

The Plight of Shia Hazaras in Balochistan, Pakistan: From Persecution to Resilience

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The Shia Hazara Community in Pakistan has faced prolonged violence, torture, discrimination, and harassment, which peaked notably from 1999 to 2015. Today, though the frequency of violent incidents has decreased, the Shia Hazara community continues to endure persistent threats, discrimination, and harassment, including sporadic targeted killings. This survey-based investigation draws upon 117 Hazara community members residing in two central localities (Hazara Town and Mariabad) of Quetta, Balochistan, to understand socio-economic discrimination and pervasive insecurity, the intricate interplay of ethnicity and religion, and additional influential factors that contribute to sustained persecution. In this investigation, besides descriptive statistics and visualization, authors utilize robust statistical techniques encompassing Chi-Squared tests for independence, testing independence for ordinal variables, counts, and rates. This study unearths compelling evidence revealing the profound extent of discrimination endured by the Hazara community in the public domain and the tenacious resistance strategies they harness to combat their subjugation.

Keywords: shia Hazaras, Pakistan, Quetta, Balochistan, target killing

The marginalized Shia Hazara community of Pakistan makes up roughly 40% of Quetta city, the capital of Balochistan province. The population is primarily concentrated in the localities of Mariabad and Hazara Town, approximately 10-13 kilometers apart and mainly connected by Alamdar Road.¹ In early 2023, the Hazara population was estimated to be between 560,000 and 900,000 across Pakistan, of which 600,000 are concentrated in Quetta, making up the third largest ethnic group in the city, after the Baloch and Pashtun (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Hazaras have significantly contributed to the development of Pakistani society in different fields, including armed forces and sports. A notable example is General Muhammad Musa, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army and later as a Governor of Balochistan.² Since 2003, Hazaras have also had their political party, the Hazara Democratic Party- HDP (Qayyum, 2018). Despite this, the community has faced structural violence, making them heavily reliant on remittances from relatives settled abroad, as their businesses have been severely impacted by escalating violence and targeted killings. In addition to persecution, discrimination affects their daily lives, employment prospects, and access to education and healthcare facilities.

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Through a survey employing a range of robust statistical models, this research aims to understand the severity of violence and the extent of marginalization faced by this community. It includes restricted employment business opportunities and unsafe environments. The purpose is to understand the factors responsible for the “ghettoization” of this marginalized community, their level of trust in state efforts, and their own community-led initiatives for rights movements. In Pakistan, Shia-Sunni sectarian violence erupted in the 1980s when many Sunni militant outfits flourished and were largely ignored by law enforcement agencies. During this period, Shia Hazaras were not directly targeted, although religious intolerance was on the rise across the country. It wasn't until the 1990s that Shia Hazaras became the target of Sunni militants for the first time.

Between 1999 and 2022, at least 261 attacks against the Shia Hazara community in Pakistan took place, resulting in 1046 deaths and 1,262 wounded.³ Half of the attacks were claimed by Lashker-e-Jhangvi-LeJ, which was 43%, and few others were claimed by Jaish-ul Adal, Jasi-ul Islam, and Islamic State Khorasan Province-ISKP (Alizada & Iltaf, 2023). Since 2013, because of the widespread protest against Hazaras, their self-protection measures, and state actions, including Operation Zarb-e-Azab and the National Action Plan (NAP), the attacks decreased but have not entirely stopped. There are many reasons behind these targeted attacks: the central remaining ethnic and religious identity and broader sectarian-ideological dynamics of the region, supported by other contributing factors like economic objectives and political mileage.

A substantial body of scholarship is available that comprehensively traces the origin and history of the Hazara tribe in central Afghanistan and their gradual and inconsistent migration to other neighboring localities, including Pakistani Balochistan, which dates to 1878 (Devasher, 2018). This community has borne the brunt of many of the destructive forces unleashed by the establishment of the Afghan monarchy. Frequent episodes of ethnic cleansing, mass dispossession, forced displacement, enslavement, and social and economic exclusion have punctuated the history of their relationship with the Afghan state. In a predominantly Sunni Muslim country, the Shia Hazara minority, identifiable by their distinct Mongolian features, became Afghanistan's marginalized group. The first phase of their intense migration was during Abdur Rehman Khan's rulership (1891-1893), who killed many Hazaras and pushed them to leave the country (Poladi, 1989; Monsutti, 2005; Creasy, 2009; Ibrahimi, 2017; Mousavi, 2018). The Hazaras settled in Quetta, Balochistan, assimilating into the culture and living in peace and harmony with the neighboring communities (Owtadolajam, 2006; Ali & Baig, 2017). They also participated actively with other ethnicities in the independence movement in 1947. Their contribution to different fields of life for development and progress remained remarkable, which also made them the third-largest ethnic group in the city.

During General Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988), Sunni radicalization began as a result of Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. “This radicalism sowed the seed of bigotry and fanaticism in the country. The first message calling the Shia community ‘kafir’ (infidels) was written on the walls of Quetta in 1981. Quetta's residents largely ignored it” (Tarar, 2018). Sectarian violence intensified during this phase in which Shia Hazaras were targeted specifically because of their recognizable features and religious identity. The persecution, which started in the 1970s, continued, and the community faced systematic attacks, bomb blasts, and killings, profoundly affecting their lives. Many Hazaras migrated abroad seeking asylum due to the unsafe environment (Alizada & Iltaf, 2023; Olszewska, 2013). As

discussed above, their distinct features made their identification easy. Additionally, their daily commute between the two central Hazara localities in Quetta provided further targeting opportunities. Furthermore, Shia pilgrims traveling to holy sites in Iran and Iraq via the Taftan border, 650 km from Quetta, are also targeted. Despite traveling in groups with armed escorts from law enforcement agencies, the long distance and challenging terrain make them vulnerable to militant attacks along this route.

The comprehensive history of sectarian violence in Pakistan focuses on the various reasons behind this violence, ranging from sectarian motives to socioeconomic tensions, which is discussed by different scholars (Ali, 2021; Ahmed, 2011; Majidyar, 2014; Fair, 2014). Ali (2021) explained the genesis of sectarian violence in the country by highlighting the role of the Sunni militant Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which emerged as a militant faction originating from the Deobandi Sunni group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in the 1990s. The political movement LeJ has been linked to Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), with some suggesting a rebranding while others point to collaboration. “LeJ has close cooperation with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), as well as with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)” (p. 200). These groups together used some Islamic religious interpretations to justify their violence against the Hazara Shias, as they are prominently involved in such prosecutions. Apart from sectarian reasons, Ali also highlights the socio-economic tensions, particularly the resentment of the local Baloch community towards the Hazara Shia community, as a contributing factor. While adding another dimension to the international actors responsible for this mass killing, Majidya (2014) discusses that the external influences from Iran and Saudi Arabia have escalated sectarian tensions. He further explains:

Iran’s growing power in Pakistan enraged both Pakistani Sunni religious groups and Persian Gulf Sunni monarchies. To counter Iranian influence, Saudi Arabia substantially increased financial support for the Pakistani Sunni religious organizations and highlighted the financial support provided to Pakistani Shia and Sunni religious organizations, contributing to inter-sect violence” (p.3).

The result of this sectarian violence was devastating for the Shia Hazara community in Pakistan, severely impacting their businesses and involvement in public life, including education and employment opportunities (Nawaz & Hassan, 2015; Rafiq, 2014; Bakhsh & Haider, 2020; Khan, 2021; Siddiqi, 2015). The unsafe environment resulted in large-scale migration, which, with limited resources, was the biggest challenge to this already marginalized community. While adding another scholar particularly mentioned that the violence between different sectarian groups often leads the already underprivileged population to be caught in between. It was not only the Sunni outfits who were involved. “A minority of Shia groups turned to violence to defend the community, engaging in tit-for-tat terror attacks against militant Sunni groups” (Abbas, 2010).

This human cost of the sectarian conflict has been addressed in different studies, where the focus remained on the challenges and experiences of Hazaras, particularly their mental health issues, community-driven solutions, and the media coverage provided to this targeted group (Tanveer, 2017; Azad, 2014; Khan & Amin, 2019). These studies contributed to a nuanced understanding of the Hazara community's struggles and resilience in adversity by providing a comprehensive examination of their socio-cultural profile, emphasizing their historically peaceful co-existence with other communities in Quetta. Majeed (2021) explained, “The insecurity caused

by fear of movement has turned both of densely populated Shia Hazara Community of Quetta in slums engulfed with the constant threat to their lives” (p.82). To address the mental trauma experienced by the community, Tanveer (2017) explains that the Hazaras focus on community-driven initiatives. These initiatives provide relief and amplify their voice against aggression and violence. In this regard, the role of media remained crucial; according to Azad (2014), the newspapers highlighted the community's persecution and killings in Pakistan, and many journalists published articles debating the reasons behind the mass killings.

The reviewed scholarships above have primarily focused on the Shia-Hazaras' history in Pakistan and various types of violence against this community, often attributing its causes solely to ethnic and religious characteristics. This study expands on prior research in several ways. First, it explores other potential reasons behind the targeted violence against the Shia Hazara community. Second, it investigates their opinions on safety and discrimination, considering factors such as age, education, profession, and socio-economic status. Third, it examines workplace discrimination, employment opportunities, high business and rental property costs, and unequal payments. Fourth, the study assesses the community's trust in state efforts to provide safety and address grievances, as well as the community's involvement in advocating for their demands and their views on the effectiveness of these efforts.

Method

Data collection and sampling

A multifaceted sampling method is employed to comprehensively understand the gravity and level of violence against Hazaras of Quetta. The initial invitations for the survey were conducted through telephonic communication, followed by in-person meetings. The principal investigator strategically established gathering points at various locations, including local restaurants, public libraries, fitness centers, martial arts training centers, community organization facilities, and BUIITEMS University. This approach ensured a comprehensive representation of the Hazara community while meticulously maintaining participant confidentiality. Every session was initiated with an introduction explaining the academic motivations behind the research. The researchers emphasized independence from NGOs or security agencies to demonstrate transparency and gain respondents' confidence. The survey was conducted from 10 a.m. to midnight to ensure the inclusion of voices from a diverse group of community members. Data was collected between August 25th and September 2nd, 2023.

In recognition of the participants' contributions, each was given a thoughtful gift as a token of appreciation for their invaluable involvement. The target was to collect data from 100 Hazara members residing in Mariabad and Hazara Town in Quetta. However, the principal investigator and the team successfully completed 117 interviews from diverse locations within the same localities.

Tools

To comprehensively understand the situations of the Hazara community suffering from extreme violence and discrimination, descriptive analysis, visualizations, univariate and bivariate contingency table analysis-have been employed. To check the significance of their findings, the authors used statistical tests like the Wald test, Chi-square test, Fisher's Exact Test, and Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel Test. All their analyses were done using the popular statistical software R.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board of the principal investigator institution approved the questionnaire and ethical considerations related to this study. Researchers involved in data collection signed a contract to formalize their commitment to the project's data collection and translation phases, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and confidentiality standards. Due to safety concerns and life threats faced by the community, no audio or video recordings were made. Instead, in some cases, researchers took notes on important information with the participants' permission. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the survey at any stage, emphasizing their agency in the process. To strengthen the ethical foundation of research, participants were presented with an informed consent form, outlining available resources for any assistance needed after completing the survey.

Results

To understand the profile of the community, their socio-demographics, discrimination and safety concerns, reasons for mass killings and violence, unequal employment and business opportunities, community confidence in state measures, and Hazara's involvement in their rights advocacy movement are analyzed in Table 1. The socio-demographic profile of Hazara participants shows that most participants (58.12%) are aged 18-25, followed by 15.39% aged 26-30 and 17.95% aged 31-40. It is evident that younger Hazaras (18-25) are more likely to participate in studies due to their availability, better access to education and technology, and presence in targeted environments like universities and social media. They are also more vocal and engaged in discussing violence and discrimination issues. Females make up 52.14% of respondents, surpassing males at 42.15%, with the remaining identifying as LGBTQ+ and transgender.

The education levels of these participants vary, with the most common being completion of higher secondary education (FA, 35.04%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (BA, 24.79%), master's degree holders (MA, 20.51%), and those with secondary school completion (Matriculation, 14.53%). The education levels of these participants vary, with the most common being FA (35.04%), followed by BA (24.79%), MA (20.51%), and Matriculation (14.53%), while the rest fall into lower education categories, higher level of education shows a greater willingness to participate in research⁴. Most respondents are students (39.32%), followed by professionals (35.9%), 11.11% in various jobs, 6.84% business owners, and 5.98% are skilled and unskilled labor. More students and professionals in the study reflect more availability and interest in survey. Only one woman reported being unemployed.

Most respondents (77.63%) earn a monthly income between 40,000 to 100,000 PKR, likely reflecting the higher education and professional status of the majority, who tend to have better-paying jobs. The smaller percentages earning 20,000 to 40,000 PKR (11.84%) and less than 20,000 PKR (10.53%) may represent those in entry-level, part-time, or less skilled positions. Most (90.6%) of the Hazara community members have lived there since birth, reflecting a strong sense of community and long-term settlement. The 8.54% who have settled in the past 10 years likely include recent migrants or those displaced by conflict. Approximately 53.85% of having family abroad suggests significant migration due to seeking safety or better opportunities, while 46.15% not having family abroad indicates a substantial portion of the community remains local and possibly more connected to their roots and cultural ties.

Table 1*Descriptive Variable Analysis*

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=117)	
Variable	%
Gender	
Male	42.15
Female	52.14
Others	1.71
Age	
18-25	58.12
26-30	15.39
31-40	17.95
41-50	3.42
51-60	1.71
Education	
Uneducated	1.70
Primary	2.57
Matriculation (10th grade or equivalent	14.53
FA (Intermediate)	35.04
BA (Baccalaureate/ Bachelor)	24.79
MA (Master)	20.51
Occupation	
Unemployed	0.86
Student	39.32
Professional (Doctor, Lawyer, CA, Teachers, etc.)	35.90
Employment (Govt servant, bank officials, factory workers, company executives, etc.)	11.11
Business	6.84
Skilled Laborer (Beautician, tailor, etc.)	2.56
Unskilled Laborer (Housekeepers, cleaners, workers, etc.)	3.42
Monthly household income (PKR)	
15,000-20,000	10.53
20,000-40,000	11.84
40,000-80,000	34.21
80,000-100,000	15.79
100,000 to above	27.63
Duration of Living in Quetta	
Since Birth	90.60
Last 10 Years	8.54
Family Members Settled Abroad	
Yes	53.85
No	46.15

Discrimination, Segregation, and Safety Concerns*Identity-Based Discrimination & Segregation*

Yes	75.21
No	23.08
<i>Safety Outside Community</i>	
Safe	11.97
Not Safe	82.05
<i>Safety at Workplace</i>	
Safe	16.23
Unsafe	72.65
<i>Travel Preference</i>	
Alone	19.66
In a Company	57.26
<i>Child Safety Outside Home</i>	
Safe	6.84
Unsafe	88.71
Reasons for killings and violence	
<i>Awareness of Violence Involving Family or Community Members</i>	
Yes	77.78
No	19.66
<i>Factors in Community Exploitation (Preference in Order)</i>	
Ethnicity	57.27
Religion	42.74
<i>Reasons for Hazara Exploitation (Preference in Order)</i>	
Ethnic & Religious	68.38
Target Violence	12.82
Socio-Economic Factors	5.98
Historical Tensions & Conflict	5.13
Political Marginalization	4.27
Unequal Employment and Business Opportunities	
<i>Discrimination during Job Applications</i>	
Yes	71.80
No	24.79
<i>Equal Salary for the same job</i>	
Yes	35.04
No	55.56
<i>Equal Business/Work Opportunities</i>	
Yes	12.60
No	79.49
<i>High rental costs</i>	
Yes	64.10
No	14.53
Community Confidence in State Measures	
<i>Unhappy with the government's efforts</i>	
Satisfied	12.82
Dissatisfied	81.20
<i>Involvement in Rights Movement</i>	
Yes	55.56
No	44.44
<i>Effectiveness of Hazara Community Efforts</i>	
Effective	40.17
Non-Effective	49.57

A significant 75.21% of respondents reported discrimination outside their Hazara community, indicating widespread prejudice and targeting based on their identity. This high level of discrimination contributes to the majority (82.05%) feeling unsafe, as they likely face threats and hostility regularly. Only 23.08% had no experience of discrimination, and just 11.97% felt safe, highlighting severe safety concerns and the pervasive impact of discrimination on the Hazara community's sense of security.

The sense of unsafety in the workplace among Hazaras is high, with 72.65% feeling unsafe, likely due to discrimination and threats they face based on their identity. Only 16.23% feel safe at work, underscoring serious concerns. This fear influences their preference for traveling in groups (57.26%) rather than alone (19.66%) to ensure safety. Additionally, 88.71% of respondents fear for their children's safety when they are outside, indicating that daily commute to schools and colleges, especially outside Hazara areas, are perceived as highly dangerous and life-threatening. This pervasive fear reflects the hazardous environment Hazaras face both at work and in their daily lives.

The findings show that 77.78% of respondents are aware of incidents where Hazara individuals were targeted because of their identity. This high awareness is likely due to the frequent occurrence of such incidents within the community, making them a common experience. Only 19.66% mentioned being unaware of such identity-motivated violence. Table 1 presents that a majority (57.27%) of respondents attribute ethnicity as the primary factor, followed by religion (42.74%) as the second reason. Further investigation shows that in the preference-based question, 68.376% of respondents ranked ethnicity/religion as first, followed by targeted violence (12.82%), socio-economic (5.98%), and historical tensions (5.13%) as other reasons behind the violence. These findings suggest that though religion and ethnic identity are significant factors, however, based on this, the other reasons cannot be totally ignored, which will be debated further in the discussion section.

The unsafe environment and targeted violence have significantly impacted the Hazara community's business and employment opportunities. A substantial number of respondents (71.80%) reported facing discrimination while applying for jobs, 55.56% believe they are not paid equal salaries, and 79.49% feel they lack equal business or work opportunities compared to other communities. This discrimination is also evident in the high rental costs charged to Hazaras, as approximately 64.10% stated that, compared to other communities, they have to pay higher rents for their shops because of their identity.

The analysis reveals significant dissatisfaction among Hazaras with the state's efforts to ensure safety and address community grievances, with 81.20% of respondents expressing discontent. This emphasizes a prevalent concern within the community regarding safety and security, motivating them to engage in their own community-led advocacy efforts, in which 55.56% of respondents are actively involved. However, a considerable proportion (44.44%) still are not part of the community-led rights movement. This may be because the majority believe the advocacy efforts are ineffective (49.57%), whereas 40.17% consider them successful.

After a detailed examination of the respondents' social demographics, feelings of safety, experiences of discrimination, beliefs regarding the Hazara rights movement, and their respective levels of engagement, the analysis further investigates the associations between various factors

(gender, age, occupation, and income) and the Hazaras' sense of safety, workplace and business discrimination, and social biases in Table 2.

Table 2*Bivariate & Chi-Square Analysis*

Vaiable1	Variable2	Chi-Square Statistic	P-value
Gender	Victim of violence or killing (%)	11.00	0.0265***
	Safety at workplace	96.26	<0.001**
	Experienced discrimination when applying for job	6.1522	0.188
	Being paid an equal salary	32.28	<0.001***
	Work opportunities available	2.81	0.589
	Higher rental costs	90.13	<0.001**
	Sending children outside home	11.675	0.166
	Traveling outside neighborhood	10.093	0.121
Age	Victim of violence or killing(%)	6.833	0.741
	Sense of safety in neighborhood	54.27	<0.001***
	Segregation	4.764	0.906
	Sending children outside the home	31.238	0.0521**
	Traveling outside neighborhood	27.518	0.025***
	Hazara rights movement	10.965	0.052**
	Advocating equal rights	11.859	0.294
	Government's efforts	30.64	0.060
Occupation	Being Equal Paid	7.0142	0.857
	Business/ work opportunities	6.267)	0.902
	Higher rental costs	7.938	0.7899
	Hazara rights movement	3.321	0.768
	Advocating equal rights	21.575	0.043**
Income	Hazara rights movement	41.88	<0.001*
	Advocating equal rights	5.419	0.712
	Government's efforts	29.06)	0.024***

*** p-value<0.05, ** p-value<0.10

Table 2 reveals several significant differences and some unexpected similarities in the experiences of men and women in this study. Men are demonstrably more likely to experience violence (p-value = 0.0265). Furthermore, feelings of safety at work and perceptions of equal pay significantly differ based on gender (p-value < 0.001). Interestingly, both genders report similar experiences with discrimination during job applications (p-value = 0.188) and perceive work opportunities equally (p-value = 0.589). While high rental costs significantly impact both men and women (p-value < 0.001), concerns about children's safety and travel comfort outside their neighborhood appear similar (p-value = 0.166 & 0.121 respectively). These findings highlight the gender-based disparities in violence, workplace safety, and pay equity. However, shared experiences in job application discrimination, work opportunities, children's safety, and travel suggest some common ground for addressing these challenges.

Age presents a complex picture when it comes to safety and involvement in the Hazara rights movement. While there's no significant link between age and witnessing killings (p-value = 0.741), younger age groups are demonstrably more fearful of letting their children play outside their communities (p-value = 0.052). Similarly, age significantly influences travel behavior, with younger people venturing outside the neighborhood more frequently (p-value = 0.025). Interestingly, the analysis suggests a marginally non-significant association between age and participation in the Hazara rights movement (p-value = 0.052). While younger people show lower

participation rates, the connection is not statistically conclusive at the 5% significance level. Additionally, age doesn't seem to impact the overall sense of safety in the neighborhood (p-value <0.001) or the level of segregation within the community (p-value = 0.906).

The statistical analysis indicates that occupation does not significantly affect factors such as equal pay (p-value = 0.857), business opportunities (p-value = 0.902), or rental costs (p-value = 0.7899) among the Hazara community. However, occupation does show a statistically significant connection to involvement in the Hazara rights movement with a low p-value of 0.0423. This suggests that individuals in certain occupations are more likely to participate actively in advocating for Hazara rights, possibly due to their social influence, access to resources, or personal experiences related to discrimination and injustice faced by the community. Similarly, income levels do not significantly impact participation in the Hazara rights movement (p-value = 0.712), indicating that individuals across different income brackets are equally likely to engage in advocacy efforts. However, higher income groups express greater trust in government security measures (p-value = 0.024), which could lead to lower participation in advocacy as they may perceive less need for it. This suggests a complex relationship between economic status and activism, where financial security might influence trust in government solutions, but not necessarily deter involvement in the movement itself.

Overall, the analysis reveals a complex interplay between demographics and experiences. Gender significantly impacts feelings of safety at work, pay equity and exposure to violence. Interestingly, both genders share similar experiences with job application discrimination and work opportunities. Age shows a connection to fear for children's safety and travel behavior, but not witnessing violence. While there's a hint of a link between age and participation in the Hazara rights movement, it's not statistically conclusive. Occupation seems to influence involvement in the movement, while income impacts trust in government efforts but not necessarily activism itself. These findings highlight the need to consider how various social factors interact and influence safety, discrimination, and activism within the Hazara community.

Discussion

The Shia Hazaras of Pakistan endure severe discrimination and face significant safety challenges, primarily due to targeted killings and violent attacks. These incidents have increased the sense of fear among them, as 82.05% express worries about their own safety, while 88.71% fear for the safety of their children outside the home. These threats to their lives influence their preference to travel in the company, as only 19.66% are willing to travel alone. These findings confirm various reports and studies on systematic killings of Shia Hazaras in nearly all public places (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The major contribution of this study is to investigate the contributing effects and strengths of different variables on experiencing extreme violence, discrimination, and inequality.

The most significant among all are the age and gender, which influence their experiences of unsafety, discrimination, and violence. Although there is no significant relationship between age and the experience of violence or killings, it is important to consider factors such as small sample size and confounding variables that could impact the analysis. These variables might influence the findings, potentially masking any true associations that could exist between age and the experience of violence or killings within the Hazara community. However, it has an association with unsafe feelings while traveling outside the neighborhood (p-value = 0.025) and sending children outside the home (p-value = 0.052). The fear and unsafety concerns for

themselves and their family members might have pushed this community to be involved more in the rights movement ($p\text{-value}=0.052$), which will be discussed in detail in the last paragraphs of the discussion.

Gender has a significant association with experiencing ($p\text{-value}=0.0265$) however, it is inconclusive and motivates further investigation into its relationship with unsafe travel, workplace discrimination, and higher rental costs for businesses. The findings did not determine any significant relationships. It could be because the Hazara women cover their heads and face as a religious and cultural practice, making them less likely to be targeted based on their identity. Our findings also confirm that females are approximately 82.02% less likely to experience killing violence than males. It is because, in Pakistani society and especially in religiously conservative communities like Hazaras, males are the main breadwinners, which enabled fewer women to be exposed outside the home, especially to workplace surroundings, let alone their experience of high rental cost. Similarly, they have limited exposure to workplace discrimination, which is also confirmed by this study. However, there is a possibility that including more respondents in the sample might produce different results.

The survey results indicate that there are various reasons for discrimination and violence against the Shia Hazara community. Notably, 77.78% of respondents believe that violent incidents against Hazaras are due to their identity, which, for this community, includes a combination of their distinct Mongolian features and their religious affiliation with the Shia faith. This is further confirmed by 57.27% of respondents who considered ethnicity as the first and religion (42.74%) as the second reason behind community exploitation.

These findings are aligned with studies that identified distinct features and sectarian affiliation as factors making this community vulnerable to targeted violence, primarily perpetrated by Sunni militant groups (Nawaz & Hassan, 2015; Rafiq, 2014). In response to a separate question, the participants identified additional potential causes, ranking them by preference, as shown in Table 1. Though ethnicity and religion are the most significant causes of discrimination and violence, however, other reasons like socioeconomic factors, historical tensions/conflict, and political marginalization cannot be ruled out. These factors might become more relevant with a larger sample in future research, as some current studies have noted these potential reasons, albeit not in detail. For instance, Olszewska (2013) argued that state law enforcement agencies are indirectly supporting ‘targeted violence’ against Hazaras by taking no action against those Sunni militant outfits who claim responsibility. This growing insecurity provides the agencies with justification to maintain their presence in the province, which they require to deal with the Baloch separatist insurgency.

The respondents also considered socio-economic tensions as a reason for the killings, which aligns with some studies. These studies mention that other communities, particularly Baloch and Pashtuns in Quetta, view the Hazaras as rivals. The Hazaras are seen as progressive businessmen with a strong community sense, and the Baloch and Pashtuns, who see themselves as the only custodians of the province, believe the Hazaras are taking away their opportunities (Dedalus, 2009). This hostility is directed toward the ‘economic reasons’ for violence. Another reason, which though statistically less significant yet debatable, is the ‘political marginalization’ of Hazaras as they neither have adequate representation in the provincial assembly nor are being heard during policymaking, which is also aligned with conducted studies (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2019). By discussing all these possible reasons, this research has opened new avenues for future studies on the causes of Shia Hazara marginalization in Quetta.

The unsafe environment, target killings, and violence manifest in discrimination against this community in terms of their employment and business opportunities. Most respondents (55.56%) reported being paid unequally for the same work and facing high rental costs for shops within the Hazara area (64.10%), which is consistent with previous research on this issue (National Commission for Human Rights, 2018). Here, it is important to explain that high rental costs are demanded from Hazaras within their locality for two reasons: first, Hazara areas are densely populated due to security threats, resulting in fewer available homes and shops to rent out, which upsurges the cost. Second, as they cannot go outside the Hazara area because of life threats, they have no choice but to rent shops within the community, further limiting their choices and increasing the rental costs. This is the factor that the community has migrated outside the country, which is confirmed by the respondents, as 53.85% of them have family members settled abroad.

During data collection, respondents shared in informal discussions that young Hazaras still residing in Quetta contemplate migrating to other provinces as they do not face life threats, particularly in metropolitan cities like Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi, where their identity becomes either blurred or irrelevant. Another important contribution of this research is to investigate job discrimination, as a large number (71.80%) mentioned that they face discrimination while applying for a job in Quetta because they are Hazaras.

The Shia Hazara community expresses strong dissatisfaction with the state's efforts to ensure their safety and security, with a significant majority of respondents (81.20%) indicating dissatisfaction with state measures. These findings resonate with reports highlighting the lack of significant action or investigations by law enforcement agencies against perpetrators. Additionally, certain elements within the security services and elected officials, who hold discriminatory attitudes and hostility toward Hazaras, have either shown indifference or, in some cases, complicity in the attacks (Minority Rights Group International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2014). Due to this dissatisfaction with state efforts, 55.56% of respondents reported involvement in community-led rights movements. Interestingly, females exhibit approximately 77% lower odds of participating in Hazara rights movements compared to males, likely due to their lesser exposure to activities outside the home, as discussed above. However, despite significant participation in community-based rights movements, only 40.17% of respondents perceive them as effective. Several factors may influence this perception, as noted in informal discussions and observation notes during the survey. These factors include their belief that their small population, limited financial resources, and inadequate political representation contribute to the ineffectiveness of community efforts for upliftment. Such feelings have deepened the sense of helplessness among them.

The findings of our study reveal that the serious safety challenges for the Shia-Hazara community living in Quetta have hindered their movement outside their areas for work or study. However, this situation is not merely due to their ethnicity and religious affiliation; other factors such as financial gains, internal conflicts, and limited political representation also play a role. Beyond life threats, ongoing discrimination against this community has affected their businesses and employment opportunities within the province, leading many to migrate either outside the province or abroad. Frustration with state security efforts has driven many Hazaras to join community-led movements, reflecting strong internal bonds and greater trust in local initiatives. This trust gap with law enforcement stems from the belief that the state's inaction against perpetrators makes it complicit in their marginalization.

Limitations

Despite offering valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the strict security measures and surveillance restricted researchers' movement and limited access to diverse participants, particularly women, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. Second, building trust was also challenging due to the community's history of being targeted, leading to reluctance to share information and requiring time-consuming interviews that reduced the sample size. Third, limited funding constrained the sample, preventing breaks between surveys and contributing to participant and researcher fatigue, hindering researchers' ability to reach a broader spectrum of participants.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the complex and multifaceted challenges the Shia-Hazara community faces in Quetta. While their religious and ethnic background undoubtedly exposes them to heightened security risks, the root causes extend beyond these factors, including financial motives, internal conflicts, and lack of political representation. The ongoing insecurity has a significant impact on their daily lives, hindering movement and employment opportunities and fostering a sense of marginalization. However, the research also reveals the community's resilience. The community-led movements highlight strong internal connectivity and trust in solutions developed from within. The perceived lack of state action and law enforcement agencies has eroded their trust in security arrangements, underscoring the need for demonstrably effective interventions.

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Notes

¹ Alamdar Road is a major thoroughfare running through both areas. Other routes, including Quetta Bypass and local connecting roads, also link these areas. All routes connecting these two main Hazara localities are considered unsafe and life-threatening. However, the inhabitants have no choice but to commute on these dangerous roads for school, work, and to visit family, relatives, and friends.

² From 1958 to 1966, he served as Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army (a position later renamed Chief of Army Staff) and, between 1985 and 1991, as Governor of Balochistan.

³ One-third of attacks targeted transportation vehicles, one-third targeted workplaces, and the rest were other social places like highways, roads, streets, public and private premises. Some were attacked at local marketplaces, sports, recreation areas, places of worship, religious and cultural events, residential areas, and health care facilities (Alizada & Iltaf, 2023).

⁴ For clarification, "FA" refers to completion of higher secondary education, "BA" to a Bachelor's degree, "MA" to a Master's degree, and "Matriculation" to secondary school completion.

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