

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Surge of Women Radicalization after 9/11: Unraveling Dynamics in Pakistan****¹Abeera Haider and ²Dr. Saqib Khan Warraich***

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***Corresponding Author:** dr.saqibkhan@gcu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

It is a conventional image of terrorist that they focus on young males only while women are also working for them. Previously, women were working covertly for extremist and militant outfits. But the recent groups like TTP, AQIS and ISIS have changed the trends. This article gives insight into women and radicalization in Pakistan. Women are integral part of any society so their radicalization is a significant threat to global values of a liberal society. The research argues the necessity of strategic and ideological pillars to de-chain the feminized radicalization and suicide terrorism in Pakistan like *Jihadi* landscape. It is based on qualitative analysis of data. The Social Identity Theory is applied to study the process by which an affluent woman transforms into religious extremist and works as front line operator.

KEYWORDS: Extremist Ideology, Radicalization, Terrorism, Terrorist Organizations, Women**Introduction**

Women involvement in terrorism is very old. In early radical and revolutionary movements, their engagement can be seen as progression. It is a stereotypical image of terrorist that they focus on young males while history shows the women participation since 19th century. Traditionally, the assigned role of women to political movements is to rise the next generation of fighters, instills their ideological commitment and military skills. With the advancement in technologies, the roles of women have also expanded. In recent times, their function is to support terrorist groups. As woman is the central figure of the family, terrorists are using them as a powerful symbol in terrorist propaganda to projects the notions of gender equality. Within earlier Islamist groups, women's involvement was limited due to patriarchal influence. But the recent groups have changed the trends. TTP and ISIS are particularly working recruitment of women. They are assigning them roles of fundraisers, disseminations of their ideology and even for suicide bombing. They have learnt that women are usually not checked on check-points, so they found it easy to by-pass security checkpoints.

In Pakistan women participation in political movements is not a new phenomenon. However, radical and terrorist outfits are exploiting their sentiments for their purpose. TTP, AQIS and ISIS have changed their male-centric approach while the policy makers and security agencies are still overlooking the significant role of women. It is surprising those apparently terrorist outfits are against women education, impose restrictions on their jobs and confined them to household activities. Despite of all, these groups are recruiting women, what we call "*Women's Jihad*". The involvement of women as jihadist has largely remained hidden. Male suicide bombers are more prevalent than female suicide bombers. But the cases of women's involvement in radical activities are growing up in numbers, with every passing day. Most of the cases are from the remote

regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Security agencies highlight the use of veil by female radicals and extremist. They report the use of veil even in suicide bombing. Females place explosive materials in their jackets and cover over a veil. There are also reports of female extremist's cells of Taliban and other jihadist groups operating in northeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. The case of Meena Gull is very prominent in this aspect. She was 12 years old Pakistani girl. She received training in smart cells on both sides of borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Meena Gull confessed that she was getting training of suicide bomber with the belief that she will be awarded in heaven. She further revealed about her sister-in-law, Zainab, who was leading her cell and fought against Pakistani troops alongside the Taliban. (Reuter, 2011)

Since 2015, there is noticeable rise in women's participation in jihadist organizations like AQIS and ISIS. The famous *Shaheen wing* of AQIS has trained over 500 female jihadists. The transition of role of women within radical and extremist groups underscores the need for a better understanding. The changing dynamics of radicalization of women in Pakistan requires effective counterterrorism strategies. (Warraich, Alam, Khan, Haider, & Khan, 2020)

Literature Review

The Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) urges women to stand up against patriarchal system and to participate in Jihad to get Jannah. They provide them with weapons as well as give them physical training. Firearms and grenades are given to them in the name of their security. TTP has changed their strategy. Previously they recruit women just to encourage her for the execution of 'martyrdom operation'. But now they are sending them to targeted locations as well. TTP has also introduced their magazine "Sunnat e Khawla" in August 2017 to get attention of women (Afridi & Gull, 2018). They prefer educated women just like ISIS. TTP is currently focusing on recruiting women from urban areas of Pakistan. They are focusing to involve working women like engineers, doctors, and teachers etc to spread their ideology. The working women have links with many families. So TTP used them as an instrument to penetrate and disseminate their ideology to maximum number of people. The wife of Mullah Fazalullah asks women to expand group membership through childbirth and indoctrinate TTP's ideology in their offspring. (Hussain, 2010)

TTP get women's attention by encouraging them to move beyond conventional roles of fundraiser, recruiter and propagandists and play more active role in violent jihad. TTP and other militant organizations are taking advantage limited inclusion of women in Pakistan Police and Military.

The trend of support of ISIS (Daesh) by Pakistani women started in January 2016. Several cases have been reported about women radicalization since then. In Lahore, a woman led three families and flees to Syria to support ISIS. A married couple was also arrested in Lahore for facilitating people to travel to Syria to support and join ISIS. Furthermore three women were arrested from Karachi for fundraising and propagation of ISIS ideology. Moreover, six women and thirteen men were detained on suspicions of links with ISIS. (Gul, 2018)

The case of Kamran Gujjar is also of very importance. He was arrested in Punjab. He revealed that his wife and sister-in-law were also working for ISIS. Before this incident, in December 2015, Karachi police arrested a group of 20 female members who had ties with ISIS. (Waseem, 2016)

Another incident, there was an academy in Baloch Colony, Karachi. The neighborhood attracts those women by showing propaganda videos of ISIS. The female students were from middle-class families. The women urged those students for

fundraising to support ISIS's goal of establishing caliphate. A well known city's chief officer of Counter Terrorism, Raja Omer Khattab revealed the presence of a group of women who were working for ISIS. The group arranges marriages and raise funds to support ISIS ideology. There were almost 12 ladies in the group. Surprisingly, among them, one woman was the wife of Omar, also known as Jalal Chandio. (Ahmed, 2016)

Generally, the supporting women of ISIS in Pakistan are the followers of strict Wahhabi/ Salfi doctrine. They often associate themselves with Jamaat ud Daawa. A much highlighted case of Bushra Cheema is its example. She was doing her M.Phil in Islamic Education at Punjab University and was also running her network, Bushra network, in Lahore. She sent many young people for jihad to Syria and later on she also left for Syria in September 2015 along with her four kids. Bushra was an educator at Noor ul Huda Islamic Centre which is a religious school for Salafi girls. Nimi Gowrinathan analyzes her radicalization as an expression of identity crisis, rooted in grievances against the state. (Ismail, Shah, Saleem, & Khan, 2022)

The case of Ms. Irshad Bibi, is also very significant in this context. She was a teenager who joined a ISIS in April 2015, in Syria. She was a teacher at a religious school near Sakim Mor in Lahore. She left a note to her mother and daughter. Later she contacts her mother from Syria, and explains her departure as for Jihad. Furthermore, the recent example of women radicalization in Pakistan is of a young medical student in February 2017. (Gul, 2018)

Theoretical Framework

Man is social being. He influences from his surroundings. He learns moral values, social norms and understandings of truth and false from his social connections. Within societal boundaries, man's loyalties can be nurtures; solidarity and empathy are practiced but simultaneously can be conducive to hostilities, rivalries and conflicts. The society shapes their opinions, constructs his worldviews, built narratives, and facilitate in transition of individual aspirations.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) helps in understanding the phenomenon of formation, mobilization, administration and management of social identity. This theory helps in inquiring the genesis of groups, their collective perspectives and the operations underpinning the conversion and development of their ideologies. This theory discusses about self-esteem of individuals of a certain group. This theory helps to study the process by which a person identify himself with a certain group, get favors from that particular group and feel satisfaction in belongingness to that group. This process involves three stages:

1. **Social categorization:** Initially individuals classify themselves and others into societal groups based on various criteria.
2. **Social identification:** People then emotionally associate to that group. They even alter their attitudes and beliefs due to attachment to that group.
3. **Social comparison:** At last stage, individuals compare their group to others. They enhance their ego by associating themselves to that group. This phenomenon seeks to take advantage of similarities within groups while emphasizing differences between groups.

Causes of Women Radicalization in Pakistan

After 9/11, people of Muslim world feel emotionally threatened with the word *terrorism*. This word is perceived as synonym to the act of terror carried out by militant

and terrorist outfits. Furthermore, the media complements by linking these horrendous terror attacks to *Islamic Jihad*. Terrorism has brought adverse impacts on social, political and physical infrastructure of states. Pakistan has suffered particularly. It paid social, economic and human cost excessively due to terrorism. Surprisingly, Pakistan is fighting in the international war against terrorism on the front line but on the same time getting label as a *sponsor* of international terrorism.

In Pakistan, terrorism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. There are many contributing factors that lead a man to act violently, but psychological factor is the most important one. It is not a single moment inspiration to carry out terrorist activity rather it is a complex phenomenon of cognitive activities. The quest for personal meaning and significance enhance their motivation. Moreover, socio-economic adversities combined with political instability put detrimental impact over individual's thinking and mind. Terrorist use dichotomous techniques to attract others to conduct their activities i.e. I am good and the other person is bad. They do not use intermediary shades of grey.

The personality traits and environmental condition are the predictors to understand why people become terrorists. Women terrorists are primarily motivated by revenge while men are through clinical depression. Women are generally triggered to terrorism to take revenge for lost loved one, to seek salvations for past moments, to restore self-esteem, a response to sexual exploitation or have ties to male members who are already working for a terrorist group. The Muslim culture that glorifies martyrdom also attracts women.

In Pakistani society, one can expect radicalization of women due to male dominated social environments. Several cases have been reported of women's involvement from northwestern and southern Punjab areas. This is primarily due to conservative surroundings, religiosity and limited exposure to modern knowledge. Historically, women are more inclined than men to contribute material assets and sacrifice their sons to the cause of Jihad. For example, after 9/11, militants in Pakistan mobilized people to support their agenda. Surprisingly, women came in front and much of the donations were poured in the form of cash and gold jewelry. Large number of women supporters was from Swat region. They enthusiastically donate valuable goods to support Mullah Sufi and Mullah Fazlullah. Terrorists knows the importance of women in the family, consequently they have now started focusing more on the recruitment of women through 'domestic radicalization'. Domestic Radicalization means to radicalize the women to that extent that she starts inculcating in the minds of their kids with the extremist ideology of that particular group.

Furthermore, the infiltration of recruiters from trans-border jihadist network is also a persistent challenge for Pakistani government. The arrest of Pakistani-Syrian in Lahore, Yousaf al Salafi in January 2015 highlights this issue. He confessed to represent ISIS in Pakistan. He made his way to Pakistan through Turkey to disseminate ISIS ideology (Khan M. N., 2017). To prevent individual's entry from the Pakistani Diaspora is expected to be very challenging for the Pakistani government. The militant and extremist groups have established their local networks in Pakistan. Moreover, those traders who have rigid religious inclinations resist paying taxes to Pakistani government and liking to donate to Islamic organizations for religious cause. It is sacred for them to donate to these organizations. Al-Qaeda, ISIS, AQIS and other such organizations sustain due to their religious slogans. Even if these are weakened still they will pose a serious threat to Pakistan because they have deep rooted themselves in the social environment of Pakistan.

The trend of recruitment of women from rural areas has now changed. The radical organizations have now targeted the women of urban areas as well. Surprisingly, women of urban areas willingly join Islamist militant organizations to get equal rights to

men. So in this perspective, women involvement can be seen due to gender-specific or personal factor to answer why women are radicalized in the name of Islam in Pakistan.

Women Radicalization in Pakistan

In Pakistan, there have been many cases of women radicalization and women involvement in terror leading activities. Sometimes they associate themselves to any Islamist political party as well to get political shed. A very well known case is of Sahiba Shahid who was the wife of former National Hockey Team Captain, Shahid Ali Khan. She was an active member of women wing of Jamaat e Islami. She was alleged in providing shelter to militants. (Khan A. U., 2005) Like her, other women also play significant role in aiding male family members. Cases have also report in Karachi of receiving and burying the dead bodies of militants by women.

The case of Farzana, who was the district leader of Jamaat e Islami, is also intimidating for the authorities of Pakistan. She was supporting Al-Qaeda. She helped them by giving shelters to their followers. The mastermind of 9/11 was arrested from her house. (Tankel, 2013)

The female students of Jamia Hafsa were also reported in involving radical activities. The Musharraf government sent Special Forces in the Red Mosque for operation against Islamist militants in July 2007. The wife of Maulana Abdul Aziz, Umm e Hassan was openly supporting Taliban and their efforts against United State and its allies (Sengupta & Sarfaraz, 2007).

Moreover, the sub-nationalist militant organizations in Baluchistan have recruited a large number of women. This is something opposite to Baloch culture. The Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have even hired correspondents for the dissemination of their ideology. BLA have *Majeed Brigade* wing that is radicalizing women for suicide bombing. The cases of missing persons in Balochistan are uses as key cards by these militant organizations to radicalize their families. The cases of Mahal Bloch and Shari Bloch are recent examples of women radicalization. Mahal Bloch was recruited by BLF despite of her resistance. These organizations also share videos of such women to attract others as well. They made documentaries and even share their burial posts on their Twitter accounts. All this is to develop positive sentiments and to get sympathy from the others. The issue of governance, the exploitive Sardari System and regional challenges in Baluchistan has further aggravated the situation. It has created an alarming situation and obviously threatens the cherished norms of Balochistan. It is the need of hour to take immediate steps by the government.

Strategies of TTP and ISIS to Radicalize Women in Pakistan

Both the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State (ISIS) have employed various strategies to radicalize women in Pakistan. The radicalization process often involves exploiting grievances, promoting a distorted interpretation of Islam, and using social and psychological tactics to draw women into their extremist ideologies. Here are some common strategies used by TTP and ISIS:

Propaganda and Recruitment Material

- **TTP:** Uses local media, pamphlets, and local clerics to spread their ideology.
- **ISIS:** Has a sophisticated online presence and uses social media platforms to disseminate propaganda globally. They publish magazines, post videos, and other online content that portray an idealized version of life under their interpretation of Islam.

Exploitation of Grievances

- **TTP:** Exploits local grievances, such as perceived injustices, drone strikes, and military actions, to garner support.
- **ISIS:** Capitalizes on broader grievances, including sectarian tensions, political instability, and perceived oppression of Muslims globally, to attract sympathizers.

Online Radicalization

- **TTP:** Utilizes local networks, including madrasas and community leaders, for recruitment. Online radicalization is present but may not be as pronounced as in the case of ISIS.
- **ISIS:** Leverages online platforms extensively for recruitment, using social media, encrypted messaging apps, and online forums to connect with potential recruits globally.

Promotion of a Distorted Interpretation of Islam

- **TTP:** Advocates for a strict interpretation of Sharia law within the local context.
- **ISIS:** Promotes an extreme and violent interpretation of Islam, justifying acts of terrorism and violence against perceived enemies.

Social Networks and Peer Influence

- **TTP:** Relies on existing social networks and familial ties for recruitment, with community leaders playing a significant role.
- **ISIS:** Targets vulnerable individuals who may be influenced by friends or family members already sympathetic to their cause. Peer influence is particularly strong in the case of online recruitment.

Incentives and Appeals to Idealism

- **TTP:** May appeal to a sense of duty and patriotism, portraying itself as a defender of Islam against perceived external threats.
- **ISIS:** Appeals to idealism by presenting a utopian vision of an Islamic caliphate, promising a sense of belonging, purpose, and empowerment.

Financial and Logistical Support:

- **TTP:** May provide financial and logistical support to individuals and families of militants, creating a sense of dependency.
- **ISIS:** Has been known to provide financial incentives and support to recruits and their families, attracting individuals seeking economic stability or rewards.

Instrumental Use of Women

- **TTP:** Utilizes women for specific roles, such as fundraising and facilitating marriages for militants.
- **ISIS:** Actively recruits women, sometimes employing them in propaganda efforts or encouraging their involvement in support roles or even combat.

Implications of Women Radicalization for Pakistani Society

The radicalization of women is badly affecting the Pakistani society. Its repercussions have extended to familial relationships, social cohesion and the nation's overarching stability. Its multifaceted impacts are discussed below:-

Shifts in Family Dynamics

Women's radicalization in Pakistan develops new family structures. It influences relationships and impacting the upbringing of the next generation. Their radicalization introduces novel dynamics in the family that disrupt their traditions and leads to conflicts between and within families.

Security Challenges

Their involvement in radical activities gives new dimensions to security challenges.

The security agencies has not focused on their role earlier. They were not thinking that terrorist may use them as weapon as well. So it requires a comprehensive reassessment of counter-terrorism measures.

Educational and Economic Impacts

The radicalization of women has also impacts in educational and economic aspects. As woman is the first school of her child, her radicalization will definitely affects the psychology of new generation.

Societal Fragmentation

Terrorists want to create fragmentation in the society. That's why they give different meanings to Islamic concept. They want to engage society in different sects. So the radicalization of women will create radicalized pockets within society that will surely fosters division, fragmentation and mistrust. This division is an alarm to social cohesion, hinder the development of a collective national identity and will create an environment favorable to extremist ideologies.

Women's Empowerment Paradox

Militant and extremists raise the slogans of women empowerment. They attract women by exploiting their emotions. They ask them to revolt against your family if you are not getting your rights. They use 'Gender Equality' agenda. It creates disturbance in society. State should use measures to disseminate gender equality positively.

Psychological Toll

Radicalization always badly affects the psychology, whether it is man or woman. It is the game of minds. It affects the psychological health of that particular women and also of the whole family. They have to go through trauma.

Generational Transmission of Radicalization

It increases the risk of the generational transmission of extremist ideologies. In Pakistan women has the responsibility to look after her kids. So the whole family is at high risk if their basic cell is under influence of radical groups. Generation will inherit those radical ideologies. That's why ISIS and TTP are specially recruiting women so that their ideology spread speedily.

By applying Social Identity Theory, the study finds that Pakistani women have experienced significant threats to their social identities especially after 9/ 11. They feel themselves as marginalized community from mainstream society and this exclusion develops identity crisis among some women. The post 9/11 contributed with a sense of defending faith against West. It leads women to seek radical ideologies for their empowerment. The research identifies the influence of social networks on the radicalization of women. The radical organizations provide them an environment of belongingness and a sense of purpose. It appeals women to restore their self-esteem. The radical outfits also give them confidence and support to challenge patriarchal structure of society. So it attracts women that they are part of such movement which gives sense of empowerment, they play more active role. So the study finds to de-chain radicalization of women, social exclusion must be addressed.

Conclusion

Radicalization in Pakistan poses significant threat. It is the product of bad governance, lack of education, non-seriousness of political parties, unfair government policies as well as societal structures. Resultantly, it is leading to terrorism in Pakistan. However, very little research has been done so far on the role of women in terrorist organizations. Their engagement in their outfits is not only affecting a single person, a single family but the whole community, collectively. It affects the religious, social, cultural and political perspectives of whole nation. To counter extremist and militant outfits, like ISIS and TTP, government needs to promote counter-narrative strategies because if they diminish ideologically they still have the capacity to recruit people with virulent mindsets, both men and women. Government should take help of religious and community leaders to create counter-narrative. Furthermore, it requires constant surveillances on their activities and efforts of soft power initiatives.

Recommendations

The radicalization of women in Pakistan is a bitter reality and cannot be ignored. Females are more than males in number in Pakistan. So their role is very significant both in betterment or destruction of society. Following are some of the suggestion for the concerned authorities:

- Government should take steps to promote women's empowerment and economic independence to counter the extremist's strategies
- Initiatives should be taken to address social exclusion of females in a society.
- Security agencies must shift their male centric approach to counter terrorism to neutral-gender approach.
- Government should increase economic documentation
- Continuous monitoring of religious institutions and religious parties
- State should take control of those religious institutions that particularly holds agenda of Anti-Western Ideology

Pakistan's society is a blend of strong family ties and bonds. Women play key role in building strong family bonds. If extremists can use women as a weapon, as a tool for dissemination of their ideology, then why not the government can take steps of their empowerment, socially, politically, economically, so the whole nation develops.

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