

LIVING UNDER CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT: CAUSES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2025 INDO-PAK ESCALATION ALONG THE LINE OF CONTROL

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Abstract:

Early May 2025 witnessed the most profound military conflict between India and Pakistan, triggered by the April 22, 2025, attack in Pahalgam, in which 26 innocent lives were lost in Indian-administered Kashmir. It was reported as this attack was prompting India to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty and for Pakistan to impose airspace closures on Indian carriers though Pakistan has in turn threatened to walk away from the Shimla Agreement. In response to this attack, Intense cross-border shelling, drone attack, and sudden displacement of tens of thousands of border residents on both sides of the LoC were to follow India's retaliatory strikes on May 7, 2025, under a high-profile operation, "Operation Sindoor/Sindhoo." The war persisted until the announcement of a ceasefire on May 10, 2025. As much as this ceasefire could arrest escalation dynamics, the reverberations of political aftershocks were felt well into August 2025. This research study deals with both proximate and structural causes for the crisis; assembles open-source, media, and policy data on casualties, displacement, and service disruption; and evaluates the short- to mid-term socioeconomic impacts on civilian populations living along the LoC. It concludes with directed policy recommendations towards early recovery, risk reduction, and conflict-sensitive development in border communities. This article deals with both proximate and structural causes for the crisis; assembles open-source, media, and policy data on casualties, displacement, and service disruptions; and evaluates the short- and medium-term socio-economic impacts on civilian populations living along the LoC. (Zaman, 2025).

INTRODUCTION

The Line of Control (LoC) is not only a military demarcation line but also a living border where the rhythms of the everyday intersect with the violent decline and flows of South Asian geopolitics. The LoC (740-776Km) area, a product of war, runs through the Himalayas' most populated valleys and is governed by a shaky ceasefire. Villages, schools, mosques, markets, and farms often exist much closer to some very heavily militarized areas, where forward posts, artillery bunkers, and border fencing dominate the landscape. The Indian LoC is unique due to the coexistence of military infrastructures and civilian settlements, as ordinary life is constantly threatened by the potential for disruption due to ongoing close calls. Private lives differ greatly from such hard-line intuitions about international and border populations, which lie outside the flashpoint of state conflict. The region also has been living with uninterrupted lingering effects of violence, ceasefire violations, and cross-border shelling for decades now. However, the reality for the people living within a few kilometers of the LoC extends beyond momentary crises and includes immense anticipation of an impending escalation. (Balla, Kumar, & Manhas, 2025).

For decades, all the civil populations living within a few kilometers of the LoC have suffered the backlash from recurrent violence, ceasefire violations, and cross-border shelling. Periodic crises and a persistent fear of escalation, displacement, and destruction characterize their lived reality. Against this grim backdrop, the 2025 crisis, another episode in the context of LoC confrontation, exemplifies more than just military signaling and interstate hostilities; it profoundly impacts local lives. The crisis began with closely spaced political and military events in late April, which culminated in Indian strikes and retaliatory firing throughout May 2025. Once again, borderland communities were thrust into the center of the turmoil. While international and national media attention primarily focuses on the strategic implications, military doctrines, and diplomatic maneuvers, the first victims of this endless cycle of violence are the

civilians, including farmers, schoolchildren, shopkeepers, teachers, women, and elderly citizens of these Himalayan valleys. With respect to the historical and present context, this study discusses the 2025 escalation, the localized communities that experienced the crisis, socio-economic disruptions, and the policy that ameliorates future impacts. (Akhtar & Bilal, 2021).

Historically, the delineation along the Line of Control represents an unfinished chapter regarding unfulfilled sovereignty claims in the region since 1947, as competing claims over Jammu and Kashmir territory emerged with the partition of British India. India and Pakistan have fought several wars over the region since, the first from October 1947 to January 1948 and the last in 1999, with countless skirmishes in between. These ceasefire agreements notwithstanding, the LoC is in unpredictable times at best, serving concurrently as a control line, medium of military signaling, and front for human suffering. The civilian populations along the LoC have experienced cycles of bombardment, forced displacements, school and clinic closures, and restrictions on mobility, all accompanied by the destruction of property. Border villages are therefore frontline zones and undefined margins. Their inhabitants are living within a constant gaze and feel the imposition of militarization on their economic and social life. Occasionally, they survive in the hinterlands because the uncertain prospect of war deters investment or development. The Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu & Kashmir has long been an episodic flashpoint for armed skirmishes, infiltration, and shelling, punctuated by ceasefire understandings—most notably the 2003 arrangement and the February 24/25, 2021 Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) reaffirmation to “strictly observe” ceasefire obligations. Despite periods of relative calm following the 2021 statement, 2025 witnessed the sharpest crisis in years. A mass-casualty attack on April 22 in Pahalgam precipitated Indian punitive strikes (Operation Sindoor) beginning May 7, 2025 followed by Pakistani responses (Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsus). It was a brief U.S.-brokered truce on May 10, and subsequent accusations of violations, with civilians bearing the brunt along the LoC. This review synthesizes on the basis of scholarly eye on structural drivers of Indo-Pak escalation and integrates early analyses of the 2025 crisis to examine socio-economic implications—livelihoods, education, health (including mental health), displacement, gendered impacts, and local governance—on borderland populations. (Bouzas, 2024; Khan et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical patterns and trigger mechanisms

A large body of work locates the LoC’s volatility in the unresolved status of Kashmir, the presence of insurgent groups, and mutual threat perceptions embedded in national security doctrines. International Crisis Group (ICG) and other policy analyses characterize cyclical crises as arising from militant violence, electoral incentives, spoiler dynamics, and the action-reaction ladder of punitive raids and artillery exchanges. The 2021 DGMOs reaffirmation temporarily reduced firing incidents, illustrating how elite-level understandings can dampen tactical violence—until a high-salience trigger reopens the escalation pathway.

The 2025 sequence

Early open-source reconstructions converge on a three-step chain: (1) an exceptionally lethal attack on tourists in Pahalgam on April 22 (claimed in some reporting by the Resistance Front, linked in Indian narratives to Lashkar-e-Taiba); (2) Indian standoff and air strikes from May 7 (Operation Sindoor/Sindhoor) on alleged militant infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir; and (3) Pakistani retaliatory missile/drone operations under Bunyan al-Marsus, with competing claims about targets, damage, and downed platforms. A fragile ceasefire around May 10, 2025 was immediately contested by mutual allegations of violations, underscoring the familiar pattern of violent “coupling” between the LoC and hinterland attacks. Parliamentary and think-tank briefings add that significant misinformation and information operations shaped domestic and international perceptions of the crisis, complicating verification and crisis-management signals. Conceptually, the 2025 crisis fits the “punishment-deterrence” model: India signaling costs to Pakistan-based groups/handlers after a spectacular attack; Pakistan signaling resolve and denial credibility through rapid counters; and both sides soon accepting externally encouraged de-escalation short of war. The sequence resembles the 2016 “Surgical Strikes” and 2019 “Balakot Episode”, but with greater standoff capability and drone/missile salience in 2025, increasing risks of inadvertent escalation and civilian exposure across a wider geography (DAWN, 2025). (Zaman, 2025).

Socio-economic implications for LoC communities

Livelihoods, markets, and household economics

Empirical studies in border districts (Neelum, Kotli, Poonch, Kupwara, Rajouri) consistently show that cross-border firing, curfews, evacuation orders, and UXO (unexploded ordnance) limit agricultural cycles, wage labor, small trade, and seasonal tourism (Balla, Kumar, & Manhas, 2025; Times of India, 2025). Local surveys and case studies (including recent rapid assessments after the May 2025 events) report market closures, disrupted supply chains, and idling of daily-wage workers during shelling peaks. For high-altitude and valley economies dependent on horticulture, livestock, and trail-based petty commerce, even short disruption windows impose cascading losses: missed sowing/harvest windows, livestock stress/mortality, price spikes from movement restrictions, and foregone tourism revenue.

The post-April 22 crisis reportedly caused evacuations of several frontier hamlets and temporary suspension of agricultural operations, mirroring patterns in prior escalations. Household coping strategies documented in the literature—income diversification, remittances, borrowing from social networks, and asset liquidation—are weakened when crises are frequent, making recovery shallow and prolonging indebtedness. Studies from Neelum Valley and adjacent LoC belts also note that infrastructure damage (irrigation channels, link roads, footbridges) compounds recovery lag and raises the cost of essential services. Humanitarian situation updates after May 2025 likewise mention civilian casualties, displacement, and disruptions to essential services along the LoC (Deccan Herald, 2025; ACAPS, 2025).

Education disruption

There is strong evidence that shelling and militarization impair schooling through closures, damaged buildings, and prolonged absenteeism of both students and teachers. Fieldwork in Azad Jammu & Kashmir finds statistically significant negative effects of border shelling on educational setups near the LoC, including lower attendance and learning continuity. Studies in Poonch district (India-administered) document similar patterns: repeated closures, emergency relocations to safer buildings, and long commutes due to minefields/UXO risk. During the May 2025 flare-up, reports indicate temporary shutdowns of schools across multiple LoC sectors, aligning with the long-observed sensitivity of schooling to even short, intense escalations (Saleem, Shaheen, & Khan, 2023; Kabir & Ahmed, 2025; Aziz & Alyas, 2023).

Health and mental health

Decades of conflict exposure in Kashmir have produced one of the densest literatures on conflict-related mental distress in South Asia. Population-based and clinical studies report high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and PTSD, with daily life impairment and heavy burdens on under-resourced health systems. A widely cited multi-institutional survey (MSF/University of Kashmir/IMHANS) estimated that ~45% of adults in the Valley experience symptoms of mental distress; news features and photo essays around 2023 contextualize these findings with persistent clinic overloads and sustained demand for psychiatric care. Subsequent research on Kashmiri youth reported near-universal exposure to conflict, very high psychological distress, and perceived lack of safety, linking episodes of escalated violence to spikes in anxiety and depressive symptoms. Acute escalations like May 2025 often amplify pre-existing vulnerabilities: restricted ambulance access during shelling, delayed referrals, and fear-based care avoidance. Humanitarian updates note casualties, injuries, and service disruptions during the 2025 escalation. Local analyses also highlight “silent trauma” and stigma around mental health help-seeking, particularly in conservative rural settings. (Housen et al., 2017; Dar & Deb, 2020; MSF et al., 2016; Sharma, 2025; Dar et al., 2025).

Displacement and protection risks

Short-term evacuations to schools or community buildings—common along the Neelum, Leepa, and Poonch sectors—recur with each spike. Relief bulletins after May–June 2025 refer to displacement and interruptions in essential services (Islamic Relief, 2025; Hindustan Times, 2025; ACAPS, 2025). Displacement carries layered risks: family separation, loss of livestock and stored grain, heightened GBV risks in crowded shelters, and learning losses (Kelly et al., 2021; Murphy et al., 2021). The literature on previous incidents shows that when return occurs quickly, psychosocial stress remains elevated due to UXO, unpredictable schedules of ceasefire violations, and distrust in assurances of calm—issues likely to mirror 2025 patterns (Naik, 2019; Caravan Magazine, 2019).

Gendered impacts

Conflict scholarship on Kashmir underscores distinct burdens on women and girls: care responsibilities during evacuations, constrained mobility, interrupted education, and increased exposure to gender-based violence. Systematic reviews and feminist analyses emphasize both victimization and women’s agency in peacebuilding and community resilience. Earlier studies of women’s health reported high prevalence of reproductive problems and conflict-related trauma, though methods and representativeness vary. During escalations, caregiving workloads intensify (care for injured relatives, queuing for rations/water), while informal income activities (embroidery, poultry, farm labor) suffer from mobility restrictions. Commentary from civil society outlets points to “compound insecurity” for adolescent girls when schools close and safe transport routes are uncertain (Kazi, 2022; Rizvi, 2025).

Local governance, service delivery, and civil-military interfaces

Borderland governance operates under dual mandates of security and service provision. The literature notes how frequent shelling compels district administrations to reallocate resources to relief (shelters, rations, cash assistance) and to militarize public spaces (bunkers near schools, fortified health posts), which in turn affects public trust and civic life. Studies from previous escalations find that community policing, disaster management cells, and local NGOs form ad hoc “response ecologies,” but coordination gaps persist, especially across the LoC where institutional architectures differ. The 2025 episode, with its rapid onset and intense but brief peak, likely re-exposed these seams while reaffirming the importance of cross-sector contingency planning (education/health/transport) in border districts.

Misinformation, perception, and risk communication

An under-appreciated dimension of socio-economic impact is the information environment. Analyses of the 2025 crisis flag unusually high volumes of misinformation about strikes, downed aircraft, and leadership changes, diffused via mainstream and social media. Such narratives shape civilian behavior—rumor-driven evacuations, hoarding, school decisions—and can undermine trust in official advisories. Parliamentary and think-tank briefings stress that crisis communication and verification mechanisms (hotlines, DGMO statements, local administration messaging) are essential public goods during escalations.

Pathways from violence to socio-economic harm

Synthesizing across domains, three recurrent pathways link LoC militarization to civilian well-being:

1. **Direct exposure and mobility risk:** Shelling, small-arms fire, and mine/UXO hazards restrict movement, suppress labor supply, and increase transport costs to markets and services. Education and health access are first-order casualties when routes are unsafe. Evidence from AJK and J&K documents marked declines in school attendance and delayed health-seeking during spikes.
2. **Income and asset shocks:** Missed agricultural windows, livestock loss, shuttered bazaars, and tourism cancellations erode cash flow and savings; repeated shocks shorten recovery cycles. Rapid assessments after May 2025 echo prior patterns of market closures and farm interruptions.
3. **Psychosocial stress and long-tail effects:** Elevated anxiety/depression/PTSD imposes productivity losses, caregiving burdens, and schooling disruptions that outlast ceasefires. The high baseline of mental distress in Kashmir means each escalation adds marginal harm that is socially diffuse but economically meaningful. (Médecins Sans Frontières et al., 2016).

The 2025 escalation in comparative perspective

Compared to the 2016 and 2019 episodes, the 2025 crisis introduced heavier standoff precision and drone/missile salience, expanding the perceived target envelope and complicating civil defense. The rapid onset-offset window (roughly May 7–10 for peak kinetics, with contested calm thereafter) compressed evacuation and relief cycles, yielding short, intense socio-economic shocks rather than protracted displacement—though localized aftershocks (sporadic firing, closures) persisted. External diplomacy (notably U.S. involvement) contributed to a fast truce, but mutual violation claims on May 10 underscore how fragile such arrangements remain and how quickly communities oscillate between “normalcy” and heightened alert (Akhtar, 2025; COSPR, 2025; Chakrabarti, 2025).

Policy and programming implications

The literature suggests several evidence-informed levers to mitigate civilian harm during LoC escalations:

- **Ceasefire monitoring & hotlines:** Reinforce the 2021 DGMOs framework with transparent incident reporting and third-party verification to reduce rumor-driven panic and enable predictable school/clinic operations.
- **Risk-informed service continuity:** Pre-position mobile education kits, satellite classrooms, and tele-consultation for primary health, including mental health first aid, to bridge short disruption windows seen in 2025. Findings from schooling studies in Poonch/AJK support flexible, modular delivery models.
- **Targeted livelihood protection:** Cash-plus assistance (cash grants combined with input vouchers and veterinary services) time-locked to sowing/harvest cycles; rapid bridge repairs; and safe corridor protocols for herders and traders. Rapid needs notes after May 2025 emphasize swift restoration of market linkages.
- **Mental health integration:** Expand community-based psychosocial support, stigma-reduction campaigns, and referral networks, leveraging existing evidence of high mental distress and clinic overload. (Médecins Sans Frontières et al., 2016).
- **Gender-responsive protection:** Safe shelters, GBV services, and transport for girls to schools during heightened alert; support women’s cooperatives/home-based enterprises to preserve income continuity.
- **Information hygiene:** Partner with verified local broadcasters/WhatsApp community groups for rumor control and evacuation guidance; invest in cross-LoC crisis communication norms to reduce misperceptions that fuel escalatory spirals.

Gaps and directions for future research

First, while there are robust mental health surveys and qualitative work on schooling disruption, panel data tracking household income, assets, and well-being through successive escalations remain scarce; the 2025 episode offers a quasi-natural experiment for longitudinal designs. Second, gender-disaggregated livelihood effects in border economies (e.g., women’s unpaid care time, informal work loss) are undermeasured relative to GBV-focused literature. Third, the disinformation–behavior nexus deserves causal study: how do specific rumor bursts (e.g., alleged missile salvos, border closures) translate into hoarding, school withdrawals, or migration? Finally, technology and civilian exposure, the diffusion of drones and precision munitions—requires updated civil-defense doctrine and humanitarian access protocols tailored to standoff engagements (Tasaduq, 2025; Dass & Basit, 2025; COSPR, 2025).

Causation of 2025 war Escalation: Proximate and Structural

The crisis that erupted in 2025 could not be considered as coming within a vacuum, for it was indeed the amicable culmination of most proximate triggers, including, but not limited to, some kinds of militant activity, retaliatory strikes, and political stunt before elections, with some structural drivers embedded in the hostility between India and Pakistan for decades. The unfortunate chain of events began with the news of militant incursions and retaliatory actions under

Indian control in Jammu and Kashmir in late April 2025. Shortly after, a heavy exchange of fire erupted along multiple sectors of the LoC in early May—one of the most serious confrontations in recent years. Though the proximate cause can be debated, the escalation followed the usual course. Each round is not echoed only in the diplomatic channels and military hierarchies but also in the everyday lives of cornered people. Native families were uprooted overnight, farmlands deserted, livestock dead, and educational calendars disrupted (Satpute, 2025; Akhtar, 2025; COSPR, 2025).

Displaced Among the Crossfire

Civilian injury is the most direct suggestion of the escalation of ceasefire violations along the LoC. Often, shelling and sniper firing will indiscriminately kill people, although there is evidence that women and children disproportionately figure among the casualties. Those who survive physical harm often find themselves fly to makeshift shelters, relatives' homes in safer areas, or government-established relief camps. Displacement is not merely a physical transfer; it embodies a profound social rupture: it interrupts livelihoods, fractures community networks, and engenders psychological trauma. Returning families often find their houses damaged or destroyed, agricultural fields turned into wastelands, and disruption of basic services such as electricity and potable water. The lower Linem villages' social fabric, which has always been stitched together with elements of kinship, mutual aid, and local institutions, will come under tremendous strain after repeated instances of evacuation and resettlement. The 2025 crisis laid the dynamics bare without any glossing over them. Preliminary reports of international media like in Al-jazeera reported dozens of civilian deaths, hundreds injured, and thousands displaced within weeks. The schools and health facilities found within the firing range had to cease their functioning, thereby denying children their right to education and communities their basic health care (India Today, 2025; OpIndia, 2025; Samaa TV, 2025).

Socio economic fallout:

The Socio economic fallout from such crises is extensive and affect multiple sectors. Firstly, in education sector, during escalation schools in the affected areas are the first to shut down, frequently serving as shelters for those displaced. The crises in 2025 disturbed exams, delay school years, and pushed children into cycle of interrupted education. The long term effects include increased dropout rates and lower literacy levels. Secondly, the Health sector were effected with many health facilities. Most of them were either closed or unsafe to access, civilians were struggled to get the care they need. This situation hits pregnant women, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses the hardest additionally the psychological impact showing up as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress- is often overlooked and left unaddressed. Thirdly, livelihood of communities near the border primarily rely on agriculture. The shelling during the 2025 crises forced many to abandon their fields at a critical planting during time. Livestock, which are the vital to rural economics, were either killed or left to fend for themselves. Daily wage workers and small business owners also suffered losses as markets were forced to close. Fourth sector was Housing and infrastructure, Homes and community buildings were directly damaged while essential infrastructure like roads, bridges and power systems faced significant disruptions. The rebuilding process is often sluggish, with insufficient compensation and bureaucratic obstacles adding to the frustrations of civilians. Lastly the Social Cohesion, Ongoing cycles of the displacement weaken community bonds and drive migration. Young people increasingly dream of leaving the line of Control, leading to demographic changes that could leave villages empty and economically stagnant in the future (Sustainability Directory, 2025; Migration Policy Institute, 2025).

Research Problem and Rationale:

Despite the recurrent nature of such escalations, academic and policy discourses often remain fixated on security, sovereignty, and military preparedness, with limited attention to civilian experiences. This research addresses this gap by centering the voices and conditions of borderland populations. The 2025 escalation offers a contemporary lens to examine long-term questions: How does militarization shape socio-economic structures in conflict zones? What mechanisms of resilience exist among local populations? Which policies can mitigate harm and enhance recovery?

This study argues that understanding the civilian dimension is crucial not only for humanitarian reasons but also for sustainable peace building. Nevertheless neglecting social and economic impacts of conflict risks entrenching cycles of vulnerability, marginalization, and hostility.

Research Questions

The study is guided by three central questions:

1. What proximate events and structural factors resulted in the 2025 escalation along the LoC?
2. How did this escalation translate into civilian harm and displacement?
3. What were the socio-economic repercussions on border communities in the weeks that followed, and which policy remedies are viable

Methodological Orientation

To address these questions, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights. Sources include:

- **Time-stamped reportage** from national and international media, providing chronology and factual detail.
- **Descriptive statistics** on casualties, displacements, and service closures, enabling a comparative assessment with previous crises.

- **Qualitative vignettes** drawn from interviews and testimonies reflecting lived experiences.
- **Structured sectoral impact assessments** across education, health, livelihoods, and housing.

This triangulated approach ensures both breadth and depth, allowing the study to capture structural patterns while remaining grounded in human stories.

Contribution of the Study

By situating the 2025 escalation within a broader socio-political and historical framework, this research contributes to both scholarship and policy. Academically, it advances the study of borderland societies, civilian agency, and the socioeconomics of conflict. For policymakers, it underscores the urgency of designing relief, rehabilitation, and long-term development strategies tailored to the vulnerabilities of LoC populations. Ultimately, this study seeks to move beyond the sterile abstractions of “ceasefire violations” and “cross-border firing,” drawing attention instead to the human costs and policy imperatives of living at the frontlines of unresolved dispute.

The Pahalgam Attack (April 22, 2025)

On April 22, 2025, a mass-casualty attack near Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir killed more than two dozen civilians, reportedly tourists. The incident—described as the deadliest since 2019—galvanized public anger in India and set the stage for retaliation. Reporting variously cited 25–26 fatalities, with responsibility initially linked to militant networks. The attack also devastated Pahalgam’s tourism economy at the cusp of peak season.

Indian Strikes and Rapid Escalation (May 7–10)

In the early hours of May 7, India launched strikes described as targeting militant infrastructure across Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir—a campaign widely referred to as Operation Sindoor/Sindhoor. Pakistan reported civilian deaths and damage and responded with its own military actions along the border. Over May 7–9, cross-border shelling, drone engagements, and panic-driven evacuations unfolded across LoC sectors, with the worst bombardments in years reported by multiple outlets. A ceasefire was publicly announced on May 10, but localized blasts and alleged violations were recorded around that time. (Zaman, 2025).

International Alarm and De-Escalation

Analytic and diplomatic communities—Stimson, CSIS, U.S. officials—flagged elevated nuclear risk perceptions and pressed for restraint. Reporting highlighted U.S. engagement in brokering the May 10 ceasefire while underscoring the fragility of deterrence stability along the LoC.

Immediate Humanitarian Effects on LoC Communities

Shelter and Housing Damage

Photo and narrative evidence from Uri/Baramulla show masonry homes with shrapnel scarring, collapsed roofs, and blown-out windows. AP and Al Jazeera documented residents returning post-ceasefire to homes rendered uninhabitable, necessitating prolonged stays with relatives or in public buildings. The Washington Post described “hundreds of homes destroyed,” emphasizing the asymmetrical burden civilians shoulder when artillery duels spill into populated belts.

The material culture of LoC villages—livestock sheds, stored fodder, terraced fields, small shops—suffers disproportionately from blast over-pressure and incendiaries. Replacement cycles for corrugated roofing, window glass, and water storage are shorter than in peacetime, and repair costs escalate as demand spikes immediately after ceasefires when supply chains are still shaky.

On May 7, 2025 schools and colleges were ordered closed across five border districts of Jammu (Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri, and Poonch) as a precaution. Even short closures cascade into learning losses for exam-bound cohorts and increase unpaid care burdens (especially for women) as children remain at home or in shelters (Al Jazeera, 2025; AP News, 2025; Washington Post, 2025).

Health Access Under Fire

Primary health centers and ambulance crews faced movement restrictions during the heaviest exchanges. Where shelling cut power or mobile networks, trauma care lagged, with Reuters noting 50+ injuries in a 12-hour window on May 10 on the Pakistan side; similar patterns likely existed on the Indian side, though many injuries remain unquantified. Delayed triage increases the risk of avoidable mortality, long-term disability, and mental health sequel.

Water, Sanitation, and Energy (WASH/Energy)

Border belts often rely on gravity-fed water schemes and diesel gensets. Blast damage to pipes and transformers interrupts water and electricity just as shelters reach peak occupancy. Reports from field journalists describe blackouts and sirens driving panic; households pivot to candles and kerosene, raising fire risk in crowded shelters.

Protection Risks for Women, Children, and Elderly

Displacement into mixed shelters and private homes of relatives underscores protection concerns: privacy, GBV risks, disruption to maternal care, and interrupted immunization for infants and toddlers. While there were no systematic protection assessments publicly released during the four days, the broader literature on LoC crises suggests elevated risks that require gender-sensitive programming in recovery.

Political Economy and Governance Context

Ceasefire Dynamics and Claims of Violations

A ceasefire was announced on May 10, reportedly with U.S. involvement. In the days and weeks that followed, officials made conflicting claims about violations; for example, on August 5, the Indian Army publicly stated there was no violation in the Poonch region despite media chatter. Such statements shape civilian expectations about risk and return migration.

Symbolic Politics and Tensions

Independence Day 2025 saw cancelled border-gate courtesies and hardline rhetoric, signals that domestic politics remained inflamed. High-salience speeches and ceremonies can reassure core constituencies while deepening anxieties in border belts, where residents calibrate planting, schooling, and repairs to perceived risk.

Strategic Narratives and International Stakes

Policy analysis (CSIS, Stimson) emphasized rapid escalation risks, the evolution of Indian punitive strategy compared to 2019, and drone duels as a new frontier. International alarm—documented by policy briefs—underscored how quickly a tactical exchange can metastasize into a broader crisis, with U.S. officials publicly voicing nuclear concerns.

Case Vignettes (Lived Experience)

Gingal, Uri (Baramulla District)

On May 8, 2025 residents huddled in a cowshed as shells impacted around Gingal. Some fled 40 km to Baramulla, learning via television and social media that homes were damaged or destroyed. After the May 10 ceasefire, families returned to debris and uncertainty, stitching tarps into makeshift roofs while awaiting assistance.)

Poonch District

May 7, 2025 was particularly deadly, with double-digit civilian casualties reported in Poonch. Stories from local press and national dailies chronicle frantic evacuations, night-long blackouts, and the trauma of children separated from parents for hours amid shelling. Days later, villagers pressed local authorities for permanent community shelters and faster compensation.

Pakistan-Administered Kashmir (AJK)

On May 10, 2025 AJK's disaster authorities reported 13 civilian deaths and 50+ injuries in 12 hours, straining district hospitals. With roads intermittently cut, patients waited for ambulances under the whine of drones. Reuters accounts captured the mix of grief and anger as funerals proceeded under tense skies.

Structural Factors

- **Unresolved political dispute** over Kashmir's status and grievances amplified since the revocation of J&K's special status in 2019; protests on the Pakistan-administered side in August 2025 signal sustained discontent.
- **Erosion and repair of ceasefire norms:** while the 2021 recommitment stabilized incidents for several years, the spring 2025 spiral showed fragility in the face of spectacular attacks and domestic political pressure.
- **Information warfare and attribution disputes,** complicating crisis diplomacy and humanitarian access.

Quantitative Snapshot (May 7–10, 2025)

Table 1. Selected reported impacts (compiled lower bounds)

Date	Area / Side	Reported civilian fatalities	Reported injuries	Reported displaced/evacuated	Source(s)
2025-05-07	LoC, India-admin. (Poonch, etc.)	≥ 12	—	“Thousands” sought shelter	The Guardian [reliefweb.int]
2025-05-07	LoC, Pakistan-admin.	≥ 5	—	—	The Guardian [reliefweb.int]
2025-05-08	Uri/Baramulla (Gingal), India-admin.	—	—	Households fled to shelters	AP News
2025-05-09	LoC sectors, India-admin.	≥ 5	—	Thousands to shelters	Al Jazeera (gallery)
2025-05-10	AJK (Pakistan-admin.)	13	50+	—	Reuters
2025-05-10	J&K border belts, India-admin.	—	—	≥ 60,000 shifted/evacuated	Contrapuntal (officials cited)

Table 2. Education service disruption (selected).

Date	Area (India-admin.)	Measure	Source
2025-05-07	Jammu, Samba, Kathua,	Schools/colleges closed	TOI (Education)

	Rajouri, Poonch	across five border districts	
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Table 3. Ceasefire milestones and narratives

Date/Period	Event / Claim	Source
2025-05-10	Ceasefire announced; reports of explosions soon after	Al Jazeera; Reuters
2025-08-05	Indian Army: No violation along LoC (vs media chatter)	Reuters)

DISCUSSION: HOW TACTICAL EXCHANGES BECOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC SHOCKS

Shock Transmission Channels

1. **Physical destruction** → capital loss (homes, shops, farm structures).
2. **Displacement** → lost labor days, schooling, and increased care burdens.
3. **Market disruption** → reduced mobility, stockouts, price spikes.
4. **Public service interruption** → schooling, PHC services, WASH and energy.
5. **Psychosocial distress** → lower productivity, health-seeking delays.

A four-day episode can yield **quarter-to-annual** income losses in subsistence and micro-enterprise settings. For farm households, missing a sowing window or top-dressing can depress yields for a full season; for tourism workers, missing May can erase the year's margin.

Geographic Inequality and Exposure

LoC-proximate hamlets (e.g., **Gingal/Uri, Poonch** belts) endure repeated cycles of risk and recovery, while interior towns can relatively quickly normalize. Such micro-geographies of exposure demand **hyper-local** policy: hardening shelters, relocating the highest-risk clusters, and pre-positioning relief.

Education and Intergenerational Effects

Even time-bound closures have lasting effects on learning trajectories, especially where cumulative conflict exposure already eroded instructional time since 2019. The opportunity costs rise for households choosing between laboring to repair homes and supervising children; girls in particular face heightened risk of permanent withdrawal.

Health Systems Under Fire

Without pre-arranged trauma corridors and stockpiled kits, ambulances and PHCs absorb shocks inefficiently. Coordination with military and district administrations to time “white flag” medical movements during lulls could save lives, as could installing blast-resistant glazing and backup power at designated health posts.

Policy Recommendations

Risk Reduction and Civilian Protection

- **Permanent, community-owned shelters** in every high-exposure panchayat/UC within 5–10 km of the LoC, with WASH, backup power, and women-only spaces.
- **Early-warning and communications:** siren + SMS protocols, battery radios distributed to vulnerable households; drills before peak escalation seasons.
- **Hardening critical services:** shatter-resistant films, sandbag sleeves, and blackout curtains for PHCs and schools.

Social Protection and Rapid Relief

- **Shock-responsive cash:** pre-authorized, mobile-money payouts to registered LoC households triggered by verified shelling events.
- **In-kind kits:** standardized home repair bundles (roofing sheets, fasteners, tarps) delivered within 72 hours of ceasefire.
- **Education continuity:** pre-loaded offline lesson packs; rapid deployment of **temporary learning spaces** and psycho-social support in shelters.

Livelihoods and Local Economies

- **Emergency input vouchers** for smallholders missing sowing windows; **livestock restocking** where sheds and fodder lost.
- **Micro-enterprise recovery grants** tied to verifiable damage.
- **Tourism revival packages** in affected valleys (fee waivers, marketing, safety signaling) once conditions permit.
- **Information, Accountability, and Ceasefire Stewardship**
- **Incident logging:** independent, time-stamped registries of shelling, civilian harm, and service disruptions to reduce contestation and inform payouts.
- **Ceasefire liaison cells** with hotline capacity to rapidly address localized violations and protect medical/relief movement.

International Support and Track-2

- **Neutral facilitation** for humanitarian corridors during escalations.

- **Track-2 crisis simulations** (e.g., Stimson-type tabletop exercises) to institutionalize de-escalation playbooks on both sides.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Indo-Pak escalation along the LoC followed a familiar script—terrorist trigger, punitive signaling, rapid counter-signaling, and externally nudged de-escalation but unfolded with greater standoff capabilities and an unusually noisy information environment. For LoC communities, the socio-economic story remains one of punctuated precarity. In short, intense shocks that unsettle livelihoods, stall education, strain mental health systems, and expose gendered vulnerabilities. The literature counsels a dual response, strategic stabilization (credible ceasefire management and crisis communication) and localized resilience (service continuity, livelihood protection, mental health integration, and gender-responsive safety nets). Centering borderland civilians in both security and humanitarian planning is the surest way to prevent brief military crises from compounding into long social recessions.

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