterious deaths and people missing were part and parcel of our lives during the peak of militancy.

It is only natural that the common man's mind will be affected," Professor Noor Ahmed Baba, who teaches at the Kashmir Central University, told this newspaper. "When violence was at the peak, no one was secure. When you left home, you are not sure you will be back safe. It was the youths who were the most vulnerable ones.

"The phenomena of missing people have resulted in more than a lakh of 'half-widows' in the Kashmir Valley," Baba added alluding to the Kashmiri women whose husbands are still missing due to the conflict.

"The 'half-widows' do not even know whether their husbands are dead or alive," he added. Youths in the early 90s would be in their 50s now. Not surprisingly, the survey concludes: "The proportion of mental distress was significantly higher in the over 55 year age group for all disorders."

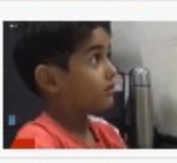
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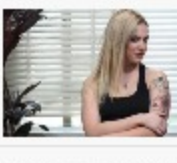
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