

**Individualland**  
Creating space for the individual

# Both Sides of a Coin



# Both Sides of a Coin

---

Individualland Pakistan

Lead Author: Gulmina Bilal Ahmad

Researchers: Mr. Zulfiqar Haider, Ms. Sundas Syeda, Mr. Yahya Ahmad, Mr. Farhan Khalid Khan

Coordination: Mr. Shaukat Ali Ashraf

Designer: Mr. Adeel Amjad

The information presented here would not have been possible without inputs from various sections of civil society. Despite all the assistance received, the lead author personally assumes the responsibility of any omissions.

### **Individualland**

Where the individual counts

House 12-B, Street 26,

F-8/1, Islamabad - Pakistan

Tel: +92-51 2 25 34 37, 2 25 34 38

E-mail: [info@individualland.com](mailto:info@individualland.com)

Url: [www.individualland.com](http://www.individualland.com)

No of printed copies: 200

Islamabad, 2014

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Big Picture.....	1
The Initiative.....	2
The Quest Begins! .....	4
In Their Own Words .....	5
Petty Display of Power .....	5
Being infamous and having authority .....	13
Greed and Fascination.....	15
Community Friction.....	19
Revenge .....	25
No Realization .....	28
Conclusion .....	30

Violence has subsisted in the world in one form or the other since the birth of Adam- the first human. World history is loaded with millions of examples of violent incidents. Talk about last hundred years (20th Century) alone, which according to a general observation, has seen an extraordinary ascend in violence, one can easily build a hypothesis that violence is something that has multiplied at a rapid pace with time. At present, violence in the form of gang wars is a menace that has plagued a lot of nations throughout the globe. Apart from Pakistan and India that are at the forefront of gang wars, developed countries like US, Australia, Japan, Italy, Turkey, South Africa and Canada, are also confronted with this challenge.<sup>1</sup>

In Pakistan, Karachi, Sindh's provincial capital is the worst hit. Once serene, the city with time has transformed into a graveyard of dead bodies and insecure citizens because of the ongoing gang wars and violence in the city. Protests every other day, hooliganism on roads, burning of state assets, has become a norm.

The pressing question here is who are the individuals or groups that are inciting violence? What are the reasons for their actions? There are those who are actively involved in violence but then there are those who were once part of it and have since relinquished it for various reasons. Our study targets individuals that have been inciting violence in the form of gang wars in the past, as well as those that suffered violence at the hands of perpetrators of violence.


We (a) document the accounts of individuals who willingly and knowingly chose the path of violence and then renounced it later. This publication aims to highlight the factors which initially lead them towards this path, including their inspiration, apprehensions, the risks taken and the factors leading to their renunciation of violence. (b) The stories also attempt to document the individuals that became the victims of violence and gang wars, their agony, the rehabilitation process and their reservations regarding the attitude of justice and law towards them.

### The Big Picture

While gang wars have engulfed the whole city, three areas namely Sultanabad, Lyari and Korangi are the worst hit. The residents of the three areas are always prone to violence. Lyari is Karachi's oldest town. Known for its passion for sports, Lyari has produced many renowned footballers in last few decades. Unfortunately, the wave of violence that hit the area in 1947 has still not subsided, overshadowing all the positive developments. Talk about Korangi, industrial hub of the city, the situation is no different. The culturally diverse town,

---

<sup>1</sup> Shah, Sabir, Gang wars alone can't cripple countries, snatch peace. (2013). Retrieved on: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013, Retrieved from; <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-199155-Gang-wars-alone-cant-cripple-countries-snatch-peace>



home to Balochs, Pashtuns, Sindhi and Urdu speaking people has transformed into a battle field with time. Issues like community friction and political influence have made it into a highly violent area. The situation in Sultanabad, another populated town of the city consisting of mainly Pakhtuns, is also very alarming. The gravity of the situation can be judged by the thinking of the inhabitants of these areas. A resident of Sultanabad shared with us “These gang wars will never subside. The situation in our area is such that we cannot go out anywhere. We live in fear everyday”.

The encouraging fact is, the victims, even after passing through such an episode which not only effected them physically but socially, financially and mentally as well, are committed to reestablish their lives from where they had left. There is a need for highlighting their stories to create awareness amongst the society and to discourage youth from adopting the path of violence.


### The Initiative

According to a research by Brennan Centre for Justice, New York University of Law, there is no silhouette of the type of person who becomes a gangster. Indeed, the process by which an individual grips on to violence is highly complex one, making it almost impossible to foretell who will adopt the path at any time.<sup>2</sup> The imperative question is what leads a person towards a violent life. The reasons why violence flourishes in certain areas more than others also need to be highlighted. Social injustice, discrimination, bad governance and deprivation of basic rights, maybe the meaningful measures in this case but there are reasons other than that which constitute to the development of a violent individual. Whatever the factors are, violence continues to effect the lives of millions residing in the city of Karachi. People are killed, kidnapped and tortured every other day. While there is a need to identify the reasons for increasing number of gangs in the city, the victims of violence should also be focused upon equally. Being the direct witness of the violence, they can help the law enforcing agencies by providing them with the inside details (operations of gang, members etc).

Keeping this in mind, Individualland Pakistan, took the initiative to locate and converse with such people. Most of them were people that adopted the path of violence at a young age and caused immense suffering to several fellow citizens as well as damage to state, but those individuals were also taken on board that became the victims of the ongoing violence in the city. Both the groups were asked various set of questions and their responses were noted. Their responses presented conclusive evidence of the reasons for joining gangs, lessons learned and renouncing violence later (in the case of perpetrators), reasons for being targeted, attempt at rehabilitation, and role of justice and law (in case of victims). It is hoped that these accounts will provide the reader with a deeper insight into the lives of people that have suffered at the hands of violence plaguing the country, as well as the

---

<sup>2</sup> Patel, Faiza. 2011. Rethinking Radicalization. New York: Brennan Center for Justice.



detailed accounts of people that adopted the path of violence- most that have renounced or trying to renounce the path.

This publication summarizes thirty seven (37) accounts of both victims and perpetrators of violence who we interviewed. Out of the total thirty seven (37), twenty two (22) individuals interviewed are survivors /victims whereas the remaining fifteen (15) are former - perpetrators of violence i.e. former gang members.. The people interviewed generally fall in the age bracket of 18 – 30. Out of the total interviews, twenty four (24) have been conducted with the residents of Liyari, seven (07) from the Korangi area and six (06) from Sultanabad. It should be noted here the names of the interviewees in the publication have been changed for security purposes.

## The Quest Begins

Taking the victims and former perpetrators of violence on board was difficult. The shortlisted field researchers nominated to carry out the task identified the victims and perpetrators that were to be interviewed. While it was comparatively easier to identify the victims, reaching out to ex-perpetrators was a highly daunting task. The fact that those people are now living a low profile life with mostly changed identities- a safety measure, made it extremely tough for us to identify them. Eventually, they were identified.

Profound discussions with the victims and perpetrators of violence were carried out. The victims were mostly interviewed at their homes whereas the former perpetrators were interviewed mostly at public places as most of them are not living at their homes anymore. The meeting spots were selected with caution by the field researchers, keeping in mind the sensitivity of the information and the fear factor, the ex-perpetrators of violence were faced with. More than one sitting was needed to complete the account of one interviewee as he did not narrate his story all at once. The interviewee took some time to satisfy himself with field researcher's credentials. The field researchers asked questions on the basis of questionnaires that were developed by us earlier. There were two separate questionnaires (each for victims and perpetrators). Both were devised carefully keeping in mind the sensitivity of the subject.

Even after they were identified, the field research team faced massive difficulty in acquiring their willingness on giving interviews. The victims wanted to share their quandaries with the whole nation; therefore it was easy to convince them. However getting the agreement of the perpetrators was a whole different story. From their identification to their agreement, we faced constant challenges throughout. Due to fear of retaliation, perpetrators of violence are forced to go underground and don't want to be identified. This was the prime reason why the field research team found it difficult to first identify such people and secondly getting their agreements on being interviewed. Most of them were either scared or suspicious therefore lot of work was involved during this process in reassuring them.



The perpetrators we interviewed have had their reasons for adopting the path (lust for power, recognition, the factor of glamour, money, revenge and community frictions etc), and in some cases the reasons for leaving it later for instance (realization, regret, guilt, loss of mental peace etc). Almost all of them were regretful of the fact, they adopted the violence path and according to them, despite of acquisition of power and money, they lost more than they won. On the other hand, the victims of violence feel helpless and blame the perpetrators as well as the justice and law for the pain inflicted upon them. The thirty seven (37) interviews enabled us to identify various issues like factors which lead to motivation of individuals to seek the deviant path, the renouncing process, the agonies of the victims and their concerns regarding the legal and judicial process. On the basis of the interviews, we have come up with six prime factors for young people to join gangs.

### Petty Display of Power

On the basis of the interviews and the common general assumption, it can be safely said that most of the individuals join the gang at a very young age. The news of violent cases in electronic and print media every other day involving individuals of a tender age leaves the viewers and readers in absolute disbelief. The interviews conducted substantiated this that those involved in inciting violence in different part of the city are youngsters of ages 16-25. The pressing question here is why do they adopt such a deviant path at such age? One such reason which came to surface courtesy of the interviews is the lust for petty display of power. The gangsters no matter where they are operate with complete impunity. They openly carry arms and kill anyone they wish to. A former gang member Mukhtar explained, "Violence is a prerequisite in our business. If we do not adopt it, no one will fear us or listen to us. A gang cannot operate successfully if people do not fear it. When people would not fear us, how will they listen to us and how will we fulfill our objectives?"

Human behavioral sciences suggest that display of power is something that is naturally present in every individual. Becoming a gangster therefore triggers it apart from providing an individual with a license to openly display it. However, if this is the case, does it mean we all should adopt this violent path once in our lifetime? The answer is no. According to a frustration-aggression theory proposed by John Dollard, when an individual fails to achieve a planned goal, it may lead to a violent or aggressive behavior. The individual may also adopt illegal ways to acquire the certain goal. This theory may form the basis for individuals adopting the path of violence in Karachi. Majority of the perpetrators interviewed added that it was the urge for this display of power, which eventually transformed into a desire or goal that played an important role in them adopting this path. Growing in the areas surrounded with gangsters, they were immensely attracted by the display of powers by the gangsters and wanted to be like them.

### **End Justifies the Means**

Madad Ullah is now 24 but he was only sixteen (16) when he joined a gang. The gang he joined consisted of 18 members aged between 15 – 22 years. According to him, being part of a gang is all about trust. It is not easy to leave the group, as those leaving have to pay with their lives. They are spared the fate, if they leave the area. Unemployment and lack of business opportunities within his area force the youth towards joining these gangs. He has now left the gang, severed all ties and even left the area where he used to reside. "I had become wary of the life I had adopted."

Since his days in school, Madad Ullah was involved in fights and petty crimes. As time progressed, he and his friends became bolder and the intensity and occurrence of their activities increased. Gauging the situation in their area, they decided to join a gang. They used to follow the instruction given by the gang hierarchy. The gang members were given weapons without any training. They used the weapons as and when situation demanded them to. Once Madad Ullah was caught with an illegal weapon at a police check post, but he was able to get away as he bribed the personnel present there. He never had to serve any jail time for all the illegal activities as a result of backing of the gang. According to Madad Ullah, the gang is like a brotherhood where the leader takes care of all the members and their families. Madad Ullah was satisfied that even if he got caught or killed one day, the rest of the gang would be always there to assist him or his family. The finances for the gang were acquired through extortion from businesses and selling of drugs. The families of fallen members were also assisted by the gang.

Madad Ullah's family resisted and reprimanded him, when they came to know of his activities with the gang, but he could not be persuaded to leave. However with time, he realized that his activities were causing lot of pain to others. He also got worried thinking about the consequences of this profession and therefore to decided to bid adieu. Now that he has finally left he states, "I do not want to go back. I have come far away from that life, now why should I return. If I again adopt that life, then cruelty and injustice will prevail through my hands." He is of the opinion that political parties and criminal gangs go hand in hand and complement each other for attaining money and power.

### **Regret**

Khalid was 17 years old when he became a member of the gang and participated in activities related to a political party. Later Khalid and a few of his friends formed their own gang and started threatening people and demanding money from them. One day, they planned to rob a bank but unfortunately for him, the gang didn't succeeded and all of them got caught. Khalid was imprisoned for two years and during his time in prison, he met people who promised to support him once he got out of prison and after his release he became more active in criminal activities and also started kidnapping for ransom. According to Khalid, violence is not justified to achieve one's motives but if the other person is using violence, then you have no choice but to retaliate and resort to the same techniques. Khalid says he

received no formal training during his time in the gang, but in the evening they used to go to a secluded place, where they practiced firearms.


Explaining about how gangs operate, Khalid says “we had gambling and drug dens and would kidnap people for ransom without feeling any remorse”. There were 8-9 members of ages between 23 – 25 years in Khalid’s gang and every member was assigned a different area. About leaving the gang Khalid says, there is no way out of the gang and he himself knows, how difficult it was for him to leave the gang. He was pressurized by his family to leave, but he was so committed to the group that he left home. After a while Khalid says he realized what he was doing was absolutely unlawful and wrong and also realized that his family was right. He left the group and went into hiding. Khalid says he wants to live a normal life but after his involvement with the gang it is not possible and regrets what time he could have used for acquiring education, he wasted it. He vows he will never again become a member of any gang and also says that other people should refrain from such activities as it is wrong and spoils one’s life.

#### **Changing circumstances**

Nisar used to live in a joint family along with his brothers, father and uncle. He says they were very happy but suddenly everything changed after the demise of his father. “My uncle and everyone else’s attitude changed towards us, due to which it became very difficult for us to live over there. My mother was very disturbed, so we shifted from there and went to stay with our aunt, but even there the attitude was hostile. Due to all of this my mindset also changed and eventually I became a member of a gang at the age of 18.” Achieving one’s motives through violence is absolutely unjustified according to Nisar but the circumstances compel you. Nisar says there is no formal training in a gang. According to him, “when you get a gun in your hand, you automatically learn how to use it.” About the modus operandi of the gang, Nisar says gangs operate thorough extortion but he was given a small place in an area where he would sell heroin and alcohol and earn quite a lot, even after paying his boys.

In case of kidnapping, he says groups assigned to kidnap people bring them to the warehouse and then the other gang members make calls for ransom money. There were a total of 15 – 20 members in Nisar’s gang who fell in the age of 25 – 30 years. Nisar says when his mother found about his involvement with the gang, he said, “I am involved with them and no one can do anything about it. When father was alive everything was fine, but now you can see the attitude of other family members. I will also behave in the same way as they did.” This is how everyone came to know about his involvement with the gang. He then adds that when he used to go home his mother used to say when I go to find a girl for you, everybody says your son is a member of a gang. This forced me to leave the group. He says he consulted with his gang who told him to keep a distance for about 15 – 20 days and then let’s see what happens.

These 15-20 days still continue. Although, his gang members tried to contact him and asked him to join back, he decided not to. Luckily for him, his gang members did not threaten him.



He has, for all practical purposes, left the gang and is now earning money by exporting merchandise to Baluchistan. Nisar says that in retrospect, he had money, a car but was not content and could not sleep at night, but now is happy and relaxed and aims to have a lawful earning.

#### **Without Any Reason**


Altaf aged 23, believes that the police has utterly failed in preventing and curtailing gang violence, while politicians and political parties are backing these criminal elements such as land mafia. He believes that intolerance is the main reason for the flourishing of these gangs and ensuing violence. He wants to adopt a legal approach against the perpetrators rather than resorting to violence, to acquire justice for the violence inflicted on him. Altaf was frequently intimidated and terrorized by members of a certain gang. The reason behind this was that one of the group members had some prejudice against him. One day that person went to his superior and gave false information regarding Altaf. The gangster without confirming the information sent gang members to beat him. He was beaten up brutally and even the violence inflicted on him was visually recorded and distributed via CDs in the area.

He remained in the hospital for a month where he underwent surgery. The family could not bear the expenses of the hospital so they borrowed money after selling all their jewelry. After he came back, Altaf was continuously harassed which prompted him and his family to leave the area. No one tried to assist him during this episode, rather the neighbors used to taunt him after the incident. The psychological trauma resulting from this experience has taken its toll on Altaf. He describes that "I have lost all my self-esteem because of this incident and cannot face people anymore."

However, he has still not given up completely and trying hard to stand on his feet once again despite all of that.

#### **Helpless**

Jamal used to work with his brother in a factory. One day his brother received a call from the factory to reach there and collect the goods. Both Jamal and his brother reached and started loading the goods into a car. While they were doing it suddenly few people appeared and opened fired; killing Jamal's brother on the spot and shooting him in the leg. Jamal ran inside the shop and hid there. Jamal says "No one came to our rescue. After sometime an ambulance reached and loaded my brother's body into the ambulance and also found me as well after which we were taken to civil hospital. "This incident traumatized him as he lost his brother, broke his foot and kept lying in bed for months in agony. About seeking revenge Jamal says his family is poor and they cannot do anything. "Allah will take our revenge from the perpetrators." According to Jamal people become members of gangs due to unemployment as young boys roam around in streets all the time and end up with weapons in their hands. He also says gang wars can never be eliminated. If the police are determined to end this violence, they can end it in minutes but they are also very corrupt.



Jamal believes that positive measures taken by government can end the menace of gang wars. He wishes that one day his city will be free of violence and no one will ever have to go through the pain he went through.

### **A Life Ruined**


Shahwaiz is 25 years old and used to work at a shop, before the unfortunate incident occurred. He was on his way to the shop, when a man kidnapped him. He was blindfolded and taken to a place, where there were other people being detained. Four other men joined the kidnapper and started beating him. They took him to the rooftop of the building and started asking him about information regarding certain individuals. As he did not have any information, so he conveyed the same to them. On hearing this they continued with their beatings. They kept giving him sedatives in his food and inflicted violence on others they had kidnapped, in front of him. Later on they called the shop's owner where Shahwaiz worked and inquired about him. The owner requested them to leave him, but they told him to fire Shahwaiz or otherwise face consequences. After that they would tell him to do senseless things, such as sing for them or beat another victim and even asked him to join them. The perpetrators cut his ear for which he also received a surgery later on.

The culprits eventually let Shawaiz go but his life had changed during this time. He became unemployed as his owner refused to hire him, while his family resultantly faced financial constraints. He knows the culprits but does not name them out of fear for his life. Regarding revenge he maintains that his nephew was also kidnapped and killed, he did not take revenge then nor will he take one now. Shahwaiz believes that money is the only reason people turn towards these crimes. Shahwaiz, although is still haunted by the horrors of this event, believes that the situation in the city will augment with time courtesy of measures taken by the government and law enforcing agencies.

### **On his Own**

Shabbir says there was a drug den near his home which created lots of problems and restrictions for women in movement outside. One morning he told them not to continue these activities. Then he went to work and returned in the evening. He then went outside to have a cup of tea and while he was returning he heard someone call him from behind. Shabbir says when he looked it was the gang leader who addressed him sarcastically and asked if he had become a bigger gangster in the area. Shabbir says he replied he is a common man and not a gangster who earns to make ends meet for his family. Shabbir says the gangster then asked him what his problem was. Shabbir's reply was not to sell drugs near his home. As soon as he said this, 15-20 gang members started beating him up. They beat Shabbir with batons and threatened people to kill them as well if they came for their help.

Shabbir says his family pleaded with them to forgive him. "They then told me to run but as I got up they shot me in the abdomen. When I fell they told my family not to pick me up that I



would die here. My family pleaded again and took me to the hospital in a rickshaw.” He says when he regained consciousness he was informed there were no serious injuries. For two months Shabbir was in the hospital and for the next three months his treatment continued at home. He says whatever savings he had was spent on his treatment forcing him to borrow money. Shabbir says after this incident he mostly stayed at home and only went out when it was urgent. He says, ‘the perpetrators would approach me and say now do you see the result of meddling in our affairs. They used to also say that you should thank God that we spared your life.’ Shabbir says no one supported him in his time of difficulty and he being a poor man does not wish to seek revenge and has left everything to God.

He is also of the opinion that political parties are related to these gangs and they do not care about the general public. Unemployment according to Shabbir is the main reason why people become part of gangs as then they start earning quite a bit of money through illegal activities. About eliminating gang wars Shabbir says this can be answered by only a politician, he can only pray to Allah to guide these people on the right path.

#### **Left for Dead**

It was 9pm in Karachi, when 24 years old Faqir’s rickshaw was intercepted by a car seating three masked men. The men forced him into the car at gunpoint and took him to Qaddafi Town. Despite his constant inquiries the perpetrators did not divulge their reasons for abducting him. Faqir did not know the exact location where he was being taken, as his head was pushed down. As they arrived at their destination, three more people joined them. Without stating any reason they started beating him and inflicting harm by taking out his nails. For more than two months he was kept at the location, where he was constantly drugged through sedatives. He had no change of clothes and during this time they reeked of dried blood. After two and a half months he was taken by the perpetrators and threw Faqir at a garbage dump near Shershah police station. Faqir believes that the perpetrators perceived him to be dead and that is why they let him go. He was spotted by a police patrol between 3 – 4pm and was taken to the police station.

There, his complaint was recorded and the First Information Report (FIR) was filed by police against the assailants, as Faqir knew them. He was later escorted to the hospital by Rangers (paramilitary), where he underwent a 6 – 7 hours surgery. According to him, later on the perpetrators also filed a counter case against Faqir, who was then sentenced and incarcerated in Landhi Jail. He was later on released, but lives in constant fear for his life. He is now physically impaired and has also suffered economically, as he has lost his livelihood. Faqir believes that the police and political parties are in cohort with the criminal elements. Youngsters mostly join such gangs because of personal grievances against certain people, which they believe they can address through gang violence. He perceives that “Lawlessness is the main reason for this violence. All these crimes would fade completely, if the law is strictly implemented. Police is corrupt and does not perform their duties. We are also

responsible for all this as we do not raise our voice against these transgressions...this can only be curtailed through competent and honest leadership."

Faqir does not want to adopt violence to take revenge as he stated, "I will undertake legal proceedings. I will go to court and will register a case. If I also take the route of violence, what will be the difference between me and them?"

#### **"My life is ruined but..."**


"The passion for 25 years old Altamash was football since a very early age. He also played on behalf of a provincial government department. He became a victim of gang violence, which also took his passion away from him. It was 12:30pm when he and his friends were passing by a girls' educational institution. The students were waiting for transport. There was a group standing at one corner of the building, harassing girls. Altamash and his friends decided to put a stop to it. When they approached them and asked them to stop, the perpetrators started beating them badly and even fired shots at them. One of the bullets hit Altamash's foot and badly fractured his bone. He was rushed to the hospital by the locals, where he underwent four surgeries on his foot. He remained hospitalized for a month, while the expenditure borne was around four hundred thousand rupees.

This incident has effected Altamash psychologically and financially. He can no more follow his passion of football, due to the injury on his foot. He believes that the police, government and ethnic based political parties along with their gangs are carrying out this violence. He believes that he can attain justice by directly approaching the court and filing his complaint with the higher judiciary. Altamash is of the opinion that the violence can only subside if the culprits are arrested and given exemplary punishment. He perceives greed for money and power as the main motivation for youth to join such gangs.

#### **Guilty by Association**

Uzair used to reside in Lyari and also owned a shop, through which they would earn a decent living. The predicament for Uzair and his family started, when his elder brother joined a gang and became part of an increasingly violent gang war. Despite pressures from family members, his brother remained associated with the gang. Over a period of time, the rival gang gained the upper hand and ousted his brother's group. His brother and all his fellow gang members went into hiding. People from rival gang came to Uzair's house and told them to leave the area, threatening them with dire consequences otherwise. Uzair started arguing with them and in their rage they started beating him, while they also shot his father in the shoulder. His father was hospitalized for 18 days, while Uzair received stitches. The hospital expenses were borne by friends and relatives.

After this incident Uzair and his family faced financial hardships, as they could not go back and he could not operate his shop. With the help of friends he sold the shop and opened a new one in another area. Uzair wants to leave all this behind and does not consider taking



any revenge. He believes that politicians, people involved in drugs and arms businesses are fueling this violence, while unemployment is the main reason for youth joining such groups. He is also of the view that "Gang leaders are powerful and dangerous people. If they reach out to someone and ask them to become a member, those people have no choice but to join."

According to Uzair, it's not only him and his mother that are effected but his brother as well. His brother cannot be with his family again and despite the money and power he gained by adopting the path, he will always be devoid of his family's affection.

### **For Raising a Voice**

Ishtiaq Hussain used to run an education related welfare organization in Karachi. He also had his cousin working with him at the organization. The violence and harm experienced by Ishtiaq at the hands of gang members was due to him raising a voice against the operation of a drug den in the vicinity of the organization office. After the drug trade started he received complaints from community members to take initiative in curbing this activity. He along with community representatives decided to file a signed application against the drug den. They filed applications with two police stations but neither took any action. As it happened, the day they filed the application with the relevant police stations; a group of men came to their office as they were closing for the day and attacked them. They started beating them and also fired their weapons. Ishtiaq was seriously injured, while his cousin lost his life. Ishtiaq was hospitalized for 15 days and could not even attend the funeral of his cousin.


The police only came to complete their formalities and did not assist in any way. According to Ishtiaq since then drug dealers have mushroomed in the area. Ishtiaq suffered a great shock after this incident and closed down his organization. He and his family members also fear for their safety. He believes that the police is corrupt and is not committed to their duty, while political parties are sponsoring these gangs. Ishtiaq is of the opinion that the attraction of wealth is luring individuals into this life of crime.

Despite all that has happened to him, Ishtiaq still believes in the justice system of the country and he is hopeful that one day he will get justice from the courts.

### **Payment**

Madad a 24 year old used to pay extortion money of PKR. 2,000 every month. He says he paid them for three months, but then developed financial difficulties due to which he could not pay the extortion money which resulted in him being abducted by the perpetrators. He says they took him to a shadowy place and asked the reason of not paying the money to which he replied "I will pay you the money next month." Madad said they slapped and threatened him. He says his family showed up and negotiated with the perpetrators and got





him released. Madad says this incident effected dhim very badly as they had to the leave the area and are now residing in Lyari. His business also suffered tremendously due to which he had no other option but to quit and is now working as a laborer. He says his brother also lost his life due to gang violence. In Madad's opinion the political parties are responsible for gang wars.

Madad says he wanted to seek revenge against these gangs but was advised by his family not to take such a step, so now he has no intention of seeking revenge. Madad says people become part of gangs for power, money and independence. In his view Madad says the government has to play a pivotal role in order to stop these gangs for creating havoc in the city.


#### **Lucky to be Alive**

Mugheez is a truck driver hailing from Peshawar. One day he had come to Karachi from Peshawar and was having lunch at a kiosk when a few unknown people came and blindfolded him and took him to a warehouse, where they gave him a brutal thrashing. Mugheez says they told him that he belongs to a political party to which he replied in the negative. They kept on beating him and accusing him of being affiliated with a political party and have spread chaos in your area. Mugheez says "I told them I am a truck driver who transports goods from one city to another but they did not listen to me and kept me there and tortured me for 4-5 days on the basis of suspicion." One day probably realizing Mugheez was not lying about not being a member of any political party, they dumped him near Al Asif Clinic. It was 8-9pm and quite dark at that time when Mugheez called for help from people who were passing by.

This incident effected Mugheez quite badly as he cannot sit or drive properly and he is the sole bread winner of his family. According to Mugheez's family he suffered a lot but is very fortunate to be alive. In Mugheez's opinion political parties are behind these gang wars as every party wants to have its hold in the country and the police are also involved in such criminal activities as they are also corrupt. He also says gang wars can only be eliminated if people strengthen their faith and get close to Allah. Mugheez's message to those involved in criminal activities is to ask forgiveness from Allah and stop doing all this immediately.

#### **Being infamous and having authority**

Recognition is something that every individual naturally covets. In the modern world, authority is earned through various processes. People belonging to entertainment industry acquire it through their skills. Same is the case with athletes, entrepreneurs and business tycoons. All of them go through this long process which requires either immense creativity, hard work or the combination of both. Unfortunately, there is something termed as negative recognition too. It is acquired when an individual using illegal or coercive measures, stomps his/her authority- in other words, being infamous. This kind of recognition is something that can be associated with the gangsters. With their activities, they spread



that much fear in the hearts of the people around them that people apparently start “respecting” them in order to stay safe. Moreover, such gangsters also commit violence openly and no one dares to utter a word in protest. In few cases, the level of authority reaches a limit where the law enforcing agencies even do not dare take any action against them. Our findings from the interviews prove that recognition or authority is another major factor which influenced most the perpetrators to adopt the path of violence.

While there were few from uneducated backgrounds, alarmingly, there were some who dropped out of schools and became gangsters to acquire the authority. These were the people, who were growing up in the presence of gangsters that walked the city with utmost impunity. The way these people displayed authority, it fascinated a lot of youngsters and for the same reason they ended up adopting the same path.

Let’s take you down the journey of few such perpetrators that we came across during the interviews.

**“What if someone kills me...?”**

Muhammad Noor now aged 24, became member of a gang when he was 18. He was drawn to this life by observing the power and influence wielded by gang members. He and his friends would watch in awe as gang members would carry out activities with impunity and without being challenged by anyone. They started socializing with these people, who also introduced Noor and his friends to their boss. Noor was finally inducted into the gang and even handed weapons for use. “Without even realizing, I became one of them. I wanted to acquire power in order to have influence over others and even the police. I did not realize what I was heading into.” Noor’s family had no knowledge of his activities, otherwise they would have forced him to quit. The gang consisted of 8 – 10 people aged 25 – 30 years. He narrates that his boss was very influential and no one including the police used to cross his path. Noor believes that his boss had direct contacts with the higher echelons. They also used to shift the blame to another party for activities carried out by them.

Noor was also involved by his boss in targeted killings of individuals, after he observed Noor’s expertise of riding a bike. Noor would assist his boss in reaching and escaping from the scene of crime. Noor is of the opinion that political parties maintain these gangs for their vested interests. The realization finally dawned upon Noor when he got married and had children. “Violence is not justified under any circumstances. At that time, I used to think that by using violent means, I could achieve my motives. Now I am married, have kids and I realize, what if someone inflicted harm on my kids?” Noor finally left the gang and also left the area for safety, as the gang would kill anyone who would try to leave. Noor now works as a laborer; he also faces financial constraints but insists that now at the end of the day he has peace of mind.

### **All That Glitters is Not Gold**


JavedNaseem used to sit with his friends at the street corner, smoking and chatting. Everyday people from different gangs used to pass from the area. Where ever they went and ate no one would charge them money. They had money and power. All the friends including Javed were fascinated with their lifestyle and wished they could also be like them. Slowly Javed and his friends started approaching them and they started giving them small tasks, which was the start of his activities in the gang. He says money and power was the main motivation behind the joining and at the age of 19 Javed joined the gang. He says he did not receive any formal training in the gang, "They just gave me a gun and explained how it works and then I learnt it on my own." Explaining about how gangs operate Javed says there is a group of five to six members headed by the supervisor who gives tasks to the juniors.

He says it is almost impossible to leave the gang as the members have a lot of information about the gang. Javed says his family did not know about his involvement until he was arrested. They were very worried and helped him in getting released. He says that is when he realized he had stepped foot in the wrong place as his colleagues also did not come to his rescue. That is when he decided it was time to quit. Javed says after leaving the gang he is having problems adjusting to normal life but vows that he will never again become a member of a gang.

### **Greed and Fascination**

Authority and petty display of power are not the only two things associated with the gangsters. That is what our findings suggest at least. Few of the perpetrators that were interviewed admitted that the lavish lifestyles apart from the authority of the existing gangsters of the area were a big source of motivation for these people. The gangsters because of the nature of their work are financially very strong. With the help of their illegal businesses such as extortion money, kidnappings for ransom, robberies, drug cartels, they achieve a financial status that is sound than that of few successful businessmen as well. They wear expensive clothes, roam in brand new cars and own luxurious accommodations. Observing the rapid growth of these people, youngsters are encouraged to adopt the same profession as well. This is what happened to most of the perpetrators that we interviewed. According to Zeeshan a former gang member, "Young people that are unemployed and desperate for money find us (gangs) themselves. They sit with us, drink with us and are motivated to join us."

It should be noted here, that majority of those whose source of motivation was the lavish lifestyle of the already established gangsters, belonged to a humble background. What they didn't realize was that "Everything that glitters is not gold". Due to their tender age, they only looked at the positive side of this profession. With time, they realized that this business although had money and power, but fair share of the dangers as well. Most of the perpetrators we interviewed were also regretful that they entered this business as they



found almost impossible to quit once they realized the dangers of it. Not only they found it difficult to quit but are now living a life full of fears. One of them added "I wish I could go back in time and change everything that I did".


### **Easy Money**

Atif joined a gang on the insistence of his friends and his desire for acquiring wealth. He joined at the age of 17 years, without the knowledge of his family. He was initially put on security duty of the area, while later on he was involved in extortion. He learned the use of weapons on his own; no training was imparted to him during his stint with the gang. There were 6 people in the group, who were between 16 – 40 years of age. Even if he did not approve of the assignment, he could not question his boss or deviate from instructions. The partner in crime would mostly be an unknown person from somewhere else, who would assist him and then part ways after the assignment. The turn in Atif's life came when he was arrested and incarcerated for four months. During this time none of his former comrades came to his rescue. This fact devastated Atif and he realized that everyone was saving their own skins. His family made some effort and bailed him out and pleaded him to leave this work.

Atif remained in hiding at his uncle's for eight months, while his family also changed their residence. His uncle also assisted in opening a shop, so he would not again think of joining. According to Atif, he does not have any interest in going back to that life, but he fears for his safety. He understands that a person can never be allowed to leave a gang, as they hold secrets. They have to pay with their lives, if they leave. Atif states that the political parties are not directly involved in these activities; they have their proxies in form of gangs. Nobody forces anyone to join a gang; rather ignorance pushes the youth towards this life, in his opinion.

### **Hard to Escape**

Kamran Najaf a 24 year old joined the gang at the age of 20. He says a friend of his came to him and told him that he earns a lot of money by stealing and he not only has money but also a lot of power. This attracted Kamran to become a member of the gang and with time his passion increased and eventually he became part of the gang. He says his family had suspicion about his whereabouts and when they asked him replied he was doing part time labor. Kamran says violence is justified as murder can only be avenged through death. About how gangs operate Kamran is of the view that there is a group leader in front of us and different parties are involved in it. He also said different parties are behind these groups but there is one massive power behind all these gangs who is working in a clever manner. It is very difficult for people to leave the gang and he realized it after robbing a bank and killing a few people, as it played a lot on Kamran's mind as he says he only killed people because of money.



After that Kamran started avoiding the gang and went into hiding. He also says he shifted his family to a safe place and escaped to Dubai. Mentioning about his past Kamran says it gives him the shivers when he thinks what he did when he was part of the gang. He says being a part of a gang gives one money and power but one can lose his life as it is a dangerous business.

### **The Company You Keep**

Shah Muhammad was 16 years old when he became a member of a gang. He says he and his friends used to get together and talk how their lives were stagnant, due to which they all decided to join different gangs. Shah Muhammad says they started off by stealing motorbikes. They also acquired guns and used them against anyone who showed resistance. "We would steal a bike and bring it to our leader who would then give us commission of PKR. 2,000. We would steal six to seven motorbikes every month due to which we would accumulate a commission of around fifty thousand rupees. After bikes we started selling drugs. Our leader used to provide us with drugs and then we would sell them in the streets." He says the main reason why he joined the gang was because his father had passed away and his mother was very old and he only earned PKR.40 daily as a mechanic. Shah Muhammad is of the view that using violent methods to achieve ones motives is unjust but he did it due to pressure from the top leadership.

During his time with the gang Shah Muhammad learnt how to fire a gun along with how to load bullets. Discussing about the modus operandi of gangs, Shah Muhammad says people used to come to meet his supervisor. "Those people were treated very nicely which was a sign for us that they were very close to our leader and would give him money and orders of what to do, then the instructions were relayed to us of what to do." There were seven members in total, plus a supervisor of ages from 17 to 26 years. He said his family was not aware of his involvement with the gang but when they found out; his brothers gave him a thrashing due to which he left home. Shah Muhammad says after a while he realized what he was doing was totally wrong and decided to leave the gang, but it is impossible to leave the group. One or two people tried to leave but they were battered and brutally murdered. He says then he contacted his brothers and informed them about his problem. Resultantly, the whole family decided to leave Lyari.

After leaving the gang Shah Muhammad says he is scared, if the gang spots him they will kill him and threaten his family. He vows he will never join a gang again and requests other people not to become a member of any gang "as it will destroy you."

### **In Desperation**

Zeeshan was 20 years old when he joined a local gang, even though there was resistance from the family. He believes that violence is unjustified as a mean to achieve anything, but people like him are forced to adopt it. Zeeshan was given weapons and he learned to use them by observing senior gang members. He was also caught twice but was not sentenced

### **Robbed of Health and Livelihood**

for any crime. There were 60 – 70 members in his gang aged between 24 – 27 years. They used to earn finances through extortion, protection money and doing illegal work of businessmen. He claims that businessmen pay gangs large amounts to solve issues through violent means. According to Zeeshan, turf war between political parties and rampant unemployment is the reason behind gang wars.

Zeeshan has now left the gang and does not plan to go back as he claims that “I was sickened by all the violence and bloodshed. I realized that political parties were using us to harm innocents and that is when I decided to leave.” However, he further states that it is very difficult to leave a gang. Even now Zeeshan lives in constant fear that an old foe might approach and kill him.

### **“Violence is a prerequisite...”**

Mukhtar became a gang member when he was 20 years old. Mukhtar initially used to earn his living as a truck driver, but his father on advice of his uncle sold the truck for business venture. The idea was not successful and Mukhtar invested some money in drugs. Meanwhile, the rest of his family moved to Iran, without any knowledge of what he was doing. The business of drugs also did not last and he consequently joined a gang. “I joined in order to make money, without realizing in what difficult position I had put myself into.” Mukhtar believes that without resorting to violence a gang will never be able to exert its influence and power. During his stint with the gang, he earned enough money to clear the debts owed by him and his family. However, when he contacted his family regarding this and they came to know about Mukhtar’s activities, they refused to take the money.

There were 250 – 300 people within the gang aged between 15 – 30 years. The gang was managed by a leader or *ustad*, who was contacted by certain people for various illegal assignments. According to Mukhtar, youth are attracted by the wealth, glamour, recognition and authority that are part and parcel of being a gang member. Whenever someone was referred to the gang, his background was thoroughly investigated before involving him. Mukhtar was paid a monthly salary by the gang. He never had any formal training for using weapons, rather he learnt by observing his seniors and watching movies. Mukhtar was highly regarded by his earlier boss, but as soon as he left the gang situation became difficult for Mukhtar. His new boss was biased against him and both of them did not agree on how things were being run. The main reason for Mukhtar to leave the gang was his tussle with his boss on a girl, who both of them liked. His boss wanted to marry her, but instead Mukhtar married her and left for Iran.

Although at present Mukhtar faces financial problems, as he is unable to earn as much as he used to in the gang; he has no plan of going back to that life. He states that all the gangs and gang wars are resultant of vested interests of political parties.

## Life Spoiled


Fascinated by individuals in the group who had influence, money and social standing and who used to dine at restaurants and roam in luxury cars, Irshad also wanted that kind of lifestyle, so he also became a part of the gang at the age of 18. After becoming a member Irshad acquired money through extortion. Sometimes he was instructed to collect money from certain shops and received PKR. 500 – 1000. He says we would also rob people of their personal belongings at gunpoint and attack rival groups. According to Irshad violence is not at all justified but he resorted to it due to greed. About training in the group Irshad says there is no formal training given, you just have to use a gun and the rest is learned through the influence of senior members. About how the group operates Irshad says there were five members in their gang. “We had a leader and there was an entire hierarchy. We didn’t know who gave the initial order.” He is also of the view there is no way out of the gang, in order to leave the gang one has to flee from the area. Irshad says after sometime he started feeling guilty of what he was doing and decided he would leave the group even if he has to face difficulties but at least he would be content. After leaving the group Irshad says he regrets why he joined the group as he has lost everything, his friends whom he used to hang around with. He also had to leave his area and now cannot go back.

## Community Friction

It is believed that cultural diversity leads to a healthy environment. Take an example of United Kingdom. The country consists of various ethnicities ranging from Asians, Europeans to Africans etc. and they are all getting well, contributing to the development of the country as well. Unfortunately, the situation is a complete contrast in Pakistan, especially in gang wars engulfed areas such as Karachi. The Urdu speaking, Balochs and Pathans have failed to co-exist in the same city peacefully. The interviews enabled us to raise curtains from the level of animosity that exists between all these quarters within the city.

With the help of gangs, Balochs are targeting Urdu speaking, Urdu Speaking are targeting Pakhtuns and vice versa. What is more alarming is the fact that their personal wars are effecting the lives of innocent people that have nothing to do with it. Almost on daily basis, people are becoming targets of the ongoing rivalry between the communities. There exist the gangs that have specially been developed to target their rival quarters and in doing so; those gangs also cause immense pain to the citizens. According to Mugheez, who was a truck driver hailing from Peshawar and was abducted by a gang on suspicion of association with rival group, “The reason for their suspicion was that I am a Pathan.”

During the interviews, we came along not only the victims of the ongoing gang wars between the communities but those individuals that specifically became a part of such community targeting gangs.



In his mid-twenties Fida hails from Waziristan and resides in Karachi. That fateful day he received a call from his brother-in-law, who asked him to meet at Sohrab Goth. As he was driving to meet him, two cars intercepted him and the occupants started shooting. One bullet hit him and he became unconscious. According to him, he was robbed of his belongings by the perpetrators, after the shooting stopped. He remained unconscious on the road for more than two hours. "The incident took place on a deserted road so no one was present to assist me. There is also the fact that people avoid helping a victim, as they may themselves get involved in it somehow." After couple of hours few locals approached Fida and asked him the details for contacting his family. They called his family, while the police also reached there. The police initially would not allow family members to take Fida to hospital, but later on he was allowed. The bullet was taken out and it took him two months to recuperate from the physical harm inflicted during the incident. The finances for the treatment were arranged through borrowing from relatives, friends and neighbors.


However, he has not fully recovered and is unable to carry out exhaustive chores, resulting in difficulties in attaining livelihood. According to Fida, people have distanced themselves from him and his family due to their deteriorating economic conditions. No one has stepped forward to offer help. He believes that the violence is the consequence of rampant poverty, unemployment and corruption within the society. He states, "How can the poor survive in this situation? Obviously they adopt unlawful measures to earn livelihood." In his opinion youth join these gangs also due to personal grievances and revenge. Fida considers the police and politicians to be involved and even supporting this violence, where political parties exploit the poor through financial assistance. "They are one of us, our brothers; who in frustration become gangsters." He however said that he would not adopt a path of violence to take revenge; rather he would initiate legal proceedings, although he believes that no perpetrator has been brought to justice by the legal system.

### **Political Targeting**

Imdad believes that youth become part of the gangs within Karachi in order to acquire money and influence. This 18 years old boy and his family were forced to leave their area, after members of a rival political party kidnapped him and also killed his father. He used to run a shop in the area and workers of rival political party collected extortion money from him. His father was a rickshaw driver and was also a worker for another political party. The extortionists were eyeing his shop and perhaps also targeted his family on the basis of political differences. They kidnapped his father and inflicted violence on him, they demanded from him to handover the shop. He was then shot four times and succumbed to his injuries at the hospital. According to Imdad, when he took his father to the emergency the doctors did not treat them, as they were also threatened by the gang members.

After his father's death Imdad was kidnapped taken to a warehouse and severely beaten. The perpetrators took his shop by force, while he and his family were also forced out of the area. Nobody, including the police; came forward to assist them as the perpetrators were





backed by an influential political party. Imdad wants to opt for legal proceedings to bring the perpetrators to justice.

### **Ethnicity**

Of Baloch descent and resident of Karachi, 29 years old Karamat believes that he was targeted due to his ethnicity. He is a laborer at a tea factory, married and the only breadwinner of the family, as his father suffers from mental illness. That fateful day he was coming back home from work, when five unknown people attempted to intercept him. They asked his name and told him to stop, but he ran as he feared for his life. They shot him in the knee and took him in the same condition to a warehouse, where they brutally beat him for 7 – 8 hours. Afterwards they dumped him at Kharadar. Even though many people and even police were present at the scene when he was being taken, but no one helped him. The people dispersed out of panic, as they heard shots being fired. After regaining consciousness, he called his family who took him to a hospital. He had to spend two months in the hospital for treatment of his knee. This episode also brought with it financial problems for his family, as due to the injury in his knee he is unable to work as before.


Karamat believes that he was targeted due to his ethnic background, by members of a rival ethnic political party. He believes that no possible means for revenge or justice as the government and police are involved with these groups and back their activities. He believes that “These perpetrators are also one of us. People have become frustrated because of inflation and poverty. Money is the reason they do it...If someone gives me a handsome amount and asks me to carry out a crime, I might do so.”

### **With Impunity**

Fawad was coming home after a day's work, when he was stopped by a group of people, which he believes belonged to an ethnic based political party. After inquiring about his ethnicity, they started searching him, which he resisted. This infuriated them and they pushed him, due to which he fell to the ground. Fawad quickly got up and started running, but the perpetrators opened fire. He got two bullet wounds, one in the arm and another on the foot. The police were present at the spot, but did not intervene. He was rescued by two locals, who also called his family. Fawad was hospitalized, while as a result of his injuries he lost his job. He also has suffered a psychological trauma, where he is afraid to step out of his house. In his view, he was targeted due to his ethnicity and everyone including the police is involved. Fawad is of the opinion that certain political elements are fueling ethnic hatred within the city and are using the youth as cannon fodder.

### **Targeted Attack**

Karim aged 24 years is disabled due to his near death experience. He is married and has children, but is unable to provide for his family due to his disability for the last two years. He



used to work in the procurement department of a company and was also affiliated with a political party, the latter being the reason he was targeted. That unfortunate day Karim was accompanying another party worker, when they crossed over a bridge and were ambushed. There were six people on two motorcycles and were firing from two sides of the bridge. His companion was killed on the spot, while he sustained multiple injuries. He received one bullet on neck, one on jaw, one in stomach and two on the back; which also resulted in his disability. His lower portion of the body is completely paralyzed. A passerby put Karim in his car and took him to the hospital. He remained hospitalized for two to three months.

Karim is of the opinion that police have entirely failed to control the violence engulfing the city. He maintains that the political parties are involved, so nothing should be expected of them as well, while he believes that the legal system will provide him justice and redress. Karim emphasizes that a mechanism should be developed through which assistance be given to people, who have been a victim of this violence.

#### **Robbery or Ethnic Enmity?**

Mashhood aged 25 years is a rickshaw driver and is the only breadwinner of the family. The incident of violence which he suffered through also resulted in his livelihood being snatched away. Mashhood had just parked his rickshaw in a parking lot, when some culprits abducted him and took him to an unknown place. They severely beat him, till he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he found himself lying near a trash dump. He was escorted to a hospital by the locals, where he received treatment. However, his rickshaw was missing from the place he had parked it. He believes that those who are involved in such crimes belong to a rival ethnic group. He also perceives that the desire for acquiring easy money makes people adopt such a life. As the perpetrators were armed, so nobody came to Mashhood's assistance. The incident has caused him both psychological trauma and financial constraints. Mashhood has left it to God for taking his revenge, while he deems legal proceedings too expensive to demand justice from the legal system.

#### **False Accusation**

Akbar and his friend were abducted by few people during a rally in Lyari. Akbar narrates that they were accused of spying by the perpetrators and were then beaten with arms and sticks after which they started crying. "We were asking for forgiveness but they kept beating us. Fortunately few people from the mosque opposite the warehouse came and freed us. After being free both of us went to our caretaker (Sardar) and explained to him the whole story and asked money from him for the doctor." According to Akbar this incident has had a very bad effect on his life as he is unemployed and no one is willing to give him a job because of threats from the perpetrators including to his previous employer. Due to which he and his family is going through a financial nightmare. In Akbar's view ethnic issues instigate these violent crimes and it is the corrupt government which is responsible for such gang wars. He

also says the police are also involved in such activities. Akbar is also scared the perpetrators will kill him if he seeks revenge due to which he has not taken that path.


### **Highly Unfortunate**

Sami was stalked daily by 4 – 5 people belonging to some political party; however he used to ignore them. One day when he was returning home from work these people abducted him and took him to an undisclosed location and started beating him up. He says he had no clue where they had taken him as he was blindfolded. When Sami acquired the reason of why was he beaten up, they said you belong to a political party. He tried to convince them but they never stopped beating him, and kept him for a couple of days and then dumped him near a trash can. Sami says while they were throwing him, he cried for help but no one came to the rescue as everyone was scared. Fortunately for Sami a cab driver spotted him while passing by. The cab driver immediately called the police who escorted Sami to an emergency center. After regaining consciousness after the treatment, Sami narrated the whole incident to his family who helped him in every possible way they could. Sami says the perpetrators let him go as he convinced them for two days; he had no affiliation with any political party, so they probably realized they had caught the wrong person and permitted him to go. Sami says this incident effected him very badly as it caused him to stay home for two-three months. When he went back to work his company fired him, giving Sami the reason for taking leave without informing them. Sami says he also lost all his friends as they all distanced themselves from him, their parents fearing that the perpetrators who attacked him they can also attack them if their children spotted with him. In Sami's opinion political parties are responsible for gang wars as these gangs are backed by political parties.

Political parties are involved in such activities in order to have a control over their area and influence over the people. He says the way to stop these gangs is by confiscating all the illegal weapons from their possession and the forces also need to be very active and efficient. About seeking revenge Sami said it is out of the question as he will lose his life taking such a step. Sami's advice to the people who commit violence is to leave this dangerous profession as one day they themselves can become victims of violence and they should cut of their own hand in order to feel the pain before they decide to cut of somebody else's hand.

### **Looming Fear**

Samiullah a 23 year old was travelling with his friend when their motorbike got punctured near Guru Mandar, Karachi. As they were getting the wheel fixed, two men came on a motorbike and started firing at them in which his friend was killed and Samiullah was injured. Samiullah says he received three bullets, two in the stomach and one in the shoulder, while his friend received five bullets. First they fired three bullets at his friend but it did not kill him. When the attackers were about to leave his friend recited the *Kalima* in a loud voice, due to which they realized he was still alive and fired two more bullets at him,




one which hit him in the neck and the other passed through his face. "There was a stop over there so cabs and rickshaws were stationed but no one came near us. "What Samiullah remembers is that after five minutes a man came and helped both of them get up. After that a police mobile came and took both of them to hospital. Samiullah says that his friend was alive on the way but later on he passed away.

Samiullah says this incident has affected his life very badly. He has become very weak physically and faces problems while eating. When he goes out to work, he has to think hundred times, sometimes he even feels scared due to the volatile situation of the city, and there is firing going on every day. Samiullah's brother has also been a victim of gang violence. He was a sub inspector in the Karachi police and died fighting for the rule of the law. In Samiullah's opinion religion has been brought from the place of worship on the streets due to which there is a lot of problem these days. One should not leave his faith and make fun of someone else's faith.

### **Living in Misery**

Two political parties have their presence in the area where AkramImdad resides and according to him both the parties are of the view that he is a member of one of them. He says one day at the corner of the street a group of boys waved at him to stop. He took his rickshaw near them assuming they wanted to go somewhere, but when he stopped they all started beating him up, blindfolded him and dragged him into a white colored car. When they untied his eyes, Akram found himself in a room, where there were pillows and two people were sitting on the floor and one on the chair carrying a large gun. Without asking him anything, they beat him up the whole day and at night tied his hands and legs. After beating Akram for two days, they asked him which party do you belong to? Akram says "I told them to I belong to a labor class and am not affiliated with any political party". One of the men had pliers, came up to Akram and told him to speak the truth while he pressed his toe with the plier.

Akram says "I started screaming and reciting verses from the Holy Quran but their cruelty did not end and within a few minutes another guy inserted shrapnel into my body and threatened to give deep wounds throughout my body if I did not tell them the truth." He then explains they did not give him any food to eat for days and one day even tied him with a fan. He later adds one day they decided to kill him, dragged him into a car and while the car was travelling at a fast speed they pushed him out forcefully, due to which he hit head on a stone and fainted. When Akram gained consciousness he was in the hospital and heard a voice in the background who are you, give me your number. Akram says "I gave my brother's number and my family reached there and when I came to my senses, they told me I was missing for 15 days." This incident has terribly effected Akram's life as he is unemployed and has left the area.



He now looks up to the government to help him and says at least he should be given a rickshaw, so he can get back on his feet again as he is not educated and driving is the best option for him. Akram says he vows to seek revenge against the perpetrators though legal proceedings. In Akram's view political parties are responsible for gang wars and the police are also involved as they are under the influence of political parties. Advising those who are involved in criminal activities Akram says he will ask them to fear Allah and imagine how they would feel if their family became a victim of violence.

### Revenge


While the factors mentioned so far are associated with the perpetrators mostly, this one is linked to both the perpetrators as well as victims of the violence. The victims interviewed, clearly linked the rise of violence and the gang wars in their respective areas to the incompetency of the state to deal with the issue. Most of them held the law enforcing agencies responsible for whatever happened to them. Moreover, they also questioned the law enforcement agencies for not providing justice to them. Reading the publication up till this point, you would have come across various accounts where the victims that suffered immense violence at the hands of a perpetrator were not offered any sort of assistance from the state, law as well as the fellow citizens. There were few that for months kept visiting the courts in order to acquire justice but got only disappointed. Despite this there are people like Ishtiaq, who himself was a victim of gang violence and also lost his cousin. He still believes in the justice system and states, "We have taken the route of courts before and we will take it again and again until provided justice."

Some also reiterated that the police have a major role in elevation of violence in the city as well. According to them, either the police is either afraid of these gang members or they themselves are a part of the gangs. Some of the victims continue to look for justice either in the form of legal proceedings or direct revenge- that is treating the perpetrator in a same way they were treated. Although, the victims have passed through a great ordeal but they have not given up and are making effort to move on. They are rebuilding their lives from scratch, but are remain strident on their path to a better future.

On the other hand, according to few perpetrators, they joined a gang in order to take revenge for various atrocities carried out on them by various individuals or groups and in some cases the state as well. There are few stories which clearly suggest that lack of trust on the law for provision of justice, forced the individuals to adopt this violent path. However one thing should be noted here that such individuals, after avenging their losses continued to be the part of a gang. This poses some serious questions for the justification of these perpetrators.

### Forced into It

According to Saleem, "I did not voluntarily become a part of a gang...when it was forced upon me, I turned towards violence." He is 25 years old, of Baloch descent and resides in




Karachi. Saleem claims that he became part of gang violence in order to take revenge for his uncle's death. He was mistakenly associated with a certain gang by a rival group. Saleem narrates that the rival gang kidnapped his uncle, without verifying the information. According to him, there are families associated with certain gangs in their area and his family was also mistakenly considered to be involved. Initially they perceived it was a kidnap for ransom, but the perpetrators killed his uncles without offering any chance for explanation. Saleem was overwhelmed with vengeance and in this feeling for retribution he decided to join a gang. "I had to protect my family and also had to take revenge. As we are Baloch, so I had to avenge my uncle's death as people would taunt me for the rest of my life, if I failed to do so."

Saleem's family was aware of the fact that he had become a gang member. The group consisted of 36 members between the ages 18 – 22, while Saleem was 20 years old at the time of joining. He informs that youth showing enthusiasm to join a gang are taken on board, while each gang develops its own system or operating procedure within their respective areas of influence. He considers unemployment and irresponsible media as the main reasons for fueling violence in areas effected with gang wars. Saleem is of the opinion that the local media gives undue coverage to certain individuals and groups, which resultantly catapults them to limelight increasing their influence. He believes that all political parties are maintaining or sponsoring certain gangs to exert their influence. Describing his own stint, he states, "I have been to police station a number of times but never been jailed...life was too tough. I was always on the run. I could not sleep nor eat in peace."

Saleem's family especially his mother pressurized him to leave the gang, as the violence had adversely effected their lives. Saleem himself was sick of committing the atrocities and wanted to leave. Eventually, he slowly drifted away from the activities and claims that after leaving his mind is at peace. He asks for forgiveness from God for all transgressions he committed during the time.

### **Motive**

Muhammad Jabbar's reason for joining the gang became the death of his brother, while his reason for leaving this path of violence was the death of his two other siblings. Jabbar used to work in a factory before joining the gang. He was pushed into this life when his brother was picked up by the police and was killed during custody. In his rage of vengeance, he joined a criminal gang at the age of 18. His family tried to stop him, but he would not listen to their pleas. The gang consisted of 70 – 80 members between the ages of 22 – 26 years. There were also small scale drug dealers who approached the gang for recruitment. Muhammad Jabbar did not get any formal training for use of weapons, during his stay in the gang. He started robbing banks, extorting money, selling drugs and weapons and also carried out kidnap for ransom. During this time he also tracked down the policeman, who was responsible for the death of his brother and killed him.



On a question regarding justification of violence Jabbar stated, "If you ask me now, my answer would be no. However at that time when I was the part of the gang, use of violence seemed justified." He was also caught and spent some time in jail, but his family was able to free him. As his two brothers lost their lives due to gang related violence, he realized the mistake he had made in involving himself in such a life. According to him, it is very difficult to leave a gang, as there is threat to life and one has to leave that area. After the death of his brothers, his parents arranged some finance and sent him to Dubai. Now he is settled in Dubai and only comes to Pakistan on vacations, while he cannot go back to his area. Jabbar believes that the political parties are behind all these gang wars. The youth have no other opportunities to pursue, such as employment, education or even sports; so they join gangs.


### **Losing a Loved One**

Sheheryar joined the gang at the age of 19 to avenge his father's death who was abducted, subjected to violence and then murdered. According to Sheheryar one's enemy has to be treated in the same manner he treats you and murder can be avenged only through death. About receiving any formal training in the gang Shaheryar says no training is given, one learns through trial and error. Shaheryar says FIRs have been registered against him regarding murder and robberies but he is very fortunate of never being arrested. Explaining how these gangs operate, Shaheryar says everyone has their own area, where there are markets, industries or drug dens through which the organization is run. Businessmen also contact these groups to do their bidding. About his involvement with the gang Shaheryar says his family was unaware of his activities but his mother once saw grenades and pistols in his cupboard and asked him about it .He denied it completely.

Shaheryar says his mother was very depressed about his alleged activities and he got the news that she had passed away. It was just then when the rangers surrounded his area and there was an exchange of fire and a bullet hit him in his foot. Shaheryar then adds he does not know how his friends were able to whisk him away and he was able to visit his mother on the death bed. Shaheryar says that was the day when "I swore that due to my own doing I lost my family and I will never be a part of this".

### **For Taking a Stand**

A resident of Lyari in Karachi, 22 years old Shahjahan is a social worker and has been a victim of violence engulfing his area. He and his friends had decided to standup against the perpetrators, who were involved in eve teasing within their area. They went up to the culprits and asked them to stop their activities. The group immediately started brutally beating them. Shahjahan spent two months in a hospital, recovering from the injuries that he had suffered. This incident has effected Shahjahan enormously, where he does not feel safe within the area he resides. He wants to take revenge but through reciprocal means, as he is of the view that the legal system does not deliver. Shahjahan believes that politics is the main reason for all this violence, while politicians and police are supporting these



groups. He believes that greed for money and attainment of better lifestyle encourages the youth into joining such groups.

### **Extortion**


Ubaid belongs to a middle class family and has five siblings. He works in the factory, while his brother drives a rickshaw to earn their livelihood. Ubaid and his family used to lead better lives, as their father used to work abroad and had saved a lot of money. According to Ubaid, local gang members used to extort money from him. With the passage of time their demands increased and could not be met. He started avoiding them and hid from gang members. One day they caught up to him, they were all intoxicated and started thrashing him. He somehow managed to escape and ran away from the area. In the meantime, the perpetrators went to his home and verbally abused his family. There was an argument between members of his family and the culprits, which resulted in use of weapons by the perpetrators. Every member of his family including his father, mother, sisters and even nephew were severely wounded. At that time neither he nor his brothers were at home, so the neighbors arranged a car and took his family to the hospital.

Ubaid's mother succumbed to her wounds and passed away within two days, while his father also passed away later. All the family's savings were consumed on medical expenses, which drove them to poverty. During this time the police did not assist in any way, rather they prevented Uzair's family from naming the culprits. Friends and relatives also started avoiding them and did not come to their help. Ubaid seeks revenge for his family, as he wants to reciprocate the same to the perpetrators. "We feel that law is not there to protect us. We are poor people who are striving for a living. If we, by any chance become powerful, we will do the same to them."

### **No Realization**

A life of a gang member may seem adventurous and prosperous one but our findings prove the other way round. Almost all the ex-perpetrators of the violence we interviewed were highly regretful of the fact they joined gangs. They are either into hiding now because of the fear of getting killed by their ex-gang members or living a very low profile life. Interestingly we came across an individual that has still not renounced the path of violence despite being aware of the grave consequences. He is affiliated to a religious extremist organization and believes that what he is doing is justified. According to him, by spreading violence, he and his organization is carrying out a noble cause. Cases like these are highly critical and need to be focused upon further. The lack of realization in this case is highly alarming. Not only has it showed that violence is so deeply embedded in the area, but in the minds of individuals as well. Below is the account of the individual who gives his reasons from joining the gang to not bidding adieu to it.





### **On the Right Path?**

Muhammad Usman joined a religious sectarian based banned organization at the age of 19 and three years onwards he is still part of it, while he also runs a business of cellphones. He believes that he is serving Islam, by taking part in the activities of the group. He maintains that "If Sharia does not give permission then using violence is unjustified. However, if government and courts fail to take action then in that case, I believe that violence is justified." Usman states that his family was initially unaware of his affiliation, but as they came to know, they begged him to leave this behind. He maintains his stance and stresses that his group is working within legal constraints. Usman's group consists of 8 – 12 members between the ages of 16 – 46, while there are no formal criteria to join. There is also no binding on people not to leave the group, as they can leave and rejoin anytime they wish. He also received training in the tribal areas, while he was arrested thrice on various allegations.

Although his life is under constant threat due to his affiliation with the group, yet he has no consideration for leaving. He believes that gang wars are due to the enmity among political parties over acquisition of power and ethnic issues and religion is not a reason or cause. The political parties are also behind extortions, target killing and land grabbing.

## Conclusion

While the general populace is faced with issues like inflation, unemployment and etc, on the other hand, the residents of Karachi apart from these issues are desperate to find ways to live peacefully. It is highly unfortunate the land where the father of nation rests asleep, the very land is engulfed with violence of the extreme level. This situation has not only rooted fear in the hearts of millions living in the city, but also has the potential to disrupt the process of our country's development. What is more alarming is the fact that the youth of the nation is heading towards destruction. The very youth that is the future of the nation, instead of playing a positive role, it is causing damage to the country's assets.

Ascend of violence in the areas mentioned poses some serious question marks on the performance of the national as well as the provincial governments. Gang wars are one of the prime issues the city is faced with. The problem here is not about the intention of the government to counter the issue but it is about the measures taken by it so far to control it. The issue of gang wars is unique in a sense that it cannot only be controlled by using coercive measures (raids on gangs, imprisonments). Instead it can be limited by creating awareness in the youth of the city, by counseling them and providing them with facilities which would discourage them from adopting the path of violence. In some of the interviews, a very interesting finding surfaced relating to the involvement of political parties in formation of different gangs in the city. According to those interviews, political parties in the city have formed gangs to counter their opponents. For their own interest, they are playing with the fate of the country by manipulating youth. If such is the case, the state leaders need to take strict measures.

Those who have been at the receiving end of this violence have gone through a trauma psychologically, physically, socially and economically. They have lost their loved ones or have been inflicted physical harm, but these victims have not lost their courage to live. They might have been pacified through force and fear for a while, but in the long run these victims remain steadfast and carry on with their respective lives. They may not be able to challenge these powerful gangs, but their will to live on is the only proof that the perpetrators have failed to achieve their objectives.

There is a need for self-realization in youth as well. A famous quote reads "no one can change you unless you yourself want to". According to our findings, the main factors for joining the gang include greed for power, authority and acquiring the lavish lifestyle. The youth need to learn from the experiences of the gang members, who despite achieving all these luxuries are devoid of mental happiness. Yes, this gang war path provides a shortcut to earn authority and money, but there is other side of the coin as well- the one which is a complete contrast.

On the other hand, the law and justice providers need to augment their effectiveness in order to provide the victims of the violence the justice they deserve. According to most of the interviews conducted from the victims of violence, the law failed to provide them with



justice. On the other hand, the Government also needs to ensure that if it cannot provide the victims with any security, at least, it should grant them financial and psychological assistance, so that they can stand on their feet again.

The purpose of this publication is not only to highlight the stories of the victims and perpetrators of violence but in fact, in a broader sense, it is to create awareness amongst the youth as well as the state institutions regarding this pressing issue. All the institutions need to play an effective role in order to end this menace.