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Bad Governance and Low Socio-Economic Identity: A Sociological Study of the Unwanted Effects of Bad Governance on the Personal and Social Lives of People from Low Socio-Economic Cohorts in District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Bad governance is a politico-social problem and is pervasive across the world, predominantly in third-world countries. It not only mishandles policies and resources but creates even further problems in the lives of citizens. The current study aims to analyze the unwanted effects of bad governance in the personal and social lives of people in low socioeconomic cohorts. The study is carried out through a qualitative research design due to nature of the problem and its related consequences. A sample size of 20 participants was selected through purposive sampling techniques. Primary information was gathered in face-to-face interviews with the participants. After careful recording and transcription of the relevant information, the data were thematically analyzed and descriptively presented. The study finds that all the citizens of any society get the negative effects of bad governance in terms of inaction and implementation of inappropriate policies, exploitation of resources, lack of provision of equalization opportunities, inappropriate healthcare provision, inflation, etc. But the people of low socioeconomic cohorts get even more devastating consequences because of their already vulnerable social and economic statuses. Pathetically, their personal, familial, and economic lives are deteriorated, and they lead a miserable life with weak social relationships and ever-increasing dependence. The study recommends that the political leadership must be qualified academics, like that of the Chinese society with a strict system of



accountability. The researcher feels the gap to thoroughly examine the factors that lead to bad governance in third-world countries.

INTRODUCTION

Bad governance is a global political-social issue that causes other heinous problems for individuals and societies, including personal, economic, religious, legislative, and social ones. The problem is prevalent across global societies (Akram, Wajid, Mahmood, & Sarwar, 2011). However, the third-world countries face the severe consequences mainly because of their increasing dependence on other societies in respect of the usage, management, and utilization of their policies and available resources. According to Owoye and Bissessar (2013), "bad governance is a symptom of institutional and leadership failures, explicitly manifested by its long list of dictatorial leaders, non-free media, and undemocratic elections." According to the World Bank, bad governance is a country that lacks the following indicators: accountability and honor to the public voice, rule of law, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and government effectiveness. Moreover, it entails systematic corruption and a lack of openness and accountability, arbitrary policymaking, and the deception of those who are ruled (Aly, 2011). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) confirms that bad governance includes governments that are ineffective and inefficient, not transparent, not responsive to the people, not held accountable for their actions, inequitable and exclusive to the elites, non-participatory, do not follow the rule of law, and lack policies that are consensus-driven (Owoye & Bissessar, 2013).

Bad governance as a problem manifests primarily with a declining tendency towards the rule of law (Ahmad & Khan, 2021). Corruption and bad governance have been mounting since the mid-1990s and have posed a potential threat to basic concepts like administrative effectiveness, state capacity building, economic prosperity, people's access to basic services such as safe water, health care, and education, economic equality, social trust, political legitimacy, intrastate as well as interstate stability, and people's subjective well-being (Holmberg, Rothstein, & Teorell, 2012).

Bad governance, as the opposite of good governance, has insufficient provision for human development and their personal, social, and economic well-being. Insecurity prevails in the masses regarding mental, personal, and relationship satisfaction (Clarke, 2004). In this regard, a major role is played by discriminatory services like double or multi standards of education, lack of meritocracy in livelihood opportunities, expensive utility services and amenities, cheap labor, etc. (Foucault, 1997). Research in the field of social psychology demonstrates that it is hard to maintain a balance of emotional, physical, marital, and interaction-related harmony in one's life if the political system of the society experiences poor governance (Mitchell, Packard, & Clark, 2023).

A political system, if upright, intends to control, regulate, and perpetuate their existing resources to meet the needs of the citizens and that of society in the present as well as in the future. However, this needs expert patronage, sincere contemplation, and merit-based implementation that not only has positive effects on the persons but also on the institutional growth and integrity of the society (Shivji, 2004). The political system serves the country and its inhabitants through devising suitable policies, strengthening institutions, developing the economic system, minimizing dependence on others, and eradicating evils, for instance, poverty, ignorance, corruption, mismanagement, monopoly, and economic imbalance (Mitchell, Packard, & Clark, 2023).

Bad governance destabilizes a sound economic system that guarantees a peaceful, meritorious, and conducive environment, thereby providing equalization opportunities, attracting local and foreign investments, and regulating the available resources of the society (Sumarto, Suryahadi, Arifianto, Sadler, & Akhmedi, 2004). Moreover, due to the menace of bad governance, the lives of people, more specifically those in the lower socio-economic cohort, are negatively affected, predominantly because of a declining tendency toward industrialization, national and private capital investment, suitable working conditions, and future security of the workers (Fine, 1984). In addition, it creates a gap of relationships among

individuals, families, and social groups, which is the prime step to the well-being and harmony of society (Ashworth, Gardner, Morgan, Smith, von Hirsch & Wasik 1998).

The social and personal life of a person possesses very narrow and complex boundaries with multi-dimensional expectations and obligations that might be affected by enormous factors. Although governance has a direct and unending impact on every aspect of a citizen's life that might be observed even in their private affairs, in this regard, literature reveals that bad governance (avoids their responsibility to) feed their citizens, raise the literacy rate and technological advancements, minimize corruption and related practices, provide a stable and effective political system, and hold the constituents together (Osborne, 2003). Pathetically, such a failing governance style not only disturbs the personal and social sphere of activities of the low socio-economic cohort of citizens but also pushes them into the stream of crimes (Loum, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

Bad governance has uncounted negative effects on society and its inhabitants. However, those with weak socio-economic positions get the most devastating effects. The problem with other essential dimensions has been widely researched in other societies. But, in the third-world countries, more specifically with recurrent governance failure like Pakistan, the problem needs an in-depth investigation. The current study, therefore, focuses on examining the negative effects that bad governance produces in the life of a person from a low social class. The study intends to find out answers to two basic questions, i.e., what effects bad governance produces in the personal life of a lower-class person and how bad governance negatively affects the social life of the person. The study would contribute to the storehouse of knowledge on the one hand and will create awareness about the miseries of the lower-class people due to the menace of bad governance.

Methods and Procedures

The current study is conducted in district Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study is carried out through a qualitative research design and framework. The data are collected from 20 participants through the purposive sampling method. Only those persons were included in the study who belonged to lower social classes with different livelihood sources, including fruit vendors, laborers, drivers, hotel waiters, skilled workers, peons in government and semi-government organizations, private security guards, sweepers in organizations, etc. To reach and record appropriate information, an interview guide is used as a tool of data collection. Interviews are a way to gather factual data on the social world by asking people to discuss details about their lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). For analysis purposes, the data collected are carefully translated and transcribed, irrelevant information is removed, and themes are developed. The interpretative paradigm is used for data presentations for the readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bad governance produces people and situations that inversely affect the very nature, structure, and functioning of the society. It invests the state's resources in less useful endeavors mainly because of inefficient leadership and inappropriate governing styles that widen the gaps between rich and poor (Ahmad & Khan, 2021). Pathetically, the institutions get manipulation from the authorities, due to which the general masses get the minimum benefits of their existence and functioning. In addition, the ruling authorities devise and amend policies and laws to monopolize resources and other personal gains (Akram, Wajid, Mahmood, & Sarwar, 2011). In such a situation, people of the lower socio-economic cohort hardly meet their needs. Resultantly, they face psychological, economic, and social problems, which they manifest in anti-social and criminal activities (Sobhan, 1998).

Bad governance loses the trust of citizens in government and public institutions, as it is less likely to provide for their development and well-being. Individuals predominantly from the lower socio-economic cohort feel powerless and trapped in a cycle of never-ending poverty (Dean, 1999). The increasing feeling of frustration creates in them mental and physical health problems. Poor people, because of the lousy

government and their inequitable provisions, develop emotional distress that is manifested in their tense relationships and even breakdowns (Akram, Wajid, Mahmood, & Sarwar, 2011). It is also believed that due to a lack of meritocracy in their system and procedures, a major portion of the citizens in failed governance do not get equalization opportunities, which adds to their underemployment (Clarke, 2004). Psychological research in this connection asserts that underemployment sets back the emotional quotient of people, due to which they are less likely to fulfill their personal and social obligations. In addition, they cannot lead a happy and peaceful life due to their weak mental health, which might create further hurdles for them and their relatives (Osborne, 2003).

Bad governance is linked with administrative problems that, on the one hand, unequally distribute the state's resources and produce impediments to the smooth functioning of the system on the other. This might include a lack of employment provisions and/or provisions without proper assessment, and the imposition of irrational taxes that might affect the quality of life of middle and lower social class people (Fine, 1984). In such a situation, people of low socio-economic class lose the ability to make choices in their personal spheres of activities, for instance, to buy suitable clothes, to eat a balanced diet, to maintain their hobbies and leisure activities, and to properly educate their children that might cope with their future challenges (Foucault, 1997). Sociological research indicates that in a failed government, poor people cannot meet their basic needs, including to avail healthcare services, to provide for their domestic utilities and commodities, and to equally participate in their family and social life events (Sumarto, Suryahadi, Arifianto, Sadler, & Akhmadi, 2004). Another study infers that poor people in a failed government always have weak and aberrant mental health, and their dissatisfaction is often reflected in their anti-social activities (Ahmad & Khan, 2021).

State functions like the human body, and their institutions work like the bodily organs, which are interconnected and interdependent. However, the governance role is similar with blood in the body that gives life, strength, and the ability to perform their related functions to different bodily organs. Governance, if lousy and failed, practices and propagates negative policies and procedures that not only create institutional problems but rather have inverse effects on the overall life of the citizens, including the social sphere (Ahmad & Khan, 2021). Primarily, it affects the role performance of individuals in different social setups and replaces the efficient and hardworking personnel by the otherwise. Similarly, the chain of responsibilities is broken, which might hurt institutional goals. It is an established fact that an influenced role and the broken chain of responsibilities can never meet demands of the job. Furthermore, bad governance impedes the development and wellbeing of society by disconnecting the social networks working for the cause of society and its inhabitants. This creates a gap among the masses, who are inclined to perpetuate the very existence of society (Sobhan, 1998). It is believed that education is the prime institution that produces and strengthens human resources, which, if utilized in the right direction, might develop society. Unfortunately, bad governance avoids the responsibility to invest in the system of education and to build sound social relations among the various stakeholders (Mitchell, Packard, & Clark, 2023).

Bad governance can cause social unrest, bloodshed, and conflict on the societal level. Also, it might hinder economic growth and make poverty worse. In rare cases, it might even lead to the disintegration of a state. For this reason, research demonstrates that bad governance has far-reaching effects that can be catastrophic to both people and civilizations (Foucault, 1997).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the main part of any research activity that aims to explore and break down the primary information into more vivid categories. It is the segment that gives the readers explicable facts out of research activity. This section intends to examine the unwanted effects of bad governance on the life of a person from a low socio-economic cohort. The effects are more specifically confined to personal and social effects. According to the current study, the personal effects of bad governance create hurdles for the

individual and his relationships with others. Whereas, the social effects negatively affect the structure and functions of the society as a whole.

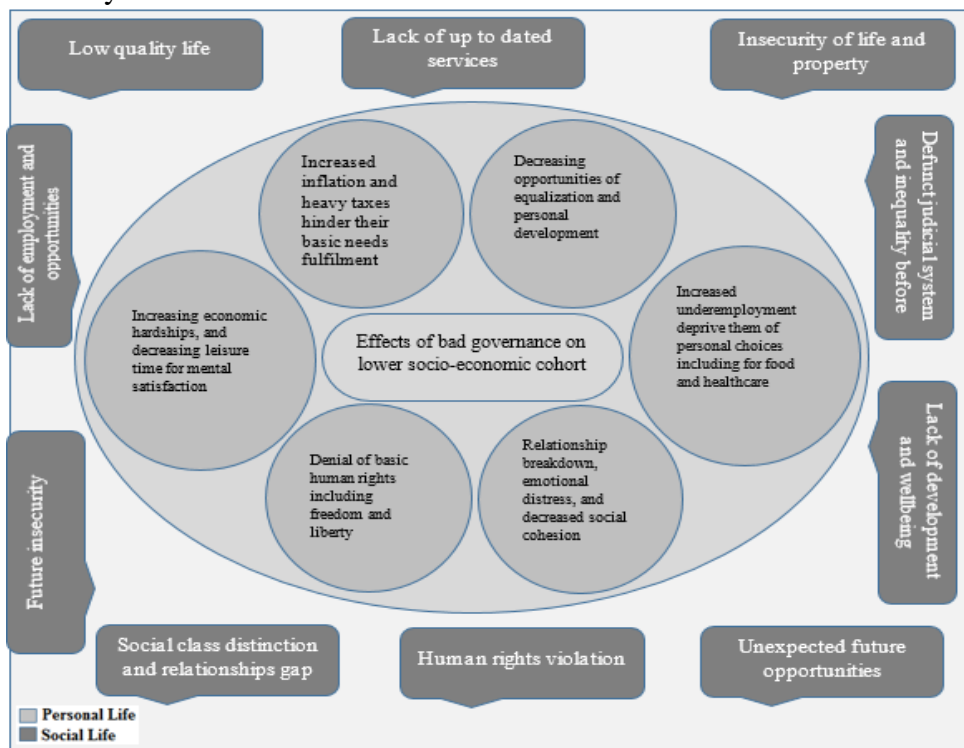


Figure 1: Personal and social effects of bad governance.

DISCUSSION

Bad governance affects the overall life of a poor man, but their personal sphere of life gets the most devastating effects. As in lousy government, the administrative and managerial responsibilities vest in inefficient and unskilled persons, who because of their inability impose heavy taxes upon the general masses and raise inflation high. Due to such abnormal conditions, the poor people cannot even meet their basic needs, for instance, food, clean drinking water, domestic utilities, etc. Furthermore, widespread underemployment, lack of meritocracy in recruitment, and an unstable market environment further weaken their economic position, due to which they cannot get a balanced diet for their bodily needs and the next day’s work. In this regard, a research study demonstrates that bad governance deprives the poor people of fulfilling their existential needs (Sumarto, Suryahadi, Arifianto, Sadler, & Akhmadi, 2004). In case of a medical emergency, they cannot get standard healthcare facilities, including access to lifesaving drugs. Sociologists associate the rise in crimes and criminality of poor people with their inability to avail healthcare facilities for their needy family members (Loum, 2002). Moreover, despite the current hardships, bad governance deprives poor people of the opportunities of equalization and personal development, with which they can alter their miseries. In many cases, the state’s policies and procedures even deny the fundamental rights of poor people, including their freedom and liberty. Although a human being deserves to make choices in their personal and family life, like in hobbies, to be a part of a social group, and/or to choose their spouse. But the people of the low socio-economic cohort engage in economic pursuits so much so that they cannot get leisure time to invest in their hobbies and other related activities that source mental satisfaction for them. In addition, the financially overburdened poor people cannot manage to participate in social events, due to which they face relationship breakdown and emotional distress. Psychological research asserts that many mental problems in the modern world are caused by a lack of social and cultural engagement of the people (Bandura, 1977).

The machinery of any state runs because of the utilization of their available resources, including human resources. Meanwhile, bad governance needs officials who carry on their policies irrespective of their competence. Such a situation often mishandles, mismanages, and misuses the state's resources, which in turn creates further miseries for the people of low socio-economic cohorts (Ashworth, Gardner, Morgan, Smith, von Hirsch & Wasik, 1998). Furthermore, ordinary people lack basic services of life, for instance, quality education for their children, standard healthcare, clean drinking water, etc., and this happens because facilitating them is not in the priorities of the governance administration. Mournfully, bad governance results in insecurity of life and property, most specifically for poor people (Osborne, 2003). Despite this, if anything unlawful happens to them, they either cannot get access to the law to address their grievance or are not revered before the law as the prosperous citizens are. This also involves flaws in the system of justice that a lousy government can amend. The poor citizens are victimized in the sense that they do not get the expected benefits of the system in terms of plans and procedures that support their development and well-being in the real sense (Clarke, 2004). Moreover, for the strength and better future of any society, youth are considered the foremost stakeholders. But bad governance exploits them and their energies by means of not providing them with suitable employment opportunities and/or lack of meritocracy in the process of employment. This attitude of the government gives rise to future insecurity and trust deficiency that results in brain drain (Foucault, 1997). Pathetically, a lousy government promotes irrational class distinction that leads to relationship gaps between the rich and the poor that ultimately raise crimes and criminality among the poor against the rich. Although the situation is further exacerbated by the denial of the basic human rights of citizens, predominantly those of the lower socio-economic class. The most drastic aspect of bad governance is the unexpected future opportunities that even worsen the condition of people from low socio-economic cohorts and raise further social ills (Aly, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bad governance is pervasive across the world and is manifested in one form or another. In third-world countries, it appears in the worst form with heinous effects. However, the people of low socio-economic class bear even more devastating effects. In their personal lives, they cannot maintain social relationships because of their inability to provide the requirements of such relationships. They experience weak mental and physical health and are left with limited choices of dress and food due to low wages and high inflation rates. Furthermore, they rarely get opportunities for personal and family development and remain underemployed. The situation becomes even worse when their fundamental rights and liberties are denied by the state's machinery. In their social life, they lead a low-quality life without up-to-date facilities and services. They observe insecurity of life and property, and the situation cannot be changed because of the defunct judicial system that, instead of serving the state, works for the interests of a few. In addition, increasing unemployment and a lack of meritocracy in recruitment deprive the people of lower socio-economic cohorts of development and well-being. This also creates and broadens the gaps between rich and poor and raises relationship gaps between them. In a nutshell, the people of low socio-economic class experience unexpected future opportunities that push them into the dark of crimes. The study recommends a thorough system of accountability for political leaders and their services. Whereas, the public should also raise their voice against all social ills, including corruption and bad governance.

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