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IMPACTS OF MILITARY BOARDING SCHOOLS ON FAMILY AFFILIATIONS OF THEIR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Military boarding schools are an integral part of education sector of Pakistan. These schools are multi-dimensional i.e., along with imparting required academic skills, these schools also focus on overall personality of a student by inculcating traits such as discipline and character building. Students at military boarding school undergo strict training which is aimed at helping students to develop good academic and social skills. Parents are often attracted by the idea that not only military boarding schools will help their children to perform well in the field of academics but also student will be able to learn required soft and social skills which are absolutely necessary for having a successful career in military as well as civil life. However, this comes at a price. Since students at military boarding school have no parent care available, they develop certain coping strategies to fight against the shock of leaving their homes. With time, these coping strategies become second nature of students. This study was conducted to answer a fundamental question that what long term effects does military boarding schools leave on the personality of their students and how it is impacting their ability to form social relationships especially family connections through their lives. The study is also aimed at finding out if boarders find it difficult to make a strong family connection. Qualitative approach was employed to conduct this study and semi-structured interview technique was used to collect data. The candidates selected for this interview were male graduates of a top-notch military boarding school in the province of Punjab (Pakistan) who had graduated from boarding institution at least 10 years ago and had a boarding experience of minimum 4 years. A sample of 10 different students was taken who had passed out through a boarding school before the age of 18 years. The results inform that that students at military boarding schools go through a way of life which significantly affects their social habits and world view. When a student becomes part of military boarding school, he is expected to adopt and embrace the routine of

the school without much delay. These expectations put lot of pressure on the child who comes up with a defense mechanism to survive himself in the challenging school environment. The child forms a shell around himself which subsequently becomes permanent part of his personality.

INTRODUCTION

Boarding school concept has been present since ancient times around the world (Patterson, 2020). This concept existed in a different form though. In ancient times, kings used to send their heirs to different teachers who would teach them art and science of war and politics (Kiffer, 2019). Subsequently during medieval times, children were sent to monastery schools for learning various academic and life skills. After its independence, Pakistan inherited 2 boarding schools from the British since it was a western method of education (Sanusi, Al Mighwar, Wasliman, & Hanafiah, 2021; Ullah & Ali, 2018; Hamza & Wadhwa, 2018). At present, there are about 14 registered boarding schools present around the country (Sarwar et al., 2020). There are a large number of boarding schools which are working without registering with the local government (Rafique & Khoo, 2018).

In Pakistan, majority of boarding schools are operated by military as these school serve as nurseries for recruitment in Army, Navy and Air force (Rashid, 2018). Parents send their children to boarding schools for different reasons. It has been observed that majority of students who are enrolled in boarding schools in Pakistan belong to a lower middle class to middle class. Parents of these children see boarding schools as an opportunity for their kids since they believe that training and grooming imparted at these military run schools will result in upward social mobility as this will help them to pass military and subsequently join military in officer cadre, a career which is considered fairly rewarding in Pakistan (Sanusi et al., 2021; Patterson, 2020).

On the other hand, there are certain semi-government and private boarding institutions where only upper and elite class can afford the fee structure. Nevertheless, regardless of social class, studying and living in boarding school affects the personality of its students. In this study, we have restricted ourselves to only exploring the impacts of military boarding schools on family affiliations of its students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An elaborate literature review regarding the difficulties faced by boarders in making good family connection was carried out. The concept of boarding school has existed in various forms since ancient times. King used to send their heirs or sons to learn the art of war, ruling and life skills so that they can have required qualities to become good ruler. As a result, the concept of boarding schools was only limited to elites of society (Prasetyo, Bashori & Rahmi, 2021; Fatimah, 2019).

This concept of boarding school also prevailed in Muslim world, as kids at young age would be sent to famous mosques where they would attain religious education (Hudzaifah, Ulfah & Pamungkas, 2021). A holistic set of training activities would be planned throughout the day to focus on religious, social and

physical sides of personality. In present era, this concept of Islamic boarding schools has been limited to under privileged segment of society only (Muazza et al., 2018). Parents who cannot afford to take care of their kids send them to Islamic schools called madrassas where the school takes care of the basic needs of all its students along with providing religious education (Oktar, 2022).

Since the British ruled sub-continent for more than a century, they brought their ideas about education with them. British generals who ruled sub-continent established certain boarding schools in subcontinent with the aim to provide quality education to their own sons and daughters (Ahmad, 2022). After the British left sub-continent, the administration of these schools was taken over by educated locals. Some of the noteworthy boarding school names in this regard are Aitcheson School, Cadet College Hasan-Abdal and Cadet College Sargodha. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the status of some of these schools was subsequently changed to serve as nurseries for induction in armed forces of Pakistan. The training routine of the schools were changed with particular emphasize on polishing personality traits of its students in line with requirements of military.

Although all boarding schools try their best to focus on academic as well as social side of its students, but still it is observed that student at boarding schools have to deal with certain extra added pressures since parental support around the clock isn't available (Schaverien, 2004). As per studies by Graham (2012), boarding schools have great impact on social skills of its students. Students spend large amount of time in these schools and it becomes their second home. While the school tries its best to provide a home like environment, it still fails to become a home. As a result, it is quite possible that certain students might be at the risk of developing psychological ailments (Schaverien, 2011). One such psychological barrier was explored in detail by Patterson (2020) which was called boarding school syndrome. This study focused on the after-graduation life patterns of graduates of a boarding school who faced certain difficulties in their social life.

Research Gap

While there have been limited number of studies on long term effects of military boarding schools on lives of its students, there has been practically no study in the context of Pakistan. This research paper is aimed to investigate this effect in the context of Pakistan.

Aim of the Study:

This study is aimed at answering a fundamental question that what effects does military boarding school leave on the personality of their students and how it is impacting their ability to form social relationships especially family connections.

Research Objectives:

1.   To study if the family bonds become weak for boarders.
2.   To understand the difficulties faced by boarders in making strong family connections.

Research Questions:

1.   Do family bonds become weak for boarders?
2.   Do boarders find it hard to make strong family connections?
3.   Are boarders expressive in a family relationship?

METHODOLOGY:

A qualitative method of study was carried out to analyze the effects of military boarding school on family affiliation of its students. Qualitative method provided the respondents with an opportunity to express themselves so that the phenomenon could be clearly understood. Semi structured interviews were planned with respondents in individual capacity to ascertain their responses on the long-term effects that boarding school had on their lives. The researcher personally scheduled interviews with all the respondents on skype and all ethical considerations were kept in mind regarding interviews.

Data Collection:

Semi structured interviews through a questionnaire were used for collecting data for this specific research article (Basheer et al. 2015). All the interviews were audio recorded and audio recording was kept for all the interviews so that they can be analyzed later. Time selected for interview was evening which was scheduled keeping in mind professional urgencies of participants during daytime.

Care was taken in not revealing identities of any of respondent to other respondents so as to increase the possibility of original thoughts. Open ended questions were also made part of interview so as to let the participant narrate their stories of boarding life which would give us more idea about their boarding experiences.

Participants:

The candidates selected for this interview were male graduates of a top-notch military boarding school who had graduated from boarding institution at least 10 years ago and a boarding experience of minimum 4 years. A sample of 10 different students was taken who had passed out through a boarding school before the age of 18 years.

The selected school is one of the best boarding institutions in Pakistan with a rich history of successful and accomplished individuals from all walks of life. The administration of boarding school is being looked after by thorough professionals and is supported by board of governors as well as a superior organization with no budgetary constraints.

The administration was further assisted by a very capable staff who focuses on all personality trait of student i.e., academic, social, intellectual and physical. Students are being guided by senior administration as well as staff throughout their course of study at the school.

The school has a total strength of 300 to 400 students who belong to all the province of Pakistan. Majority of student belong to lower income and middle-income group of society with average monthly income of 250 to 500 USD (60000 to 100000 PKR). Since the school is supported by government, hence a very nominal fee is charged from the parents which doesn't burden their pockets. This fact also makes the school a very attractive option for lower income groups as top-notch facilities are being provided in these boarding schools which would not be affordable to the parents otherwise.

Convenient sampling technique was used for the selection of participants. Here it is pertinent to mention that personal views and biases of respondents regarding certain situations may be present. Extreme care was taken to filter those responses so that an accurate assessment and analysis could be made.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis was being done in continuation keeping in view the time constraints. All semi structured interviews were first transcribed and then sent back to the participants to verify and cross check. Digital signatures of participants were obtained on the transcription version of their interviews and subsequently this version was analyzed for drawing results. Participants were given pseudonym as MSA1, MSA2, MSA3 respectively.

After initial analysis of all interviews, certain themes emerged as common among all participants. Those themes were carefully examined to filter out the possibility of any biasedness.

The three main themes that arise as a result of questionnaire and interview are following:

1.   Level of family affiliation before attending boarding school
2.   Effects on family relationships and family affiliations after attending boarding school
3.   Bitter experiences at boarding school
4.   Joyful experiences at boarding school
5.   Employment experiences post attending boarding schools

To limit this research, we kept our focus on family affiliation of students which had a negative impact as a result of attending boarding schools.

"My attitude towards life definitely changed after I joined military boarding school. Before joining school, I felt strongly connected to my immediate family members, however as time passed, I felt that the bond got weaker and weaker. I became more self-centered". (MSA4)

"Yes, my attitude definitely changed as I was spending very little time home. I started considering boarding school as my first home and my own home as a secondary home". (MSA7)

"Boarding school has made me materialistic to a certain degree where I gauge my personal value on the parameter that how successful I am in my career. While this psychic may be true for day scholar as well, however I am sure that this effect is significantly more pronounced among boarders". (MSA3)

During all interview, an important theme which emerged was change in family affiliations of students as a result of attending boarding school. After joining the school, it was part of training culture of school to stop the students from contacting their family members and isolate them from family members, so that they can adjust in this new reality within smallest possible time. Only thereafter, the students were able to focus on their studies, sports and social skills. The school created an environment for its students where they had to find their brothers and other family members within the school so as to create a sense of bonding

"I felt my lack of involvement in family matter as I grew up since I was unable to build strong family connection during my early years". (MSA10)
"While boarding school was instrumental in grooming my personality in imparting hard and soft skills required to succeed in general, however it left a void inside me as I was deprived of parental care which was absolutely vital during my early year of life". (MSA6)

While this gives a short-term benefit to school as students adjust quickly in new school environment, it leaves certain gaps in psychological upbringing of students who find themselves lost and craving for affection of parents.

"In boarding school, the environment is very centrally controlled. It is very rare that we as students used to see new faces. Hence, we didn't get chance to connect freely with new people. I felt that once I grew up and entered university, I felt difficulty in connecting to new people". (MSA1)
"To a certain degree, yes. It definitely makes me feel more vulnerable if not open to attack. As I grew up during my years at boarding school, there was no one whom
I could share my feelings with. Now that I am a grown-up man, I still feel difficulty
in expressing my deepest feeling even to my closest family members such as spouse or a parent". (MSA5)
"If given a choice, I won't be attending boarding school again. I would prefer to study in day school and pursue my dreams in line with that. I would also not want my kids to join boarding school in any capacity. I think that cost benefit analysis will prove that you lose more by joining boarding school". (MSA8)

As time passes by, students tend to make stronger bonds and completely disregard family commitments. The ideas are further enforced by the culture and motto of school administration which project school as a home and all

students as brothers and teachers a fatherly and motherly figure. As these individuals grew older in their lives and after finishing boarding schools, they found it hard to re connect with their families again.

"My relationship with my mother, father and siblings is far from ideal. There is a significant difference in my connection before and after attending boarding school. I feel that connection weakened after joining boarding school as I learnt to deal with all my problem on my own. Over period, this thought creeped into my mind that I don't need anyone as I could take care of myself on my own". (MSA2)

"In boarding school, we had vacations after months. Hence, I got used to staying away from my family. This factor has shaped my way of life even during adult years as I don't feel a strong urge to visit my family". (MSA9)

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As per the results, it was clear that students at military boarding schools go through a way of life which significantly affects their world view. First of all, when a student become part of military boarding school, he undergoes a complete lifestyle change where he is expected to come up to the required standards. Conscious effort is made by boarding school administration to keep the students busy so that they don't have time to miss their parents and family members.

Even if a child complaint about any environmental and social difficulty that he faces, he is reminded that he is part of an elite institution and he should not lose this opportunity. If he decides to quit, he is regarded as a loser by all his peers. This undue pressure forces the child to take up new challenge and build a defense mechanism to survive himself in the challenging boarding school environment. The child forms a shell around himself which has a significant effect on his personality throughout the years.

Although boarding school try their best to provide a home like environment to its students, however it still cannot be an alternative for pastoral care. More research work needs to be carried out in this domain to give decision maker a better chance to make an informed decision about the future of boarding schools.

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