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The Human Cost of Border Tensions: A Study of Livelihood and Educational Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Long a source of tension between India and Pakistan, the Line of Control (LOC) in the Jammu and Kashmir area is known for intermittent flare-ups of cross-border shooting and shelling. This abstract offers a summary of a thorough investigation on the various effects of LOC cross-firing on the local civilian populations, with an emphasis on the livelihoods of these vulnerable communities. The study makes use of governmental reports, research papers, research articles, books and other online and offline sources. The goal is to present a nuanced picture of how persistent cross-border fire impacts the everyday activities and way of life of Jammu and Kashmir citizens. With an emphasis on Poonch, Rajouri, and the Kashmir Valley, this study explores the various effects of Operation Sindoor, India's military retaliation against Pakistani terror infrastructure in May 2025, on the livelihood and education of civilians living in Jammu and Kashmir's border districts. The operation caused a new wave of cross-border shelling and security escalations that significantly disrupted civilian life, despite its strategic importance in counterterrorism efforts. Long-term academic disruptions and the growing educational gap between rural and urban areas resulted from the closure of schools in conflict areas or their conversion into relief shelters. Students' psychological trauma and the absence of digital infrastructure made matters worse, especially in isolated places like Balakote, Mendhar, and Nowshera. The causes and effects of Operation Sindoor are examined in this essay, emphasizing the necessity of an integrated policy approach that blends immediate educational and psychosocial interventions with national security measures. The results highlight how crucial it is to protect the right to education despite geopolitical unrest and conflict, especially for marginalized groups residing in border areas.

Keywords: Line of Control, Cross-Firing, Civilian Population, Jammu and Kashmir

Introduction

Long a contentious and unstable geopolitical fault line, the Line of Control (LOC) that separates India and Pakistan in the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It has experienced intermittent outbreaks of cross-border shooting and shelling for decades, serving as a depressing reminder of the ongoing hostilities and simmering tensions in the region. The civilian population of Jammu and Kashmir has taken the brunt of the fighting, having to deal with a wide range of difficulties that endanger their very survival. In order to thoroughly assess the far-reaching effects of LOC cross-firing on the lives and livelihoods of civilians in the Jammu and Kashmir region, this study goes into the core of this intricate and profoundly important subject. It explores the lived realities of people and communities coping with the constant danger of violence, economic instability, and psychological suffering in an effort to provide light on a phenomena that goes beyond headlines and statistics. (Dar, A. A., & Deb, S. 2020).

For a number of reasons, the effect of cross-border shooting on civilian populations is a subject of utmost relevance. It primarily focuses on the survival and well-being of those who reside in these conflict-affected areas. As the line between safety and danger is frequently hazy and cross-border shooting occurrences occur with frightening regularity, their everyday lives are characterized by uncertainty. (Farhan, S., & Kumar, V. 2022). Families must navigate a dangerous existence where even everyday tasks carry a hefty risk of peril. Second, this clash has significant economic ramifications. The region's economy, which historically depended heavily on trade, tourism, and agriculture, has been badly hampered. (Farhan, S., & Kumar, V. 2022). The livelihoods of countless people and towns have been threatened by crop losses, trade route closures, and infrastructural damage. Such economic instability has effects on access to services like healthcare, education, and basic necessities in addition to its direct financial consequences.

Furthermore, it is impossible to overstate the psychological cost of constantly being in danger. The anxiety and worry that cross-border firing causes permanently damage to the mental health of people, whether young and elderly. Unwelcome companions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder make it even more difficult to pursue a career and create a future. (Dar, A. A., & Deb, S. 2020). We want to disentangle the complex web of difficulties experienced by people caught in the crossfire as we explore the effects of LOC cross-firing on civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir (Tabassum, M. T. 2012). By presenting insights that can guide policies, interventions, and initiatives meant to lessen the suffering of civilians and advance peace in this hotly contested region, this study aims to provide a thorough knowledge of the problem. The Line of Control (LOC) in Jammu and Kashmir is more than just a physical border; it is a representation of protracted geopolitical conflicts, old resentments, and the intricate interaction of competing

national interests. The civilian population of Jammu and Kashmir faces a life that is particularly difficult in the midst of this geopolitical mess. (Mustafa, R. 2019). The next round of gunfire or shelling might shatter the appearance of routine, throwing people into chaos and misery. It is a life marked by a perpetual state of awareness. While the larger political aspects of the India-Pakistan conflict are frequently the focus of the global conversation, the daily struggles, dreams, and tenacity of individuals go mostly ignored. Their tales serve as a moving reminder that there is a tapestry of humanity hidden behind the headlines and diplomatic debates.

Therefore, the instability of livelihoods threatens not just these communities' social fabric and consequently their very cohesion, but also their financial security. This study analyzes the difficulties as well as the resiliency and inventiveness of these civilian people. It displays the creative coping strategies created by people and communities to negotiate the perilous seas of conflict. These tales of perseverance offer hope and inspiration in the face of adversity, whether via the development of social support networks, the diversification of one's income, or creative approaches to education. In the end, this research aims to contribute to a more complex understanding of how civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir are impacted by LOC cross-firing. It is a rallying cry for stakeholders and decision-makers to acknowledge the pressing need to solve the problems these vulnerable communities are facing. We can work towards a future where the people of Jammu and Kashmir can aspire to lead lives of stability, prosperity, and peace, transcending the boundaries of conflict that have defined their existence for far too long, by understanding the full scope of the challenges and utilizing the potential for resilience within these communities. While immediate humanitarian assistance is crucial, it must be combined with long-term plans for economic and social development that provide communities the tools they need to start over. In places afflicted by violence, this may entail making investments in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and job development. The effects of LOC cross-firing on civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir go beyond national boundaries, statistical analysis, and political discourse. Human decency, fortitude, and the inalienable right to a happy and successful existence are at stake (Das Gupta, S. 2012). By encouraging the world to acknowledge the continuing strength of those who, in the face of overwhelming adversity, continue to fight for better lives amidst the tumultuous environment of conflict.

Objectives of the Paper

1. Evaluate the extent to which cross-border firing along the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir disrupts local economies, including agriculture, trade, and tourism.
2. Investigate the psychological trauma experienced by civilians living in conflict-affected areas, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
3. Explore the social repercussions of prolonged conflict, including the disruption of community cohesion and traditional ways of life.
4. Document and analyze the coping strategies employed by individuals and communities to adapt to the challenges posed by cross-border firing.

Data from the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs

In a joint statement on February 25, 2021, the directors general of military operations of India and Pakistan agreed to "strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors with effect from midnight on February 24/25, 2021."

This represented significant progress toward "achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace" along the border, especially in light of the historically high number of ceasefire violations (CFVs) in the years prior.

These incidents demonstrate that the ceasefire along the international boundary and the Line of Control (LoC) has been broken by both India and Pakistan. This article examines the efficiency of the ceasefire, its effects on border residents on the Indian side of the IB and LoC, and its potential future course. Data from the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs show that Pakistani CFVs increased from 2,140 in 2018 to 3,479 in 2019 to 5,133 in 2020. As of June 30th, 2021, there had only been 664 instances. Almost all of those 664 infractions took place before the joint statement. In contrast, according to official government data, there were just six breaches registered between February 25, 2021, and June 30, 2021. According to newspaper reporting, there were fewer ceasefire violations in the second half of the year and in the early months of 2022 than in prior years.

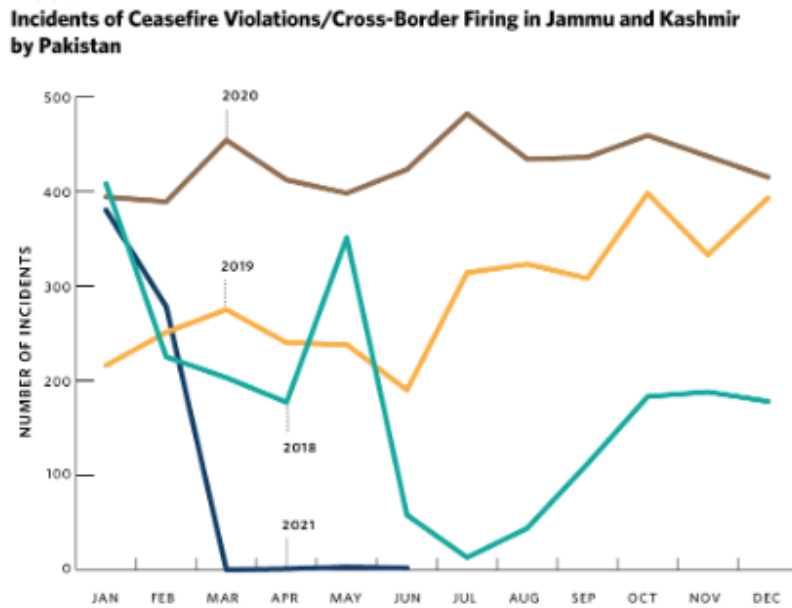


Figure taken from <https://carnegieindia.org/>

Methodology

The research methodology section outlines the systematic approach and techniques employed to gather, analyze, and interpret data in the study. Conceptual analysis is made to understand the different dimensions of the topic. This paper purely based on secondary sources of data. Various research papers, research articles, books and reports are consulted to write this very article.

Major Impact

Cross-border shooting seriously impairs the region's economy, especially trade and agriculture. As a result of frequent trade route closures, infrastructural damage, and a fear of violence, many people experience financial hardship. Along with this people suffered a direct loss of livelihood due to cross-border fire occurrences. Many people no longer have a way to support themselves due to displacement, property destruction, and the inability to engage in customary occupations. The ongoing risk of cross-border shooting has caused psychological trauma among civilians to be pervasive. Both adults and children frequently struggle with anxiety, sadness, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which makes it difficult for them to participate in activities that support their livelihood (Dar, A. A., & Deb, S. 2020). The difficulties experienced by civilians are made worse by the significant restrictions on access to basic services like healthcare and education in conflict-affected areas. In spite of the security hazards, humanitarian organizations struggle to offer assistance. Despite the hardship, some communities have grown resilient and learned coping skills. These include developing support systems, taking part in other sources of income, and adjusting to the unstable environment. For policymakers, international organizations, and peacekeeping operations in the Jammu and Kashmir region, it is essential to comprehend the significant impact of cross-border firing on civilian livelihoods. (Mohan, S. 2013). The findings of this study highlight the pressing need for policies that prioritize the defense and recovery of impacted communities as well as programs meant to advance peace and stability in the area.

Operation Sindoor and Its Impact

India responded forcefully to the April 22 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed 26 lives, with Operation Sindoor, which was initiated in early May 2025. The Border Security Force (BSF) destroyed three terror launchpads and a Pakistan Army post as part of the operation, which targeted terror infrastructure across the Line of Control (LoC) and the international border. Strikes on high-value targets, including an underground bunker at Pakistan's Murid Air Base, were verified by satellite imagery. With this operation, India's military strategy underwent a dramatic change, prioritizing prompt and strategic responses to transnational terrorism.

The livelihoods of civilians in Jammu and Kashmir were significantly impacted by the escalation brought on by Operation Sindoor. Villages along the Line of Control had to be evacuated due to cross-border shelling and retaliatory attacks, which disrupted daily life and economic activity. Because of safety concerns, markets were closed, schools were closed, and agricultural operations were stopped. Residents experienced psychological stress and a sense of insecurity as a result of the ongoing threat of violence. Additionally, the region's resources were further taxed by the need for rehabilitation and humanitarian aid due to the destruction of homes and infrastructure. Although the goal of Operation Sindoor was to eliminate terrorist threats, the unintended consequences for civilian life highlight the difficult problems that conflict areas like Jammu and Kashmir face.

India launched Operation Sindoor in response to the terrorist attack that killed 26 civilians in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on April 22, 2025. Terrorist organizations operating from Pakistan's other side of the border were identified as the perpetrators of this attack. Increased infiltration attempts and reinforced terror launchpads close to the Line of Control (LoC) were suggested by intelligence inputs. Three launchpads and an underground facility at

Murid Air Base were confirmed destroyed by India's precision strikes against Pakistani military posts and terror infrastructure in retaliation (Times of India, 2025; Vijay Karnataka, 2025). With an emphasis on swift, focused military operations to neutralize cross-border threats, the operation signaled a strategic change in India's counterterrorism doctrine (War on the Rocks, 2025).

The civilian population in Jammu and Kashmir's border regions suffered greatly as a result of the operation and the subsequent cross-border escalation. Heavy shelling of villages along the LoC resulted in widespread disruption of local livelihoods and forced mass evacuations. Due to safety concerns, markets were closed, schools were closed, and agricultural activities—a vital source of income—were suspended (India Today, 2025). Families became more economically vulnerable as a result of the destruction of homes and essential infrastructure, and the psychological toll—particularly for children and the elderly—was high because of ongoing fear and displacement (The Hindu, 2025). In an attempt to meet the immediate humanitarian needs as well as the long-term socioeconomic recovery of impacted communities, the government's relief and rehabilitation efforts were overburdened.

Educational Impacts of Operation Sindoor on Civilians in Jammu and Kashmir

Education in Jammu and Kashmir's border regions has suffered greatly as a result of the conflict's escalation after Operation Sindoor. In order to protect students and staff, many schools were forced to close permanently as shelling increased along the Line of Control (LoC). The start of classes was further delayed in some areas by the conversion of classrooms into temporary shelters or relief camps for displaced families (India Today, 2025). Due to inadequate internet connectivity and a lack of digital infrastructure, children in the impacted villages experienced frequent disruptions in their education and had limited access to online learning.

Students' capacity to learn was also adversely affected by the psychological effects of violence. Particularly for girls, who frequently bear the brunt of such crises in terms of vulnerability and domestic responsibilities, ongoing exposure to conflict, fear of displacement, and trauma witnessed decreased concentration levels and raised school dropout rates (The Hindu, 2025). Long-term difficulties in guaranteeing consistent attendance and access to education were also brought about by the destruction of infrastructure, including roads, school buildings, and transportation facilities. A dramatic drop in student engagement was reported by teachers in these areas, underscoring the urgent need for educational interventions such as mobile schools, trauma-informed instruction, and safe learning areas. In the conflict-affected areas of Jammu and Kashmir, the educational setback brought on by Operation Sindoor could have a long-lasting effect on a whole generation if prompt and consistent assistance is not provided.

Operation Sindoor's effects on education have been particularly noticeable in the Kashmir Valley's border districts of Poonch and Rajouri. These regions, which were already at risk because of their closeness to the Line of Control (LoC), were hardest hit by cross-border shelling, which led to the displacement of civilians. In frontier villages like Nowshera and Manjakote in Rajouri and Balakote and Mendhar in Poonch, schools were either destroyed or converted into makeshift shelters for evacuees (India Today, 2025). Thousands of school-age children were impacted by the sudden suspension of the academic calendar in these regions.

In Poonch, where more than 50 schools close to the LoC remained closed for weeks, the situation was especially dire. Through community learning circles, teachers attempted to keep things going, but these attempts were mostly ineffective because of security limitations, a lack of resources, and family anxiety. Similar to this, months of education disruption occurred in Rajouri when both government and private schools were forced to close due to the intense shelling in villages like Kalsian and Tarkundi. Families in these areas prioritized survival over education, and many children—especially girls who were pulled out of school entirely for safety reasons—were compelled to work in the home or as relief workers during the displacement (The Hindu, 2025).

Although not as directly impacted by shelling, the increased security, fear of militant reprisals, and road closures in the Kashmir Valley had a chilling effect on school attendance. For example, students from Baramulla and Kupwara had limited access to coaching centers and their board exams were delayed. Students' anxiety and absenteeism rates rose as a result of the psychological effects. Children who saw the devastation or were forced to leave their homes during the escalation had an increase in trauma-induced behavioral problems, according to mental health specialists in the area.

Furthermore, in many areas of Poonch and Rajouri, digital education—which was utilized as a substitute during times of conflict—was not a practical choice. Remote learning was practically impossible due to poor network connectivity, limited access to laptops or smartphones, and frequent power outages. The educational gap between urban and conflict-affected rural areas has widened as a result of these areas' students falling months behind in their coursework.

In conclusion, Operation Sindoor's aftermath has highlighted how urgently border regions need to prepare for educational emergencies. Establishing mobile learning units, psychological counseling services, and safe education zones that can continue to function even during times of conflict requires cooperation between the government and non-governmental organizations. The long-term educational harm done to children in Poonch, Rajouri, and other parts of Kashmir in the absence of such interventions will not only hinder their personal futures but also lessen the region's overall chances for peace and progress.

Discussion on outcomes

The discussion section of this study serves as a platform to analyze and interpret the outcomes in light of the research objectives, shedding further light on the impact of LOC cross-firing on civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir (Das Gupta, S. 2012). Here, we explore the key findings and their implications, acknowledging the complex dynamics at play. The paper emphasizes the significant economic costs associated with cross-border firing. It demonstrates how large economic losses for people have been caused by disruptions in trade, tourism, and agriculture. Due to economic uncertainty

brought on by crop damage, trade route closures, and decreased tourist, many households are now experiencing financial hardship. The economic impact includes access to crucial services like healthcare and education as well as financial losses. The region's economic development would suffer serious long-term effects of disrupted livelihoods, which necessitates quick action. **Psychological Impact:** The study sheds light on the widespread psychological trauma that civilians in combat zones endure. In both adults and children, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are prevalent. The persistent threat of violence has a negative impact on daily living and erodes resilience and mental health. The quality of life and people's capacity to engage in livelihood activities are significantly impacted by these psychological consequences. Humanitarian and healthcare groups must prioritize meeting the mental health needs of affected communities.

Cross-border shooting has caused social unrest, including the disintegration of traditional ways of life and the deterioration of community solidarity. Due to the instability caused by conflict, communities frequently become dispersed and isolated. In conflict-affected areas, access to basic services, such as healthcare and education, is severely constrained. (Badmus, I. A. 2006). This not only makes things more difficult for civilians but also makes it more difficult for the region to develop in the long run. **Coping Mechanisms and Resilience:** The report shows instances of community resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity. These include the creation of support networks, participation in other sources of income, and flexibility in the face of environmental uncertainty.

Fostering better awareness and empathy for the predicament of citizens residing in conflict zones is one of the study's main conclusions. The human cost of geopolitical crises is brought to light by personal narratives and firsthand accounts, which inspire the international community to approach these problems with greater compassion. This study adds to the larger conversation on conflict resolution and peacebuilding by highlighting the urgent need for peaceful, negotiated solutions to the India-Pakistan conflict. It emphasizes that any peace efforts in the area should have the welfare and safety of the civilian people in Jammu and Kashmir at its core.

An important turning point in India's counterterrorism strategy was the start of Operation Sindoor in May 2025, which sought to destroy the infrastructure that enabled cross-border militancy. Although the operation's military goals—targeting terror launchpads and interfering with enemy logistics—were strategically important, it also increased unrest in Jammu and Kashmir's border areas. The balance between the demands of national security and the humanitarian costs borne by local populations is called into question by this dual impact.

The evacuation of thousands of civilians living close to the Line of Control was one of the operation's most direct effects. People frequently lost access to healthcare, basic amenities, and their main source of income as a result of the hurried evacuations. Because of shelling and concerns about resuming violence, agriculture—the foundation of the local economy—was severely disrupted, with fields abandoned and livestock left untended (India Today, 2025). The closure of educational institutions had an impact on the academic continuity of kids who were already struggling with scarce resources. Furthermore, the psychological effects of constantly being in danger have exacerbated the region's already-existing mental health issues, particularly for vulnerable populations like women, children, and the elderly (The Hindu, 2025).

Conclusion

This region's borders are not the only thing that the effects of Line of Control (LOC) cross-firing on civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir are complicated and urgent. This study has made an effort to shed light on the complex difficulties experienced by people and communities who find themselves in the middle of protracted geopolitical conflicts (Bhat, N., & Gul, A. 2023). As we wrap up this investigation, many significant realizations and recommendations. In conclusion, LOC cross-firing's devastating effects on civilian populations serve as a sobering reminder of the pressing need to address the human aspects of warfare. It is a call to action for the international community to prioritize the rights and well-being of people caught in the crossfire and to put unwavering effort into finding peaceful solutions that cut across national boundaries and geopolitics. (Bellal, A. (Ed.). 2015). The discussion's conclusion highlights the complexity of the effects of LOC cross-firing on civilian populations in Jammu and Kashmir. It serves as a sobering reminder that conflicts have actual and long-lasting effects on people's lives and communities. In addition to diplomatic and humanitarian measures aimed at fostering peace, stability, and resilience in the region, overcoming these obstacles necessitates a comprehensive strategy that takes into account economic, social, and psychological factors.

More generally, discussions concerning the long-term viability of military responses in areas prone to conflict have been rekindled by Operation Sindoor. The operation did little to address the underlying socio-political factors that fuel unrest and alienation among border communities, even though it may have temporarily weakened militant networks. Increased resentment and further marginalization of impacted populations may result from the lack of a parallel civilian support framework, such as better infrastructure, trauma counseling, and economic rehabilitation. Therefore, comprehensive peace-building initiatives that put local residents' security and dignity alongside national interests are essential to the effectiveness of India's counterterrorism efforts.

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