



Journal of Social Issues and Development (JSID)

(Himalayan Ecological Research Institute for Training and Grassroots Enhancement
(HERITAGE))

ISSN: 2583-6994 (Vol. 2, Issue 3, September-December, 2024. pp. 64-79)

Social Cohesion and Economic Struggles Among Borderlanders of District Rajouri

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the unique interplay between social cohesion and economic struggles among borderlanders in District Rajouri, situated near the Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir border. Through in-depth interviews with 61 residents, the researcher uncovers a compelling narrative of resilience amidst adversity. The findings reveal a stark economic reality: a significant portion of respondents earn less than ¹ 1,00,000 annually, primarily relying on agriculture for their livelihoods. This economic vulnerability is compounded by barriers such as job scarcity and inadequate education. Yet, against this backdrop of financial hardship, a remarkable sense of community emerges. Nearly 80% of participants reported knowing their neighbours “very well,” illustrating a deep-rooted social fabric that fosters support and connection. Engagement in community events is notably high, with many residents actively participating, reinforcing bonds that are

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crucial during tough times. Respondents expressed strong confidence in their community's ability to provide emotional and informational support, showcasing the power of social networks in navigating economic challenges. This collective action not only provides practical solutions but also instils a sense of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

This research highlights that while borderlands face significant economic obstacles, their strong community ties act as a vital lifeline. The insights suggest that initiatives aimed at improving economic conditions should not only focus on employment opportunities but also on nurturing these social connections. The importance of community support cannot be overstated, as it provides a sense of belonging and a safety net during times of economic struggle.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Economic Struggles, Borderlanders, Rajouri, Community Support, Livelihoods.

Introduction

After three centuries of colonial control, India was divided into two independent nations, India and Pakistan. This Partition of India creates a border conflict between the two countries, which plays a critical role in the life of the respondents of Jammu and Kashmir as compared to other people; the lives of those who live close to the border are pretty tricky and challenging. In the beautiful but tough area of District Rajouri, the lives of borderlands reflect a mix of rich culture and economic challenges. This region, known for its diverse communities and essential location, provides a unique opportunity to study how social connections exist alongside financial struggles. The respondents of Rajouri have faced the difficulties of living in a border region, where their identity, traditions, and economic situations influence their everyday lives. Social cohesion, which means the strength of relationships and a feeling of belonging among community members, is vital for these borderlands as they deal with economic issues. The local economy faces many challenges due to limited resources, political conflicts, and changing trade conditions. However, community ties grow more robust during these challenging times, highlighting stories of resilience, support, and shared hopes.

Borders are complex social constructs that profoundly impact the lives and identities of individuals and communities. Borders are political boundaries, and often, these boundaries are guarded. Borders are not fixed; they can change over time. This can happen through violence when respondents take over a region, trade or sell land, or divide it and give it out in measured portions after the war through international agreements. The border is a dividing line between two countries. It separates one country from another. They are, by definition, political boundaries. Border areas are often defined by the presence of respondents or groups who live in the in-between places of national borders, known as “borderlands” (Picione & Valsiner, 2017). Borderlanders, also known as borderland respondents or frontier dwellers, live in the physical regions near the edges or borders between two or more countries or political entities. These border regions are often defined by a unique socio-cultural, economic, and political factor that sets them apart from their respective countries’ centres or major areas (Picione & Valsiner, 2017).

The J&K border has been a conflict-stricken area since the Independence of India and the formation of Pakistan. It has watched and is still witnessing conflict, migration, and unrest on its borders since 1947. With the drawing of a new border, i.e. the ceasefire line (1949), now known as the Line of Control (1972), the condition of ‘extended violence’ came into life. This condition, characterised by frequent skirmishes, shelling, and infiltration attempts, has become a regular and unavoidable part of daily life for the residents of J&K (Chowdhary 2012). Border conflicts often create an environment of uncertainty and disruption, particularly for families living in the affected regions. Border conflicts, whether political, economic, or social, can have far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the immediate geographical area and touch the lives of individuals and families. These disputes can lead to the disruption of family structures, the separation of loved ones, and the emergence of transnational family dynamics, all of which can significantly impact the well-being and social mobility of those affected. Border conflicts persist in many regions worldwide, characterised by frequent tension and instability at national boundaries. Families living in frontier areas, which are typically located at the edges of disputed territories, experience these conflicts in profoundly personal and often traumatic ways. The proximity to conflict zones means that these families are subjected to a constant state of uncertainty, with

their lives disrupted by violence, displacement, and economic instability.

Historical Background of J&K

Jammu and Kashmir, which had earlier been under Hindu kings and Muslim sultans, became part of the Mughal Empire under Akbar in 1586. After Afghan rule from 1756 was transferred to the Sikh Kingdom of Punjab in 1819. In 1820, Maharaja Ranjit Singh made it over the Jammu region to Gulab Singh. In 1846, Jammu and Kashmir State was formed under the Treaty of Amritsar between the East India Company and Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu. Ladakh was taken by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1830. Ladakh was taken by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1830. Thus, this northernmost state was formed by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1846 and was India's biggest royal state before the country's partition in August 1947. On 17th August 1947, the Radcliffe Line was established as the border between India and Pakistan following India's partition. The line is named after Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was commissioned to fairly split 4,50,000 km sq. of land. The idea behind the Radcliffe Line was to create a boundary that would divide India along religious demographics, under which Muslim-majority provinces would become part of the new nation of Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh-majority provinces would remain in India because of its location, Jammu & Kashmir could choose to join either India or Pakistan. The Radcliffe Line and the subsequent decision of Maharaja Hari Singh to keep J&K independent have been significant factors in the ongoing border dispute and the region's history of conflict.

Struggle Due to Border Disputes

Jammu & Kashmir is located in the northernmost part of India. One of the most beautiful places in the world is snow-bound Himalayan peaks and glaciers, clean rivers and valleys, thick evergreen woods, and fresh mountain air famous as Heaven on Earth. It consists of two different areas, i.e., the Kashmir Valley and Jammu. Jammu and Kashmir, located between 32° 17' N and 36° 52' N latitude, and 73° 26' E and 80° 32' E longitude, form the northernmost state of India. The altitude changes from 1000 to 28250 feet above sea level. It shares borders with Pakistan in the west, China in the north and east, and the Indian states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in the south. The Jammu and Kashmir border dispute is a complicated and long-standing

conflict that has its roots in the division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The area of Jammu and Kashmir, with its diverse people, language, and culture, has been the heart of a strategic tug-of-war between India and Pakistan ever since the two countries gained freedom.

The population makeup of Jammu and Kashmir is a critical factor in the war. The area is mainly Muslim, with Muslims making up 78% of the people, while Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists make up the remaining 20% (Wang, 2022). However, even within the Muslim population, there are significant differences in terms of economy, culture, and language, with the Jammu and Srinagar regions having unique identities and living habits (Wang, 2022). The partition of India in 1947 led to the creation of two successor states, India and Pakistan, and the carving out of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, which a Hindu ruler initially ruled, Maharaja Hari Singh (Mansergh, 1966). The disagreement over the ownership of Jammu and Kashmir has been at the heart of the India-Pakistan war. The three Indo-Pak wars of 1947, 1965, and 1999 have all been fought partly over the rule of Jammu and Kashmir. These wars have significantly impacted the region, leading to further unrest and displacement (Wang, 2022). Despite rare peace offers and times of detente, the war shows no signs of a lasting solution (Paul, 2005). The open acquisition of nuclear weapons by both India and Pakistan, as well as the growing number of crises involving the two countries, have heightened the chance of a cataclysmic war breaking out in South Asia with unimaginable effects (Paul, 2005).

Moreover, Pakistan has been accused of backing rebel groups and terrorist strikes in India, as well as giving refuge, training, and arms to other hotbeds of conflict throughout Asia (Carment, 2011). This has further exacerbated the tensions between the two countries and made the border issue even more difficult. The Jammu and Kashmir border dispute is a complicated and diverse war lasting over seven decades. The population makeup, religious and cultural differences, and the strategic importance of the area have all added to the continuation of this rivalry (Wang, 2022) (Khanna, 2019) (Paul, 2005). Resolving this conflict will take a careful balancing act between the competing interests of India and Pakistan, as well as a better understanding of the area's unique characteristics.

Review of Literature

Author(s)	Year	Title	Findings	Relevance to Study
Meena, K.	2019	Borders and Bordering Practices: A Case Study of Jaisalmer District on India–Pakistan	The study highlights how the border restricts trade and personal connections, mainly affecting older generations.	Provides insights into the impact of borders on community life.
Sharma, R.	2017	Ceasefire Violations and ‘Border Residents’ in Akhnoor Sector (J&K)	The research shows that ceasefire violations directly affect the lives of border villagers, disrupting education, health, and the economy.	Highlights the consequences of conflict on daily life in border areas.
Naqshbandi, M. M., & Amin, W.	2013	Conflict Zone and Developmental Issues Faced by Youth: A Study from Kashmir	The study found that youth are significantly affected by ongoing conflict, leading to trauma and disrupted socialisation.	Sheds light on the psychological impact of conflict on younger generations in border areas.

Research Gap

Despite the existing body of research on border communities and their socio-economic challenges, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific experiences of borderlanders in District Rajouri. Much of the current research focuses on broader themes, such as conflict impacts and economic hardships, often overlooking the critical role of social cohesion in shaping these communities’ responses to adversity.

Moreover, there is a lack of qualitative studies that capture individuals’ personal narratives and lived experiences in border regions. This gap limits our understanding of how social ties and community networks contribute to resilience and coping mechanisms in the face of economic struggles.

By addressing these gaps, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social

cohesion and economic resilience among the borderlanders of Rajouri, ultimately offering insights that can inform effective policies and community initiatives.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the unique experiences of borderlands in District Rajouri, a group often ignored in discussions about economic and social issues. By examining their challenges and strengths, this research helps us understand how their geographical and cultural backgrounds affect community life.

Second, investigating the link between social cohesion and economic struggles can offer valuable insights for policymakers and community leaders. Knowing how strong social ties can help communities withstand economic difficulties can guide efforts to improve the lives of border residents. This is especially relevant for areas facing similar issues, showing the potential for collective support and action.

Additionally, this research contributes to the growing border studies and social cohesion field. It underscores how meaningful human connections are in overcoming challenges, providing lessons that can apply to other regions facing economic hardships. The study aims to build empathy and raise awareness, encouraging social justice and economic fairness discussions.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of borderland residents in the Doongi block of District Rajouri, specifically focusing on their social cohesion and economic struggles. A total of 61 respondents were selected for this research, all of whom live within an aerial distance of one kilometre from the international border POJK (Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir).

To gather data, a structured questionnaire was developed, including both closed-ended and open-ended questions. This instrument was designed to elicit information regarding the respondents' socio-economic backgrounds and perceptions of social cohesion within their communities.

Data collection involved personal interviews with the respondents, ensuring a more in-depth understanding of their individual experiences.

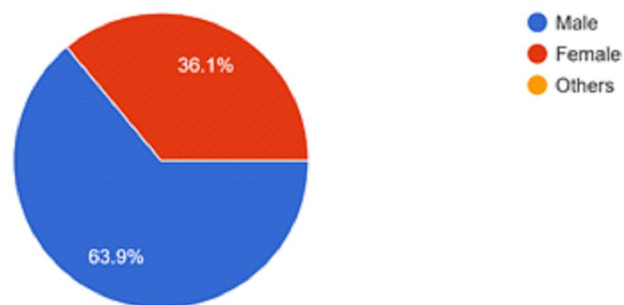
Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents, aiming to include individuals from diverse religious backgrounds and social classes to capture a wide range of perspectives. This diversity is crucial for comprehensively understanding the dynamics of social cohesion and economic challenges borderlanders face. The interviews were conducted respectfully and culturally sensitively, allowing respondents to express their thoughts and experiences freely. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns related to social cohesion and economic struggles.

Major Findings

The findings were derived from the structured questionnaire administered to respondents living in border areas. The questionnaire was divided into three key parts: the demographic profile of the respondents, an assessment of social cohesion, and an exploration of the socio-economic challenges faced by the borderlands.

Each part contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' experiences, highlighting the interplay between their demographic characteristics, the strength of their community ties, and the economic difficulties they encounter.

Gender?
61 responses



The study included both males and females, with 39 male respondents and 22 female respondents. The participants also varied across different age groups.

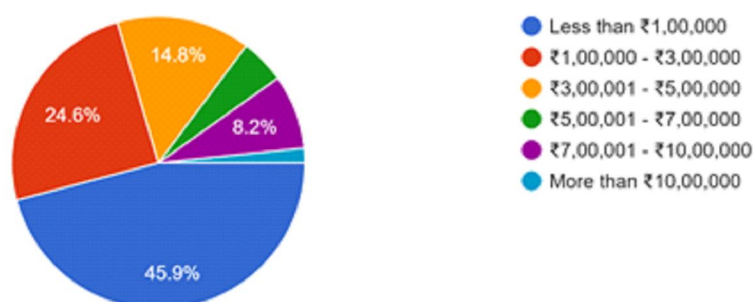
Social Cohesion and Economic Struggle Among Borderlanders of District Rajouri

Family Type	Percentage
Joint families	52.2%
Extended families	8.2%
Nuclear families	39.3%

This table summarises the types of family structures among respondents, showing that most belong to joint families, followed by nuclear and extended families. The borderlanders maintain traditional family structures, with most living in joint families. This reflects cultural norms and practices that value extended familial connections.

What is your annual family income? (Please select the appropriate range)

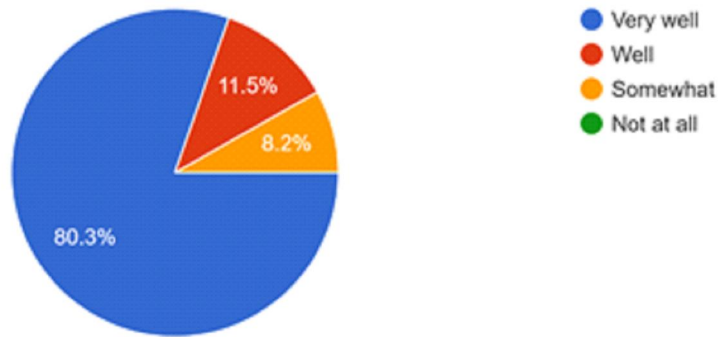
61 responses



The income data reveals the economic profile of the respondents. The majority, 28 respondents, earn less than Rs. 1,00,000 annually, indicating that a significant portion of the population may live in low-income conditions. The next largest group, with 15 respondents earning between Rs. 1,00,000 to Rs. 3,00,000, also suggests limited financial resources. Fewer respondents fall into higher income brackets, with only a small number of three earning above Rs. 5,00,000. Overall, this distribution highlights the economic challenges borderlands face, with most respondents in lower income ranges, reflecting potential issues related to poverty and limited economic opportunities in the region.

How well do you know your neighbors?

61 responses



The data indicates a strong sense of social cohesion among respondents, with 49 out of 61 participants (approximately 80%) reporting that they know their neighbours “very well.” Only seven respondents indicated they know their neighbours “well,” while five answered “somewhat.” Notably, no respondents reported knowing their neighbours “not at all,” suggesting a high familiarity and connection within the community.

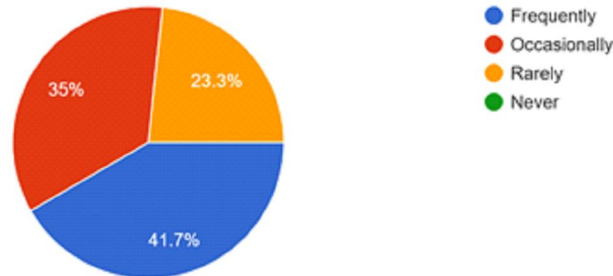
How would you describe the sense of community in your area?	Number of Responses
Very Strong	17
Strong	20
Moderate	23
Very Weak	1

The data reveals a strong sense of community among respondents, with most rating it as moderate to very strong. This positive perception is crucial for fostering support and resilience during economic challenges.

Social Cohesion and Economic Struggle Among Borderlanders of District Rajouri

How often do you participate in community events or gatherings?

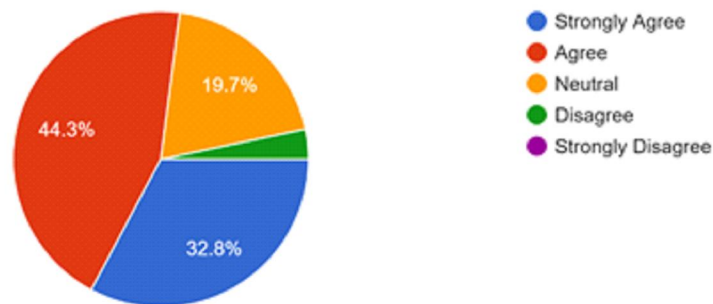
60 responses



The responses indicate a high level of engagement in community events, with 25 participants attending frequently and 21 doing so occasionally. This suggests that a significant portion of the community is actively involved, fostering connections and collaboration. The absence of respondents who never participate underscores the overall commitment to communal activities, which can enhance social cohesion and collective resilience in the face of economic challenges.

In times of need, do you feel you can rely on your community for support?

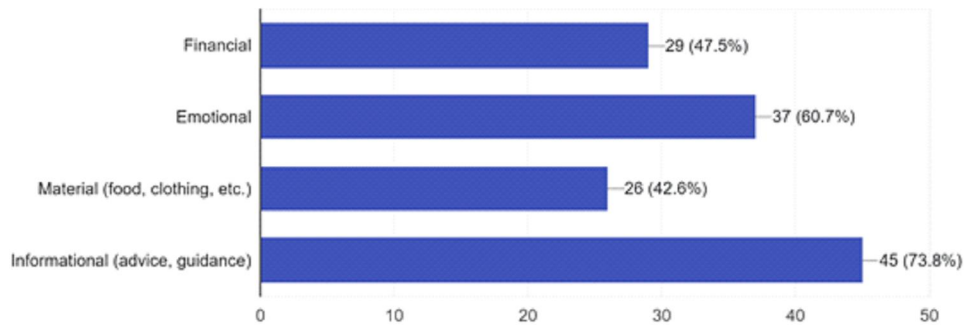
61 responses



The responses indicate a strong belief in community support, with 47 participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can rely on their community in times of need. Only two respondents disagreed, while 12 remained neutral, highlighting a positive perception of communal support networks. The absence of solid disagreement further reinforces the notion of a cohesive and supportive community.

What types of support are most commonly provided by the community? (Select all that apply)

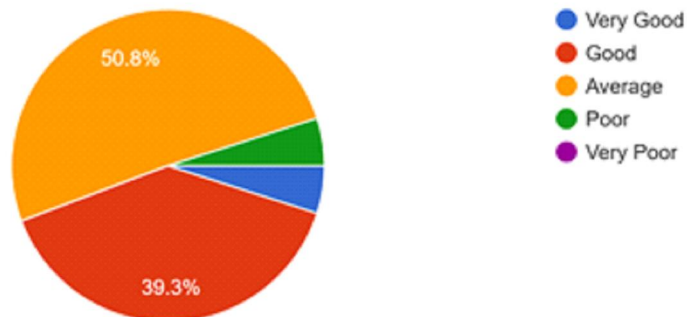
61 responses



The community primarily offers information support (45 respondents) and emotional support (37 respondents), followed by financial (29 respondents) and material support (26 respondents). This highlights the community's focus on sharing knowledge and emotional assistance during challenging times.

How would you rate your household's financial situation?

61 responses

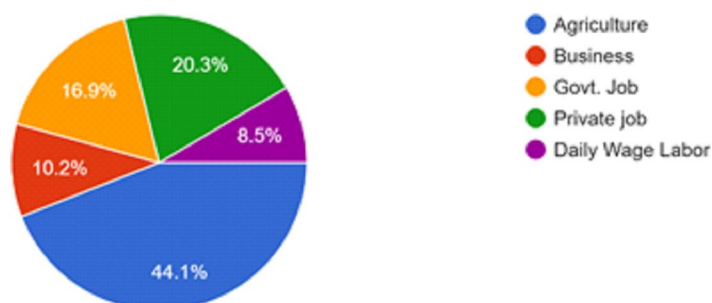


The responses indicate a general dissatisfaction with employment opportunities, with 33 participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that sufficient jobs are available. Only 18 respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while ten remained neutral. This highlights a significant concern regarding the local job market.

Social Cohesion and Economic Struggle Among Borderlanders of District Rajouri

What is your primary source of income?

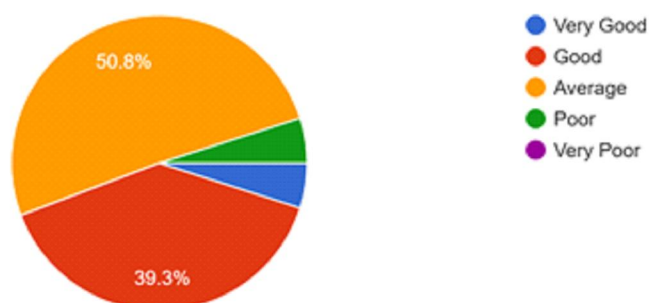
59 responses



Respondent's primary source of income is predominantly agriculture, with 26 participants indicating it as their main livelihood. This is followed by private jobs (12 respondents), government jobs (10 respondents), business (6 respondents), and daily wage labour (5 respondents). This distribution highlights the community's reliance on agriculture, which may influence economic stability and social cohesion.

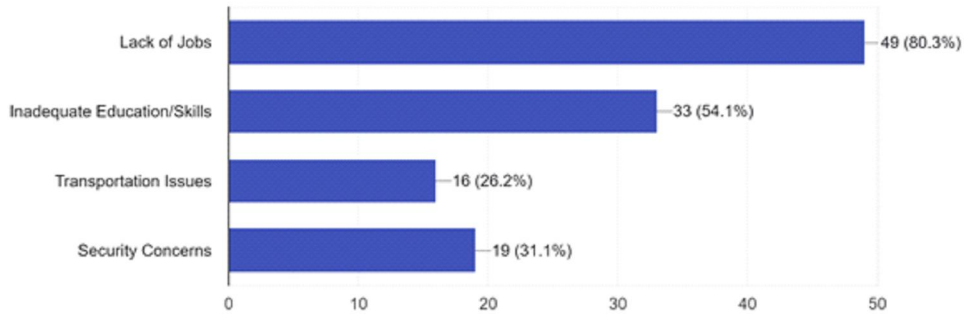
How would you rate your household's financial situation?

61 responses



The assessment of household financial situations reveals that most respondents rate their finances as average (31 participants) or good (24 participants). Only three respondents rated their situation as very good, while 3 indicated it as poor. This suggests a prevalent sense of financial struggle within the community, with many households facing moderate economic challenges.

What are the main barriers to employment in your community? (Select all that apply)
61 responses



The responses highlight the primary barriers to employment in the community, with 49 participants citing a lack of jobs as the main issue. Thirty-three respondents noted inadequate education and skills, 19 identified security concerns, and 16 mentioned transportation issues. These factors collectively hinder employment opportunities and reflect significant challenges that need to be addressed for economic improvement.

Conclusion

This research has provided valuable insights into the intricate relationship between social cohesion and economic struggles among the borderlanders of District Rajouri; through qualitative interviews with 61 respondents, a rich tapestry of experiences has emerged, illustrating the challenges and strengths within this community. The findings indicate that a strong sense of social cohesion persists despite facing significant economic hardships, with most respondents earning less than ¹ 1,00,000 annually. The overwhelming familiarity among neighbours and high levels of community engagement demonstrate that interpersonal relationships and support networks are vital for resilience in times of economic difficulty. Approximately 80% of participants reported knowing their neighbours “very well,” highlighting the importance of social ties in fostering a supportive environment. Moreover, the predominant reliance on agriculture as a primary source of income underlines the community’s vulnerability to economic fluctuations. The barriers identified, including job scarcity and inadequate education, call for targeted interventions to enhance economic opportunities. However, the positive perception of communal support indicates that strengthening these networks can be a powerful tool in addressing economic struggles.

While the borderlands face pronounced economic challenges, their strong sense of community is a critical asset. Efforts to bolster economic development should be coupled with initiatives that enhance social cohesion, ensuring this community can thrive despite its struggles. Addressing the identified barriers to employment and harnessing the existing social fabric could pave the way for improved livelihoods and overall well-being.

Limitations of the Study

1. The data was collected only from the two villages of the Doongi block of District Rajouri; it may not represent the whole district.
2. Due to the low participation of respondents and limited time and resources, the sample size is not very large, which allows the researcher to miss the diversity of experiences.
3. The findings may not universally apply to all border areas as they differ in culture, socio-economic status, and ethnicity.

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