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SOCIO CULTURAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF KAGHAN VALLEY, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Kaghan valley is one of the most beautiful valleys of Pakistan, located in the northern part of district Mansehra. The valley is famous for its natural and cultural beauty and pleasant weather. Millions of tourists visit this valley within few months of the year due to its unique attractions and currently it is one of the top most destinations of the country. Due to heavy tourism, the natural and cultural heritage of the valley is deteriorating day by day. Overcrowding is also effecting the daily life of the local community and it is becoming difficult for the locals to lead their daily life peacefully during the tourist season, though having some very positive impacts of tourism as well. The current study is an attempt to explore the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the local community of the valley and to suggest the measures to relevant authorities for the planning of sustainable tourism development in the area.

Keywords

Socio-cultural impacts, tourism, local community, Kaghan valley, sustainable development

Introduction

Kaghan valley is one of the top most tourism destinations of Pakistan, located in the northern part of district Mansehra. The valley is famous for its natural and cultural heritage and pleasant weather. Due to some of the legendary lakes, it is also known as the land of lakes. Due to its diverse and charming attractions, every year millions of tourists visit this valley within few months of the year. Kaghan valley is situated between 34°-17' and 35°-10' N latitudes and 73°-28' and 74°-7' E longitudes. It is bordered on the northern side with Gilgit-

Baltistan and on the eastern side with the Neelum valley of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and on the rest of sides it is bordered with the settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Masrur and Khan, 1973). Its length from Balakot to Babusar Pass is 159 kilometers (92 miles) and its average width is about 15 miles. The valley is accessed through Balakot town, also known as the gateway of the valley (Watson, 1907).

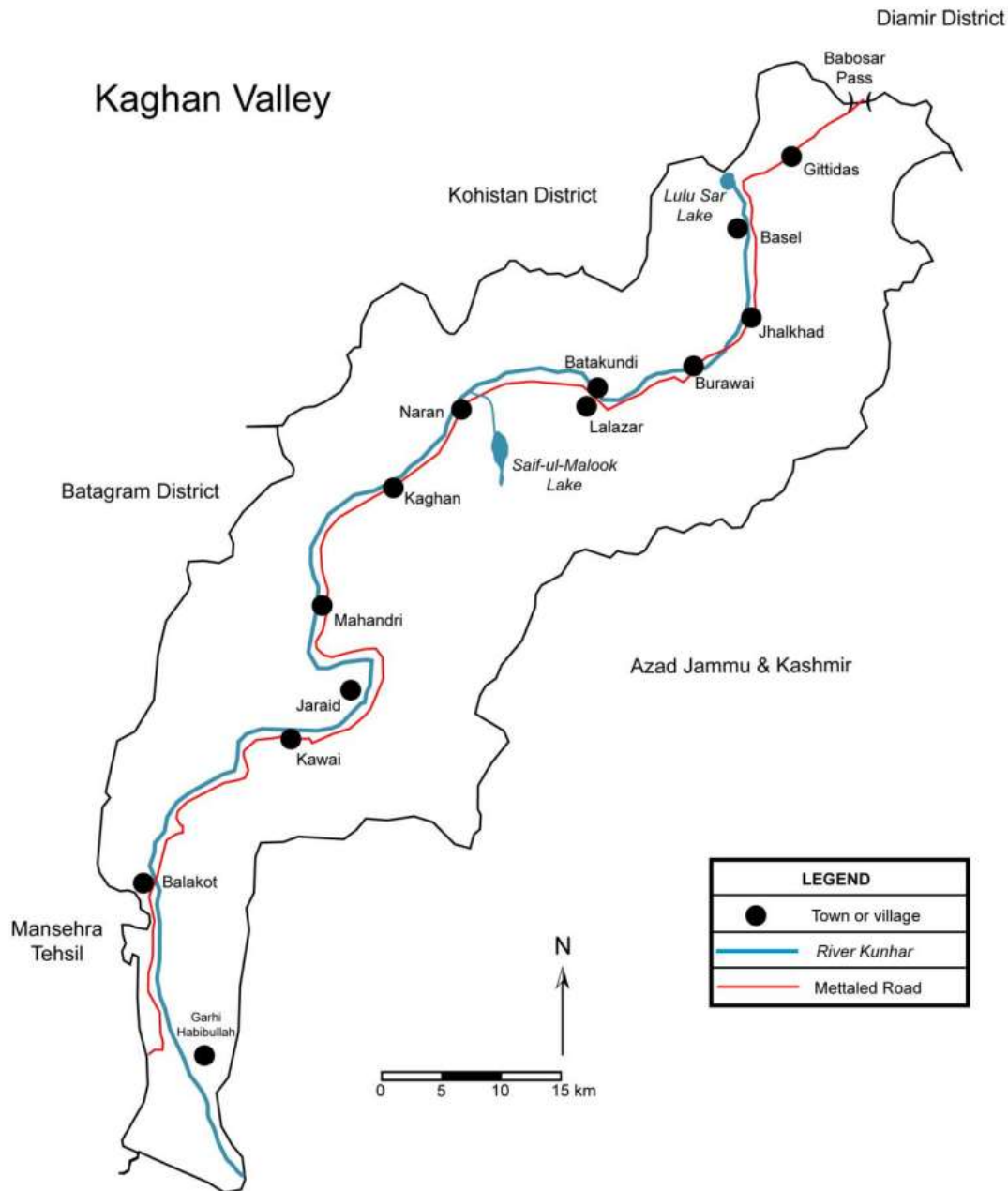


Fig. 1: Route Map of the Kaghan valley

The history of the valley dates back to the early historic period ranging from the Buddhist to the British periods, while some of the remains may be assigned to the earlier Gandhara Grave Culture based on the urn burials as claimed by the local people (Ali et al., 2011). The cultural uniqueness of the valley continues and some very attractive nomadic, semi nomadic and settled cultures can still be seen. These cultures attract the tourist and make their visits memorable. These cultures are very sensitive and need to follow the visits' code of conduct. If the ethics are not followed, tourism may put adverse effects on the socio-cultural environments of the valley. Current study is of first ever of its kind to explore the impacts of tourism on the local community of the valley.

Socio-cultural and socio economic and environmental impacts through the local community perspective have been under discussion nationally since last few years. Some of the research work on the said issue have been carried out in the Northern Areas of Pakistan like Saqib et al., (2019), Bibi and Bibi (2020) and Jehan et al., (2023). Limited research has been conducted on the Tourism of Kaghan Valley. Most of the previous studies were carried out to document the natural and cultural heritage of the valley. Some of the work done previously is Gazetteer of the Hazara District 1883-4; Aziz, 1998; Rasheed, 2009; Ali, 2007; Ali et.al., 2011; Khan, 2011 and Shah, 2017. These previous studies fulfill some basic requirements of the visitors. Recently, some studies were conducted to assess the potential and problems of tourism in the valley (Arif, 2019; Hussain, 2020, Arif, 2021, Arif, 2022). The current study is an attempt to explore the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the local community of Kaghan valley and to know their perception about tourism. The study will provide a base for the planning of sustainable tourism development in the area and to take maximum benefits from tourism and minimize the negative impacts due to unplanned and irresponsible tourism.

Materials and Methods

To study and analyze the tourism perception of the local community of Kaghan valley and positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism, a questionnaire was designed and responses from the four hundred local community members (men and women) were collected in order to plan the sustainable tourism in the valley. Questionnaire was carefully designed that best suits to the study, according to the level of the respondents and at the same time busy respondents may also respond well. The questionnaire was in English but we translated it into Urdu language for the ease of the respondents and the local community mostly preferred to fill in Urdu. Questionnaire starts with the personal information of the local community and contains three parts. Part first deals with the perception of local community about the tourism in general, its benefits, harms in general and interaction with tourists etc. having 10 questions while part second deals with the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the local community having 18 questions. Part three is for the suggestions of local community for the planning and development of responsible tourism in the valley. The questionnaire was

having a mix of open and closed ended questions. Open ended questions permit the interviewer to go into more depth if needed or to clear up any misunderstanding (Schensul et al., 1999). We adopted both open and closed ended questions, according to the nature of the questions to get the opinions of the local community. The local community was given the option to express themselves freely, so their feedback may be utilized for the sustainable development of tourism in the area. The data thus obtained was analyzed in excel to get the results of the responses.

Results and Discussions

In the following lines, the results obtained from the survey are discussed:

Tourism Perception of the Local Community

In this section, following major questions were asked from the respondents, to know about their perception about tourism in general. The questions were provided with yes or no options and some questions having open choice.

Table. 1. **Tourism perception of the local community**

S. No	Questions	Yes	No
1	Has tourism enhanced the image of the Kaghan valley people?	92%	8%
2	Do you benefit from tourism in Kaghan valley?	81%	19%
3	Is there any harm to you due to tourism in the area?	72%	28%
4	Do you support tourism and welcome tourists to come to your community?	92%	8%
5	Do you feel interaction with tourists is a valuable experience?	93%	7%
6	Are community representatives involved in the developmental decisions by the government and other stakeholders concerning the tourism in the area?	8%	92%

Discussion on the Local Community's Perception about Tourism

Respondents were asked about what tourism is? provided with six responses i.e. tourism is any activity, industry, leisure, travel and stay outside the usual environments, experience or all the mentioned activities? 22% of the community is of the opinion that tourism is an industry, 17% are of the opinion that tourism is leisure, 16% say tourism is travel and stay, 11% are of the opinion that tourism is an activity and 33% say tourism is all the mentioned activities.

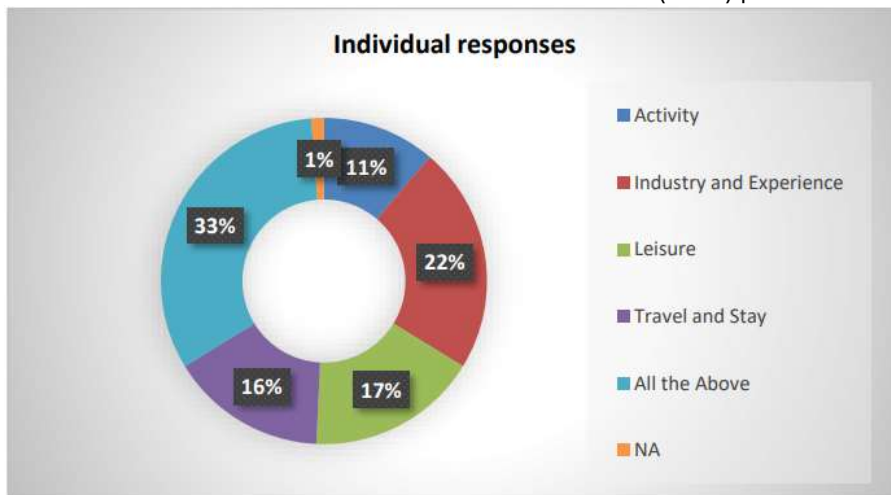


Fig. 2: Tourism in your opinion is?

Most of the local community i.e. 92% is of the opinion that tourism has enhanced the image of Kaghan valley people and majority of the local population i.e. 81% is getting benefits from tourism. It means that 81% of the local community is directly or indirectly involved in tourism related businesses or is aware of the benefits associated with tourism in the valley. Majority of the local population i.e. 72% is of the opinion that they do not have any harms from tourism while 28% is of the opinion that tourism is also carrying some harms along with benefits. The major harms highlighted by the local community are environmental threats, security issues, impacts on cultural identity and economy disruption/ inflation.

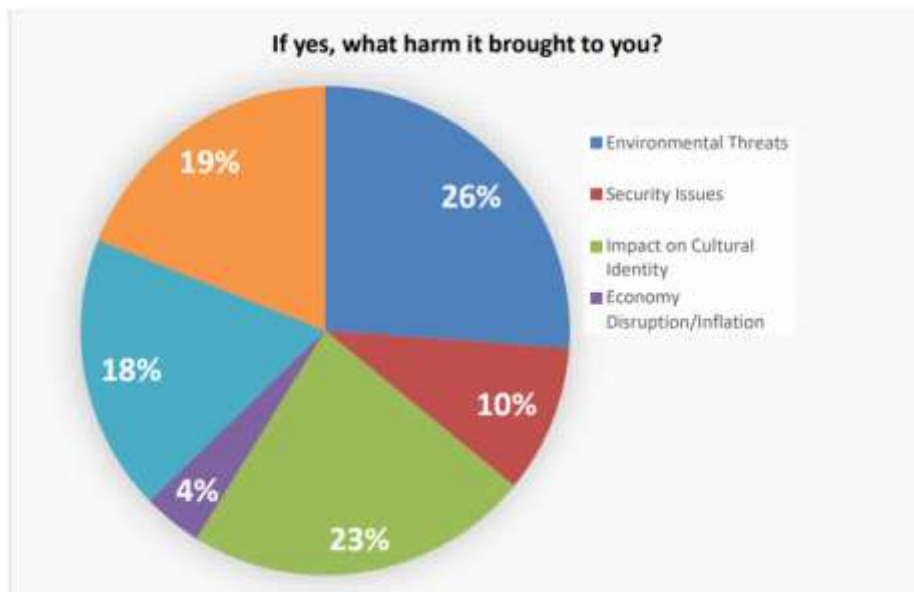


Fig. 3: Identification of harms from tourism in the valley

Some of the local community is of the opinion that due to heavy tourism in the valley, natural environments are affecting a lot and there are threats to local cultural environments as well. Local community is of the opinion that their daily life is disturbed due to overcrowding. Pollution is increasing in the valley due to overcrowding and unplanned tourism. Environment is deteriorating due to tourist activities (as there are no treks, camping sites etc.). Tourism has destroyed the natural beauty of the area, water and air pollution is due to tourism. Garbage and littering are there, which is not only spoiling the resources but also eye soaring. Pollution/ smoke from vehicles is entering our body. A lot of natural resources are being misused for tourism purposes i.e. construction of hotels, restaurants and markets etc. and there is construction without planning. This construction without planning is disturbing the agricultural lands and the beautiful landscapes as well. Once there was a beautiful morning view or scenery, now is a multistoried hotel and nothing to see and enjoy. The construction without planning is at such a height that investors use excavators and bulldozers to smooth the land for construction. Due to tourism and heavy traffic, noise pollution is also increasing and the smoke from the vehicles is deteriorating the air and causing the increase in temperature. Local community is also of the opinion that due to environmental pollution the lives of kids and school going children are at risk, as they do not have enough immunity in young age and their health is at risk due to environmental pollution.

92% of the local community supports tourism and is happy to welcome the tourists to come and visit the Kaghan valley. It shows that the local community is aware of the importance and benefits of tourism while 8% of the community is of the opinion that due to certain problems and harms, they do not like tourists and tourism in the area. They highlighted that due to tourism's negative impacts on cultural identity, behavioral repercussions, economy disruption and environmental threats they do not support and want the tourists and tourism in this area.

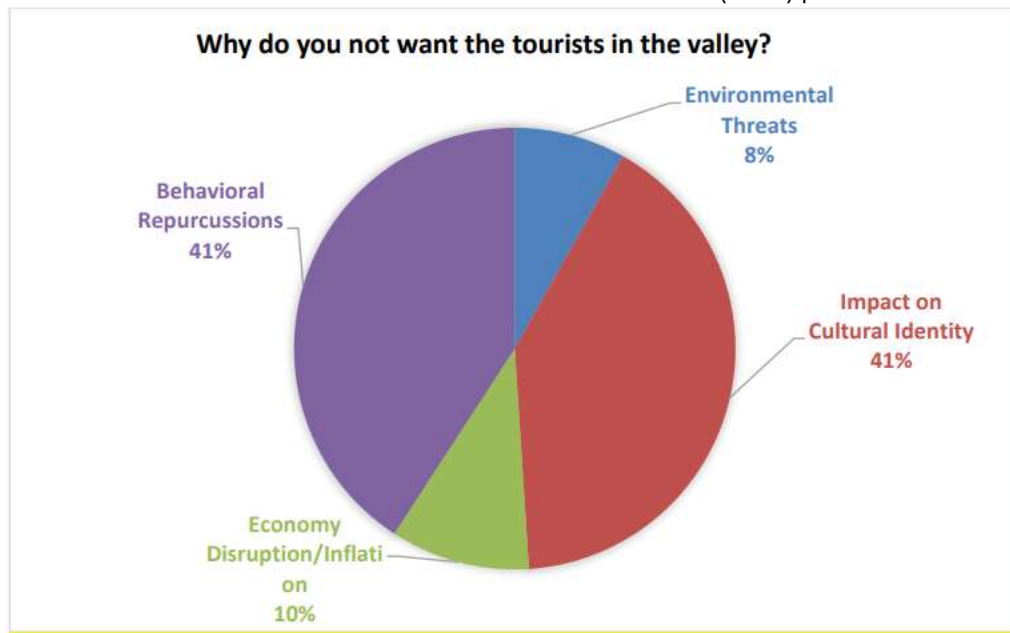


Fig. 4: Why do you not want the tourists in the valley?

Majority of the local community i.e. 93% feels interaction with tourists as a valuable experience while 7% respondents are of the opinion that interaction with tourists is not a good experience. These community members feel that tourists do not respect the local culture, they do not respect the women, stare at them and take pictures/ photographs of them and they also misbehave with the local community and so the tourists are not trustworthy as well. Local community also considers the tourists and the tourism as a source of inflation in the valley.

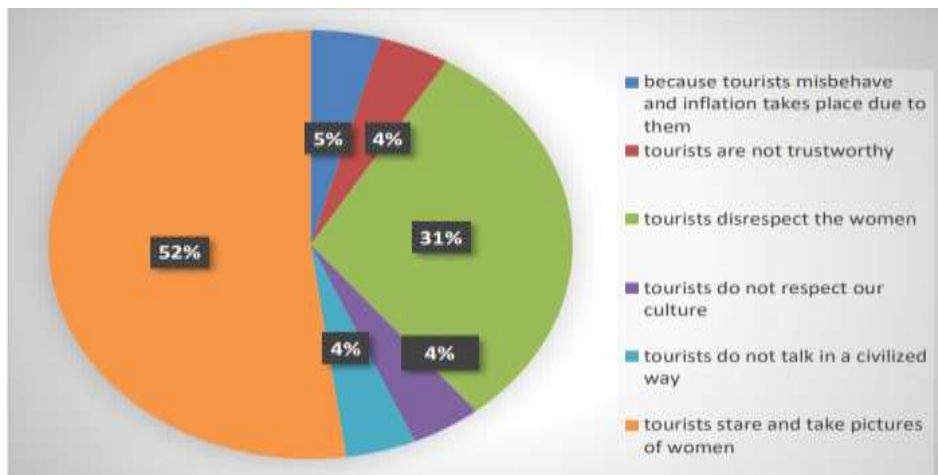


Fig. 5: Why interaction with tourists is not a valuable experience?

92% of the local community complains that the community and its representatives are not involved in the tourism planning and development decisions by the government and the stakeholders. This is an alarming situation and for the sustainable tourism development in the valley and give maximum benefits of tourism to the local community, it is important to consider them in tourism making decisions, so that community support the government initiatives in the area. This will also create a sense of ownership among the community about their area. All the relevant departments should consider this issue and involve the local community in tourism development process.

Socio Cultural Impacts of Tourism

In this section following major questions related with the perception of local community on socio cultural impacts of tourism on the Kaghan valley were asked. The questions were provided with yes and no options and the open-ended questions as well, giving the space to respondents to discuss their views freely regarding these impacts. The results of this section are as under:

Table 2. Socio Cultural Impacts of Tourism

S. No	Questions	Yes	No
1	Has tourism increased the level of education among Kaghan valley's people?	85%	15%
2	Has tourism at Kaghan valley improved peoples' life style?	68%	32%
3	Has tourism encouraged some immoral behaviors among some Kaghan valley's people?	37%	63%
4	Due to tourism, crime has increased in the local community?	33%	67%
5	Is tourism the reason for youngsters' misbehavior in the community?	42%	58%
6	Does tourism weaken the social bonds and family structure of Kaghan valley's people?	40%	60%
7	Tourism does not disrupt the peace and tranquility of this area?	34%	66%
8	Tourism improves women socio-economic situation/ condition?	67%	33%
9	Has tourism increased the cost of living at Kaghan valley?	83%	17%
10	Do you see tourism as source of invasion of foreign culture?	66%	34%
11	Do you feel tourism is a threat to local values and traditions?	55%	45%
12	Has tourism decreased pride in your culture?	20%	80%
13	Has tourism caused changes in your traditional culture (language, music, art and craft, rituals, events, festivals, dresses, symbols, customs, food and folklores)?	58%	42%
14	Tourism development makes local people more satisfied with their living in this area?	95%	5%

Discussion on the Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism on the Local Community

Local community is of the opinion that tourism has brought positive impacts on the local community of Kaghan valley but at the same time some negative impacts are also influencing due to unawareness and lack of tourism planning. Dominant majority of the local population i.e. 85% is of the opinion that due to tourism, awareness among the local community has been created and level of education has been increased, while 15% of the community is of the opinion that, education level has not been increased due to tourism (Table 2). While discussing the improvements in standard of life, 68% of the local community is of the opinion that due to tourism people's lifestyle in the valley has improved, while 32% are of the opinion that no such improvement has taken place (Table 2). The respondents also highlighted the areas of improvement in daily life. According to them (67%) some positive changes took place and standard of living, cleanliness, better accommodations, dress, conversation, attitudes and behaviors and food etc. improved. 18% of the respondents are of the opinion that due to tourism employment opportunities and economic conditions improved and due to economic improvements, standard of life in the valley has improved. 15% of the community is of the view that due to tourism education and awareness improved, resulting in the improvement of lifestyles of the community.

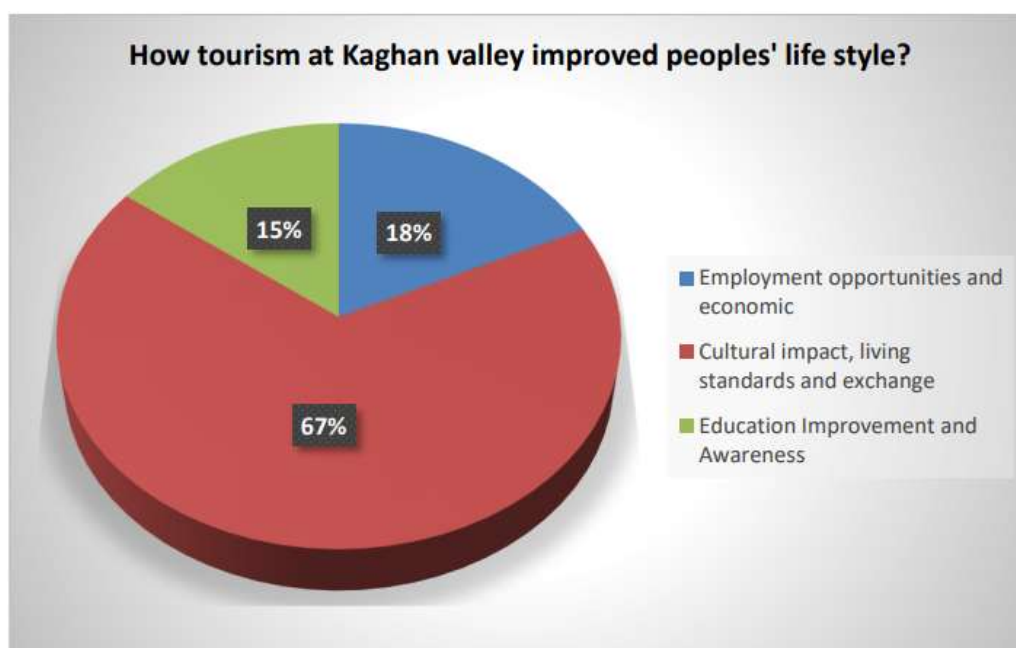


Fig. 6: How tourism has increased peoples' lifestyle?

These are some of the very positive changes and impacts happened in the valley resulting in the change/ improvement in the lifestyles of local community due to tourism. Some of the respondents i.e. 37% are of the opinion that tourism has encouraged some immoral behaviors in some of the Kaghan valley's people while 63% are not agree with this (Table 2). The people who are of the view that due to tourism immoral behaviors have taken place,

highlighted some of the immoral behaviors of the local community resulted due to tourism. 68% of the respondents among these are of the opinion that behavioral repercussions are in big number i.e. tourism is currently affecting the individuals and smoking, addiction and theft etc. are taking place in the society, 16% of the respondents are of the opinion that societal economic impacts i.e. lust for money and dishonesty in business etc. are taking place. Similarly, some of the respondents are of the opinion that trend of education in youth is decreasing due to tourism and youth is also deviating from the religion and the religious practices like worship etc. Some of the local community is of the opinion that in the valley, due to tourism prostitution is taking place. Tourists are involved in this business, which is negatively affecting the local community, especially youth. Some of the respondents are of the opinion that due to tourism food and dress is being changed rapidly and this is due to tourism's demonstration effect. Security issues are also taking place and the trend of theft in the community is increasing and all this is due to observing the tourists and their colorful lives and the local community wants to be like them and are adopting some short cuts to become wealthy.

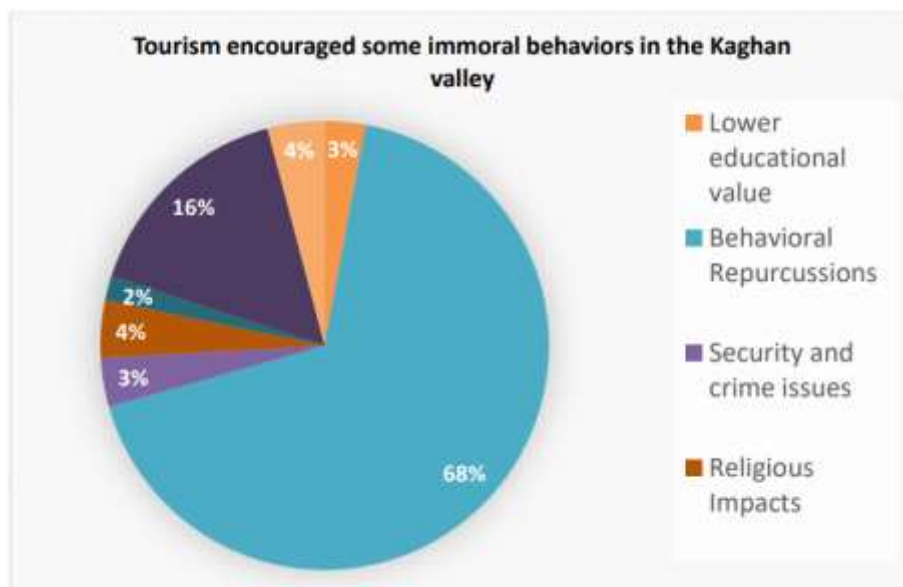


Fig. 7: Some immoral/ unethical behaviors of the Kaghan valley people

33% of the community is of the opinion that due to tourism crime rate is increasing while 67% are not agree with this (Table 2). Youngsters' misbehavior is a challenge in different communities and in Kaghan valley a fair number of respondents i.e. 42% are of the opinion that tourism is a cause of youngsters' misbehavior in the local community while majority of the community i.e. 58% is of the opinion that tourism does not have any such negative impact on the youth (Table 2). Different factors for the change in youth's behavior need further research.

40% of the local population is of the opinion that due to tourism social bonds and family structure of the valley are weakening while 60% are not agree with this (Table 2). The trends

in theft, dishonesty in business, lust for money, competition in businesses etc. are the factors which are indicating that if the situation continues, it will weaken the social bonds and family structure in the valley and the local community will be cut from one another. So, the local community should be aware of the fact and take notice of it and settle the matters among themselves (if any) to release the tension for the strong family and social setup in the valley. 34% of the community is of the opinion that due to tourism the peace and tranquility of the area has disrupted while 66% are not agree with this (Table 2). The peace and tranquility are the special problems for those destinations who receive heavy tourist burdens. If the burden of the tourists is shared and some more destinations are explored and planned, this uncertainty from the locals may be minimized. An important positive impact of tourism in the valley is the improvement in women's socio-economic condition. 67% of the community is of the view that due to tourism the socio-economic condition of the women has improved, while 33% are not agreed with this (Table 2). This is true when we visit Kaghan valley and see the girls/ women going to schools/ colleges and for jobs, which is continuously increasing, and the attitude of the locals is being changed regarding the women. The girls grazing their sheep and goats are now seen in the schools and housewives now going for jobs. Still there is a need to do more for the welfare of the women in the valley. This positive impact of tourism is visible in the tourist's destinations. In the side areas having no tourism, women are still suffering from the same old age traditions. Women can play an important role in the tourism development and in increase in economy of the valley due to their diverse skills (handicrafts etc.) and tourism can enhance and conserve their skills.

One of the negative impacts of tourism in the valley is cost of living. 83% of the local community is of the view that due to tourism cost of living in the valley has increased while 17% are not agree with this (Table 2). This is an important factor and at several other places during the survey while responding to questions, local community has complained and highlighted this issue. Majority of the local community is underprivileged and increased cost of living is disturbing their daily lives. The relevant authorities should think on this matter and try to ease the daily lives of the locals.

Majority of the local community i.e. 66% is of the opinion that tourism is a source of invasion of foreign cultures in the valley while 34% of the respondents are not agreed with this (Table 2). Similarly, majority of the local community i.e. 55% perceives tourism as a threat to local values and traditions while 45% of locals do not consider it a threat to local values and traditions (Table 2). Majority of the local community i.e. 80% feels pride in their local cultures while some of the respondents i.e. 20% are of the opinion that visitors' cultures are far better from ours (Table 2). The respondents identified the areas of local culture in which they feel inferiority complex. According to those respondents, visitors' culture is superior from them in terms of economic conditions, education and their food and dresses etc. Tourists speak in a pleasant and civilized way, so their culture is superior. Some of the respondents are of the opinion that local women are influenced by the foreign cultures at once and leave their own.

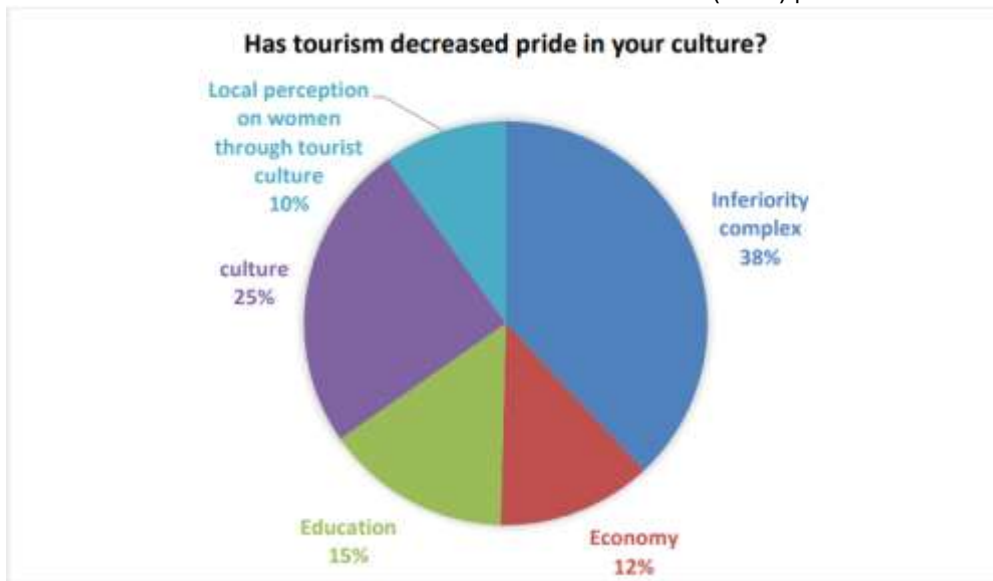


Fig. 8: Areas of decrease in pride

The responses show that some of the community members are in inferiority complex and there are number of reasons for this complex. So, there is a dire need to raise awareness among the local community and educate them that tourists come here to see and enjoy their culture so they should not think their culture as inferior. While responding to the changes in traditional culture (language, music, arts and crafts, rituals, events, festivals, dresses, symbols, customs, food and folklores etc.), majority of the respondents i.e. 58% are of the view that tourism has caused changes in traditional culture while 42% are not agreed with this (Table 2). 42% respondents are of the opinion that food and dress are being changed due to tourism, 19% are of the view that language is being changed, 13% responded that rituals and customs are being changed, 12% mentioned arts and crafts, 7% responded that all the enlisted aspects are being changed, 5% of the respondents are of the opinion that music, dances and folklores are being changed and 2% are of the opinion that fairs and festivals are being changed.

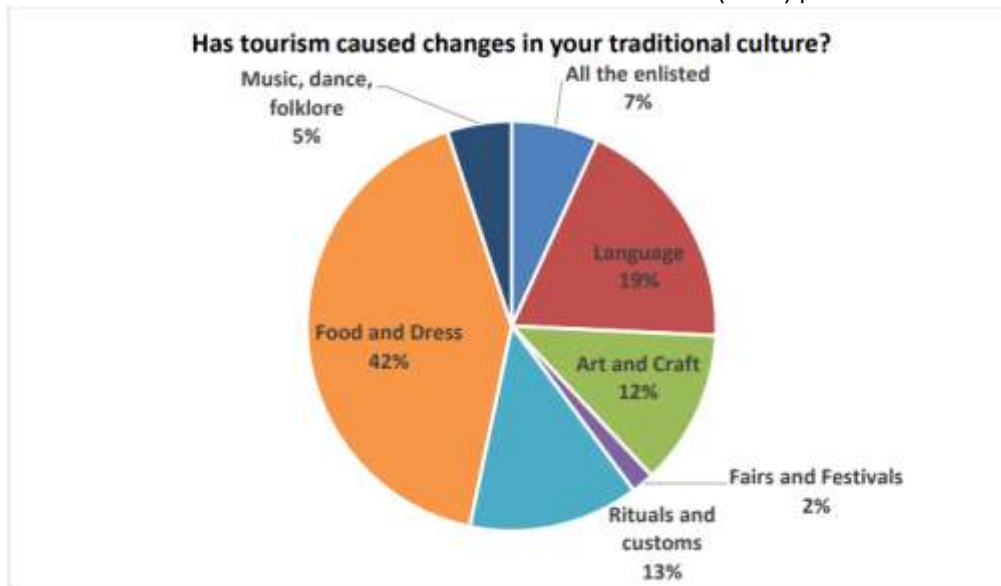


Fig. 9: Changes caused by tourism in the traditional culture

There is a dire need to raise awareness regarding all these issues and tell the locals to follow their traditions and way of life. An important and delightful aspect is that majority of the local community (95%) is satisfied and happy to live in the valley and do not want to migrate anywhere else due to tourism or any other reasons.

Suggestions for Improvement

Tourism in Kaghan valley is increasing day by day and over tourism is creating number of problems. For the sustainable tourism development in the valley, following suggestions are proposed to be implemented on priority:

1. Awareness

There is a dire need of raising awareness among the visitors and the local community. There is a need to aware the visitors to respect the local culture and follow the traditions of the area. Similarly, locals should be taught not to think themselves or their culture as inferior. Visitors come to observe and get knowledge about their culture. Similarly, the local community should be trained in tourism and hospitality related businesses, so that they can take maximum benefits from tourism and lead a prosperous life.

2. Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development

The government should plan tourism in the valley. Different stakeholders and government departments should cooperate with each other and involve the local community in tourism process. Government should implement the rules and regulations regarding the protection of natural and cultural heritage. Similarly, overcrowding should be controlled. In this regard, different stakeholders should play their role by using different media and other means. To make local community prosperous, different micro projects in the field of tourism and

hospitality may be launched and funded. In this way, the local culture and traditional arts and crafts and traditions may be preserved for the future generations. To control overcrowding and concentration of tourists at few destinations in the valley, alternate destinations should be developed in the area. This will not only overcome the over tourism but also reach the benefits of tourism in the whole valley. Some potential destinations are in the planning phase and need to be executed at priority, so that the existing destinations may cater for a long time. The delay in the development of these potential destinations will cause huge damage to the existing destinations.

Conclusion

Kaghan valley of District Mansehra, Pakistan is one of the most beautiful destinations of the country with rich natural and cultural resources. These resources can be best utilized for the satisfaction of varying needs of tourists through sustainable tourism planning and development. Kaghan valley is an emerging tourist destination and the tourist number is increasing day by day. Within a few months of the year, the valley receives millions of tourists and increased number of tourists within three or four months of a year is putting adverse effects on the tourism resources, which are very fragile. The natural and cultural resources are under the threat of deterioration due to unplanned tourism. Similarly, tourism is also effecting the local community of the valley and some negative impacts are being seen on the socio-cultural environments of the valley. Over tourism is also effecting the daily routine businesses of the local community. To take maximum benefits from the tourism and make local community benefitted through tourism, it is the dire need to plan and develop tourism sustainably in the valley. It will not only make the local community tourism friendly and prosperous but also prolong the life of existing tourism resources in the area.

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