

Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses

A Faculty-Oriented Policy Brief

PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent extremism (VE) has been a particular challenge for Pakistan at least for the last four decades. As with other spheres of life, a rise in ideological support for hate and divisive narratives in universities across Pakistan has resulted in multiple instances of violence, both within and beyond campuses.

There is the prospect of faculty members helping perpetuate VE narratives and mindsets in universities, knowingly or due to lack of awareness and understanding of the underlying drivers and contextual factors. Amid the faculty's inability to effectively push counter-violent extremism (CVE) messages, there has been a lack of reinforcement of values and ideas that promote pluralism and tolerance, particularly at public universities.

This policy brief is aimed at benefiting from key stakeholders' perspectives to lay out in broad strokes a vision to tackle violent extremist influences at universities. It summarizes the key findings from an exercise aimed at sensitization and capacity building of selected faculty members from six universities in Multan and Karachi and related activities over a period of four months. The programme sought to build capacity of the educators to help them identify and tackle extremist tendencies, support counter-narratives and promote interfaith harmony and appreciation of diversity.

The policy brief concludes with a set of recommendations for a range of stakeholders to promote positive values and respect for diversity among the faculty and students of universities in Pakistan. Particularly emphasized is the importance of ensuring a safe environment on campuses, not just for counter-narratives but also for a free exchange of ideas and critical thinking which is the essence of the academic environment.

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism (VE) has hardly been a recent challenge in Pakistan. The policies in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan, are often linked to the trajectory of VE in the country. The impact manifested itself in all spheres of life, including the education sector. Yet education also constitutes one of the foremost components of most counter-violent extremism (CVE) models and frameworks currently being implemented in both Muslim-majority and Western countries. In countries like Pakistan, where education, both mainstream and religious, is considered by many to have been a factor in the promotion of ideological radicalization and violent extremism, the need to promote inclusive and tolerant educational narratives becomes even more significant and pressing.

A rise in ideological support for hate and divisive narratives among stakeholders in universities across Pakistan, including faculty and students, has led to multiple instances of VE both within and beyond campuses. Instances of violence against students and faculty on campuses from the past few years alone point to penetration of violent extremist influence at universities. These include horrific acts of violence, such as the brutal killing of student Mashal Khan by a mob, at the Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan in 2017.¹

Beyond campuses, perpetrators of the assassination of activist Sabeen Mehmood as well as the Safoora Goth massacre, both in 2015 in Karachi, belonged to prominent universities in Karachi.² The top leaders of terrorist network Ansarul Sharia Pakistan were associated with Karachi University.³ The role of Tashfeen Malik, a graduate of Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, in a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, which killed 14 people,⁴ also highlights involvement of female students in such acts of VE. Among illustrations of support for VE

¹ "Mardan university student lynched by mob over alleged blasphemy: police," *Dawn*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1326729>

² "Saad Aziz confesses to Sabeen's murder for holding Valentine's Day rally," *The Express Tribune*, May 22, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/890555/saad-aziz-confesses-to-sabeens-murder-for-holding-valentines-day-rally>

³ <https://www.samaa.tv/news/2017/09/video-three-ansar-ul-sharia-facilitators-arrested-ku-premis/>

⁴ "Who do we blame for Tashfeen Malik's radicalisation?" *The Express Tribune*, December 9, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1007081/who-do-we-blame-for-tashfeen-maliks-radicalisation>

narratives at universities not being confined to students alone is the October 2016 arrest of a SZABIST faculty member over links with a terrorist group.⁵

Against this backdrop, there is the prospect of faculty members helping perpetuate VE narratives and mindsets in universities, whether knowingly or due to lack of awareness and understanding of the underlying drivers and contextual factors. Additionally, there has been a lack of reinforcement of values and ideas that promote pluralism and tolerance among faculty members, particularly at public universities. A general lack of understanding of VE issues limits the faculty's ability to effectively push counter-violent extremism messages.

This context gains even greater significance in view of a recent statement by the federal information and broadcasting minister that extremism had flourished in Pakistan not through madrassas, but through mainstream colleges and universities. He added that the teachers who held radicalized views were intentionally recruited in educational institutions in the 1980s and 90s that promoted extremism in these higher education institutions.⁶

In the given circumstance, coherent and focused policies for addressing VE narratives as well as for reinforcement of pluralism and positive values in universities cannot be stressed enough. The fact that such policies are conspicuous by their absence calls for urgent remedial action, not merely in the form of reactive steps on the campuses, but also through sensitizing the policy makers on the pressing need for well thought-out proactive measures. This is part and parcel of the state's basic obligations.

Against the backdrop of rising radicalization among educated youth of Pakistan and a possibility of faculty support to the radical elements in the university campuses, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) engaged leading and senior faculty members from six universities to develop a network of peacebuilders. PIPS considers that it is one of the key functions of a vigilant civil society to identify whenever the state falls short of its commitments and obligations. Another task

⁵ "Militants find breeding grounds in universities", *Express Tribune*, October 22, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/977709/sleeper-cells-awaken-militants-find-breeding-grounds-in-universities>

⁶ "Society itself has to rectify narrative of extremism: Fawad Chaudhry," *Dawn*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1658820>

of civil society is to make demands, suggest recommendations and offer a vision to overcome challenges. It is for the state and the government to make policy on the basis of public demands and translate that policy into practice.

Based on proceedings of the workshops, seminars, social action plans, and other project activities conducted by the selected six universities from Multan and Karachi, the present policy brief lays out in broad strokes a vision to tackle VE influences at universities. The rationale for development of a policy brief was built upon on the available evidence that Pakistan's education system is, as deemed by many, one of the factors of extremism and persecution of minorities in Pakistan. While the emphasis is on the institutions of religious education, or madrassas, when it comes to discuss the causes of intolerance and radicalization in Pakistani society, many scholars believe that a great deal of problem also lies in the public school system, which subsequently feeds into the higher education system of colleges and universities.⁷ C. Fair contends in her paper on militancy and madrassas that the public school system in Pakistan works on the basis of a curriculum that is highly likely to engender intolerance and promote the concept of conflict resolution through violence.⁸ S. Hafeez has made the point in these words: "Any attempt to Islamize the social sciences is very likely to engender fanaticism, emotionalism, and post-facto analysis on or interpretation of social realities."⁹ Parallel to public schools, the higher education also has had the similar trends of Islamization. A directive issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1983 said that textbook writers were to demonstrate that the basis of Pakistan is not to be founded in racial, linguistic, or geographical factors, but rather, in the shared experience of a common religion".¹⁰ In 1978, Council of Islamic Ideology had proposed a scheme of "establishment of an Islamic society" and sought Islamization of educational, economic, legal system etc. of the country.¹¹

As a result, parallel to historians and clergy, the work of strengthening national Islamic ideology was undertaken by the educationists and textbook writers, supported by the successive

⁷ Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges and Prospects," in *Pakistan: Haunting Shadows of Human Security*, ed. Jennifer Bennett (Dhaka: BISS, 2009), 58.

⁸ Quoted by Safiya Aftab in her paper on "Poverty and Militancy," *Conflict and Peace Studies*, 1(1), 75.

⁹ Sabeeha Hafeez, *The Changing Pakistani Society* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1991), 256.

¹⁰ University Grants Commission directive (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 1983), 11.

¹¹ Saeed Shafiqat, *Political System of Pakistan and Public Policy* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1989), 104.

governments. This, many believe, sowed the seeds of religious intolerance particularly in terms of persecution and exclusion of religious minorities. A close review of the textbooks, particularly on the subjects of Islamic and Pakistan studies, reveals that their writers believe that “Pakistan ideology is indeed Islamic ideology, which guides us in every sphere of life.”¹²

While the issue of curriculum reform falls in the domain of the federal and provincial governments, it is imperative at civil society level to influence educationists and teachers in support of tolerant, inclusive education and curricula that do not teach discriminatory treatment of minorities and extremist viewpoints or narratives. There are several initiatives and institutes in Pakistan which focus on education’s link to peace and harmony but most of these are random and do not exclusively focus on influencing educational discourse and training teachers in support of inclusive, tolerant, and harmony-supporting education. Nor has government launched any initiative with the same objective. Indeed, most of the related measures either talk about curriculum reforms or engage teachers and students in programs of peace education and awareness. On the whole, these PIPS workshops also meant to support the on-going state- and society level efforts to improve quality of education, which is imperative to bring a positive social change in society and promote favourable views about minorities.

The policy brief offers recommendations for strengthening the role of faculty members/teachers in peacebuilding, emphasizing particularly on the role of female faculty members in promoting social peace and harmony on university campuses. The policy brief will be disseminated to relevant stakeholders such as parliamentarians, government institutions, civil society, and media. Besides, it will be launched formally with concerned stakeholders during the launch ceremony of the Network as well. The main objectives of the *Network of Faculty Peacebuilders in Universities* are knowledge exchange and mentorship. The Network members will exchange knowledge and experiences on peacebuilding and conduct activities that promote the Paigham-e-Pakistan initiative. Secondly, the trained faculty will mentor student activists and leaders like leaders of societies and clubs in peacebuilding. The Network will be maintained through digital means. The members will be added to an online platform where they can connect and interact.

¹² M. Amir Rana and Safdar Sial, *Radicalization in Pakistan* (PIPS: 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This policy brief encapsulates activities spanning four months aimed at promoting the role of faculty in CVE and peacebuilding. A project was designed with consideration of meeting the targeted aim in the limited available time. The figure 1 below outlines the project components. In this section, details of each component are described in detail, along with description of the challenges faced at each stage in accomplishing the targeted objectives.

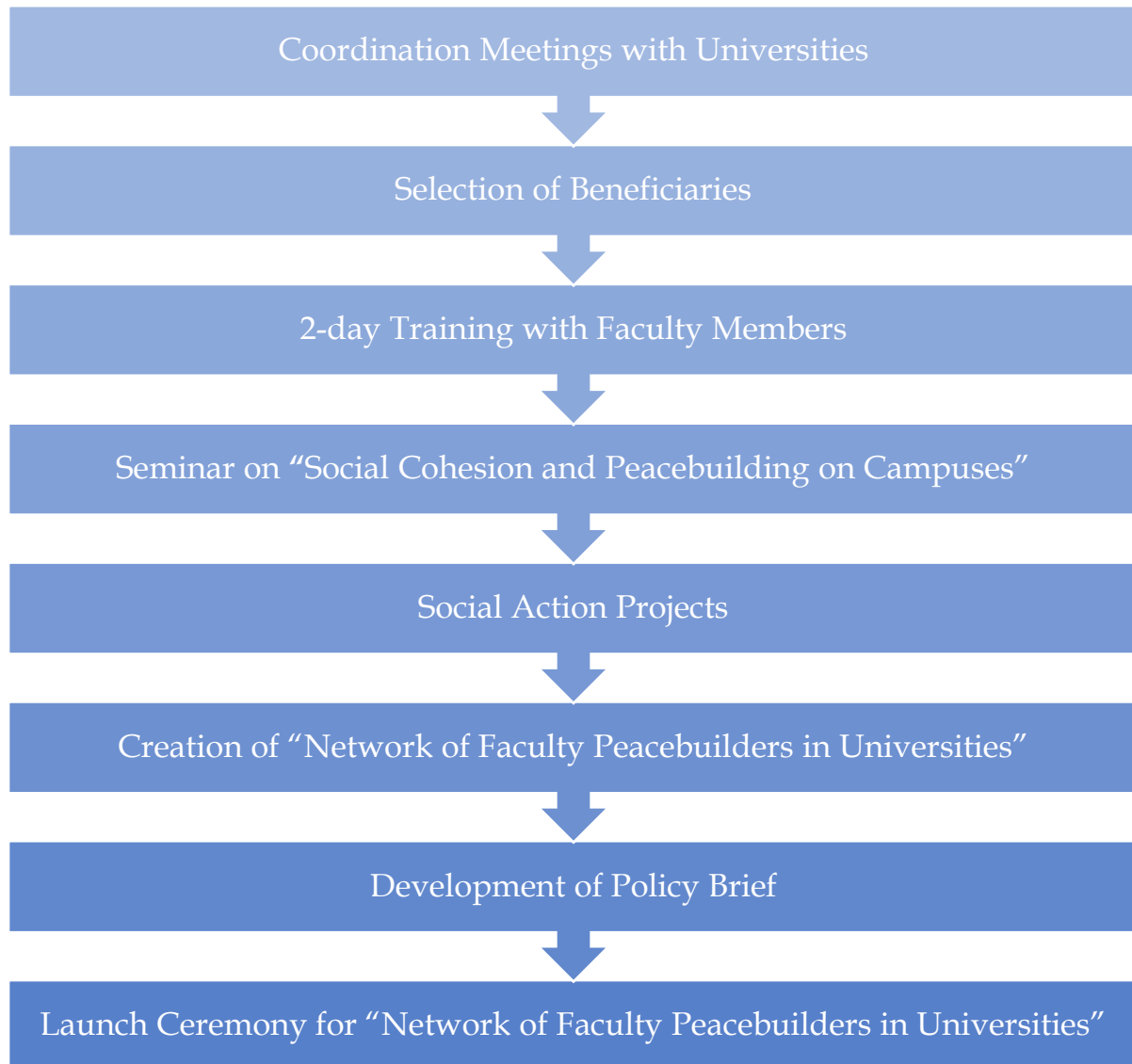


Figure 1: Project components

Selection of sample

Specifically, the exercise was aimed at sensitizing 60 faculty members from six target universities in Karachi and Multan on VE and enhancing their role in inclusive peacebuilding, specifically in the context of university campuses. Figure 2 lists down the six universities that participated in the project.

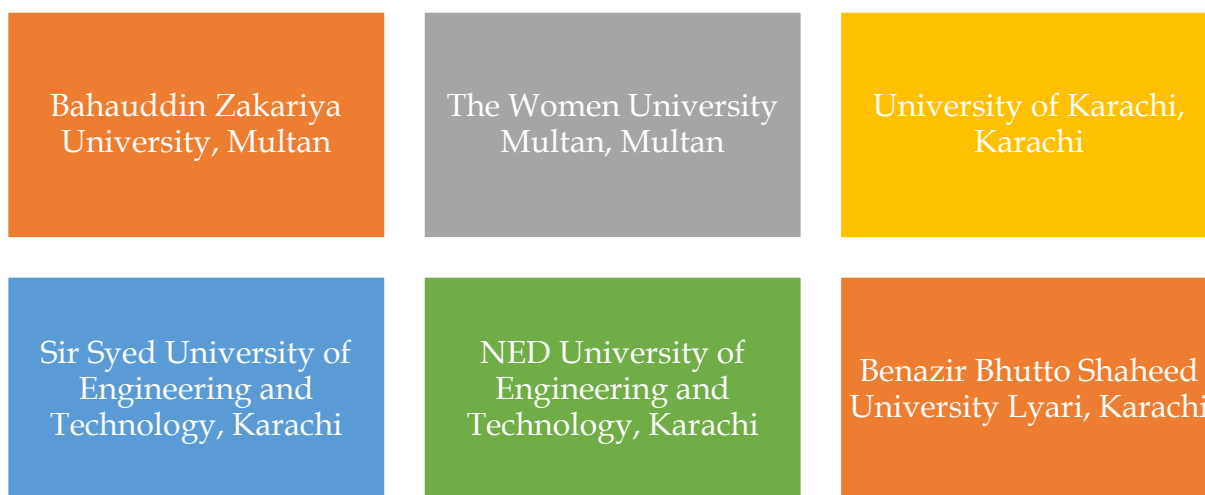


Figure 2: Partner Universities from Multan and Karachi

Using targeted sampling method, the six universities were selected based on the PIPS’s strong linkage and existing ability to engage faculty members and students. PIPS has previously worked with these universities and has identified several problems in their campuses in relation to extremism and radicalization. The current project served as a furtherance of the previous efforts and extension of its scope to more faculty members and students.

With the exception of Sir Syed University of Engineering & Technology, the other five were public-sector universities. In PIPS’s previous engagements with the universities over issues of radicalization and extremism, it was noted that public-sector education system suffers from these issues at a larger scale due to several bureaucratic and political constraints as well as limited financial support from the government for any initiative on peacebuilding and inclusive learning.

Gender considerations in project designing and conduction

For the purposes of the activity the implementing partner, or PIPS, conducted a gender analysis to determine current on-ground realities with regards to gender parity and inclusivity at the universities. For the analysis, PIPS initiated conversations with faculty members and students. According to the analysis, the gender ratio (male: female) among students in the target universities is roughly 1:1, however, among faculty members, the proportion of female faculty members is 20% on average. It was observed that a higher level of dependence is found amongst women, being dependent on their families or male counter parts financially along with

permissions for decision making as opposed to vice versa. Challenges with regards to mobility and transportation creates hurdles for women when it comes to access to the university.

Education to employment ratio of men is also higher than women. As some women students reported, their families are generally encouraging regarding higher education, but similar level of enthusiasm is not found when it comes to careers and professional life. When it comes to socio-cultural expectations men are expected to have financially lucrative jobs and women are expected to manage the household. It is also a common perception, especially highlighted by faculty members that if a woman decides to work then she must balance work and home. In the higher education sector, discrimination in terms of wages/pay packages towards women faculty members was observed (mostly in the cases where women were hired on short-term contracts).. Consequently, these limitations impede the ability of female faculty members to effectively participate and engage in constructive activities on campus leading to lack of relatable role models for female students as a result.

Hence, following measures were taken to ensure active participation of female faculty

- Conduction of all activities in the venues which are easily accessible to female participants and arrangement for adequate transportation facility (if needed). The most suited venue for female faculty was the university campus. However, in case of the Women University Multan, the faculty chose to conduct the exercise outside the university premises, due to some internal issues, which was allowed and facilitated.
- Conduction of all activities during days and timings that are conducive for female participation. Hence, the team consulted female faculty while designing the schedule for the activities and ensured all activities concludes in daytime.
- Discouraging gender stereotypes like patriarchy and exclusion/discrimination on the bases of gender/religion, sect and reemphasizing the important role of all genders as peace makers. The resource persons were specifically informed of no-tolerance policy for any stereotypical content in their trainings. While some participants exhibited the male misogynist attitude and passed comments which could be hurtful to female faculty present, the PIPS team immediately intervened, corrected them through factual data and rejected such comments in strongest words.

Coordination meetings with faculty members

Coordination meetings with faculty members in Multan and Karachi kicked off the four-month exercise. In-person meetings in the university campuses enabled melting of ice between the project team and representatives from universities, including administrative staff, faculty, and students. In addition to building a relationship of trust with the selected universities, the coordination exercise helped project team developing an implementation strategy for the conduction of activities, in accordance with the convenience of university faculty, particularly female participants.

The schedule of the coordination meeting is provided in the table 1 below. The meetings were attended by Vice Chancellors, Deans, Heads/Chairpersons of department, DSAs, faculty members and selected student society leaders.

University	Venue	Date	Time
NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi	Department of Humanities	20 December 2021	10:30 – 11:00
	Dean Office		11:00 – 11:30
University of Karachi, Karachi	Department of International Relations		12:00 – 12:30
	Department of Sociology		12:30 – 13:00
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi	Vice Chancellor Office	21 December 2021	11:00 – 11:30
	Department of Computer Sciences		13:00 – 13:30
Women University Multan, Multan	Department of English	22 December 2021	11:00 – 11:30
	Department of Sociology		11:30 – 12:00
Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan	Department of Political Sciences		13: 30 – 14:00

Table 1: Schedule of coordination meetings

Based on the attendance sheets signed during the meetings, the number of male and female participants in each coordination meeting is provided in the table 2. As can be seen the female participation in the coordination meeting was more than 50 pc.

University	Female Participants	Male Participants	Total Participants
NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi	4	3	7
University of Karachi, Karachi	7	6	13
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi	3	4	7
Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi	2	4	6
Women University Multan, Multan	3	1	4
Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan	6	5	11
Total	25	23	48

Table 2: Number of male and female participants in coordination meetings

Selection of beneficiaries

All six universities provided a nominated list of faculty members for the project. During the coordination meeting, it was emphasized that at least 50 pc of the nominated list should be composed of female faculty. However, some heads of the department shared that the department only have one or two female faculty. To accommodate such cases other departments having majority of female staff were requested to nominate their faculty. In case of Bahauddin Zakariya University, not a single female faculty member was nominated despite presence of many faculty members in the coordination meeting. However, this was balanced through requesting an all-female nomination list from Women University Multan.

As shown in table 3, the Women University Multan nominated 13 female and 1 male faculty. Similarly, the Department of International Relations nominated only one female faculty so other departments were asked to nominate their female faculty. The percentage of female in the total

number of nominated faculty was 43 pc, slightly down than the percentage present in the coordination meeting but still close to the targeted 50 pc. It must be noted that the gender imbalance in hiring of faculty in universities as well as glass-ceiling by mostly male chairpersons in giving career growth opportunities, such as this project, to female faculty served as a major barrier in maintaining gender balance.

University	Female Faculty	Male Faculty	Total Faculty
University of Karachi, Karachi	6	8	14
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi	4	8	12
Sir Syed University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi	3	9	12
NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi	7	5	12
Women University Multan, Multan	13	1	14
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	0	12	12
Total	33	43	76

Table 3: Number of male and female faculty members nominated by universities

2-Day training with faculty members

In January 2022, PIPS team held three two-day workshops, two in Karachi and one in Multan, with at least twenty male and female faculty members from the target universities attending each workshop. The first workshop with faculty members from the two universities in Multan was held on January 07-08, 2022. The second, held in Karachi on January 12-13, was attended by faculty members from NED University of Engineering and Technology and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University, Lyari. Faculty members from the University of Karachi and Sir Syed University of Engineering & Technology were trained and sensitized at the third workshop, held in Karachi on January 14-15, 2022.

The resource persons for the three workshops included noted professionals from various fields related to the project theme. In the selection of training experts, PIPS tried to have equal number

of male and female trainers and was successful in the effort to some extent, with 30 pc female trainers in both Multan and Karachi training sessions.

The selected faculty members were trained and sensitized on CVE, critical thinking, social cohesion, social action, women's role in peacebuilding, and leadership and mentoring to enable them to not only challenge the extremist narratives but also put forth counter-narratives of peace and harmony. Faculty members were also acquainted with key aspects of the National Action Plan and detailing the role of universities as institutions and key stakeholders, including faculty, student advisors, student leaders, etc., within the broader CVE narratives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan.¹³

Workshop participants were requested to complete a brief survey, which explored the faculty members' worldview and opinions on the issues in focus. The survey was open-ended and had questions to understand the perceptions and views of faculty on issues such as extremism, interfaith harmony, social harmony, and peace. The answers to the survey questions were analysed using thematic analysis.

Throughout the various stages of designing and conducting the workshops, a conscious focus remained on the inclusion and active participation of female faculty members. As mentioned earlier, during the coordination meetings, female participants were asked regarding their preferences of venue and time. As far as possible, the workshops were organized in line with those preferences to ensure female participation. In choosing the workshop venues, due consideration was given to ensure ease of access for female faculty members. During the training, the resource persons encouraged female participation in the discussion, asking them specific questions. A specific session on Women Role in Peacebuilding was also included in the program.

Despite these efforts, gender inclusivity became a major challenge. The table 4 lists down number of male and female participants in the training sessions. The target participation was 20 in each session, with 10 male and 10 female faculty. The average participation of 23.5 shows that while in

¹³ *Paigham-e-Pakistan is a narrative and a unanimous decree against terrorism and extremism issued by religious scholars of all schools of thought. It condemns terrorism and extremism and prohibits suicide bombing. The decree defines jihad as being the sole purview of the state and disallows use of force to compel obedience to faith.*

terms of number the target was achieved, the average female participation was 8.67, slightly lower than what was targeted.

City	Date	Female participants	Male participants	Total participants
Multan	7 Jan 2022	8	12	20
	8 Jan 2022	10	13	23
Karachi	12 Jan 2022	10	14	24
	13 Jan 2022	8	15	23
	14 Jan 2022	8	18	26
	15 Jan 2022	8	17	25
Average		8.67	14.8	23.5

Moreover, it was noted that female beneficiaries who attended the trainings were mostly silent and male attendees dominated the discussion despite several interventions by the resource persons to encourage female participation. Some male participants of the session were also found to be mansplaining women trainers through interruption, cross questioning and aggressively challenging their views. For instance, Veengas, the editor in chief of the Rise News, shared how minorities feel excluded by the very term “minority” and prefer to be called as their religious identity i.e., Hindus, Christians. Many male participants intervened and brushed off her concerns, claiming that we give equal rights to our minorities and media exaggerate the issue. Interestingly, the same participants agreed about minority rights issues next day in Dr. Farooq Hassan’s session on Interfaith dialogue.

Seminar on “Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding on Campuses”

Trained faculty members subsequently led seminars on “Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding on Campuses” with student society leaders. Six seminars were held in total, one each by the trained faculty members of the six universities. The schedule of the seminar conducted by the universities is provided in the table below.

University	Venue	Date
Sir Syed University of Sciences and Technology, Karachi	Seminar Room/Hall	08 March 2022
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	University Auditorium	08 March 2022
University of Karachi, Karachi	Department of Islamic Studies	13 March 2022
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi	University Auditorium	14 March 2022
NED University, Multan	University Auditorium	25 March 2022
Women University Multan	Madrasa Khair-ul-Huda	25 March 2022

It is important to note that the number of female beneficiaries outnumbered male beneficiaries in most seminars. In all seminars, there was a specific session on “Gender, Peace, and Education,” where speakers highlighted the role female teachers can play in building peaceful environment in universities. It was also noted that clashes in universities, irrespective of whether they are between political, religious, or ethnic groups, has a more profound effect on female students.

However, there was a notable gender gap in the speakers of seminar session. All speakers in BZU Seminar were male. The participation of female attendees in BZU seminar was also less than in other universities. Apart from gender, a major challenge was a constant shift in schedule by universities. Many a time, universities informed PIPS coordinator of change in their plans just a day or two before the scheduled event. The Women University Multan changed their venue to outside university campuses, citing delays in getting timely approvals from university admin. Similarly, NED university postponed its activities citing mid-term examination.

Social action projects

Total twelve Social Action Projects (SAPs), two in each university, have been conducted jointly by faculty and students on social cohesion, peacebuilding, gender inclusion, diversity and tolerance. Trained cadre of university faculty members were asked to design the SAP plans during the training workshop and were guided on how to keep their SAPs inclusive. The scope

of SAPs broadly included multi-stakeholder panel discussions, mentoring workshops, guest lectures by CVE practitioners/lawmakers, inter-university faculty dialogues, etc. The details of the SAPs conducted by all six universities is provided in the subsequent table.

University	Social Action Project	Date
Sir Syed University of Sciences and Technology, Karachi	SAP 1: Panel discussion: (discriminatory behaviour of teacher)	09 March 2022
	SAP 2: Peace Walk (Respect for diversity of culture, faith & ethnicity)	11 March 2022
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	SAP 1: panel discussion (discriminatory behaviour of other and its impact on student.	21 March 2022
	SAP 2: Guest speaker lecture (CVC, Paigham Pakistan)	22 March 2022
University of Karachi, Karachi	SAP 1: Interfaculty dialogue (Promoting tolerant behaviour at campuses)	03 March 2022
	SAP 2: Panel discussion (Discriminatory behaviour of teacher and its impact on education)	07 March 2022
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi	SAP 1: Panel discussion (Promoting tolerant behaviours among students at campuses)	16 March 2022
	SAP 2: Peacewalk (Respect for diversity of culture, faith and ethnicity)	17 March 2022
NED University, Multan	SAP-1 Inter faculty dialogue (Discriminatory behaviour of teacher towards “others”)	29 March 2022
	SAP-2: Peacewalk (Promoting tolerant behaviour at campuses)	29 March 2022
Women University Multan, Multan	SAP1: Panel discussion (The role of women in peace building)	11 March 2022
	SAP 2: Mentoring workshop for students (interfaith dialogue and religious freedom)	14 March 2022

Creation of “Network of Faculty Peacebuilders in Universities”

The trained pool of faculty members from both regions (South Punjab and Karachi) were then brought together to form the “Network of Faculty Peacebuilders in Universities”. This network, formally launched at the end of March, would provide a platform for diverse faculty members to engage in constructive discourse on CVE initiatives in universities along with facilitating and mentoring student society/club leaders in their respective campuses on leadership and inclusive peacebuilding efforts. Thus, the platform would not only lead to the creation of a constructive

and safe space for discourse among faculty members, but also increase positive role models and mentors in universities for student society leaders. The network will be sustained through routine activities and meetings initiated by PIPS and the network members.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Several key observations emerged from the exchanges during the three training workshops and the participants' responses to a brief survey.

Extremism in education

The first workshop began with a sobering acknowledgment from resource persons and faculty members alike. There was consensus that with VE casting a long shadow everywhere, it was unimaginable that any field would remain wholly unaffected by it.

“Places of higher learning must be particularly mindful of promoting and preserving tolerance and keeping violence out. The truly free exchange of ideas, critical thinking and a spirit of inquiry – which are the hallmarks of the academic environment – are not possible otherwise.” -A female workshop participant in Multan

Another related point of unanimity in that workshop in Multan was that nowhere was it more crucial to confront VE, and prevent it from taking root, than in educational institutions. Similar sentiments reverberated in the following workshops and seminars as well.

Absence of faculty training on peacebuilding

“Advocating for discourses and narrative of peace and putting up counter-narratives in seminars is one thing. However, doing that on the ground is a completely different proposition. Those responsible for providing security

have become spectators. We have examples of what happened to Mashal Khan and Junaid Hafeez. When academics, who can only wage war with their ideas, regularly face violence and intimidation for furthering positive values you can imagine which side is winning, at least in the short term.” –

A workshop participant in Multan

From the outset, it was obvious that the participants of the workshops had seldom had opportunities or avenues for a candid discussion on such themes with a sizeable group of their peers. In fact, one of the two things that the survey responses established most distinctly was the hunger among the participants for wider engagement with faculty and sharing of experiences regarding the issues related to harmony, tolerance, and peace building.

Lack of awareness and conceptual clarity

Through the three workshops, numerous participants readily admitted that they lacked sufficient understanding of important concepts and tools to play an effective role in promoting harmony and confronting extremist tendencies.

“While many CSOs initiate projects on teachers training, there is no follow-up after the initial training. It is good to see a project with an element of sustainability, with establishment of a network that will continue to engaging on the issues of extremism and violence in higher education institutions.” –A workshop participant from Bahauddin

Zakariya University, Multan

In fact, in responding to the survey questions, the most common expectation the participants said they had from the workshops was to enhance their knowledge of the themes in question as well

as of the tools and methodologies to effectively communicate that knowledge to their students. They said that enhanced knowledge would increase their confidence in promoting peace and harmony as teachers. Several participants yearned for linkages and collaborations to regularly share with fellow faculty members experiences and ideas for promoting peace and harmony in their role as educators. They welcomed the fact that a trained pool of faculty members from South Punjab and Karachi would soon have such a network.

*I hope the training will improve my learning of the concepts such as interfaith harmony and peace and enable me to understand the process of peacebuilding – A male beneficiary, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University
Multan*

One participant noted that it was vital for the educators to collectively brainstorm and reflect on the matters creating unhealthy and intolerant attitudes everywhere, particularly on campuses, and devise strategies for peace building and promoting positive values.

The other main finding, based on the survey responses, pointed to an unmistakable need to enhance the faculty members' basic grasp of concepts such as extremism, harmony, and tolerance. In response to two survey questions, most participants were able to correctly identify what constituted extremism or interfaith harmony. However, numerous faculty members across the three workshops seemed to have a rather deficient, and at times downright inaccurate, understanding of these basic concepts and struggled to define extremism or social or religious harmony.

Poor understanding of solutions to the problem of extremism

When asked about the possible solutions to the problems of extremism, many faculty members offered impractical or ineffective ideas. To illustrate, there were those who argued that following the rules of faith automatically protect against extremism.

Extremism is to enforce intentions whether they are allowed in Sharia or not. Some people do not follow the rules of Islam and do whatever they like or think is right. They create mischief and ruin everything. [Sic] - A faculty member from NED University of Engineering and Technology

Some others implied that religion and culture were natural antidotes to extremism. One participant defined extremism as something that went “beyond religious, cultural and constitutional boundaries”.

Another believed that extremism was “anything beyond the limits of religious rules, social and cultural norms”. A participant from Karachi defined extremism as a “thought process adopted by people that is against the established norms of society”. This definition presumed the established norms of society to be based on moderate tendencies. Depending on the given context, that might or might not be true.

A few faculty members thought that answers such as “We should avoid extremism” or “it is bad” sufficed in response to a question asking them about what they thought extremism meant. In addition to the general alarm and dismay such lack of basic understanding of key concepts among the faculty itself should cause, there are other more specific implications too. To state the obvious, coupled with a deficient grasp of basic concepts, any endeavour to offer counter-narratives would struggle amid ambiguity on the very narratives that are sought to be countered. Furthermore, engaging with these issues without clear understanding or familiarity with the various tools could quite possibly be dangerous.

Such a scenario had been discussed by the project team with the resource person beforehand and possible responses and alternative routes were agreed upon. Upon identifying the conceptual deficiencies, the resource persons switched to using more specific examples to illustrate and explain the point.

“Unfortunately, Lyari’s reputation is scarred by the violence that occurred in the past, and many people still avoid this neighborhood notwithstanding the peace and improved law and order now. It is good to see that you are reaching out to us.” – A faculty member from Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University, Lyari

Views on religious and social harmony

Extremism was not the only concept some participants struggled to grasp. There were those who, in explaining their understanding of interfaith harmony, did not make any reference to faith, religion, equality, non-discrimination and the like. To one such participant, interfaith harmony meant “having a belief or faith associated with different concepts.”

Many participants argued that religious harmony was hardly something that could be turned on by flipping a switch. They emphasized that narratives sponsored by the state itself in the past had played a substantial role in the present context of intolerance and extremism. To undo that damage, they believed that an education policy that was inclusive and curriculum that reflected diversity were imperative. Early inculcation of positive values among students, at the school level, was emphasized by many faculty members.

The resource persons and the project team considered it important to identify that some faculty members had much, perhaps too much, faith in the positive influence of religion to foster peaceful co-existence among followers of various religions. One participant in particular referred to Pakistan’s so-called youth bulge and said that since 98% of the national population consisted of Muslims “these young people will bring interfaith harmony”. This hardly sounded like a concrete plan, and perhaps again indicated a basic struggle with grasping the issue. At the other end of the spectrum, another faculty member thought that eradicating the role of the Mullah would lead to the youth promoting social and religious harmony.

The role of youth in promoting harmony

The project team and resource persons also noted that – in response to a question asking how the youth could promote harmony – at least a quarter of the participants acknowledged the importance of youth role but did not actually offer any suggestions or insight on how that importance would translate into the youth playing a role in promoting social or religious harmony. It was not always clear if that was a mere oversight or a lack of imagination leading to absence of concrete ideas on the youth’s role. However, irrespective of the reason, it was considered important to note this as a finding on account of the frequency of such a response.

In view of this finding, the resource persons highlighted the significance of identifying and sharing more specific ideas and crafting solutions and capacity tools for stakeholders across a wide spectrum of understanding. Greater focus on sharing examples and experiences that could be replicated as well as expert guidance for brainstorming to find viable solutions was suggested as an appropriate response.

Asked to comment on how youth could promote social and religious harmony, most participants suggested involving the youth in group activities that enhanced their knowledge and understanding. Participation in seminars, workshops, and debates on the themes in question was particularly suggested.

A number of participants observed that it was lived experience rather than any lecture or reading a page or chapter in a book which would drive home lessons of interfaith harmony. They thought that followers of different faiths visiting and cleaning each other’s religious places could strengthen respect for others’ faith and promote harmony. A female faculty member suggested involving students in organizing religious events of other faiths as a way to celebrate diversity and build harmony. The youth making friends across religions was another idea suggested as was the use of social media by the youth to promote positive values. Another advice was for the students to arrange events and activities focusing on the commonalities and shared values of various religions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and observations of the four-month exercise, the following recommendations were particularly relevant.

Governments and policymakers

- Make adequate resources available for periodic training and capacity-building of teachers to enable them to effectively challenge narratives of extremism and hate. The training should focus in particular on equipping the teachers to identify and effectively respond to narratives and drivers of VE as well as push CVE messages.
- Ensure that the education policy is inclusive, curriculum reflects diversity, and no intolerant material finds a place in the textbooks.
- Introduce courses on social harmony, peace, and tolerance in curricula.
- Promote through varied activities in the academic sphere understanding and value of diverse cultures, faiths, and ethnicities different from one's own. One example can be including visits to workshop places of different religions for students as part of inculcating appreciation of diversity among them, instead of confining that aspect only to brief sections of textbooks.
- Organize inclusive spaces for faculty and students to engage and for mentoring of the latter in order to create tolerance and build peace and harmony.
- Introduce effective means to empower female educators and students and ensure that stakeholders in the academic environment are protected against violence and aggressive behaviour on any ground.
- Establish a formal role for parliamentary committees to monitor and regularly evaluate both the policies and their implementation to protect the educational institutions from negative influences, violence, and extremism.

- Make it the purpose of educational bodies to find answers to problems facing education, rather than propagating personal or political views of those at helm of affairs of these bodies.
- Education became a provincial subject after the 18th Constitutional Amendment but still most books are designed on the foundation of 2007 syllabus. Efforts are needed to fully implement the decentralization of education and in particular to ensure the provincial reviews of textbooks, curricula and implementation of the Article 25-A. Participants noted that centralisation of education was counterproductive to perceived national harmony and unity.
- Pakistan needs an intellectual infrastructure for countering extremism. This ranges from promoting a stable education framework to ensuring there is freedom of expression and speech to enable the expression and sharing of alternative ideas. Therefore, the government needs to improve the fundamental freedom of speech for all citizens including at education campuses.

Faculty

- Utilize and expand all available spaces and avenues for promotion of harmony, and inclusion in the educational institutions.
- Familiarize themselves with best practices and effective tools for CVE as well as underlying drivers and contextual factors of extremism.
- Establish linkages with other faculty members across institutions in an inclusive manner, benefitting from the active participation of female educators as well.
- Encourage and support student initiatives that acknowledge and celebrate diversity and positively reinforce constructive engagement
- Keep regular liaison with civil society, including rights organizations, media, political parties, and the bar, to enhance capacity and seek and offer support for shared objectives.
- Uphold diversity and introduce students to multiple views. Teachers also need to develop self-learning techniques through reading and joining training sessions with a view to keep themselves updated as well as to build capacity of their students to ask and

frame questions and find answers. For one, teachers may not confine themselves to syllabus books but read others too on the subject, to know all possible versions.

- Promote culture of research among students and in institutions.
- Learn and practice how to overcome parochial biases and disassociate their understanding of the world from a single identity, whether ethnic, religious, or sectarian.
- Summarise all the existing knowledge on a given subject, and then present one's opinion, thus letting students decide on their own which one is right. That is how knowledge grows and societies develop.
- To teach tolerance, strengthen positive attitudes in classrooms including non-discriminatory approach towards students subscribing to different faiths and sects.
- Avoid discussion on controversial topics and sensitive religious issues in classrooms and try to resolve moderately and amicably if such a discussion happens.
- Make careful selection of words in classrooms, workshops, or seminars so as no one gets uncomfortable or offended.

Civil society

- Monitor the state's academic policies and practice related to institutions of higher education in an ongoing manner to gauge their impact on promotion of harmony and positive values, highlight deficiencies and suggest appropriate improvements wherever warranted.
- Facilitate avenues for educators and students to network and share experiences regarding promoting of harmony and confronting extremism.
- Arrange pilot interventions to share best practices and effective tools for CVE.
- Sensitise teachers on social media tools so that they ensure their students do not fall prey to extremist and divisive ideologies easily available in cyberspace.
- Train teachers on the basic chapters on the fundamental human rights and how to inculcate that to students.

Curricula reforms

- The study of human rights, ethics and diversity be prioritised in curricula and further appreciated by teachers.
- Make the curricula a source of instilling in students a sense of citizenship based on the fundamental rights provided in the constitution.
- Include critical thinking in the curricula as well as make it a part of pedagogy. The students need to be trained to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills from early on so that by the time they reach universities they are well versed in the application of these skills.
- Instead of one particular set of beliefs and ideas, universal ethics and morals be incorporated in curricula. Similarly, instead of teaching studies from one faith to minority students, their respective religious precepts be included in curriculum or in books on ethics for them to study.
- The curriculum should highlight commonalities among different religions, focusing more on ethical and humanistic side of divine dogmas.
- Instead of focusing too much on past and the past glory, the curriculum should prioritise the contemporary realities of the world and future roadmap for youths. That will not only reduce the appeal of regressive, extremist mind-set but also encourage Pakistani youth to indulge in forward-looking and rational narratives.
- Curriculum may not be limited to certain courses; rather it should also give students space for understanding the methodologies of a subject topic.

Culture and identity

- Make humanity the sole purpose of teaching instead of focusing on one particular set of beliefs and ideas.
- Promote cultural diversity at campuses instead of propagating one particular culture or tradition.
- Curricula and teachers shall own local history and local heroes. People resonate best with them; otherwise, concepts remain alien to students.

- Engage students in cultural activities to reduce appeal of extremism.
- Shared traditions and sociocultural connectors among followers of different faiths be highlighted in educational curricula and classrooms, which can significantly transform our society in support of peace and harmony.
- Identify sociocultural community circles at local level, representing all faiths, make them active and empower them.
- Teach the modern concepts of shared identity and citizenship based on democratic values at educational institutions.

Youth engagement

- Educational institutions need to be given more academic freedom and space because restrictions on free thinking on grounds of religious sensitivity etc. check intellectual growth among the youth. Inquisitiveness and questioning should be encouraged and promoted.
- Engage youth in diverse programs to empower them politically, socially, and economically.
- Government's initiatives for youth be expanded and disseminated widely. The scope of government initiatives with youth, be increased, in both numbers and backgrounds.
- Bridge communication gap with youth.
 - Regular interaction be made with them.
 - Career counselling be provided to students; counselling department be encouraged at school level.
 - Youth-adult partnership be undertaken.
 - Parliament-youth interactions be increased and explored.
- Enabling environment to be provided for youth to engage with diversity and/or diverse opinions, by reviving dialogues, student unions, parks, playgrounds, public places, youth clubs, online communities, campus magazines.

APPENDIX

Agenda/Program of the Training Workshop

Agenda - Day One

10:00-10:15 AM **Morning Tea and Registration, COVID-19 SOPs briefing and PPE Distribution**

10:15-10:30 AM **Welcome and Introduction**

- Welcome by Dr. Fizza Batool, Reporting and Communication Officer, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
- Objectives and scope of the event by Ahmed Ali, PIPS

10:30-11:30 AM **Policy Discourse on Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan**

- The session will examine different policy frameworks available to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE), how effective they are and how they can better be applied for peacebuilding and community resilience; The frameworks include Paigham-e-Pakistan, NAP, NISP, NSP and new CVE Policy

11:30-12:30 PM **The Global Trends on Scientific Thinking**

- What constitutes rational and scientific thinking? Exploring relationship between rational thinking and tolerance, and between excessive emotionalism and violence.

12:45-01:45 PM **Lunch Break**

01:45-02:45 PM

Role of Women in Peacebuilding

- Faith-based extremism and violence affect women in many ways including loss of loved ones and rise in misogyny; why women's crucial role in peacebuilding has largely been overlooked in Pakistan; and what value they can add as peacebuilders.

02:45-03:45 PM

Religious Faith and Culture

- How people's connection to folklores and interaction with physical surroundings shape their cultures; how culture and faith interact with and influence each other? Appreciating cultural variations.

03:45-04:45 PM

Media Expansion & Minorities' Persecution Going Parallel?

- As media outlets proliferate in Pakistan, religious minorities face increased persecution; Are media houses doing justice to highlighting the plight of minorities? Is commercialism trampling human rights?

04:45-05:00 PM

Wrap up of day and tea

Agenda - Day Two (15 January 2022)



10:00-10:30 AM

Arrival, Registration, COVID-19 SOPs briefing and PPE Distribution

10:30-11:30

The State of Interfaith Relations in Pakistan

- The evolution of interfaith relations in Pakistan; factors affecting interfaith harmony; case studies and inspiring stories of interfaith and communal relations in Sindh.

11:30-11:45 PM

Tea Break

11:45-12:45 PM	Mentorship and Role Modelling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An interactive session in which participants will practice the role teachers could play in molding thinking and outlook among pupils; why sensitizing teachers about social peace and harmony is so crucial? Non-verbal cues to instil inclusiveness among students.
12:45-01:45 PM	Freedom of Speech: The Mother of all Freedoms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why freedom of speech is important for peace? How free speech is curbed at home, school, and society levels?
01:45-02:30 PM	Lunch Break
02:30-03:30 PM	Psychology of Extremist Mindset
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why people adopt extremist views and develop radicalized thinking? Self-assessment and self-management of extremist tendencies.
03:30-04:30 PM	Developing an Effective Social Action Plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How to plan your social action project around vulnerable classes. What it means to belong to a socially disadvantaged class in our society; what challenges minorities face and how SAPs can create awareness about and build empathy for the plight of minorities.
04:30-05:00 PM	Distribution of Certificates, Photo, and Tea

Program of the Seminar on Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding on Campuses

10:00-10:15 AM	Registration, COVID-19 SOPs briefing and PPE Distribution
10:15-10:30 AM	Welcome and Introduction

- 10:30-11:15 AM **Promoting Peace on Campus**
- The session is meant to initiate a discussion on the importance of having a peaceful environment in educational campuses. The speaker will highlight the challenges faced by universities in promoting peace and will detail the responsibilities of students and teachers in dealing with these challenges.
- 11:15-12:00 PM **Let's Agree to Disagree**
- Why is it critical to have diversity of beliefs and views on campuses? How can we enhance tolerance and acceptance of other views among students and teachers? How can we create a classroom environment where everyone can openly share views?
- 12:00-12:45 PM **Gender, Peace and Education: What's the connection**
- Gender inclusion in campuses plays an indispensable role in peacebuilding. In this session, share the impact of gender exclusions, gender segregation and gender stereotyping on campuses and their likely effect on students' behavior.
- 12:45-01:30 PM **Diversity - A symbol of Beauty**
- The session is aimed to promote diversity as a gift of nature. The speaker can explore social identity theory and its critique to suggest ways for normalizing diversity in universities to promote open thinking.
- 01:30-02:00 PM **Lunch Break**
- 02:00-02:45 PM **Give it Five Minute before Responding**

It can be an interactive session. Make participants listen to dissenting views and pick the common points before phrasing their response. Make them learn to not just into disagreements without properly listening. Share cues and phrases to use when disagreeing.

02:45-03:00

Conclusion and Way Forward

