**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Terrorism has long been a pressing global issue, with various regions experiencing different forms of violent extremism. While much research has been dedicated to understanding the motivations, recruitment patterns, and operational strategies of male terrorists, relatively less attention has been given to the role of women in terrorism. In Northwestern Pakistan, a region plagued by instability and conflict, the involvement of women in terrorist activities presents a complex and often overlooked dimension of violent extremism. The traditional narrative tends to portray women as passive victims of conflict rather than active participants, but recent evidence suggests that they play significant roles ranging from logistical support to direct combat roles in terrorist organizations.

Understanding the psychology of female terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan requires a multi-faceted approach that considers cultural, religious, socio-political, and economic factors. Women involved in terrorism in this region may be influenced by a variety of factors, including coercion, radicalization, ideological commitment, personal grievances, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. By studying their motivations, decision-making processes, and psychological profiles, researchers can develop more effective counter-terrorism strategies that address the root causes of female radicalization and prevent their recruitment into extremist networks.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon, yet much of the existing research has focused primarily on male participants, leaving the role of women in terrorist activities under explored. Traditionally, the studies on terrorism have primarily focused on the male terrorists while often overlooking the female terrorists’ psychological, sociological, and ideological issues. There is a large gap of knowledge concerning the reasons as to why women commit terrorism, because the prevalent view has been formed in the shadows of the terrorist’s representation by men. Considering that goals and behaviors of female terrorists cannot be generalized with those of male terrorists, this mistake is very crucial. These trauma issues as well as distress from identity crises and life events sometimes, interact in complex manners to contribute to terrorism by women. These characteristics do also appear but in most cases unlike the way low looking terrorists in male’s terrorists been. Other social factors including peers, family, socio-economic status are also very important towards the course of women’s radicalization. Also, these women terrorists are often recruited by the extremist terrorists on the basis of their ideals, political situation, or women’s stories translated into ideology. Extremist religious organizations promote a narrative that opposes the progress of women's education and empowerment. At first, Al Qaeda maintained that women should not be engaged in direct combat but should instead be used in auxiliary roles. In 2010, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula actively sought the involvement of Muslim women in the Yemen conflict. The emergence of the militant Islamic State organization facilitated the participation of women in combat alongside men. Financially impoverished women may be attracted to extremist organizations because of the heightened social status they receive as wives or mothers inside these organizations. The rise in the number of fighters marrying Islamist partners following September 11th led to an influx of international women into battle zones. Extremist organizations can utilize technology as a means to radicalize women, specifically.

These principles highlight the need for policies that are transparent, just, and compassionate, ensuring that women are not hindered by bureaucratic obstacles and are treated with fairness and respect. Various Islamist terrorist organizations in Pakistan actively recruit women for different roles. These initiatives systematically exclude women, despite the extensive body of research that has consistently shown their crucial contribution in preventing and combating violent extremism (P/CVE). State and congressional lawmakers continue to maintain gendered assumptions that downplay women's ability to participate in lethal acts of terrorism. This impedes the efficacy of preventative and critical video event (P/CVE) activities and hampers the implementation of comprehensive legislation that embraces both violent and nonviolent individuals. Cultural and societal constraints impede women's participation in community rehabilitation and reintegration. Given the significant threat posed by extremism, it is crucial for women to actively participate in combating violent extremism.Similarly, women's participation in the criminal justice system remains significantly inadequate, notwithstanding a small statistical progress, to empower them to have a significant impact on social unity. The recently merged regions provide numerous possibilities to understand the suffering experienced by women who were exposed to instability throughout the conflict. Despite their inaccessibility, many cultural obstacles hinder entry. The implementation of the National Internal Security Policy (2018–2023), which acknowledges the significance of women in leadership roles, would necessitate a considerable amount of time.

Developing focused and successful counterterrorism strategies requires an understanding of the factors and motives unique to female terrorists. Interventions may not adequately address the particular characteristics of female radicalization in the absence of this nuanced understanding, which could result in less successful outcomes. Through an examination of the psychological, sociological, and ideological aspects that define female terrorists, this study attempts to fill a vacuum in existing research. The study aims to present a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective on female terrorism in Pakistan by thoroughly examining these aspects. This will provide insightful information for security agencies, support organizations, and legislators. The results of this study will help to improve counterterrorism tactics by enabling strategies and support networks to be more effectively adapted to the unique requirements and driving forces of female terrorists.

In Pakistan, female involvement in terrorist groups has gained increasing attention, particularly as women take on more visible roles in extremist organizations. These roles range from logistical support to active participation in attacks. This research seeks to understand the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving the radicalization and participation of female terrorists in Pakistan. The study will explore why women are drawn to terrorism, what social dynamics influence their decisions, and how ideological commitments shape their actions.

The knowledge gathered from this research will be crucial in creating more potent counterterrorism tactics in addition to extending scholarly horizons. The accuracy and effectiveness of these tactics will increase if interventions are tailored to the particular psychological and social requirements of female terrorists. Comprehending the significance of personal trauma or identity crises in the radicalization of women, for example, may facilitate the development of focused psychological assistance and rehabilitation initiatives. In a similar vein, acknowledging the impact of family and social networks can help improve community involvement and preventative efforts.Pakistan opted to join United States in Afghanistan for the sake of international peace and security. Subsequently, the Afghan Taliban declared war against Pakistani government, and another wing Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed under the headship of Bait Ullah Masood to operate from Pakistan against Pakistani government. Peter J. Philips claims that terrorist organizations upsurge the spiralling of attacks when stances counter-insurgency. Likewise happened in the case of Taliban. With the execution of operation by United States in Afghanistan, a high frequency wave of terrorism took Afghanistan and Pakistan in its way. Tehrik-e-Taliban planned and execute deadly attacks in Pakistan that only resulted into the killings of masses but also caused monetary loss of billions of US dollars. One hundred and sixty-four people were killed in 2003 in terrorist attacks, whereas the death toll reached to three thousand, three hundred and eighteen in 2009. Till early 2018, 61213 people were killed.8 Enduring terrorist attacks and escalation in homicide caused the adverse effects on the mental health of individuals. Coming below is the precise picture on psychological disorders prevailing in Pakistan consequent to terrorism.

* + 1. **Impacts of Terrorism on Mental Health in Pakistan**

Terrorism is a psychological warfare that not only brings human and economic forfeiture but carries psychological harms too. The terrorists escalate their actions to cast terror in the minds of masses. Fear is a prime instrument of terrorist organizations, utilized to capitalize their objectives. Modern terrorism may look like ordinary criminal actions, however in terrorism, criminal acts such as homicide, sabotage and blackmailing are just means to reach desired ends. The strategies and gears utilize by the terrorist organization goes through various short-term aims and objectives, such as inculcation of paralyzing fear in the target population. Therefore, modern terrorism creates insecurity in each and every individual of target population that following attack may take his life away. The entire kit and caboodle of terrorism is developed to perform the task of identification of sagaciousness of security, and to dismay the target society to

function efficiently. The concealed objective of terrorist group behind terror propagation strategy is to initiate public opinion to compel the governments to up their hands before the demands of the terrorist organization. Hence, as a result of perceived threat and fear, target populations are played in the hands of terrorists, and assist them to proceed with their goals. The physical and economic loss caused by terrorism might be limited in scope, but limited loss is very well affected to build psychological impact on fairly broader degree.

Terrorist organizations focus on three types of audience:-

* The first target audience is the membership of the terrorist group and its popular support. Through terrorist attacks, terrorist organizations convey message that we are successfully leading towards our goal, and strength of enemy can be counterbalanced if we hit its most sensitive point i.e. masses.This tactic helps the terrorists to regenerate solidarity and uplift morale among themselves and their supporters.
* The second target audience of the message of terrorist organizations is the victim population and message bore to them is contrary to mentioned above audience. The government of victim is told that despite all your measures to prevent terrorism, you are not yonder to our access. Once masses begin to recognize themselves insecure in their residences, offices and schools, the next message is delivered that you are not safe until you surrender before our demands. This is done to shatter the national morale and create hustle bustle among the victim population.
* The third target audience population is international community residing outside the victim country. The aim is to draw attention of global community towards the conflict, and to recognize the fortitude of terrorists to achieve their goal without considering the nature of means and costs. In this way global community put pressure on host country to consider the demands of terrorist group, and to bargain with them to bring about peace.
  + 1. **Understanding of Psychological Disorders**

The terminology “psychological disorder” is frequently used to refer the mental and psychiatric disorders. Psychological disorders are defined through behavioural and mental warning signs that produce impacts on multiple domains of life. The psychological disorders produce distress in the person enduring the behavioural and mental warning signs. The DSM-5, the latest edition of the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual describes psychological disorder as:

“…a disorder categorized by a clinically substantial commotion in an individual’s mental, sentimental directive, or action that portrays a dysfunction in a psychological, biological, or developmental course fundamental to mental working and performance. Mental disorders are commonly related with significant suffering and distress in social, professional, and other significant activities.”

Though umpteen psychological disorders are extant yet mentioned below are only few of them that occur as an upshot of terrorism:

* + 1. **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders are commonly characterized by life-threatening and persistent worry, fear, anxiety and further behavioural disorders of similar types. Fear involves an emotional response to a menace. The menace can be a reality or a perception. Anxiety also comprises of expecting the ascendance of future threat. The anxiety disorder can be sub-categorized into following types:

* **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAP):**

It involves the lop-sided concern about the day to day events. Worries and concerns are considered normal sometimes, yet GAP are those concerns and worries that may have tendency to affect the proper mental functioning of a person.

* **Agoraphobia**

In this psychological disorder, a person fears of public places and hesitate to visit those places where chances of having panic attack are high. In certain cases, an individual develops hesitant attitude that he becomes inept to face public, and leave home.

* **Social Anxiety Disorder:**

A person suffering from this disorder feels as if he is watched or judged by someone. Sufferer of this disorder avoids visiting social settings such as school, office, market etc.

* **Specific Phobias:**

This psychological disorder is categorized by deadly fear of a certain person, thing or an event. Sometimes people are found having phobias of reptiles and bugs, fear of highlands or deep waters. These mentioned phobias are called specific phobias of natural events. The specific phobias also include the unnatural events such as war, terrorism, homicide etc. The encountering of an individual with man-made events results into shivering, nausea, heart excruciating, and fright of death in some cases.

* **Panic Disorder:**

This type of psychiatric disorder involves panic attacks that may happen without any particular reason. Anxiety and worry are the common signs of this disorder. Sufferers of this disorder avoid to visit the places where last panic attack happened, avoiding attitude develops as a consequent of previous panic attack. This affects the routine activities.

* **Separation Anxiety Disorder:**

It is a sub-type of anxiety disorder that is characterised by life-threatening fear and anxiety regarding being separated from attachment figures. For example, fear in children to get detached from their parents or parents’ fear to lose their kids. The person having warning signs of separation anxiety disorder avoids leaving house, attending college and workplace.

* + 1. **Trauma and Stress Related Disorders**

This category of psychological disorders occurs as a result of stressful and traumatic events. Previously trauma and stress-related disorders were placed in under the scope of anxiety disorders, but presently they are replaced into new category. Given below are the types of trauma and stress-related disorders:-

* **Acute Stress Disorder:**

The warning symptoms of this disorder occurs within one month of the encounter with traumatic event. The event can be natural or man-made. The symptoms include extreme anxiety and fear, and person’s inability to develop positive emotions.

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* **Adjustment Disorders:**

This category is characterized by sudden change for example, death, divorce, monetary damage, migration and other impairments of similar kind. The symptoms of this disorder are extreme anxiety, sense of isolation, annoyance, bleakness, depressed mood, fear and irritability.

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* **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):**

Exposure to a life-threatening and traumatic incidence results in the development of this disorder. The sufferers of PTSD develop habit of recollecting and re-experiencing the incidence persistently, and stepping aside from those figures that make the suffer to recollect the traumatic event. In addition to that a suffer finds himself drown in negative thinking, nightmares, annoyance, and incapable of reminiscing aspects of the event.

* + 1. **Psychological Disorders face to face Terrorism in Pakistan**

Terrorism has brought about adverse psychological disorders among Pakistani masses. Every second individual residing in Pakistan is a sufferer of psychiatric disorder and strain consequent of terrorism. The survey published in Dawn revealed that forty percent of the total Pakistani population is suffer of psychological disorders. According to the survey 57.5 percent of women and 42.5 percent of men are facing depressive disorders. Intense traces of trauma, depression, phobias and anxiety found in the air of Pakistan are the poisoned chalice of Pakistan’s counter-terrorism efforts for global peace and security. People sitting in every nook and corner of the country got affected by the psychological consequences of terrorism. Secretary General of Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), Dr. Qaiser Sajjad said that 35.7 percent residents of Karachi, 43 percent inhabitants of Quetta and 53.4 percent people are sufferers of psychological illness. According to Pakistan Medical Association, worldwide, twenty percent people are victim of psychological disorders, whereas in Pakistan the estimated depression in country’s population is thirty-four percent. 27 Beside genetic factor, environmental elements also contribute primarily in the pathogenesis of psychological disorders. Researches revealed that people who witness terrorist attacks directly have most adverse psychological impacts. In Pakistan, survivors of terrorist attacks and people from security agencies who had encountered the attacks have most adverse psychological disorders.29 Terror, insecurity, fear and threat propagating in the social environment of Pakistan has put the mental health of masses at risk. The study conducted by students of Rawalpindi Medical College (RMC) tells that 68.2 percent of the families of students enrolled in RMC fear to send their children to college, and 34.4 percent families do not allow the students to attend the college on any day consequent to security threats. The mentioned critical situation is troublesome for the streamline education of the students. Students enrolled in Pakistani institutions also contemplate that media overstate the situation and create flimflam by extra exaggerating the news and role of media is gobbledygook and distressing. In Pakistan, most of the people are exposed to terrorism over television. Besides curricular activities, terrorism also hinders the extracurricular activities, therefore has a negative impact on students’ life. Mostly activities are cancelled or postponed due to security concerns.People want to migrate from Pakistan, and desire to settle abroad due to prevailing insecurity in the country.Consequent to assassinations of medical doctors, many of them left Pakistan to limit the risk of life.

**1.2 Literature Review**

Existing literature on terrorism focuses predominantly on male perpetrators, with limited research on female terrorists, particularly in South Asia. Studies on women in terrorism often emphasize their roles as passive participants or victims, downplaying their agency. However, scholars like Jessica Davis (2017) and Mia Bloom (2011) highlight that women are often active participants and can be equally motivated by ideological, political, and personal reasons as men.

The concept of security was revised to be more inclusive, non-traditional and comprehensive in 2000s.The debate between IR scholars and feminists was characterized by Robert Keohane. The effort was based upon the reservations of feminist school of thought regarding language and content of existing IR literature which was ‘gendered’ towards men. It was followed by the wave of writing and research of feminists urging revision of IR literature to balance footprint of each gender [1].

Social internet gives young ladies a platform to openly process their transition on an individual, societal, and political level; establish connections with other women who are going through the same thing at the same time; and find and mentor new, younger women. (Windsor, 2018) Studies such as Sageman have shown that the Internet has become more and more attractive to female extremists as a means of avoiding the gender-based divide that exists in actual Islamist activism. For women who are seeking religious information without having a thorough understanding of Islam beforehand, this makes the internet a particularly relevant place for radicalization, making them susceptible. While some contend that the people who already hold radical beliefs are the ones who are most at risk of becoming radicalized online, others contend that people with a neutral mindset and little prior knowledge are the ones who are most vulnerable to extremist ideals. Online risks may be worse for young Muslim women in Britain who have little offline access to Islamic information. Such a notion has given rise to analogies between radicalization on the internet and "grooming.” (Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2018; Sageman, 2011) Using the Internet as a substitute platform, a less restricted gender identity, first interacting with Islam and then moving toward a more radical and ultimately violent posture, defying Al Qaeda's views on women's duties. (Pearson, 2015) It is not new that women are using the internet to spread information favoring jihad. Throughout the previous ten years, female activists actively participated in recruiting and spreading the Al Qaeda message among women. One such activist is Malika el-Aroud, a Belgian national of Moroccan descent. (Fraihi, 2012) Women are urged by Tehrek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to oppose the patriarchal society and take part in Jihad in order to achieve Jannah. They provide them physical training as well as arm them with weapons. For their security, they are handed grenades and firearms. TTP has modified their approach. In the past, they have only recruited women to assist them in carrying out "martyrdom operations." However, they are now actively participating and targeting specific sites. In an effort to attract women's attention, TTP also launched their magazine, "Sunnat e Khaula," in August 2017. (Haider & Warraich, 2023) Like ISIS, they favor educated women. Women from Pakistan's cities are the TTP's primary recruiting target right now. To propagate their philosophy, they are concentrating on enlisting the help of working women in fields like engineering, medicine, and education. The employed women are connected to numerous households. Thus, TTP employed them as a tool to infiltrate and spread its ideology to as many individuals as possible. Mullah Fazalullah’s wife advises ladies to have more children and spread the TTP’s ideology to their progeny in order to increase the group’s membership. (Hussain, 2010) Women see war as a means of escaping the expected life that is planned for them, according to Clara Beyler, who discusses female suicide bombers differently than male suicide bombers. When women turn into human bombs, they do so to make a message about their gender as well as about a nation, a religion, or a leader. [2]

The Greed and Grievance theory is adopted as the theoretical handle for this study. It is important to start by stating that the aims of terrorism are hinge on fundamental, historical, ideological, economic, political, religion and technological motives (Collier & Heoffler, 2000). These two aforementioned phrases (greed and grievance) refer to the two opposing but intertwined words that are capable of understanding the dynamics and nature of human beings in relation to wealth and resources. Armed conflicts scholars such as Paul Collier and Anke Heoffler popularized this theory. They posited that terrorism is caused by combatants’ desire for self-enrichment, religious aggrandizement, economic gains, control of resources or the attainment and/or dominance of the grip of power. Also, poverty and underdevelopment are founding justification for the grouping and regrouping of terrorist groups in order to press for their demand and change.Collier and Heoffler (2000) are of the opinion that the factors that increase the military or financial viability of terrorism correlated with more instances of conflict than factors leading to grievances. In the case of the women and international terrorism, absence of rule of law, unlawful seizure and refining of crude oil are source of financial wealth for the terrorist organizations in purchasing sophisticated weapons which thus has promoted the activities of terrorists, especially in Middle East. Collier and Heoffler attempted at distinguishing between the preference and constraints in terms of situation that propel terrorist acts, societies can be more prone to conflict because preferences for terrorism are unusually strong or because constraints on terrorism are unusually weak. The former being aligned with grievance while the latter with greed. These variables are important to establish because a potential terrorist group might have grievances that align with terrorism especially in a weaker States of the world.

The Greed and Grievance theory presents a lot of utilities to the study of women and girls’ involvement in international terrorism, as major causes of the menace like discriminating socio-cultural practices; neglect of women in the battle against terror and in the overall conflict resolution process; religious dogma, attractive economic rewards; intention to protest perceived societal inequalities and human rights violations; and the zombification of women among other causes, can be situated within the purview of the theory [3].

In Pakistan, radicalization among women is influenced by a combination of socio cultural, political, and religious factors. Works by Amir Rana and Khurram Iqbal (2018) illustrate how extremist groups exploit social structures to recruit women, offering them a sense of empowerment, status, and purpose within the confines of a patriarchal society. Other studies suggest that personal trauma, such as the loss of a family member in conflict, plays a critical role in women’s radicalization. These motivations are often intertwined with ideological commitments, with extremist groups utilizing gender-specific narratives to attract female recruits.

While there is a growing body of research on women in terrorism, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific psychological and social influences on female terrorists in Pakistan, as well as how these differ from those of men. This study seeks to fill that gap.

## 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite growing awareness of female involvement in terrorism, there remains a significant gap in academic and policy-oriented research focusing specifically on the psychology of female terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan. This region has witnessed a rise in female participation in militant activities, particularly within groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other insurgent organizations. However, most counter-terrorism efforts and research initiatives continue to focus on male extremists, leaving an incomplete understanding of the gendered dimensions of terrorism.

This research seeks to bridge the enormous knowledge gap that exists, in terms of psychological profile, social context, and ideological basis, on female terrorism in Pakistan. While much has been done to unravel some of the causes of male terrorism, not much concern has been directed to the specific factors that make women susceptible to terrorism. The existing literature on the subject tends to miss the mark by only looking at the common, general reasons that may push women towards terrorism without examining why some women take such an extreme step and the uniqueness of their other factors. For example, many works have been dedicated to the personality characteristics and influence of leadership on male terrorists; however, investigations of the similar level toward women terrorists are sometimes too general.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the psychological drivers that lead women to engage in terrorism, the mechanisms through which they are recruited and radicalized, and the roles they assume within terrorist organizations. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on gender and terrorism while providing valuable insights for policymakers and security agencies working to combat extremism in the region.

The review of any research work available so far invariably leads to the conclusion that women’s paths to terrorism are more or less reduced to stereotypes or omitted altogether. Understanding what women’s grievances are, beyond what has historically been the case, that has propelled them into terrorism is also warranted and these can vary from individual to individual, family or society. And also how attachment to family and social groups and gender especially is rarely applied effectively is always understated. The ideologies that appeal to female terrorists, for instance, may be more intrinsic whereas male terrorists are motivated by action-oriented ideologies. This gap is filled by means of in-depth analysis of these perspectives by this study. The present research also aims to advance and integrate the understanding of women’s terrorism motivation by investigating their criminal psychology, socio-political issues as well as ideology. Such an extensive investigation of these components will help improve strategies in combating terrorism by understanding the processes involved in radicalization females.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore and analyze the psychology of female terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan. The specific objectives include:

1. To identify the psychological drivers behind the involvement of women in terrorism in Pakistan.
2. To examine the social factors, including familial and community pressures, that influence women's decisions to join terrorist groups.
3. To analyze the ideological narratives that female terrorists adhere to and how these shape their roles within extremist organizations.
4. To compare the roles and motivations of female and male terrorists in Pakistan.
5. To provide recommendations for counter-radicalization and de-radicalization efforts that are tailored to the unique experiences of female terrorists.

## 1.5 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the primary psychological motivations that drive women in Pakistan to become involved in terrorist activities?
2. How do social influences, such as family, community, and gender roles, contribute to the radicalization of women?
3. What ideological narratives and commitments are embraced by female terrorists in Pakistan, and how do these influence their actions?
4. In what ways do the motivations and roles of female terrorists differ from their male counterparts within the context of Pakistani terrorist organizations?
5. What strategies can be developed to prevent the radicalization of women and assist in their de-radicalization?

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

* This study is important because it sheds light on the particular psychological, sociological, and ideological motivations of female terrorists in Pakistan, which will help develop more specialized and successful counterterrorism tactics as well as support systems catered to their particular need.
* The timing of this study is critical because of the growing number of women participating in terrorist activities and the pressing need to comprehend their distinct influences and motivations in order to create efficient counterterrorism plans and support networks. The results of this research will provide insightful information for creating focused counterterrorism plans and intervention programs that target the particular psychological, social, and ideological factors that motivate female terrorists in Pakistan, thereby improving prevention and rehabilitation initiatives.
* Those working in counterterrorism, politicians, psychology, and research who want to comprehend the social dynamics and motivations behind female terrorist involvement would find this study useful in creating more potent preventative and intervention plans.
* By filling a vacuum in the literature on gender-specific terrorism, this study will add to the body of knowledge by providing a greater understanding of the distinct psychological, social, and ideological elements that drive female terrorists in Pakistan.

This research holds significant importance for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, security agencies, academics, and human rights organizations. By shedding light on the psychological aspects of female terrorists, this study can help in developing more nuanced counter-radicalization strategies that address gender-specific motivations and vulnerabilities.

For policymakers, the study provides insights into the underlying socio-political and economic factors that push women toward extremism, which can inform the design of policies aimed at improving women's rights, education, and economic opportunities in the region. Security agencies can benefit from a better understanding of female recruitment strategies and psychological profiles to tailor their counter-terrorism operations more effectively.

Academically, this research contributes to the growing field of terrorism studies by emphasizing the gendered dimensions of radicalization and extremism. It also encourages further scholarly inquiry into the often-overlooked roles of women in terrorist organizations. For human rights organizations, the study highlights the need for rehabilitation and reintegration programs specifically designed for women who have been involved in or affected by terrorism.

## 1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the psychology of female terrorists operating in Northwestern Pakistan. The research examines cases from various militant organizations, including but not limited to the TTP, Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, and other extremist networks active in the region. The study will analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, drawing from interviews, psychological assessments, case studies, and secondary sources such as academic articles, government reports, and media coverage.

The research will not only investigate direct participants in terrorist activities but also women who support terrorist groups through indirect means, such as logistics, recruitment, and propaganda dissemination. Additionally, the study will explore the broader socio-cultural environment that facilitates female radicalization, including the influence of familial ties, community networks, and online propaganda.

## 1.8 Structure of the Study

This dissertation is structured as follows:

* **Chapter 1 (Introduction):** Provides the background, problem statement, research objectives, significance, scope, and theoretical framework of the study.
* **Chapter 2 (Theoretical Construct):** about cognitive and feminist perspectives and what variables are relevant with your study.
* **Chapter 3 (Methodology):** Outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework used in the study.
* **Chapter 4 (Findings and Discussion):** Presents the research findings and analyzes them in the context of the theoretical framework.
* **Chapter 5 (Conclusion and Recommendations):** Summarizes the key findings, discusses implications, and offers policy recommendations.

# ****Chapter 2****

# Theoretical Construct

## In Order to understand the psychology of female terrorists in the West Pakistan, a versatile theoretical structure is needed. Two primary approaches: Cognitive perspective and feminist perspective provides valuable insight into motivation, psychological processes and social structures affecting women's participation in terrorism. Cognitive perspective helps to initiate individual psychological mechanisms, while the feminist perspective highlights gender -specific factors, such as harassment, agency and sociopolitical contexts. This chapter examines these approaches and identifies the relevant main variables relevant to understanding terrorism in this region.

The psychological study of terrorism involves multiple theoretical approaches, including:

1. **Social Learning Theory** – This theory posits that individuals learn behaviors, including extremist ideologies, through observation and social interactions. Women in Northwestern Pakistan may be influenced by familial and community ties that expose them to radical beliefs (Noor et al. (2023)).
2. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** – This theory suggests that individuals who experience prolonged frustration due to socio-economic hardships or political oppression may resort to aggression and violence as an outlet. Women who face systemic discrimination, poverty, or personal trauma may turn to extremism as a means of expressing their grievances (GSDRC).
3. **Cognitive Radicalization Theory** – This framework examines how individuals undergo a gradual cognitive shift towards radical beliefs through exposure to extremist narratives, often facilitated by propaganda and ideological indoctrination (Van den Bos et al.’s).
4. **Feminist Theory** – This perspective highlights how gender roles and societal expectations shape women's involvement in terrorism, whether as active combatants or as facilitators of extremist movements (Springer’s).

By applying these theoretical perspectives, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms driving female radicalization in Northwestern Pakistan.

## 2.1 The Cognitive Perspective

### Since the 1980s, more "active" women have been suicide attackers - those who do more functions of violence. The inclusion of women in political groupings affects how the public and leaders see them, as demonstrated by previous feminist international relations (IR) theorists. One might anticipate that this increase would alter how states and institutions view and anticipate the threat posed by terrorist organizations; however, previous research and reporting has mostly concentrated on the effects of female terrorists' perceptions on individuals, largely ignoring any long-term effects on the negotiation or group structure. The effects of female suicide bombers' involvement on the system are mostly disregarded as they are analyzed as individual players inside a system that was designed and operated by men. This vacuum in the research might be filled by taking into account both individual and structural elements as well as by looking at both sides' perspectives. The cognitive perspective emphasizes mental processes, decision-making, and information processing, providing a foundation for understanding how individuals develop radical beliefs and engage in extremist actions. (Levy, I., & Rozmann, N. 2023).

### 1. Cognitive Radicalization and Belief Systems

Radicalization is a widely studied yet contested concept that is sometimes, but mistakenly, used interchangeably with terrorism. This article defines radicalization which lacks a comprehensive definition—as a gradual process in which people are conditioned to hold extreme ideas that manifest in acts of violence or nonviolence. Through coercion, intimidation, or instilling fear in people and their government, regardless of their own roles, people can adopt extreme beliefs that justify the use of violence to further the political, national, religious, or ideological goals of the terrorist organization they are inspired by or join. This phenomenon is of particular concern to society. Hoffman stated that in compared to secular terrorist groups, people who are radicalized to religious terrorism (i.e., endorsing violent acts to achieve goals based on radical interpretations of their faith) are the most dangerous due to the lethality and violence of their actions (Munte, A., & Natalia, D. (2022).

Women in Northwestern Pakistan, who may experience systemic marginalization, socio-political disenfranchisement, or restricted autonomy, often seek alternative avenues to assert their identity and agency. In such contexts, extremist ideologies can provide them with a sense of belonging, empowerment, and purpose that may otherwise be inaccessible through traditional societal roles. The allure of radical groups often lies in their ability to offer a structured belief system, protection, and a perceived opportunity to contribute meaningfully to a greater cause. Additionally, exposure to radical narratives through familial, communal, or online networks can further reinforce these ideological shifts, making extremism appear as a legitimate response to perceived injustices. Though there are similar underlying "ideological, psychological, and community based factors" that contribute to one's susceptibility to ISIS propaganda, each person's path toward radicalization to religious terrorism is unique. Akins and Winfree assert that "all crime is learned," which includes terrorists' unlawful actions regardless of their ideology, religion (or pseudo-religious) foundations, or global location.This idea of radicalization aligns with the idea that social factors influence how ideology and the unlawful practice of religious terrorism are accepted. In order to comprehend the socio cognitive processes behind American women's radicalization to religious terrorism, illegal involvement in terrorism, and terrorist-related actions for ISIS, this study used Akers' social learning theory (SLT). The four components of SLT that contribute to the development and maintenance of behaviors that society views as "deviant" are continuous processes, in contrast to stage or step theories that explain radicalization.

**Radicalization process classification:** Women who began and remained alone during the radicalization process and activities were described by the self-class. Women who either started alone and joined someone else or who started with someone else and remained with them throughout the radicalization process and activities were defined by the dyad-class. The women who began as a dyad and joined a group, or who began with a group and stayed with it throughout the radicalization process and activity, were defined by the group-class.

**Socialization and support network:** Extremist ISIS beliefs and behaviors may be promoted or devalued in part by women's perceptions of the support of friends and relatives in their social circles. Data on whether the women's online and offline friends and/or family members (parents, siblings, spouses/partners, kids, and extended family) supported her participation in ISIS and/or encouraged her to do so, possibly because they were also active members of the group or shared sympathies with it. Furthermore, it was investigated how the Internet was used to initiate the radicalization process and how it was then used in subsequent operations.

**Internet functionality:** Researchers looked for explicit mentions of social media use, general Internet use, or no mention of the women's use of online communication during the radicalization and action phase in the judicial documents. Theoretically, the Internet can be used as a tool to facilitate radicalization and to support recruits in carrying out actions that further the cause. For the contacts between recruits and other supporters and/or members of the terrorist organization, two approaches were found.

**Reasons for radicalization:** Radicalization may occur because the woman may identify with the terrorist/group’s religious, political, or extremist ideas. Another reason for radicalization stems from the woman’s need for belonging or to fill a void. Radicalization may also result from a woman's desire to exact retribution in the US or overseas or to right a perceived or actual injustice. When a woman sympathizes with the group's predicament and believes in its causes, radicalization may also ensue. Being in or wanting a relationship with a terrorist or sympathizer might also cause women to become more radicalized. Lastly, a woman may get radicalized because she is at risk because she is young and gullible, mentally sick, intellectually challenged, indoctrinated, or bullied. Since the coding did not call for identifying just one reason, all of the reasons listed in the papers were recognized. (Shapiro, L. R., & Maras, M. H. 2020).

### 2. Cognitive Dissonance and Rationalization

People justify harmful behavior in a variety of ways while trying to lessen dissonance. Think about the practice of euphemism labeling, such as when a salesperson "lies" to consumers instead of "leaves out certain details." By redefining acts of murder and oppression as jihad to liberate Islamic territories or reestablish the caliphate, ISIS skillfully employs this type of justification to promote cruel conduct. ISIS states that its goal was to grant Muslims izza, or honor, rather than to murder or exploit people. By redefining their violent conduct in a way that is consistent with their values, they are able to lessen the discordant contrast between their beliefs and very violent behavior. (Halldorsdottir, S. 2023) .

For women in Northwestern Pakistan, where societal norms often dictate submissiveness and passivity, encountering violence or systemic marginalization can create a profound sense of dissonance. When they witness or endure military raids, displacement, or loss of family members, the disparity between their ingrained beliefs about nonviolence and their harsh realities may become untenable. To reconcile this contradiction, they may gradually shift their perspectives, seeing participation in extremist activities not as a betrayal of their values but as a necessary adaptation for self-preservation or a justified means of enacting societal change.

First, keep in mind that one gets beyond numerous psychological obstacles to completing a job if an act is performed effectively. That initial successful deed is therefore important. However, ISIS successfully uses social media platforms to promote the other ways of increasing efficacy, overcoming the challenge of individual success on social media. The use of videos, images, and written accounts give vicarious experiences that social media followers then also experience and share – building confidence to support ISIS, migrate to Iraq and Syria, or even carry out violent acts. Additionally, social media's support features, social sharing, and conversational content all contribute to social and linguistic persuasion. Lastly, ISIS-supporting emotional signals are triggered by a combination of religious themes, horrific imagery, and firsthand stories. The formation of efficacy beliefs for tasks including the encouragement and use of violence is the group outcome.

The importance of knowledge in the fight against terrorism and extremism is highlighted by these common psychological processes, which include boosting self-efficacy and resolving dissonance through euphemism labeling and moral justification. Where should we concentrate our efforts, though? It appears that early intervention is essential, and such initiatives ought to concentrate on better ways to interfere with recruiting. However, we also want a stronger information strategy that targets the psychological processes that now encourage radicalization and violence more precisely. The target population's perception of self-efficacy in committing acts of terrorism must be undermined, along with the euphemism labeling and moral defenses that now justify violence, by first causing cognitive dissonance in their thinking. Second, we need to resolve and reduce dissonance around constructive behaviors, delivering messages that increase the population’s sense of self-efficacy pertaining to normal employment, education, and family life.

It could be challenging to cause dissonance in order to disrupt rationalizations. However, counter-messages that impede the rationalization process can be disseminated via the same social media platform that is used to promote damaging rationalizations. These messages need to humanize victims, explain violence and its consequences truthfully, discredit moral defenses, and link violent action to its extremely detrimental consequences. However, the difficulty of upending justifications also draws attention to the unrealized potential of self-efficacy as a target. (Esmailzadeh, Y. 2024).

### 3. Heuristics and Decision-Making

Cognitive biases and heuristics play a crucial role in shaping human perceptions and decision-making processes, particularly in high-stress environments. These mental shortcuts help individuals process information quickly, but they can also lead to distorted judgments and irrational choices. One such bias, the **availability heuristic**, suggests that people assess risks, threats, and opportunities based on the most readily accessible information in their memory. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to particular narratives, images, or experiences, those impressions become dominant in their cognitive framework, influencing their perception of reality (Ashkenazi, T., & Fisher, R. P. 2022).

In conflict-ridden areas like Northwestern Pakistan, where violence, instability, and political turmoil are prevalent, women are frequently subjected to direct and indirect exposure to conflict. This exposure may come in various forms—witnessing military operations, experiencing displacement, suffering personal losses, or consuming radical propaganda that portrays violence as a justified response to oppression. Over time, such experiences make extremist ideologies and acts of terrorism seem not only justifiable but also necessary for survival and resistance. If personal trauma or community suffering is consistently attributed to external forces, such as government actions or foreign interventions, radical groups can exploit these emotions to recruit individuals by framing terrorism as a form of justice or retribution.

Furthermore, the **confirmation bias**—the tendency to seek out and interpret information that aligns with preexisting beliefs—further reinforces these radical perspectives. Women who already feel marginalized may gravitate toward extremist narratives that validate their grievances, dismissing alternative viewpoints that advocate for peaceful resolution. Similarly, the **illusory truth effect**, wherein repeated exposure to misinformation increases its perceived truthfulness, makes propaganda a powerful tool in shaping attitudes toward violence (Atran, S. 2021).By understanding how cognitive biases and heuristics operate within radicalization processes, counterterrorism efforts can be designed to disrupt these distorted perceptions. Initiatives that provide alternative narratives, emphasize critical thinking, and create opportunities for women to engage in nonviolent activism can help mitigate the influence of cognitive shortcuts that push individuals toward extremism. Addressing these biases is essential in developing effective de-radicalization strategies that offer women in these regions viable alternatives to terrorism.

### 4. Emotional and Psychological Triggers

Without a doubt, terrorism has existed throughout history, even before written history. Three interconnected elements have drastically modified the type and extent of dangers, despite the fact that human nature has not changed.:

1. The increasing interconnectedness of trade, travel, and information exchange on a

global scale has accentuated economic inequalities, ideological rivalries, and

facilitated acts of aggression.

1. The rise of religious fundamentalism has emerged as a threat to modernity's democratic and secular economic advancement.
2. Small organizations or even individuals now have the capacity to carry out large-scale acts of terrorism thanks to the privatization of weapons of mass destruction (DRAGOMIR, A. N., & BERINDEA, S. G. 2023).

Furthermore, prolonged exposure to trauma can lead to **cognitive restructuring**, where individuals reframe their perspectives to accommodate extreme beliefs. Psychological theories suggest that in moments of intense emotional distress, people seek meaning in their suffering, which can make them more susceptible to black-and-white thinking, dehumanization of perceived enemies, and an unwavering commitment to extremist causes. Radical groups reinforce this mindset through propaganda that glorifies martyrdom, revenge, and armed resistance as justified responses to oppression and loss.Understanding the link between trauma and radicalization is crucial for designing effective intervention strategies. Psychological support, community resilience programs, and alternative pathways for seeking justice can help prevent the exploitation of grief and anger by extremist networks. By addressing the underlying emotional and social needs of affected women, counter-radicalization efforts can provide them with healthier ways to process their trauma and resist the lure of extremism (Bögelein, N., Eppert, K., Roth, V., & Schmidt-Kleinert, A. 2022).

## 2.2 The Feminist Perspective

The rise in far-right and supremacist terrorism, especially in the United States and Europe, is caused by a number of converging factors: These include

1. widespread public resentment toward immigrants from various cultural traditions, particularly those of Muslim origin, which is fueled by backlash against Islamist-inspired terrorism and economic fears from the Great Recession;
2. the populist radical right's rapid political ascent and expanding influence, which increase societal tolerance and susceptibility for extremist ideas and actions;
3. the largely unplanned social networking among supremacists, whose survival and resilience depend even more on Internet dynamics than is the case for radical Islamists in particular, as this online ecology allows the formation and interconnection of self-organized hate clusters in a global network of networks that are extremely resistant to policing. (Atran, S. 2021).

The female terrorist plays a variety of roles within the terrorist organization and has assumed a number of functions and life-styles. Her personality, preferences, and psychological makeup are so diverse that it is impracticable to attempt a comprehensive classification. She has been a mother, mistress, academic, leader, follower, and "gofer." Individual personalities and group dynamics influence how these positions are allocated (or taken), upheld, and evolved. The vast variances of biological, social, and technical elements are equally essential. All terrorists, male and female, are products of their surroundings, cultural indoctrination, biological imprinting, and physiology, regardless of their beliefs and ideologies. It appears that this is not reflected in practice, despite the fact that many organizations would brag that female terrorists have "equal opportunity" inside the terrorist framework and back this with a great deal of revolutionary theory.

The duties that a woman does are often distinct from her job, regardless of her title or style within the firm. The choice to join, stay in, or quit a terrorist group is frequently influenced by the fact that a person is a woman and thinks and lives as a woman. Even in our day and age, few women carry with them the necessary military or operational training that would be helpful to a terrorist organization due to cultural norms, mores, and folkways. Perhaps this is because "fighting" is commonly understood to be a way to enter the state of manhood, which is almost atavistic in culture, rather than Due to the widespread belief in the community that women require male protection and are physically unable to perform combat responsibilities, as well as legitimate parental concerns about their daughters being raped and ravished by the enemy, women have historically been frequently prohibited from this position on the battlefield. This issue remains ongoing, as demonstrated by the arguments in the United States as to whether women should or should not be conscripted for military duty. Individuals who willingly enlist in the military are prepared for a noncombatant position, often with modified training and different physical demand^.Some women have embarked on a life of terrorism through the prior involvement of family, close friends, or associates. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Irish female terrorists, so often witness to the effects of terrorism first hand.” When a family member is killed, bitter emotions naturally run high. The desire for revenge can be felt by the women, strongly, if not more so than by any man.

The situation in Northern Ireland is a very special one, akin to open warfare. Erik Hazelhoff Rolfzema, a former underground organizer in World War II, points out that there was a substantial involvement of seemingly typical, benevolent individuals who risk their lives and join the underground in order to uphold their convictions. The circumstances, in addition to peer and familial pressures, have undoubtedly contributed to the Irish woman's decision to carry a pistol or a bomb in defiance of what must be perceived as contradictory lessons. Many Irish women have chosen to lead the peace movement and avoid violence because of their more traditional conduct and mores.

### 1. Structural Oppression and Gender Roles

Despite the intricacies of women’s participation in violence, authorities in criminal justice systems across the world generally presume that women who commit violence are either naive victims of circumstance or dangerous deviants from the natural order. Regarding their criminal and civil culpability, strategies for women's repatriation and reintegration also differ greatly. Regardless of their intent, criminal justice authorities may perceive women as victims of terrorism, which leads to fewer arrests for acts involving terrorism and sentences that are lower than usual.

In the Balkans, governments do not take into consideration the noncombatant assistance given by female Islamic State adherents, and the majority of female returnees completely evade prosecution. This pattern has been observed throughout the United States and Europe. In other instances, criminal court system authorities have punished female returns more severely than their male colleagues. German courts have indicted individuals under domestic terrorist laws and accused women returning from Syria with war crimes. Both countries denied admittance to female Islamic State members, such as Shamima Begum and Hoda Muthana, and revoked their citizenship, despite allowing numerous male foreign fighters to return and stand prosecution. The worst penalties in Iraq include death or life in jail for female members of the Islamic State, even if they have not committed any violent crimes and claim they were forced to enter Islamic State territory. (Bigio, Jamille, and Rachel Vogelstein 2019).

Managing the risks of terrorism to the most populous and visited cities requires an evaluation of their impacts on the relationships between the presence of terrorist acts and the decisions tourists make regarding the visit to a destination, and destination image (Alvarez et al., 2020). The objective of this paper is to evaluate the impacts of recent terrorist attacks on cities on the relationships between tourists' perceptions of the risks associated with terrorism, their behavioural intentions, and a city's image. To predict the possibly negative consequences of terrorist attacks on tourism in city destinations, it is vital to assess how terrorism affects travelers' decision-making and views of the location. Both preventative counterterrorism programs and initiatives for repositioning cities' image as travel destinations may benefit from this.

The theoretical framework creates a model of the connections between travelers' behavioral decisions, perceptions of terrorism, and destination image. Whether recent terrorist strikes at urban sites have an impact on these linkages is the hypothesis that will be experimentally examined. Using data on travelers' views of terrorist threats in a few European cities—Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid—as well as their travel plans and impressions of these places, the model is experimentally generated using a structural equation technique. To compare a set of cities that have recently been the targets of terrorist attacks with those that have not, multi-group analysis is used. The results indicate that the experience of terrorist attacks at a city destination leads to significant differences in tourists' reactions when it comes to visiting intentions or the configuration of destination image. (Carballo, R. R., Leon, C. J., & Carballo, M. M. 2021).

### 2. Agency and Political Motivation

The academic and intelligence institutions are still at odds over whether psychological profiles of militant women constitute a helpful paradigm even ten years into the global fight on terrorism. Few academics can identify recurring themes in the many conflicts and nations where female terrorists originate. Some doubt the value of attempting to analyze female terrorists as different or special from other types of terrorists.Researchers looking through testimonies, trial transcripts, and other communication channels, as well as the literature on jihadi myths, do find common motifs voiced by many women and men who participate in violent acts.One term for terrorism is "propaganda of the deed." However, when women carry out the action, the propaganda that follows frequently focuses more on the women than on what they did?

### The usage of suicide bombing as a terrorist technique and the number of women carrying out these attacks have significantly increased during the last ten years. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Kurdistan Workers Party, Chechen insurgents, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, hamas, and al-Qaeda are among the at least seventeen groups that have employed women as suicide bombers. These organizations have taken credit for female suicide bombs all throughout the world, in some such as Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Israel, Iraq, and Jordan (Sjoberg, L., & Gentry, C. E., 2011).

### 3. Gendered Violence and Revenge Narratives

Although feminist researchers have set the stage for investigating the link between terrorism and gender-based violence, more information is required to completely comprehend this relationship. In her most current recommendation, Joan Smith urges efforts to prevent domestic violence to "promote understanding of the link between domestic abuse and other forms of male violence, up to and including terrorism." The characterization of violence against women as a trigger is problematic, but Hamm and Spaaij also found that "interpersonal conflicts between male loners and women matter a great deal" as catalysts for radicalization. The term "trigger" is used to describe a "turning point" for this type of violence, as explained by McCulloch et al. subtly reframes male aggression against women as a reciprocal relationship between the victim and the offender. This has led to the classification of violence against women as a distinct and less significant kind of violence, and in-depth research on lone actor terrorism is rife with this presumption. Critics have out that certain incidents having a gendered connection have been written off as not being terroristic, highlighting the necessity for a more thorough integration of gender in terrorism research. Hudson and Hodgsonassert, “The societal character of male/female relations is one critical structural factor,and there is a differential sex-linked salience to many previously identified causes of terrorism, which salience is generally overlooked in terrorism studies.” Furthermore, Gentry argues for a more expansive understanding of what constitutes terrorism Itself because gender-based violence exerts control over women’s behavior, and a coercive force is the dread of violence.

Extremism spreads through narratives and culture, which sustain "the perception of the threat posed by an out-group and the prescription to solve that threat." Berger uses a ladder metaphor to illustrate how violence seems to be the only option when an individual's identity construction is connected to the idea that an out-group possesses unchangeable, dangerous traits and the out-group invariably engages in behaviors that endanger one's life. "People assess the impact of their escalated involvement in terms of tangible and intangible benefits to themselves and the group," according to Berger's model of radicalization, which also includes a reflecting component. Berger claims that this type of introspection is similar to the cyclical process of radicalization, with constant inputs that hasten fanaticism.(Windisch, B. 2023).

### 4. The Role of Women in Extremist Organizations

In times of increased conflict, women have eagerly joined terrorist organizations, fought for their beliefs, and experienced the same consequences of involvement as men. Considering this, it is somewhat surprising that the current trend in female terrorism studies paints women largely as victims of male instigated violence. Frequently, women in these movements are thought to hold insignificant, auxiliary logistic roles such as nurturer and caretaker, while men are either on the frontlines or incarcerated.

The growth of female suicide bombers over the past ten years has led to a significant increase in studies on the role of women in terrorism. Women have played a number of roles in terrorist groups, both voluntarily and uninvitedly. These responsibilities cover the range from moral and logistics assistance to espionage, blatant terror activities, and the odd leadership role. Each terrorist organization has its own beliefs and methods. Women's involvement in each group will thus probably differ. According to the ideological form or variation of terrorism, certain research have found recurring themes and tendencies. For instance, women are more likely to serve in operational capacities among leftist terrorist groups that fight for state independence or to free countries from tyrants and dictators. 5. The revolutionary nature of left wing terrorism and its progressive outlook is attractive for women seeking a better quality of life through active participation.6 In groups such as the Provisional Irish Republish Army (PIRA) and Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF), many females acted as conventional terrorists. Upon distinguishing themselves, they were rewarded by being assigned leadership positions.

Women in the PIRA became famous for conducting bombing operations on British targets. In the RAF, women bombed department stores throughout Germany and led high-risk attacks against U.S. installations.In Islamist extremist organizations such as al-Qaida and Hamas, the responsibilities of women traditionally were to simply provide moral and logistics support. Women in these groups are principal actors in the "vertical transmission" of family morals and values. Predominantly, female participation consists of being a wife, mother, recruiter, organizer, proselytizer, teacher, translator and fund-raiser. Women were to remain hidden and veiled and play background positions, only authorized to pass on family traditions and systematically restructure, repackage, and recycle cultural traits. Women are viewed as the keepers of family values and morals, it naturally becomes their responsibility to convey this knowledge to subsequent generations.

Females are executing sensational Holy War suicide missions. Since the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2006, for example, female suicide attacks spiked with 27 female suicide bombers dying between the years 2006 and 2008 alone. These organizations now have a wider range of duties, which empowers women and positions them as important participants in future assaults. Terrorist organizations are increasingly using women to achieve their political or ideological goals in the modern operational environment. This also applies to the Islamic State. ISIS actively seeks out female recruits for a number of objectives, including as expanding their membership and population and attracting media attention. Like many modern terrorist groups, ISIS sees female members as an untapped resource and is becoming more and more prepared to compromise its principles in order to accept them into its ranks. The presence of women evolved into a strategic advantage for the group. It became clear that using female terrorists generated dramatic, global media coverage.

Foreign media sources significantly expanded their coverage of ISIS because they were morbidly captivated by the roles that women played within the group. A new group of prospective recruits became aware of the ideological cause, and ratings dramatically improved. To the benefit of the Islamic State, the media found it impossible to resist doubling down on reportage of women's involvement in terrorism. ISIS started aggressively employing women for propaganda after realizing how valuable a tool it had just acquired. However, there are several more tactical and logistical requirements for an insurgency, and more and more women are taking on these responsibilities. (Spencer, N. 2016)

## 2.3 Relevant Variables in Understanding Female Terrorism

The highly politicized term "terrorism" has frequently led to contradictory claims in the research. Scholars point to political, religious, social, and personal motivations to understand why people turn to terrorism. Many academics have attempted to break down this barrier and examine the reasons behind terrorist acts, even though the media frequently focuses on the attack's ferocity rather than its cause. The reasons that people turn to terrorism are widespread and not easily identified. However, understanding the causes of terrorism is important to understanding individual motivations behind terrorism.

By reviewing the current research regarding the causes of terrorism, this study will strive to discover whether characteristics researched by these experts apply to women. People frequently point to psychological factors as the root cause of terrorism. Scholars, however, frequently refute this claim by arguing that there is no meaningful causal link between terrorism and mental illness, sadness, or suicidal ideation. As with other connections, there are exceptions in this one, but generally speaking, researchers have refuted the notion that mental illness leads people to resort to terrorism. Many individuals turn to terrorism because they were personally touched by the activities of another group. Jacques and Taylor also come to the conclusion that people's motivation to join terrorist groups is somewhat influenced by retaliation. Terrorist organizations are able to identify those who have lost friends and relatives in order to enlist them. Because such individuals sense a personal connection to someone who was involved in violence and an attack, this hypothesis is related to the social bonds theory. (Buchanan, C. R. 2020).

### 1. Socioeconomic Status

### The emergence of female suicide bombers marks a dramatic and alarming change in the dynamic realm of terrorism. Terrorism has always been a male-dominated field, with males playing key roles in attack preparation, execution, and leadership. Extremist groups like the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, ISIS in the Middle East, and Boko Haram in Nigeria have been using more and more women in their high-impact and deadly activities in recent decades. This technique seems to be based on the idea that women are more adept at evading security systems. Because women are frequently seen with less suspicion by security agents, terrorist organizations take advantage of gender prejudices and cultural conventions. In addition to posing serious ethical questions about agency and compulsion in violent extremism, this tendency also calls into question security structures.

### The victim-perpetrator narrative is complicated when women are engaged in terrorist actions. Many female suicide bombers are forced to carry out attacks against their will after being coerced, tricked, or kidnapped. However, some voluntarily take part, driven by a belief in martyrdom, personal retribution, or ideological devotion. The attempts to combat terrorism are severely hampered by this contradiction. It is difficult for governments and security services to distinguish between treating these people as victims who need to be rehabilitated and criminals who need to be punished. A greater focus on rehabilitation is required in light of the findings that female involvement in terrorism is frequently the result of exploitation and compulsion. Counterterrorism strategies must evolve to prioritize gender-sensitive approaches that not only address the tactical advantages terrorist groups gain from involving women but also focus on the unique vulnerabilities and victimization women face, offering pathways for recovery and reintegration over punitive measures. Even when territorial or political aims are not fulfilled, the daring and symbolic potency of suicide assaults amplify their influence. Such incidents frequently have the dual purpose of undermining public trust in the state's capacity to protect its inhabitants by causing panic, mayhem, and widespread media attention. This dual purpose of suicide terrorism both as a coercive tactic to impose pressure and as a technique of psychological warfare underscores its lasting importance in modern conflict. By taking advantage of gender-based presumptions about innocent and non-violence, female assailants are able to avoid discovery. These days, extremist organizations use ingrained gender standards as a force multiplier to further destabilize communities and cause psychological upheaval (Galehan, J. N. 2023).

### 2. Political and Ideological Exposure

### Various criminology theories illuminate the factors contributing to terrorism and violent extremism. The relevant criminological theory, for instance, the General Strain Theory, suggests that terrorism often emerges when individuals face unjust collective pressures from significantly more powerful entities, and the resulting acts of terror have a substantial civilian impact. Individuals with weakened social ties are more prone to engaging in violent extremist acts. When these ties diminish, the likelihood of committing crimes increases (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Thijssen (2023) suggests that before radicalization, individuals often experience personal and social strain and uncertainty, making them vulnerable to identifying with violent extremists. This identification offers a sense of certainty and can justify violent actions against others.

### Aside from that, incorporating gendered perspectives into criminological analysis is essential for understanding the unique experiences and motivations of women in violent extremism. Gender-specific factors, such as patriarchal norms, gender roles, and experiences of violence or trauma, may also shape women’s pathways to radicalization and their roles within extremist groups. Exploring these gender dynamics can provide insights into the intersectional nature of violent extremism and inform more targeted prevention and intervention strategies. Furthermore, understanding these pathways can shed light on the specific vulnerabilities and risk factors that contribute to women’s involvement in violent extremism. By investigating and analyzing instances of women’s involvement in terrorist groups, this paper aims to examine the place of women within terrorist violence, as well as to challenge conventional perceptions and constructs. To challenge these misconceptions, the following discussion explores the diverse roles, recruitment logic, and motivations of women involved in violent extremism in Indonesia (Paripurna, A., 2025, January). (Amadio, N., & Sakhi, M., 2024)

### 3. Psychological Trauma and Personal Loss

### Despite differences in definitions, terrorist activities frequently have certain characteristics in common. The use of communal violence, which often takes an unusual form, is a common component of terrorism. The goal of this violence is to generate fear and intimidation in innocent individuals in order to effect change. Frequently, acts of terror are justified by religion or another ideology. A group of people’s sense of security within a society is diminished or destroyed by the violence, which is usually planned. Kidnapping, torture, murder, bombing, poisoning, or property destruction are some examples. These violent crimes can take many different forms, but they are generally unpredictable, making it hard for individuals to avoid becoming victims.

### Although terrorists may claim that no one is innocent, victims of terrorism are mostly noncombatants and are thus innocent parties by definition. In most cases, victims are typically unable to effect the changes that the terrorists want to see. These desired changes might include the installation of a new government, the extermination or expulsion of a certain population inside a country, or the official acknowledgment of a terrorist organization.

### Terrorist acts have the immediate goal of producing damage and the far-reaching goal of creating fear and intimidating government officials or a group of citizens. In addition to producing suffering or death among direct victims, terrorist acts instill fear among other members of the victims’ group or government officials who may fear they could be the next targets of violence. To add credibility or legitimacy, terrorists often describe their actions in terms of religion. They portray acts of terror as part of a "holy war," an effort to rid a society of unbelievers. The mentality of most terrorists is "us against them." This way of thinking has often been cultivated over many generations and picked up through socialization. It may begin when an individual feels they have been wronged by the government or a particular group; the wrong need not be actual or deliberate. According to social identity theory, a person’s personal identity is strengthened and reinforced when they interact with others who share similar experiences and perspectives.

### Terrorists do not identify as terrorists and do not associate themselves with any other negative societal term. They may consider themselves warriors or soldiers with a justified cause, similar to government troops. They resort to violence because they believe it is the only effective or practical means of achieving their goals. As a result, they view their actions as rational and purposeful. Their violent attacks serve as a form of psychological warfare, designed to instill fear and exert psychological pressure.

### Terrorism is significantly influenced by cultural ideology. For instance, attitudes and beliefs about life and death vary across cultures and religions. Certain faiths perceive death as a transition or gain in the afterlife rather than a loss, particularly where beliefs in martyrdom or posthumous rewards exist. This contributes to the justification and cultural acceptance of suicidal terrorist acts in some societies. These attacks often occur during everyday activities—such as working, commuting, or leisure—maximizing their disruptive and psychological impact on society.

### The consequences of a terrorist attack are not limited to the immediate physical destruction or loss of life. They extend to broader societal and psychological disruptions, creating long-lasting fear and instability. Based on our understanding of similar contexts, terrorism has widespread psychological effects not only on direct victims but also on their communities. Psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), often persists long after the attack. Additionally, the psychological burden extends to first responders, support personnel, and the wider population affected by media exposure and social proximity.

### The theoretical underpinnings of many psychological therapies have not significantly changed in recent years. While some concepts may become outdated, others have remained valuable in shaping treatment strategies. Psychological interventions continue to provoke debate: What adaptations are necessary to meet the growing mental health needs of society? Is there a need for a new overarching theoretical framework that can integrate various treatment approaches while addressing the limitations and fragmentation of previous models? Furthermore, how can psychological therapies evolve into a more rigorous academic discipline with stronger ties to foundational psychological science? And importantly, how can we ensure equitable access to evidence-based therapies (EBTs) for all who require them?

### (McWhorter, R. L., 2023)

### 4. Social Networks and Group Dynamics

A key strategy of far-right terrorism is to disrupt emergency services and cause society’s implosion so that a New Order can be built from the rubble, in an apocalyptic form of terrorism, which unleashed sarin gas in Japan as a test bed for the ultimate action of destroying the world to save it. The spread of radical ideologies and plots into the general public, however, may be far more deadly than the actual terrorist attacks. A group can only withstand more powerful but less dedicated adversaries who are willing to disregard the costs and consequences of action if a sufficient number of members are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice when the group is in grave danger and its chances of survival are slim. This is the evolutionary logic behind the willingness to sacrifice for the group. Even if the membership of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS has recently shifted from comparatively well-educated and wealthy recruits to more disenfranchised youngsters, this sacrificial logic is evident in their activities.(Atran, S. 2021).

### 5. Role of Religious and Cultural Narratives

Religious and cultural interpretations play a significant role in shaping women’s understanding of their roles within extremist movements. In many cases, extremist groups use **selective religious teachings** and **cultural narratives** to justify female participation in jihad or other forms of terrorism, framing such involvement as not only permissible but also **righteous**. These interpretations often present women’s roles as integral to the success of the cause, casting them as protectors of the faith or as key supporters in the broader struggle against perceived oppression. In this way, religious ideologies become powerful tools for **recruitment and justification**, providing a sense of moral legitimacy for women's involvement in violence and extremism.

## In addition to attempting to identify the ideology and motivation of individuals who lack clear organizational ties, it is important to recognize that Far-Right extremists do not always claim responsibility for their actions. Moreover, the violence committed by individuals influenced by such ideologies can fluctuate between being ideologically motivated and appearing as ordinary criminal behavior. While this is not fundamentally different from offenders aligned with other ideological movements, the framing of such acts often differs significantly. For instance, violence perpetrated by members of recognized paramilitary groups—regardless of whether it is officially sanctioned—is typically interpreted as a reflection of the group’s ideology. In contrast, when the perpetrator is a lone actor, this ideological attribution becomes less apparent and more inconsistently applied. Some individuals are more readily classified based on proxies such as religion, nationality, or race, which are often used to infer ideological affiliation. These disparities in interpretation are evident in media representations. Research by Frisby, for example, reveals that Black, Latino, and Asian suspects involved in mass shootings are more likely to be labeled as "terrorists," whereas White suspects are more frequently described as “lone wolves.” This inconsistent labeling diminishes the perceived political or ideological intent behind certain violent acts, leading to a reluctance to categorize them as terrorism. In such cases, the violence is seen as lacking any broader goal of societal transformation. A recent study by Silver, Horgan, and Gill highlights the difficulty in determining motive, particularly when distinguishing between ideologically motivated violence and crimes driven by personal grievances or hatred. This complexity is compounded by the fact that many lone actors do not identify as such and often classify their actions as hate crimes rather than terrorism (Ahmed, Y., & Lynch, O., 2024).

## When men are the perpetrators and women the victims of sexual and domestic violence, gender disparities in crime become most evident. These inequalities are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that reinforce women’s vulnerability. Such dynamics can also influence the pathways of young women into criminal behavior. For some, crime becomes a survival strategy—an escape from cycles of abuse and exploitation. In these cases, girls may engage in status offenses such as drug trafficking or prostitution after fleeing domestic violence. However, feminist criminology has begun to expand our understanding of these patterns by challenging male-centered theories of crime. Traditional criminological frameworks, often developed with male offenders in mind, have struggled to fully explain female criminality, especially where gendered trauma and social inequality are contributing factors.

## 2.4 Female Terrorism: A Global Perspective

Events in human history have shown that women and girls can play multiple roles in terror-related activities: either as supporters of terror groups; activate members of terrorist organizations; or as preventers or instruments of counter-terrorism.women (and girls) may play the role of supporters or participants in terror groups for a variety of reasons, some of which may have little to do with their gender. Although causes of women’s involvement in terror is still relatively unexplored, studies shows that some of those factors which are responsible for men’s involvement are at the same responsible for that of women grief or revenge for loss, ideology, financial hardship, personal or familial shame and the need for protection of self and family are salient factors responsible for women’s participation in terrorism. (Alok, S. 2023).

Almost all societies hold women in high regard as mothers, intimate partners, and gentle nurturers. Women can and frequently are violent, something that few like to acknowledge. Especially in the context of terrorism, acknowledging that women are capable of violence does not explain how they develop this behavior. However, confronting the societal myth that we don't want to acknowledge women's violence does help to explain how terrifying female terrorist violence can be because it challenges long-held beliefs about women's identities and abilities. Just as we know that women in fact can be violent, we also know that women join terrorist groups when allowed in and they often beg to and actually do carry out highly lethal and violent acts.

## From the standpoint of the terrorist organization, the widespread shock caused by witnessing a female terrorist's savagery may be highly beneficial for media amplification, and most terrorist organizations desire for media attention. Female terrorists typically get a lot more media attention for their cause by raising questions about why a lady would commit a violent act on behalf of a terrorist organization. The press later mistook the headscarves and long black Salafi robes worn by the twenty participating ladies and twenty participating men for widows in mourning. The Chechen female terrorists were called "black widows," and their three-day siege of 800 theatergoers sparked immediate conjecture, sympathy, and interest throughout the world. "Even if we are killed, thousands of brothers and sisters will come after us, ready to sacrifice themselves," a young Chechen woman said to the camera in a terrorist-released clip to al Jazeera.

## There was a significant media uproar when Palestinian organizations let women to join the ranks of suicide bombers. The public in Israel and throughout the globe was surprised to learn that young women were also ready to wear suicide belts and backpacks in order to enter Israel and set themselves on fire, proving that the terrorist cause was not just confined to Palestinian militant males. When it was revealed that one of these female terrorists was a lawyer and a mother of two, the shock level rose even further. The idea that the bearers of life could also carry bombs to kill defenseless civilians seemed unthinkable.

## 2.5 Female Terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan

Pakistan's many Islamist terrorist organizations actively recruit women for a range of jobs. These initiatives purposefully exclude women in spite of the overwhelming body of research that consistently shows how important women are in preventing and combating violent extremism (P/CVE). State and federal legislators continue to maintain gendered assumptions that undervalue women's ability to commit lethal acts of terrorism. This reduces the efficacy of critical video event (P/CVE) and preventative activities and complicates the implementation of comprehensive legislation that encompass both violent and peaceful individuals. Cultural and cultural limitations impede women's participation in community rehabilitation and reintegration. Given the serious threat posed by violent extremism, women must actively participate in the battle against it.

Similarly, women's involvement in the criminal justice system remains largely inadequate, albeit a minor statistical increase, to enable them to have a real effect on social harmony. There are several possibilities to understand the suffering that women who experienced instability throughout the conflict went through in the recently merged districts. Despite their inaccessibility, several cultural obstacles hinder entry. The National Internal Security Policy (2018–2023), which acknowledges the value of women in leadership positions, would take a long time to implement. The integrity of the legal system is undermined when laws are passed without considering their broader context, when there is a lack of adequate resources for their implementation, and when law enforcement fails to effectively enforce them. These matters necessitate prompt consideration.

Although there have been significant improvements in women's political participation, protection of their rights, and overall safety, women living in the northwest tribal zone of Pakistan continue to face significant challenges in terms of security and economic opportunities. After Pakistan's 25th constitutional amendment was approved in 2018, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) were combined to form the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. When combined with further modifications, the amendment might greatly improve women's empowerment, especially for those who have fought for peace in areas that have seen extreme violence. These enhancements may increase the likelihood that these advocates and activists may take part in peacebuilding initiatives in their conflict-affected areas.

The number of women joining transnational jihadist organizations like the Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has significantly increased in Pakistan since 2015. The Al Zikra Academy network, which is made up of wealthy Karachi women who help connect with the Islamic State and raise money, the Shaheen Women's Wing of AQIS, which allegedly trains more than 500 female suicide bombers, and the 2015 incident involving three women who fled to Syria with their twelve children are just a few instances of women actively engaging in terrorist activities and radicalization.

In Pakistan, it is common for women to be involved in terrorist groups. Regarding terrorist groups, Pakistani administrations and security forces have adopted an androcentric approach. minimizing or disregarding the important contributions that women have made to terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban in Pakistan, the Tehrik-i-Taliban in Pakistan (TTP), and more recently, IS and AQIS. These organizations restrict women's employment options, forbid them from going to college, and mostly limit them to household duties. These groups do, however, nonetheless advocate for women to be assigned to critical and specialized roles, which may be called "women's jihad," despite their recognition of the inherent gender inequality in their conception of a "Islamic" society (Mansab, M. 2024).

Women are contributing to security in Pakistan, which is a reality on the ground. In addition to being victims, women also serve as catalysts, performers, and determined agents. Although their function may not be well defined on the political front, it is clearly seen on the social front and in the fieldwork of post-conflict or crisis situations. The situation in Pakistani society is made worse by gender inequity, which encourages radical and extremist tendencies that pose serious security threats to the societal fabric. Women in Pakistani society suffer from internalized systemic violence and inequity. The ability to inherit and own property is frequently denied to women. In a same vein, women do not have access to available and accessible protection or justice. The security of the entire nation is impacted by this patriarchal structure. Patriarchal institutions prolong development, which also helps to maintain the persistent disparities. Men in Pakistani culture enjoy perks due to the patriarchal social structure: their labor is valued by society, they control resources, they have the power to make decisions, they are mobile, and they are not subjected to harassment. Due to their absence of these rights, women are less able to make meaningful contributions to development and do not have access to proper education, training, health care, nutrition, or decision-making authority.

Gender discrimination is ingrained in Pakistani society and restricts women's roles to domestic work or subordinate roles. The lack of visibility of women in Pakistan's economy and the resulting negative effects on women are concerning and perverse. Mahbub-ul-Haq was instrumental in emphasizing the value of gender equality for the nation's economic growth. Despite having women's wings inside all of Pakistan's major political parties, women in Pakistan are still far behind in politics due of the low level of female engagement in party leadership. These wings are mostly intended to encourage female voters during elections rather than to address the practical role of women in political processes. Since they have seldom impacted party goals, their presence is mostly decorative or symbolic. They are vulnerable to extreme impulses since they are underrepresented and a marginalized group in society. For instance, the extreme northwest of Pakistan (now known as the newly Merged Tribal Districts; formerly known as FATA, it was recently merged with KP under the 25th constitutional amendment in 2018) is particularly affected by terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and extremism. It also has one of the lowest rates of female literacy in the world, at 3%, and a 70% school dropout rate for girls. Prior to 2018, FATA women were not taken into account while evaluating the legal effects of Pakistan's mainland women's legislation. It is clear that the prevalence of female illiteracy led to their social marginalization and disempowerment, which had a bigger effect on how the children were raised and socialized.

Children in the region thus lack a contextualized and impartial knowledge of religion, as well as a dispassionate grasp of the religious ideals of self-control, altruism, and tolerance. A significant political void has naturally resulted from the fact that women, who make up half of FATA's population, have been excluded from the political and economic development processes. The most significant connection in the case of FATA is that between the political void and the emergence of terrorism and extremism in the name of Islam. If FATA women had received education and had more influence, they would have known how to settle conflicts amicably. This knowledge might have been passed on to their offspring, who may have been the first line of defense against extremism and terrorism. An educated young Bajaur Agency youngster has attested to this reality.

However, in the regions they control, the Taliban have prohibited females' education, which has led to a rise in terrorism and extremism in FATA (Dilawar, S., Khan, A., & Jadoon, M. N. K. 2019).I carried out fieldwork mostly among gem merchants, cutters, miners, and gemmologists in a market in Peshawar, Pakistan, as part of an anthropological study on how minerals are transformed into valuable commodities.The research looked into how various players who use value-adding techniques start a series of transformations that lead to the emergence of precious stones. I worked in Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, from 2017 to 2019. I traced the supply chain of precious stones to Thailand, a global center for gem trading, by conducting fieldwork at several mining sites in northwest Pakistan and the adjacent regions of Afghanistan.

The most significant mineral and gemstone trade and processing hub in the area at the time of the study was located in Peshawar, where there existed a wholesale market for minerals and gems called Namak Mandi, which translates to "wholesale market for salt." The city acquired its position as a centre of the gem trade in the region largely due to its geographic location and the geopolitical context that saw the arrival in the 1980s of Afghan refugees, They carried their contacts to the mines that produced gems. Peshawar has been seen as too unstable for Western scholars for a number of decades for a variety of reasons originating from Pakistan's internal politics as well as outside variables, chief among them being its closeness to Afghanistan. Travel in the provinces of KPK and Balochistan, which also comprise the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), is discouraged, according to the official websites of the US and UK governments, among others. The US Department of State, In its 2021 travel recommendation, for example, they advise against visiting these two areas because "terrorists have attacked US diplomats and diplomatic "attacks continue to happen across Pakistan, with the majority occurring in Balochistan and KPK, including the former FATA," according to the statement.

## The necessity for a "No Objection Certificate" (NOC), which visitors must get from Pakistan's Ministry of Interior for "prohibited areas in the province," was added to these measures. This rule has been in effect since 2012. However, the NOC was lifted for a few KPK provincial locations in March 2016 (The News 2016). The government agreed to remove the NOC need for foreign visitors wishing to go to different regions of Pakistan in 2019 in an effort to increase tourism, allowing international visitors to travel across the nation without restriction (Dawn 2015). When I first started working in the field, both locals and foreigners warned me about the region's high level of insecurity and advised me to move my study to places like Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad where foreign researchers have previously conducted fieldwork.These cities not only had greater infrastructure and a wider network of institutions, but they were also "more manageable" in terms of security. The fact that they had sizable expat populations and could therefore better serve the demands of a foreigner was perhaps most significant, at least to my safety-conscious counsel. However, the market in Peshawar and the mineral-rich region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa served as the focal point of my research's gem trade and, as such, a primary location for gathering ethnographic data. (Lin, P. H. A. 2022).

## 2.6 Psychological Motivations for Female Terrorism

The psychological aspects of female terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan encompass several key factors:

### Personal and Emotional Drivers

The savage rape of young female terrorists is frequently justified as a kind of punishment for their lack of training progress. Soria, an escapee who was violently raped, describes such a technique in the Human Rights Watch Report. The procedure was repeated, she was at risk, and no one took anything to stop the woman's injury. Because she disobeyed, she was threatened with death. It was discovered that Soria was expecting a child when she managed to flee the colony. The most attractive female recruits are selected by unit commanders. In order to get them to consent to more intimate, frequently sexual contact, they offer them presents, take care of them, and provide them privileges. Women are incapable of refusing. They are adapting to the current circumstances and embracing connections with insurgents who are far older and more powerful.

The commander must be asked for approval if there is a connection between the partisans and they wish to build a relationship. If he accepts, the entire unit is informed that a new pair has been created. They must also acquire permission if they merely want to spend one night together. They must also notify the commander of their departure, who will then inform all of their fellow soldiers. Consequently, there is little room for closeness or genuine emotion among the guerillas. The duration of the connection also depends on their superior's wishes, who has the right to dissolve it at any moment for the sake of the entire company. (Bodziany, M., & Netczuk-Gwoździewicz, M. 2021).

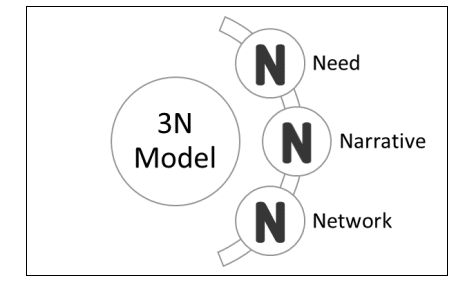


Figure 2.1 3N Model

According to Kruglanski's 3N theory, three important factors—people's needs, the narratives they are exposed to, and the networks they are a member of—interplay to cause radicalization. These three factors have a major impact on the development of violent extremism, claims this idea. The need, which refers to a person's innate drive for personal importance, is the first component. The second element is the narrative, which influences how group members look for meaning in the group's shared history. The third component is the network, which stands for the membership of the group that upholds the story and offers incentives to those who follow it, such respect and recognition.

The analysis of Precht is expanded to identify and investigate factors that run the radical process of militant Islamists. He classifies these motivational factors into three groups:

I. Background factors: These include personal challenges related to questions with religious identity, discrimination experience and social integration.

II. Tiger Factor: This includes influential individuals, such as borrowers or charismatic leaders, and specific events or political decisions that can provoke a reaction or activity.

1. Opportunity factor: These refer to a person's reach and extremist ideas or boundaries for the possibility of individuals. Such factors include physical and virtual places such as the Internet, mosques, prisons and various social groups or collectives.

The two theories provide insightful information on the organizational roles, recruiting tactics, and motives of female terrorists. It is crucial to acknowledge that although these models offer a preliminary comprehension, they could not be applicable to all cases involving women's involvement in terrorism. For example, the "Needs" component of the 3N theory explores the socioeconomic, psychological, and personal factors that influence women to commit acts of terrorism. Additionally, narratives emphasize the propaganda or ideological messaging that terrorists employ to appeal to women, as seen in the situations of the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (BLA). (ASHRAF, M. 2024).

Motivational elements are referred to as the needs component. For many years, a variety of reasons such as retaliation, humiliation, financial incentives, or oppression have been put out to explain the radicalization process.According to the 3N model, these have a common denominator: the need for personal importance, the need to be valued, "to be someone," and that one's life has purpose. This quest for meaning can be triggered in a number of situations, but it is most triggered when people feel a loss of meaning, such as when they suffer from social alienation, humiliation, oppression, or anomia. There is a tremendous push to restore importance in situations that result in a loss of it. It should be mentioned that everyone has the urge to find personal meaning, and most individuals satisfy this need in constructive and prosocial ways (e.g., through employment, family, emotional connections, art, or sports). But occasionally, prosocial approaches to achieve significance are inaccessible or unreachable, which might lead people in particular environments to be inclined to use other, covert means of achieving their significance quest., such as joining a group that upholds antisocial values, such as a criminal gang or radical group.

These groups are social networks that may provide its members with monetary resources, but more importantly, they can foster strong interpersonal bonds that unite people a good sense of self and a sense of brotherhood. The social context in which the radicalization process takes place is provided by these ties. Furthermore,Because of these dynamics, members of the group look up to and respect those who use violence at the organization's command and in accordance with its ideology (e.g., martyrs, heroes). To put it another way, the social network is the ideal platform for gaining personal importance and spreading ideologies a notion we will discuss later.The ideological aspect of radicalization is referred to as narratives. From a psychological perspective, people benefit from these stories since they define what is deemed appropriate in order to attain personal meaning. According to the 3N model, these three variables have a dynamic and interacting role in radicalization. The shift from necessity (personal significance) to joining networks of like-minded people to endorsing political violence is one trajectory that has been described. It is important to stress that recruiters may readily take advantage of the lack of personal importance to justify political violence. Similarly, some settings that promote meaning loss (such as imprisoned areas, war zones, and ghettoized metropolitan areas) could be conducive to radicalism. Cities with low social integration, high crime rates, and limited economic possibilities, for example, have been linked to an increased likelihood of Islamist radicalization, according to research. In this essay, we ask why social settings that are likely to result in significance loss also frequently lead to support for terrorism. Here, we contend that some mosques can contribute to this process under susceptible situations (Lobato, R. M., Moyano, M., Bélanger,J. J., & Trujillo, H. M. 2021).

These deadly suicide assaults are carried out by terrorist organizations that are either secular or religiously motivated and target their enemies, which include both foreign and local administrative authorities. They are active in several nations and comprise groups like the Osama bin Laden network (Al Qaida), the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of Turkey, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of Algeria, and Egyptian Islamic Jehad (EIJ).

Furthermore, women's radicalization is also significantly influenced by socioeconomic challenges. Women frequently experience extreme poverty, limited access to education, and limited prospects for social mobility in conflict-ridden areas, especially in the global south. When these socio -economic difficulties are combined with the death of a family member or violent disturbance of a society, it seems that extreme ideas are a good way to avoid the terrible reality of their existence. Radical groups provide women in the organizations that cross traditional gender stereotypes, and can give women a chance to avoid community, related and harassment.

Extremist ideologies are psychologically attractive because they otherwise provide security and clarity in the misleading and unpleasant world. Terrorist groups can appeal to trauma by portraying terrorism to alleviate personal pain and protect the dowstrade, increasing the possibility that these women will support ideology and its deadly goals. Under these circumstances, terrorism is a fighting strategy, a means of regaining control and a revenge remedy for those responsible for the grief.

In short, the intersection of personal trauma, revenge and socio -economic difficulties creates a fruitful reason for radicalization in women. The psychological tolls of these experiences, in connection with the feeling of extremist ideologies and a sense of purpose, make these women weak for particular recruitment. Understanding the psychological motivations behind female terrorism is crucial for developing more effective **counterterrorism strategies**. Addressing the underlying grievances, providing emotional support, and offering alternative pathways to empowerment and belonging are critical steps in preventing radicalization and ensuring the resilience of at-risk communities.People are driven by various motivations to join these organizations, such as glorification after death, pride for the community, poor living conditions, and cultural and religious compulsion. Recently, these groups have turned to increase the participation of female suicide bombers because they can help them achieve their practical goals and send them to places that male bombers cannot access (Munir, G., Ali, M., & Sheikh, S. 2023).

### Ideological and Religious Indoctrination

The literature reviewed revealed that relationship between Far-Right movements and

the general public is inconsistent, but that the groups appear to be universally interested in eliciting support from a wider (albeit highly specific) audience. On the one hand, certain Far-Right movements seek to get more involved in society by exploiting common grievances in an effort to recruit more adherents to their organization, on the other, many Far Right movements are broadly perceived as being

divorced from society (e.g. some of the Neo-Nazi movements) and do not seek to recruit members of the wider public to their cause.

The findings of **our content analysis** indicate that when efforts are made by Far-Right groups to win over the public, the public either passively aligns with a rising wave of racism or experiences a kind of 'awakening' in response to the group's use of excessive violence, which is typically connected to the Far Right group committing unacceptable levels of violence. Logical and experiential meta functions are the two sub meta-functions that make up ideational meta functions. Another name for an experiential meta function is a transitivity system. Process refers to seeing how an event is represented. It is the process that expresses our experiences and the world around us. The process is realized by a verbal group in a clause. Participant refers to the nominal group involved in the activity. Circumstance refers to an adverbial or prepositional phrase; it is an additional meaning of the process. It gives extra detail about the physical action and inner world in which human experiences are constructed. there are “six types of processes in transitivity such as material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process, and existential process”. They can be explained as the following:

• First, the material process is also known as the action process. It shows physical actions (doings) and events (happening). It constructs our physical world by showing our actions and events. Participants in the material process are an actor (the doer of the action), goal (the participant who is affected by the actor), scope (the participant who is unaffected by the actor), beneficiary-recipient (the participant to whom the process occurs), beneficiary-client (the participant form whom process occurs), and initiator (the participant that acts as a catalyst).

• Second, mental process refers to our inner world. This process shows the experiences of consciousness. It represents the inner thoughts, ideas, perceptions, desires, and emotions of human beings. There are four main subtypes of a mental process such as mental perception, mental cognitive, mental emotive, and mental desiderative. In mental perception, the senser perceives an object in the external world using his five senses such as seeing and hearing. In mental cognitive, senser involves his mental process to construct his inner world such as thinking and knowing. In mental emotive, senser constructs his emotion in the world of consciousness such as like, love, and hate. In mental desiderative, senser shows the desires of his inner world such as hope and wish. The participants in the mental process are senser which is a participant who perceives, thinks, feels, and wants in the mental process and the phenomenon which is the act, thing, or fact which is perceived, felt, and wanted.

• Third, the relational process refers to the relationship between different entities and

constructs the relations between acts, facts, and things. Two subtypes of this process

are attributive and identifying.

• Fourth, the verbal process is also known as the process of saying. The participants

in the relational process are the carrier, attribute, attributor, token (the participant

which is indicated by an entity in the identification process), and value (the

participant which is identified as the token).

• Fifth, the behavioral process constructs the physiological and psychological behaviors of human beings like breathing and smiling.

• Sixth, the existential process shows the existence of things or happenings of events.

The word ‘there’ and ‘to be’ are also used to show the existence of things (Gunawan, F., Kuraedah, S., Amir, A. M., Ubaidillah, M. F., & Boulahnane, S. 2023).

Extremist groups in Northwestern Pakistan effectively use **religious narratives** to recruit and radicalize women by offering them a framework in which violence is justified and their roles are both sacred and necessary. By combining religious indigenization with personal complaints, social networks and online publicity, these groups create a compelling story that attracts weak women, giving them a sense of purpose, authority and related. Understanding the role of religious extremism in female fanaticism is necessary to develop effective anti-terrorism strategies that address both ideological and socio-political factors that engage in women's participation in terrorism.

### Socio-Economic Pressures

Poverty, lack of education and economic scarcity are important factors that contribute to women's vulnerability in joining extremist groups. In areas such as northwestern Pakistan, where socio -economic conditions are often serious, women meet limited opportunities for social mobility, education and economic freedom. These structural inequalities make women receptive to promises of special authority, economic stability and social recognition that offer terrorist organizations. For many women, joining an extremist group is an alleged path to avoid poverty and improve their socio -economic status, especially when alternative roads for progress are rare or inaccessible.

Research has shown that extremist organizations often provide financial incentives, such as scholarships, access to basic needs and even the possibility of pay for participation in terrorist activities. This financial support can be very attractive, especially in poor areas where women often have some means to support themselves or their families. An appeal of economic stability in an environment where other alternatives are limited to serving livelihoods, they cannot be reduced. Extremist groups exploit these weaknesses, which give women a promise of security and economically **independence** in exchange for their allegiance and participation in their violent cause.

Apart from economic incentives, terrorist organizations also provide a sense of social recognition and belonging. In many Orthodox communities, women are often excluded from public life and deprived of leadership or opportunities for social influence. Extremist groups exploit women with roles that allow them to go out of the boundaries of traditional gender roles and be recognized as active participants in a major ideological movement. The feeling of purpose that comes with part of the more cause in itself can be incredibly hypnotic, especially for women who feel marginalized or oppressed. This social recognition often extends to the social status of the group, where women involved in extremist movements are celebrated and respected to their commitment to the ground.

In addition, extremist groups offer opportunities for authority that women cannot find in their traditional social roles. In a context where many women feel powerless and trapped in tough social expectations, becoming a member of a terrorist organization can be a way of achieving agency and controlling life. For some women, terrorism becomes a means of ignoring oppressive patriarchal structures that limit their freedom and opportunities. It gives women an opportunity to demand their agency, through violent means, and to have a concrete impact on the political landscape, even though that effect is disastrous.

In some cases, the promise of authority is associated with religious or ideological motivations, where extremist groups give women a spiritual or moral structure that justifies their participation. The spirit of Empowerment is then associated with a deep sense of religious or ideological duty, further strengthens the appeal of Bigotry.

### Finally, poverty, lack of education and economic scarcity are the most important factors that increase the vulnerability of extremist recruitment of women. The opportunities for financial incentives, social recognition and authority offered by terrorist organizations are powerful tools used to attract marginalized women. By addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions that contribute to sensitivity to women's fanaticism, anti-terrorism strategies can more effectively address the causes of female participation in extremist activities. Economic empowerment, social recognition and providing alternative roads for individual agencies can help reduce the appeal to terrorism and reduce the number of women drawn in extremist movements (Ahmed, Y., and Lynch, O. 2024)

### Psychological Manipulation and Coercion

errorism is often exposed to various forms of psychological power for women, including brainwashing, forced recruitment and social pressure from family members or extremist networks. These psychological strategies are designed to manipulate and control especially weak individuals, often exploited their emotional weaknesses, personal complaints and limited autonomy. Terrorist organizations understand the significant psychological effects of recruitment, appoint these strategies to break the individual's resistance and draw them into their rank.

**Brainwashing, or ideological dissection is one of the most effective methods used to manipulate women manipulating acts of violence. Through frequent contact for extremist ideologies, they are designed to internally a new world vision that justifies violence as a fair task, often designed as a divine or moral obligation. When it comes to women, this process often involves introducing violence as an authority, honor or way of obtaining justice to their personal sorrows or social margins. The more uncertain the person, the easier it will be to distort their faith and values ​​for recruitment, and present them a stiff and narrow ideological structure that otherwise makes sense of meaning and direction in a chaotic or painful environment.**

**In many cases, forced recruitment also plays a role in female fanaticism. Women, especially on marginalized or from the deprived background, may not actively look for extremist attire, but instead are forced to join it. It can come in the form of pressure from forced threats, manipulation or male family members, social leaders or other individuals who are already part of the extremist network. In some cases, women are forced to perform terrorist work by family members who see the action as a duty or respect for the group, and women's decisions can be significantly influenced to participate in social pressure in the family or social network. Lack of autonomy in these situations makes challenging to reject recruitment efforts for women, as they may be afraid of rejection, shame or punishment in their social context.**

**Social pressure in extremist groups can also be a powerful strength. When women are integrated into these networks, they can quickly be isolated from the large society, and often undergo an intensive socialization process in the group. They may be led to believe that the group is their only source, the only source of support and security, especially if they feel isolated or oppressed in local communities. This feeling of society is especially compelling to women who have experienced trauma, loss or dissolution. Through the group of harmony and pressure from the colleague, women are often pressured to perform acts of violence, not necessarily out of a real ideological involvement, but out of the desire to fit the group.**

**Terror organizations also exploit the woman's emotional weaknesses. Many female recruitment comes from the background characterized by personal trauma, grief and loss, and extremist groups give these feelings a sense of purpose and revenge. In this context, emotional appeal is strong - terrorist groups can give women a legend about revenge against those responsible for the grief, such as loss, economic deficiency or political harassment of family members. In the event of violence as a means of justice or redemption, extremist groups effectively manipulate women's will for treatment or restoration.**

**The psychological strategy used by these organizations also includes the agency's identity, purpose and feeling - anything that can appeal incredibly to women who have historically denied their traditional social roles.** By preparing violence as an opportunity for individual authority and social change, women are motivated to believe that they play an essential role in the struggle for a major reason, often one who is divinely appointed or morally prepared as fair.

Terrorist organizations have psychological coercive -dimensional for women facing women, including brainwashing, forced recruitment and social pressure. These organizations exploit women's emotional weaknesses, complaints and limited autonomy to manipulate them in acts of violence. Understanding these psychological strategies is important for developing anti -terrorism strategies aimed at emotional and social factors that run female radicalization. It may be possible to address these weaknesses through alternative opportunities for education, emotional support and authority, reduce the attraction of extremist organizations and give women a way of treatment, related and authority beyond violent extremism.

**2.8 Roles of Women in Terrorist Organizations**

### Suicide Bombers

**Women suicide attackers have become an important large strategy for terrorist organizations, especially in areas where security measures are mainly designed to focus on male fighter jets. The use of women in these roles is largely inspired by their perceived ability to circumvent security tests. Since women are often less likely to fulfill violent actions, they are strategically used by extremist groups to perform suicide bombing or murder, which will be more easily detected when done by men. This strategic benefit has made women suicide attacks an important component of the arsenal to many terrorist organizations.**

**Research in motivations behind women's involvement in suicide bombing suggests that these women often do not work out of independent desire, but are subject to a complex set of forced factors, including social pressure, psychological manipulation and ideological indigenous peoples. Social pressure, especially from family members, social leaders or militant commanders, is an important strength for pushing women into these roles. In many cases, women can be forced or manipulated to fulfill suicide attacks, either through dangers, emotional manipulation, or respect and promise of prices.**

In some examples, female bombers can be recruited directly by male members of the family or through other social relationships, explaining them that their self -sacrifice will provide respect for their families or bring divine approval. These women are often told that their martyr death will have spiritual awards and their work is needed to win the case. This ideological commitment is depth through religious indigenization, which depicts his role as an essential part of fulfilling religious obligations, especially when it comes to jihad.

Psychological power also plays an important role in recruitment and bigotry of female suicide attackers. Studies have shown that many women who become a suicide attack are often subjected to psychological manipulation, where they are motivated to believe that taking such actions will give them freedom from their previous socio -economic or personal conflicts. For some women, the promise of purpose or authority through suicide bombing may be more compelling than their previous oppression or marginalization. Women are sometimes designed to realize that their lives have been useless or insignificant, and the function of the bombing is depicted as a way to gain significance and recognition.

In addition, sex stories play an important role in the radical process. In many Orthodox communities, such as northwestern Pakistan, women are often involved in secondary roles in society and denied opportunities to participate in major political or social movements. Terrorist organizations can benefit from these sex mobilities by putting women suicide attackers in the form of change agents, which can defy the traditional roles made on them, leading to a sense of empowerment. The task of becoming a suicide attack is designed as a rebellion against patriarchal systems that limit their autonomy, which can be recognized not only in the terrorist group, but also in their society.

While some women are forced or manipulated to commit suicide bombs, there are also examples where women actually believe in ideology and commitment to cause. For these women, the action of suicide bombing can be carried out by deeply sitting faith about the rights of their case, which is combined with the disadvantage of family members due to military operations or drone strikes, such as the disadvantage of alleged injustice or trauma. In these cases, bombing is not only an expression of commitment to an ideology, but also a revenge for personal loss and seeking justice.

While women's suicide attacks are often seen as a symbol of martyr death and affection in the eyes of terrorist organizations that recruit them, reality is far more complex. Women who become suicide bombers often do so under power, social pressure or psychological manipulation instead of making independent decisions. Their participation is often designed as an act of self -sacrifice and authority, but it is often the result of a deep underlying system of ideological indigenization and sex utilization. Understanding the motivations and psychological factors behind women's suicide attacks are important for anti -terrorism efforts trying to prevent radicalism and destroy the systems that enable the recruitment of women to violent extremist movements **(Rohman, A., & Ambo'Dalle, A. R. 2022)**.

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### Recruitment and Propaganda

**Women have become increasingly important in the recruitment efforts of extremist groups, especially to target other women. Unlike their male colleagues, female recruitment often has unique access to social networks in local communities, making them very effective in influencing others to broadcast ideological messages and involve violent extremist movements. These women act as reliable figures in their social circles, use their roles to appeal to other women such as mothers, sisters, wives or even peers and to make them radical through personal connections and shared experiences.**

One of the primary methods of extremist groups is one of the most important methods using women in their recruitment efforts, and utilizes women's recruiters to contact potential recruitment through mutual conditions. In many Orthodox communities, including in the Northwest Pakistan, women often have close ties in family and social networks that may be important to spread extremist ideologies. These women can ignore the obstacles to recruit gender insulation that can limit the range of male recruitment for women, which can lead to more effective opportunity for bigotry.

Social media and online forums have also become important tools in the radical and recruitment process. Women's recruiters in extremist groups often use social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Telegram, to share publicity, empowerment messages and notice posts aimed at the purpose of other women. The ability to communicate externally allows them to now wide target groups, especially in more isolated or oppressed areas where physical access to extremist groups or recruitment can be limited. These platforms enable recruiters to establish virtual communities, where women with equal ideologies can add each other to their ideology, share experiences and support each other.

Religious ceremony is another important method as female recruits spread extremist ideologies. In many mattresses (religious schools), women can play leadership roles or serve as mentors, which can help shape the faith of small or less radical women. This environment allows recruiters to inspire women in a controlled and impressive location, where religious stories are woven with political or militant goals. Women's recruiters can use these settings to tell the personal stories of empowerment, revenge or martyr death, who prepare their participation in extremism as a function of religious duty and social significance.

The task of recruiting other women is particularly powerful, as it gives a sense of solidarity and shared goals that appeal to women's will for fellowship, related and empowerment. In many cases, female recruitment is motivated to believe that their participation in extremist activities, either suicide attackers, support staff or ideological warriors, is a means of freeing themselves from social oppression or marginalized. Women, especially those who tolerate personal complaints such as family loss, poverty or discrimination, often find a sense of purpose and strength in these stories. Female recruiters play on these feelings, pay radicalization as a means of correcting control of their lives and abusing patriarchal norms.

In addition, women can recruit benefit from the emotional ties between women, for example between mothers and daughters, or sisters and sisters. These conditions are central to many women, and a sense of duty for family and community can be used to manipulate women to participate in violence. Women in extremist groups can use their status as reliable figures in their local communities to influence other women, often promise respect and recognition to join them in the case, especially if they feel marginalized or powerless in everyday life.

It is important that these women are not just passive disorders in the process of bigotry. They often demonstrate agencies in their actions, and in some cases the decision to recruit other women is inspired by personal ideological involvement, revenge or desire to be part of a great social and political movement. Female recruiters can really believe in ideology as they promote and see their work as a function of religious affection or nationalist duty, thus acting as an important capacitor for the development of extremist networks.

Finally, female recruiters play an important role in the radical process, especially to reach and recruit other women. Their social networks, access to religious ceremonies and the ability to communicate through online platforms make them very effective at spreading extremist ideologies and recruiting new members. By exploiting emotions, grief and empowerment of the desire for marginalization, complaints and empowerment, these recruitment plays an important role in strengthening female appearance in extremist organizations, making it an essential aspect of understanding the dynamics of Bigotry in areas such as Northwestern Pakistan.

### Logistical and Support Roles

Women play an important role in terrorist organizations, which contribute to operations beyond direct violence. While media and public opinion often focus on female suicide attacks or fighter jets, women also act as the stability of extremist networks and all necessary components in the function of the extremist networks and also act as narrator, logistical supporters, economics and intelligence collectors.

One of the most important roles of women in terrorist groups is logical support. In these roles, women often manage or help maintain safe houses or other secret places used by the organization. They can facilitate movement and communication in the network and ensure that the operation continues smoothly and reduces the risk of detection. These tasks, although they are often not as glamorous as a direct struggle, are integrated parts of terrorist operations and are particularly important in areas where military attendance or intelligence agencies are very awake.

Another important field where women contribute, money is to raise and financial management. Female members of terrorist groups are often tasked with raising funds for the organization through different types, including charity fronts, smuggling, extortion of ransom and personal donations. They can organize money to raise programs, contact sympathetic individuals or even use their social networks to support terrorist activities. The financial resources they produce allow extremist groups to buy weapons, ammunition and other necessary supplies, as well as maintain the infrastructure of the recruitment. In some cases, women may also be involved in money laundering or channeling resources for terrorist networks through legitimate businesses or front organizations.

Intelligence is another important role that women contribute to terrorist operations. Women often act as detectives, informants or cures, collect and transfer important information on military movements, law enforcement activities or goals. Their ability to move in local communities undoubtedly makes them very effective at gathering intelligence, as they can collect and pass with information without attracting attention. In some cases, women can also participate in recruitment efforts, where they want to identify potential colleagues or targeted people who may be radical to join the case or who can give the organization valuable intelligence to the organization.

In addition to these practical roles, women in terrorist organizations often serve as **ideological supporters** and **propagandists**. They may be tasked with spreading **propaganda** and **recruitment materials** through various channels, including **social media**, **religious gatherings**, and **community networks**. Their role in spreading the ideological message is crucial in maintaining the **morale** of the group and in recruiting **new members**, including women who might feel that their involvement in the cause offers a form of **empowerment** or **resistance** to oppressive societal structures. Women are also used in **public-facing roles** in some extremist groups to **humanize** the movement and show a softer side, especially in **online media**, to attract broader support or recruit **sympathizers**.

The **psychological manipulation** of women, by turning them into **logistical operators**, **financial facilitators**, and **intelligence gatherers**, is often seen as an effort to maximize the **efficiency** and **stealth** of terrorist organizations. Women involved in these roles may **rationalize** their involvement by viewing their activities as acts of **supporting a just cause** or **defying oppression**, providing a sense of **purpose** and **agency** within a larger **movement**.

Moreover, **gender dynamics** often play a role in these roles. Women may be able to infiltrate areas or interact with individuals that male operatives cannot, given societal norms regarding **gender segregation** in many regions. This dynamic allows women to access spaces that are typically closed off to men, such as schools, religious institutions, and private homes, thereby providing valuable access for intelligence gathering, recruitment, or spreading propaganda.

In summary, **women in terrorist organizations** serve in a multitude of roles that are vital to the success and **continuation** of extremist activities. Their involvement is not limited to **combat or violence** but extends to **logistical support**, **fundraising**, **intelligence gathering**, and **ideological promotion**. While these roles are often overshadowed by more visible acts of violence, they are equally essential in sustaining terrorist operations. Understanding the breadth of **women's contributions** in these capacities is crucial for developing more effective **counterterrorism strategies** and for challenging the common **narrative** that portrays women in these organizations solely as **victims** or **followers**.

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The psychological and social dynamics driving female terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan are complex and multifaceted. The cognitive perspective provides insight into the individual processes that lead to radicalization, while the feminist perspective highlights the structural and gendered factors influencing women’s involvement in terrorism. By examining variables such as socioeconomic conditions, trauma, ideological exposure, and social networks, researchers can better understand the motivations and psychological constructs of female terrorists in this region. A nuanced approach integrating both perspectives is essential for developing effective counterterrorism strategies that address the unique experiences and challenges faced by women in extremist environments.

The theoretical construction of this study, as mentioned provides a strong structure to understand the complex motivations, social effects and ideological obligations of female terrorists in answers -west Pakistan. By integrating cognitive and feminist approaches, the research creates a multidimensional objective that captures both individual psychological processes and the socio -political structures that shape women's participation in terrorism. Cognitive perspective suggests that psychological mechanisms - such as radical processes, cognitive disadvantages and emotional triggers - women - to extreme ideologies, often as a reaction to trauma or margins. At the same time, feminist perspective reflects these individual experiences in broad patriarchal and fighting contexts, and shows that structural oppression, gender roles and social expectations increase the vulnerability to women's fanaticism. It is supported by principles such as double overview, social learning principles, frustration concept hypothesis and cognitive radical principles, not only enriches the analysis of female terrorism, but also draws a significant interval in the scholarship of international relationships by disrupting the interaction between psychological and gender dynamics. By structuring theoretical construction in this way, the study provides a broad and fine understanding that indicates both educational discourse and political intervention, which advocates traumatic, sex -sensitive approaches to terrorism and peace.

# ****Chapter 3****

# ****Research Methodology****

## ****3.1 Introduction****

The methodology chapter outlines the procedural foundations of the study titled **"Understanding the Psychology of Female Terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan: Motivations, Social Influences, and Ideological Commitments."** Given the sensitive and complex nature of the topic, this chapter details the **qualitative research approach**, the rationale for selecting **secondary case study data**, and the methods used for sampling, data analysis, and ensuring validity and ethics. The research seeks to investigate the intricate psychological, social, and ideological factors driving women’s involvement in terrorism—a phenomenon underexplored in academic literature.

In this thesis I examine the factors involved in motivating women to join terrorist organizations. In order to determine the impact of these various factors, I will engage in a qualitative analysis of three case studies of different terrorist organizations with female involvement. In this chapter, I will justify my choice of qualitative analysis as opposed to a statistical quantitative analysis. Then, I will discuss the case selection process and how the cases fit together to achieve the desired comparisons. Lastly, I will discuss the measurement of variables and the validity concerns applicable to these measurement techniques.

**3.1.1 Justification for Using Case Studies**

**Introduction**

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the motivations of women joining terrorist organizations, focusing on three cases to provide in-depth insights into individual, societal, and organizational factors. The case study method is chosen due to the unreliability and scarcity of quantitative data on women’s participation in terrorism, as self-reported accounts may be biased and many organizations lack comprehensive data on female members. By analyzing three cases, this study delves into contextual factors, compares motivational patterns, and identifies influential variables across diverse settings. The selected cases focus on regions in Pakistan affected by terrorism, with an emphasis on understanding how these contexts influence women’s motivations to join terrorist activities.

**Selected Cases**

The three case studies are drawn from regions and contexts in Pakistan impacted by terrorism, with a focus on how these environments shape women’s involvement in terrorist organizations. Below are the cases based on the provided abstracts, adapted to focus on women’s motivations.

1. **Case 1: Women in the Pashtun Belt (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan) Post-Taliban Resurgence (2021–2022)**
   * **Context**: This case examines the impact of the Taliban’s resurgence in Afghanistan (2021–2022) on Pakistan’s Pashtun belt, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. It focuses on women influenced by the Taliban’s conservative ideology and its spillover into Pakistani politics and society, potentially motivating female participation in Taliban-affiliated or sympathetic groups.
   * **Rationale**: The Taliban’s rise has ideological and political repercussions in Pakistan’s Pashtun belt, where women may be drawn to extremist groups due to shared cultural and religious ties. Data from political manifestos, discourse, and interviews provide rich qualitative material to explore motivations such as ideological alignment or social pressures.
   * **Data Sources**: Analysis of political party manifestos, slogans, rhetoric, and interviews with community members or former female affiliates, supplemented by secondary sources like academic studies and reports.
2. **Case 2: Women in Swat Valley Post-Conflict (Post-2009)**
   * **Context**: This case focuses on the Swat Valley, a region in Pakistan heavily affected by terrorism during the Taliban’s control (2007–2009) and its aftermath. It examines how the socio-psychological impacts of conflict influence women’s motivations to join terrorist or extremist groups, either during or after the conflict.
   * **Rationale**: The Swat Valley offers a unique case to study the lingering effects of terrorism on women, including trauma, loss of resources, and exposure to extremist ideologies, which may drive participation in terrorism. Primary and secondary sources, such as interviews and reports, provide insights into these motivations.
   * **Data Sources**: Interviews with affected women, official reports, books, and journal articles documenting the socio-psychological impacts of conflict in Swat.
3. **Case 3: Women Across Pakistan Affected by Psychological Impacts of Terrorism (Post-9/11)**
   * **Context**: This case explores the psychological consequences of terrorism on Pakistani women nationwide, particularly how fear and psychological disorders may push some women toward extremist groups as a coping mechanism or response to societal instability.
   * **Rationale**: The pervasive psychological impact of terrorism across Pakistan provides a broader context to study how fear and trauma influence women’s motivations to join terrorist organizations. This case complements the regional focus of the other two by offering a national perspective.
   * **Data Sources**: Interviews, psychological studies, and policy reports documenting the mental health effects of terrorism, with a focus on women’s narratives and extremist recruitment patterns.

**Justification for Case Selection**

The three cases were selected based on the following criteria:

1. **Availability of Qualitative Data**: Each case provides access to primary and secondary sources (e.g., interviews, reports, political discourse) to support in-depth analysis of women’s motivations, addressing the challenge of unreliable quantitative data.
2. **Relevance to Terrorism**: All cases are rooted in contexts heavily influenced by terrorism (Taliban resurgence, Swat conflict, national psychological impacts), allowing exploration of how these environments shape women’s involvement in extremist groups.
3. **Geographic and Temporal Diversity**: The cases cover different regions (Pashtun belt, Swat Valley, nationwide) and time periods (2021–2022, post-2009, post-9/11), ensuring a varied yet comparable set of contexts.
4. **Focus on Women’s Involvement**: While direct data on female terrorists may be limited, these cases provide indirect insights through socio-political and psychological impacts that influence women’s motivations to join extremist groups.

**Similarities Across Cases**

The following commonalities across the cases help identify broadly influential motivational factors for women’s participation in terrorism:

1. **Exposure to Extremist Ideologies**: In all cases, women are exposed to extremist ideologies, whether through the Taliban’s influence in the Pashtun belt, the legacy of Taliban control in Swat, or the broader fear-driven narratives post-9/11.
2. **Socio-Psychological Stressors**: Trauma, fear, and social disruption (e.g., conflict in Swat, psychological disorders nationwide, or political shifts in the Pashtun belt) create vulnerabilities that extremist groups may exploit to recruit women.
3. **Community and Cultural Influences**: Social networks, including family and community ties, play a role in shaping women’s motivations, as seen in the Pashtun belt’s cultural proximity to Afghanistan, Swat’s community trauma, and national fear-driven dynamics.
4. **Gendered Vulnerabilities**: Women in these contexts face unique challenges (e.g., marginalization, loss of agency) that may drive them toward terrorism as a form of empowerment or resistance.

**Differences Across Cases**

The differences between the cases allow for a nuanced understanding of context-specific factors:

1. **Geographic Scope**:
   * **Pashtun Belt**: Focuses on a specific region (KP and Balochistan) with cross-border ties to Afghanistan, emphasizing political and ideological shifts.
   * **Swat Valley**: Concentrates on a localized conflict zone with a history of Taliban control, highlighting post-conflict recovery and trauma.
   * **Nationwide**: Examines a broader, national perspective, focusing on psychological impacts across diverse regions.
2. **Time Period**:
   * **Pashtun Belt**: Recent (2021–2022), tied to the Taliban’s resurgence in Afghanistan.
   * **Swat Valley**: Post-2009, focusing on the aftermath of intense conflict.
   * **Nationwide**: Long-term (post-9/11), covering a broader timeline of terrorism’s psychological effects.
3. **Primary Motivational Drivers**:
   * **Pashtun Belt**: Ideological alignment with the Taliban’s conservative worldview and political disenfranchisement.
   * **Swat Valley**: Socio-psychological trauma and loss of resources, pushing women toward extremism as a coping mechanism.
   * **Nationwide**: Fear and psychological disorders as instruments of radicalization.
4. **Data Focus**:
   * **Pashtun Belt**: Political discourse, manifestos, and slogans, with a focus on ideological changes.
   * **Swat Valley**: Socio-psychological impacts, using interviews and reports on mental health and resources.
   * **Nationwide**: Psychological studies and policy reports, emphasizing fear and mental health disorders.

**Contribution to the Study**

By analyzing these three cases, the study can:

* **Identify Common Motivations**: Similarities (e.g., exposure to extremism, socio-psychological stressors) highlight universal factors driving women’s participation in terrorism.
* **Understand Contextual Influences**: Differences (e.g., regional vs. national scope, ideological vs. psychological drivers) reveal how specific contexts shape motivations.
* **Provide In-Depth Insights**: The qualitative approach allows detailed exploration of individual backgrounds, societal factors, and organizational influences, overcoming the limitations of unreliable data.
* **Enable Comparative Analysis**: Comparing across these cases helps isolate the most influential variables (e.g., ideology, trauma) while accounting for regional and temporal variations.

**Conclusion**

The selection of these three cases—women in the Pashtun belt post-Taliban resurgence, women in Swat Valley post-conflict, and women across Pakistan affected by terrorism’s psychological impacts—enables a robust qualitative analysis of women’s motivations for joining terrorist organizations. Their similarities provide a foundation for identifying common drivers, while their differences ensure a comprehensive exploration of diverse contexts. This approach maximizes the depth and comparability of the analysis, addressing the challenges of unreliable data and contributing to a nuanced understanding of women’s involvement in terrorism.

**3.1.2 Outcome measures**

The qualitative outcome of this study is a detailed exploration of the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving women’s involvement in terrorist activities in Northwestern Pakistan, as derived from the thematic analysis of three case studies. Specifically, the study aims to identify and describe:

* The psychological motivations (e.g., trauma, psychopathology, identity crises) that influence women’s decisions to join terrorist organizations.
* The social influences (e.g., familial pressures, community networks, gender roles) that shape their radicalization pathways.
* The ideological narratives (e.g., religious or political commitments) that female terrorists adopt and how these inform their roles within extremist groups.
* Comparative insights into how these motivations and roles differ from those of male terrorists.

These outcomes are assessed through the identification of recurring themes and patterns across the case studies, using thematic analysis to uncover the interplay of individual experiences, societal contexts, and ideological frameworks in female radicalization

**3.1.3 Data extraction**

Data extraction was conducted by the researcher to systematically collect and organize qualitative information from secondary sources relevant to the three case studies, focusing on the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving female involvement in terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan. The primary aim was to extract data that illuminates the motivations, social influences, and ideological commitments of female terrorists, with a secondary focus on comparing these factors with those of male terrorists where possible.

**3.1.4 Assessment of the risk of bias in the included studies**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researcher evaluated the quality of the secondary sources used in the three case studies, focusing on their relevance, credibility, and applicability to the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving female terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan. The assessment was guided by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, which integrates Social Learning Theory, Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis, Cognitive Radicalization Theory, and Feminist Theory to provide a comprehensive lens for understanding female radicalization.

### Quality Assessment Process

The quality of each source was assessed based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance to Research Objectives**: Sources were evaluated for their direct relevance to the study’s focus on psychological motivations (e.g., trauma, identity crises), social influences (e.g., familial and community pressures), ideological narratives (e.g., religious or political commitments), and comparisons with male terrorists. Sources providing detailed accounts of female terrorists’ experiences, roles, or motivations in Northwestern Pakistan were prioritized.
2. **Credibility and Authenticity**: The researcher assessed the credibility of sources by examining their origin, authorship, and publication context. For example, scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals, reports from reputable NGOs (e.g., International Crisis Group), and government publications were considered highly credible. Media reports and biographical accounts were cross-checked with other sources to verify accuracy and minimize bias.
3. **Alignment with Theoretical Framework**: Sources were evaluated for their alignment with the study’s theoretical constructs:
   * **Social Learning Theory**: Sources were assessed for evidence of how women learn extremist behaviors through observation, social interactions, or exposure to radical networks (e.g., family, community, or online platforms).
   * **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis**: Sources were examined for data on how socio-economic hardships, political oppression, or personal trauma contribute to women’s engagement in terrorism as an outlet for frustration.
   * **Cognitive Radicalization Theory**: Sources were evaluated for insights into the cognitive processes (e.g., exposure to propaganda, ideological indoctrination) that lead to radical beliefs among women.
   * **Feminist Theory**: Sources were assessed for their treatment of gender-specific factors, such as patriarchal constraints, agency, and gendered violence, in shaping women’s roles in terrorism.
4. **Depth of Female-Specific Insights**: Sources were prioritized if they provided detailed, gender-specific data on female terrorists’ motivations, roles, or psychological profiles. When female-specific data was limited, the researcher evaluated whether broader data (e.g., on terrorist groups or regional contexts) could be contextualized to infer female-specific insights, ensuring relevance to the study’s focus.
5. **Contextual Richness**: Sources were assessed for their ability to provide contextual depth, such as socio-political, cultural, or historical details relevant to Northwestern Pakistan. This ensured that the case studies captured the complex interplay of individual and structural factors influencing female radicalization.

## ****3.2 Research Paradigm****

This research adopts an **interpretivist paradigm**, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals. The interpretivist framework aligns with the study's aim of understanding the motivations and narratives of female terrorists from their own contexts. Instead of seeking objective generalizations, this paradigm enables exploration of the lived experiences, ideologies, and environments that shape women’s paths to radicalization.

**3.2.1 Analytical Strategy**

This thesis supports the hypothesis in four phases. First, biased reporting is evaluated through various examples of conclusions that are derived from media speculations about how women are treated and expected to behave in repressive societies. This study challenges those claims with academic findings.

Second, it identifies historical evidence that describe women’s participation in violent activities. Descriptive case study analysis is conducted throughout this study to identify the role of women in terrorist groups found in Europe, South America, Central America, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East.

Third, using criminological data on gender and violence, this thesis compares criminology findings on gender and violence to the effect of perceptions on female terrorists. Assumptions about women terrorists are mirrored in theories about female criminality. The long-standing focus on male violence has left a significant gap in understanding the motivations of violent women.

Fourth, using a case study, this paper evaluates women of the Akers' social learning theory (SLT) in a multicausal framework. It exposes that existing gender analysis at the individual level is insufficient to fully understanding causal factors for female terrorists. Analysis conducted at the individual, organizational, and societal levels demonstrates that motivations of female terrorists are best identified when evaluated in the context of organization and society.

## ****3.3 Research Design****

A **qualitative case study design** is employed in this research to explore and analyze the complex motivations, social influences, and ideological commitments of female terrorists in Northwestern Pakistan. This approach is particularly suited for examining phenomena that are deeply embedded within specific socio-political and cultural contexts. **Case studies** enable an in-depth and holistic examination of a contemporary issue by situating it within its real-life environment, thereby allowing the researcher to investigate not only the phenomenon itself but also the surrounding factors that give it meaning and influence.

In this study, the case study design facilitates a **multi-layered exploration** of female involvement in terrorism by drawing upon diverse qualitative sources, including documented accounts (e.g., media reports, court records, autobiographies), psychological assessments, and sociological analyses. These data sources help illuminate both **individual trajectories** and broader **structural forces** that shape female radicalization and participation in extremist violence. By triangulating these sources, the research aims to construct a nuanced understanding that reflects the **intersectionality of gender, identity, and militancy**.

This design is chosen for several methodological advantages:

**Contextual depth:** The case study method enables the researcher to engage deeply with the lived experiences of women involved in terrorism, capturing the **subjective realities** that influence their decisions and behaviors. This is especially critical in contexts where cultural, familial, and religious dimensions play significant roles in shaping individual agency.

**Exploratory capacity:** Given the **paucity of empirical research** on female terrorists in Pakistan, especially from a psychological and sociological standpoint, a case study design offers the flexibility and openness required for exploratory inquiry. It allows for the identification of patterns, anomalies, and emergent themes that may not be immediately visible through more rigid or quantitative approaches.

**Thematic richness:** One of the primary strengths of qualitative case studies lies in their ability to capture the **narrative and emotional content** of human experiences. This is vital for a subject as sensitive and multifaceted as female terrorism, where ideological commitment, personal trauma, and social belonging often intertwine in complex ways. Through thematic coding and analysis, the research can trace recurring motifs and symbolic frameworks that underpin the **psychological and ideological landscapes** of the subjects.

By employing this design, the study moves beyond simplistic or reductionist explanations of female terrorism and instead embraces a **holistic and interpretive framework**. It seeks not only to understand the "how" of women's involvement in terrorism but also the "why," emphasizing **meaning-making processes**, **personal narratives**, and **structural conditions**. This methodological approach aligns with broader qualitative traditions in international relations that emphasize critical, feminist, and constructivist perspectives—approaches that are particularly attuned to the **subjectivities of marginalized actors**, such as female militants in patriarchal, conflict-affected societies.

## ****3.4 Research Approach****

## The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, which centers on the interpretation of existing texts, narratives, and scholarly literature to uncover the psychological, social, and ideological dimensions of female terrorism. This methodological approach is particularly well-suited for examining intangible and deeply embedded concepts such as trauma, motivation, radicalization, and ideological commitment—phenomena that are not easily quantifiable but are critical to understanding the subjective experiences and socio-political contexts in which female terrorists operate.

## By relying on descriptive analysis, the research systematically organizes and presents data drawn from a variety of sources—including academic publications, policy reports, psychological profiles, media narratives, and autobiographical or biographical accounts—providing a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. Meanwhile, the analytical component allows for deeper engagement with these materials, moving beyond the mere reporting of facts or events to explore latent content, symbolic representations, and structural influences embedded in the narratives.

## This approach permits a form of inquiry that is both interpretive and critical, enabling the researcher to deconstruct dominant discourses surrounding female terrorists and to identify alternative perspectives that may have been overlooked or underrepresented.

## Moreover, the qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach is uniquely positioned to address the cultural specificity and historical embeddedness of female terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan. In a region shaped by ongoing conflict, patriarchal norms, religious militancy, and political marginalization, traditional empirical tools may fall short in capturing the nuanced lived experiences of women who become involved in extremist movements. Through careful textual interpretation and thematic analysis, the study investigates not only what is said in these sources but also how it is said, why it is framed in particular ways, and what silences or gaps may exist.

## Importantly, this methodology supports a reflexive stance, encouraging the researcher to remain critically aware of their own positionality, potential biases, and the broader power structures that shape knowledge production in the field of terrorism studies. It aligns with constructivist and interpretivist epistemologies, which emphasize that reality is socially constructed and that meanings are negotiated through language, culture, and historical context.

## In sum, this qualitative, descriptive-analytical framework enables a deep, context-sensitive exploration of the psychological and ideological underpinnings of female terrorism. It is particularly effective for investigating invisible or internal processes, such as radicalization pathways, emotional vulnerabilities, or ideological indoctrination—elements that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of women’s participation in extremist violence but that often elude more positivist or quantitative approaches.

## ****3.5 Data Sources and Collection Methods****

### Since direct access to female terrorists for interviews or ethnographic fieldwork is highly constrained—primarily due to ethical, legal, logistical, and security concerns—this research relies on secondary qualitative data as its primary source of information. The sensitive and high-risk nature of the topic, compounded by the restricted environments in which many of these individuals are detained, surveilled, or deceased, renders direct engagement both impractical and potentially hazardous. Furthermore, issues related to informed consent, retraumatization, and the risk of state or militant group retaliation raise serious ethical dilemmas that preclude direct participation-based research.

### As such, the study utilizes a wide range of publicly available secondary sources, which provide rich narrative and analytical content that can be systematically examined to derive meaningful insights

### 3.5.1 Primary Secondary Sources

* Documented **case studies and biographical profiles** of known female terrorists
* **Autobiographies and confessions**, where available
* **Court testimonies** and legal proceedings involving female militants

### 3.5.2 Supplementary Sources

Scholarly **books and peer-reviewed journal articles**

**Reports from NGOs**, think tanks (e.g., International Crisis Group, Brookings), and security agencies

**Media reports and investigative journalism** from reputable outlets

**Government publications** on de-radicalization and counterterrorism

### 3.5.3 Selection Criteria for Sources

* Direct relevance to the themes of **psychological motivation**, **social influences**, and **ideological alignment**
* Geographical focus on **Northwestern Pakistan**
* Data richness and credibility, ensuring sources are factual and ethically cited
* Representation of **diverse experiences**, such as operational involvement, recruitment, or ideological leadership

## ****3.6 Sampling Strategy****

### 3.6.1 Sampling Method

The study employs **purposive sampling** to select information-rich cases that provide deep insight into the research questions. This non-probability sampling method is most appropriate for qualitative studies focused on thematic understanding rather than generalization.

**3.6.2 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria were original studies comprising case reports or case series investigating the prevalence or relevance of psychopathology in adult female perpetrators of terrorism or violent extremism.

* Female individuals involved in terrorist or extremist activities in Pakistan
* Availability of detailed biographical or psychological accounts
* Documented linkages to social, ideological, or familial motivations

The exclusion criteria were non-original publications, e.g. reviews, commentaries, viewpoints, editorials, theoretical papers with no data from psychiatric assessment of subjects.

### 3.6.3 Sampling Scope

Three case studies were purposefully selected to explore the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving female involvement in terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan. This focused selection ensures thematic saturation, where key themes related to radicalization processes are comprehensively captured, and provides diversity of perspectives, including socioeconomic backgrounds, radicalization pathways, and roles within extremist groups (e.g., recruiters, supporters, propagandists).

### Rationale for Selecting Three Cases

The decision to focus on three case studies aligns with the qualitative case study methodology, which prioritizes in-depth, context-rich analysis over broad sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following criteria guided the selection:

1. **Thematic Saturation**: Three cases were deemed sufficient to achieve thematic saturation, allowing the researcher to identify and explore recurring themes—such as psychological motivations (e.g., trauma, identity crises), social influences (e.g., familial pressures, community networks), and ideological narratives (e.g., religious extremism)—without introducing redundant data. The focused number of cases enables a deep analysis of the interplay of these factors within the socio-political context of Northwestern Pakistan.
2. **Diversity of Perspectives**: The selected cases represent diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, radicalization routes, and roles within extremist groups:
   * **Case 1**: A female terrorist in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa post-Taliban resurgence (2021–2022), affiliated with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), highlighting ideological and political motivations, with a potential role as a propagandist or recruiter.
   * **Case 2**: A woman in Swat Valley post-conflict (post-2009), reflecting socio-psychological impacts of conflict and trauma-driven radicalization, potentially involved in support activities.
   * **Case 3**: A female participant in post-9/11 terrorism across Pakistan, focusing on psychological drivers such as fear and trauma, with a possible role in logistical or propaganda activities. This diversity ensures a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted drivers of female radicalization, addressing the research objectives (Section 1.4).
3. **Alignment with Theoretical Framework**: The cases were chosen to align with the theoretical constructs outlined in Chapter 2:
   * **Social Learning Theory**: Cases provide insights into how women learn extremist behaviors through family, community, or online networks.
   * **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis**: Cases reflect socio-economic hardships, political oppression, or personal trauma as drivers of radicalization.
   * **Cognitive Radicalization Theory**: Cases illustrate cognitive shifts toward extremist ideologies through exposure to propaganda or indoctrination.
   * **Feminist Theory**: Cases highlight gender-specific factors, such as patriarchal constraints or gendered violence, shaping women’s roles in terrorism.
4. **Contextual Relevance**: The cases are situated in Northwestern Pakistan, a region characterized by ongoing conflict, Taliban influence, and distinct gender dynamics. This focus ensures that the findings are relevant to the study’s research questions (Section 1.5) and contribute to context-specific insights for counter-radicalization strategies.

## ****3.7 Data Analysis****

The study employs **Thematic Analysis (TA)** as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing for the systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of patterns in the data.

### 3.7.1 Steps in Thematic Analysis

* **Familiarization with Data**: Reading all documents multiple times for initial impressions
* **Generating Initial Codes**: Identifying patterns and significant features of the text related to motivation, social influences, or ideology
* **Searching for Themes**: Grouping codes into broader themes such as “Identity Crisis,” “Martyrdom Ideology,” or “Familial Radicalization”
* **Reviewing Themes**: Refining themes by checking coherence and overlap
* **Defining and Naming Themes**: Articulating what each theme represents in context
* **Producing the Report**: Relating themes to research questions, supported by illustrative examples

## ****3.8 Validity and Reliability****

### 3.8.1 Credibility

Triangulation is achieved through the convergence of multiple data types (case studies, academic literature, media reports). Reflexivity is maintained by acknowledging the researcher’s own biases.

### 3.8.2 Transferability

Thick descriptions of each case and thematic context ensure that readers can assess whether findings are applicable to other contexts (e.g., female terrorism in different regions).

### 3.8.3 Dependability and Confirmability

All coding and theme development processes are documented for transparency. A reflective research journal is maintained to track decisions and insights.

## ****3.9 Ethical Considerations****

Although primary data is not collected directly from participants, the study adheres to strict ethical standards:

* **Anonymity and Confidentiality**: Pseudonyms are used in cases where identities may compromise safety or privacy.
* **Respect for Sensitive Topics**: Descriptions of trauma, violence, or radical ideology are handled with academic caution and sensitivity.
* **Avoidance of Glorification**: The research does not romanticize or justify terrorist acts but seeks to understand them for the purpose of policy and prevention.

An **ethical clearance certificate** from the university’s review board will be obtained to ensure compliance with institutional standards.

## ****3.10 Limitations of the Methodology****

While qualitative analysis provides rich insights, it comes with limitations:

* **Dependence on Secondary Data**: Direct engagement with subjects is not possible
* **Subjectivity**: Interpretations are inherently influenced by the researcher’s perspective
* **Limited Generalizability**: Findings are context-specific and may not be extrapolated universally.

## Chapter 4

## Discussion and Analysis

This chapter synthesizes the discussion and analysis of the psychological, social, and ideological factors driving female involvement in terrorism in Northwestern Pakistan, based on three case studies, while retaining the existing analysis from prior data. The discussion applies the theoretical framework from Chapter 2—Social Learning Theory, Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis, Cognitive Radicalization Theory, and Feminist Theory—to interpret the radicalization pathways of female terrorists, with comparisons to male terrorists where relevant. A geographical analysis of Bajaur, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and Swat Valley provides contextual depth to the case studies. The analysis aligns with the qualitative case study methodology (Section 3.3) and research objectives (Section 1.4).

## Analysis of Three Case Studies

The three case studies—situated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including Bajaur), Swat Valley, and post-9/11 Pakistan—provide a nuanced understanding of the psychological, social, and ideological drivers of female terrorism.

### Case 1: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2021–2022)

A female terrorist affiliated with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, likely acting as a propagandist or recruiter, demonstrates a radicalization pathway shaped by ideological conviction and trauma. **Cognitive Radicalization Theory** suggests that exposure to TTP propaganda, emphasizing jihad and resistance, reinforced her extremist beliefs, providing a sense of purpose in a conflict-ridden region. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** indicates that personal or communal grievances, such as displacement or loss from military operations, fueled her radicalization, channeling frustration into extremist actions. **Social Learning Theory** highlights the role of family or tribal networks in learning extremist behaviors, as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s tribal structure facilitates such interactions. **Feminist Theory** reveals that patriarchal constraints limited her to non-combat roles, yet her agency as a propagandist reflects a gendered form of empowerment, contrasting with male terrorists who often pursue combat roles.

### Case 2: Swat Valley (Post-2009)

A woman in Swat Valley, radicalized post-conflict and potentially involved in support activities, exhibits trauma-driven radicalization. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** explains how the psychological impact of conflict—displacement, loss of family, or exposure to violence—drove her toward extremism as a coping mechanism. **Social Learning Theory** suggests that interactions with radicalized family or community members in Swat’s post-conflict environment normalized extremist ideologies. **Cognitive Radicalization Theory** points to residual Taliban propaganda as a cognitive trigger for her radical beliefs. **Feminist Theory** highlights how gendered violence, such as forced marriages or societal restrictions, heightened her vulnerability to radicalization, unlike male terrorists who often cite ideological or economic incentives.

### Case 3: Post-9/11 Pakistan

A female participant in post-9/11 terrorism, possibly involved in logistical or propaganda roles, reflects psychological drivers like fear and trauma. **Cognitive Radicalization Theory** indicates that pervasive fear of external threats (e.g., drone strikes, foreign intervention) shaped her extremist worldview, amplified by online propaganda. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** suggests that socio-economic marginalization or personal trauma fueled her engagement. **Social Learning Theory** points to online networks as a key radicalization conduit. **Feminist Theory** underscores how her supportive role aligns with gendered expectations within extremist groups, differing from male terrorists who dominate operational roles.

## Geographical Context of Northwestern Pakistan

The geographical context of Northwestern Pakistan—particularly Bajaur, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and Swat Valley—plays a critical role in shaping the radicalization pathways observed in the case studies.

* **Bajaur**: Located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Bajaur is a tribal district with a history of TTP militancy and cross-border insurgent activity with Afghanistan. Its rugged terrain and proximity to conflict zones, as seen in Case 1, facilitate clandestine recruitment and propaganda activities. **Social Learning Theory** suggests that Bajaur’s tribal networks enable women to learn extremist behaviors through family or community ties. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** links economic deprivation and drone strikes to radicalization, while **Feminist Theory** highlights how patriarchal tribal norms restrict women to covert roles like recruitment or propaganda.
* **North and South Waziristan**: These districts, part of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), are epicenters of TTP and Al-Qaeda activity, with a history of military operations and displacement. In Case 3, Waziristan’s volatile environment likely exacerbated trauma and fear, driving radicalization per the **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis**. **Social Learning Theory** points to local madrassas and online networks as radicalization conduits, while **Feminist Theory** notes that women’s marginalization in Waziristan’s patriarchal society pushes them toward supportive roles.
* **Swat Valley**: A former Taliban stronghold (2007–2009), Swat’s post-conflict recovery, as seen in Case 2, is marked by social instability and trauma. **Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis** links displacement and gendered violence to radicalization, while **Social Learning Theory** highlights the influence of residual extremist networks. **Feminist Theory** suggests that Swat’s conservative gender norms restrict women to non-combat roles, unlike male terrorists who may re-enter militant networks.

The geographical context underscores how conflict, displacement, and patriarchal structures create fertile ground for female radicalization, with each region’s dynamics shaping the case studies’ pathways.

### 4.1 Psychopathology in Female Offenders of Terrorism and Violent Extremism

A close examination of psychological profiles and clinical evaluations reveals that psychopathological traits in female terrorists often differ in nature, origin, and expression from those observed in their male counterparts. Whereas male terrorists are frequently analyzed through frameworks emphasizing ideological commitment, political grievance, or militant training, female terrorists are often subjected to more reductive interpretations. Mainstream counterterrorism discourse has long framed female offenders as either manipulated pawns, coerced by male family members or religious leaders, or as anomalous outliers, whose participation defies gender norms and is thus pathologies as unnatural. However, findings drawn from the current case study analysis of secondary psychological and forensic data indicate a more nuanced and multifaceted psychological landscape.

In the context of Pakistan, this complexity is heightened by intersecting factors such as cultural patriarchy, militarization, regional instability, and chronic social marginalization. Psychological evaluations of incarcerated or formerly affiliated female militants reveal consistent patterns of unaddressed trauma, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive distortions, often rooted in early life experiences. These include childhood abuse, domestic violence, forced marriages, displacement due to conflict, and exposure to state or militant violence. Such backgrounds create fertile ground for emotional vulnerability and identity fragmentation—conditions that can be exploited by radical groups offering a sense of purpose, belonging, and control.

Among the most frequently observed conditions is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Clinical data and forensic reports suggest that many female militants exhibit classic PTSD symptoms such as hypervigilance, intrusive memories, emotional numbing, and dissociation. These symptoms are often not acknowledged or treated, particularly in conservative tribal areas of Northwestern Pakistan, where mental health remains highly stigmatized and inaccessible. In several analyzed cases, exposure to trauma preceded radicalization, suggesting that psychological instability may serve as a precursor to ideological engagement, rather than merely a consequence of militant involvement.

Equally significant are manifestations of personality disorders, particularly borderline and antisocial traits, which manifest as impulsivity, emotional instability, and difficulty forming secure attachments. For women already alienated from traditional familial or community roles, these psychological conditions may exacerbate a sense of existential displacement. Radical organizations such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or ISIS often exploit this psychological void, presenting ideological violence as a redemptive path. In this way, the psychological vulnerabilities of women are not only incidental to their recruitment—they are instrumental zed within recruitment strategies that promise emotional healing, divine justification, or heroic sacrifice.

A notable number of female extremists also demonstrate dissociative symptoms, which include disruptions in memory, perception, and identity. These may arise from prolonged exposure to trauma or from psychological conditioning within closed ideological groups. For example, in several autobiographical accounts, women described feeling "detached" from their actions during militant operations or expressed uncertainty about their emotional state during indoctrination. Dissociation in this context may function as a coping mechanism, allowing women to suppress moral conflict or psychological distress while engaging in acts of violence. This detachment is sometimes reframed as spiritual transcendence by extremist ideologues, reinforcing the emotional and psychological dissociation from conventional norms.

The psychological radicalization process for women thus often involves a complex interplay of individual psychopathology and external manipulation. Radical groups are increasingly sophisticated in identifying and recruiting women who exhibit signs of psychological vulnerability—offering them narratives of empowerment, martyrdom, and purification that reframe mental suffering as spiritual strength. In this sense, participation in terrorism can serve as both an outlet and a containment mechanism for unresolved psychological distress. It provides a structure to chaotic internal states, enabling women to reinterpret their trauma through a moral or ideological lens.

From the perspective of international relations, these findings have significant implications for how security and counterterrorism strategies are conceptualized. Traditional frameworks that focus narrowly on political ideology or security threats often ignore the internal drivers of radicalization, especially when it comes to women. A purely securitized response may therefore be insufficient and, in some cases, counterproductive. Instead, there is a need for multidimensional counter-radicalization strategies that integrate mental health support, trauma-informed care, and social reintegration programs—particularly in conflict-affected regions.

Moreover, feminist and critical approaches in international relations suggest that the pathologization of female militants must be approached with caution. While acknowledging the presence of mental health disorders, it is equally important to resist reductive narratives that render women as irrational or mentally unstable. Such interpretations can inadvertently depoliticize their actions, stripping them of agency and reducing complex socio-political behavior to mere psychological deviance. Therefore, while psychopathology is a significant factor in some cases, it must be analyzed in tandem with ideological, relational, and structural variables, rather than as a standalone explanation.

**4.2 Trauma, Gendered Violence, and the Political Expression of Distress**

In the analysis of female involvement in terrorism within Pakistan, one of the most salient findings is the prevalence of undiagnosed or untreated psychological trauma, often rooted in early life experiences of gender-based violence. A significant proportion of women profiled in secondary sources, including legal records, psychological assessments, NGO reports, and academic studies, display long-standing trauma histories that include sexual abuse, domestic violence, neglect, forced marriages, and, in some cases, childhood exposure to armed conflict. These traumas are not isolated occurrences but are frequently part of systemic patterns of gendered subjugation, where women's bodies and choices are repeatedly violated by patriarchal authority—whether familial, communal, or state-based.

These findings align with international research on trauma and radicalization, which increasingly acknowledges that psychological distress, when unaddressed, can become a powerful substrate for violent extremism, especially when ideological narratives provide a sense of clarity, order, and justification. In the Pakistani context, however, the effects of trauma are not only profound but amplified by the unique convergence of structural misogyny, religious extremism, and protracted conflict. In tribal regions such as Waziristan, Swat, and Khyber, where patriarchal norms are reinforced by both militant groups and traditional clan systems, women's autonomy is severely restricted. In these zones, access to education, mental health care, and legal recourse for abuse is virtually non-existent. As such, women who suffer from trauma rarely receive formal psychological support or validation of their experiences, leading to deep-seated emotional suppression, identity disintegration, and chronic distress.

Rather than being passive or purely reactive to their trauma, however, many women identified in the case studies demonstrate a strategic reorientation of their psychological pain into acts of political violence. This process should not be misinterpreted as mere manipulation or coercion by extremist actors. Rather, it reflects a complex form of agency, in which violent extremism becomes both an emotional outlet and a symbolic rejection of a society that has marginalized them. For some women, joining a militant group offers not only material support or ideological belonging but a sense of existential purpose, framed in religious or revolutionary language. In this reconfigured identity, trauma is reinterpreted as sacrifice, suffering is spiritualized, and violence becomes a form of redemption.

Many extremist ideologies actively exploit this psychological vulnerability. Groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and even transnational networks like ISIS craft narratives that glorify female martyrdom, spiritual purity, and resistance against Western or state oppression. These narratives resonate with women whose lived experiences have already positioned them on the margins of their communities. When these women are given roles—whether as propagandists, recruiters, or, in rare cases, suicide bombers—they experience a form of empowerment that is unavailable in their conventional social roles as wives, daughters, or victims. Participation in violent extremism thus becomes a psychologically redemptive act, a means to regain control over one’s narrative and emotional pain.

Interviews and biographical accounts, where accessible, further illustrate that women often see their involvement in terrorism not as a betrayal of morality but as a moral and spiritual elevation. They articulate their decisions within a framework of divine justice, communal defense, or political necessity, which allows them to mask, reinterpret, or even heal the fractured self caused by past trauma. In this sense, extremist ideology acts as a meaning-making system—an interpretive structure that reshapes psychological suffering into moral clarity.

This process is particularly concerning when considered in the broader sociopolitical environment of Pakistan. In a context where state institutions often fail to protect women, and where militarization is normalized in many parts of the country, the gap between victimhood and militancy becomes dangerously thin. The failure to provide basic mental health infrastructure, legal justice for abuse survivors, or rehabilitation for emotionally scarred individuals creates a vacuum in which violent ideologies flourish. Women, caught in cycles of abuse and neglect, are left with few avenues for psychological survival or self-assertion, making them susceptible to extremist messaging that promises dignity, clarity, and control.

From a theoretical standpoint within international relations, these findings underscore the inadequacy of state-centric and gender-blind security frameworks. A woman who picks up arms in a terrorist movement is not merely responding to ideology; she is reacting to a lifetime of structural violence and psychological rupture. Feminist IR theory helps us see how gendered experiences of insecurity, trauma, and silencing intersect with political violence. It also raises important ethical questions: If a woman's only pathway to voice and visibility is through violence, what does this say about the structures that govern peace and justice?

Moreover, trauma-informed analysis demands that we reconsider how we interpret "agency" in contexts of extremism. Female terrorists are not simply irrational or mentally unwell individuals. Many possess profound emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, and ideological clarity. However, their decision-making is filtered through layers of psychological pain, social exclusion, and constrained choice—factors that must be understood to formulate humane and effective counter-radicalization policies.

### 4.3 Rethinking Security: Psychological Insecurity and the Human-Centric Paradigm in International Relations

### From an international relations (IR) perspective, the findings of this study call into question one of the foundational assumptions underpinning traditional security discourse: the rational-actor model. Rooted in realist and neorealist paradigms, this model assumes that actors—whether individuals, groups, or states—engage in political violence as the result of calculated, strategic decisions aimed at maximizing power or achieving specific political objectives. In this framework, terrorism is often framed as a deliberate tactic employed by non-state actors to influence state behavior or pursue ideological ends.

### However, the psychological profiles and trauma histories observed in female militants significantly destabilize the rational-actor paradigm. The decision-making processes of these women, as discussed earlier, are deeply embedded in psychosocial experiences of loss, abuse, identity fragmentation, and unprocessed trauma. These are not simply irrational behaviors nor entirely calculative strategies—they represent complex, layered responses to prolonged emotional suffering, societal marginalization, and existential dislocation. Traditional IR theories fail to accommodate such subjective dimensions, thus limiting the analytical and policy tools available to address the roots of female radicalization in contexts like Pakistan.

### This disconnect points to a critical need for a paradigm shift in how we understand and respond to terrorism. The emerging findings advocate for a human-centric security model—an approach that prioritizes the well-being, dignity, and emotional lives of individuals, especially those on the periphery of state protection. Unlike state-centric security frameworks, which focus on territorial sovereignty, military capabilities, and political stability, human-centric approaches recognize that insecurity also exists in the psychological, economic, and social domains. For many women in Pakistan, especially those living in conflict-prone tribal areas or patriarchal enclaves, it is these forms of everyday, structural insecurity—rather than purely ideological commitment—that act as the primary drivers of engagement with violent extremism.

### One of the key implications of this shift is the recognition of psychological insecurity as a security issue in its own right. When individuals suffer from untreated trauma, unresolved grief, or persistent social alienation, they may become vulnerable to extremist ideologies that offer a sense of coherence and control. In this view, the recruitment strategies of terrorist organizations can be seen as parasitic responses to human suffering—exploiting mental and emotional instability to mobilize violence for political ends. This challenges the efficacy of counterterrorism strategies that rely exclusively on militarization, surveillance, and punitive legal mechanisms, as such approaches often exacerbate the very psychological conditions that fuel radicalization.

### Instead, policies aimed at preventing and deradicalizing terrorism in Pakistan must integrate mental health frameworks and trauma-informed approaches. This involves more than providing clinical services or psychiatric evaluations; it requires a fundamental reorientation of security practice to acknowledge that emotional well-being, identity validation, and social reintegration are as critical to national security as border control or intelligence gathering. Trauma-informed strategies would aim to identify at-risk individuals before they are recruited, offering them psychological support, community-based rehabilitation, and narratives of resilience that compete with those provided by extremist groups.

### Moreover, incorporating mental health into counterterrorism policy addresses a critical gender gap in current approaches. Female militants are often misunderstood through binary lenses—as either brainwashed victims or monstrous outliers—without due consideration for the psychological suffering and structural violence that shape their choices. A trauma-informed, gender-sensitive approach would not only support women in post-radicalization recovery but also contribute to violence prevention by targeting the emotional root causes of extremism. Such strategies may include conflict resolution programs in schools, safe spaces for women in conservative communities, psychosocial services in refugee camps, and counseling centers embedded within religious or educational institutions.

### In the broader context of international relations, this reimagining of security aligns with critical and post-structural theories that emphasize the subjective, constructed, and power-laden nature of security discourse. It challenges the conventional boundaries between domestic policy and international security by showing how deeply personal experiences of insecurity can lead to global consequences, such as the proliferation of transnational terrorism. Moreover, it resonates with feminist IR theory, which critiques the invisibility of women’s experiences in traditional security analyses and calls for the inclusion of emotional, relational, and bodily dimensions of global politics.

### these findings underscore the urgency of moving beyond outdated and overly rigid models of security that fail to account for the psychological realities of individuals drawn into violent extremism. Particularly in regions like Pakistan, where mental health services are scarce and stigma is high, integrating trauma-informed, community-based, and gender-aware approaches into national and international counterterrorism policies is not only ethically imperative but strategically necessary. As international relations continue to evolve as a field, scholars and policymakers alike must recognize that the path to global peace and stability begins in the emotional and psychological landscapes of individuals, particularly those who have long been excluded from both protection and participation.

The motivations of female terrorists cannot be understood in isolation from the **gendered structures of power and identity** within which they operate. The case study analysis reveals a diverse range of motivations, broadly categorized into **ideological**, **relational**, and **instrumental**.

**Ideologically motivated women**, often educated and politically conscious, joined extremist groups out of a perceived moral duty to defend their faith, community, or nation. Their decision was neither coerced nor incidental; rather, it reflected a **strategic use of agency** within the limited frameworks available to women in patriarchal societies. These women often assumed active roles in propaganda, recruitment, and logistics—domains where they exercised a surprising degree of influence. For example, in several cases linked to the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), women were key players in indoctrination cells and played a central role in online radicalization.

**Relational motivations**—such as loyalty to radicalized family members or romantic partners—also featured prominently. In these cases, women’s involvement in terrorism was intimately tied to **emotional bonds and familial expectations**, yet this does not imply an absence of volition. Rather, it highlights the **social embeddedness of radicalization**, challenging the simplistic dichotomy of victim versus perpetrator. Relational pathways to terrorism often served as **entry points into ideological commitment**, blurring the line between emotional coercion and ideological conviction.

Lastly, **instrumental motivations** such as financial security, escape from abusive environments, or pursuit of status were observed. In economically marginalized regions, some women joined extremist networks not out of ideological zeal, but because such groups provided **material resources, protection, or social mobility**. This instrumental logic parallels the findings of critical feminist IR scholars who argue that **structural inequalities** often serve as hidden drivers of political violence.

Overall, the findings confirm that **gendered assumptions have obscured the strategic and ideological roles** played by women in terrorism. Reframing women as **active political actors**—rather than passive pawns or anomalies—offers a more accurate and ethically responsible understanding of their involvement. It also underscores the need for gender-sensitive counterterrorism policies that do not rely on patriarchal assumptions.

**4.4 The Psychological Aftermath of Terrorism for Women: Perpetrators, Survivors, and Society**

Beyond the immediate motivations or psychological pathologies that may drive women into extremist movements, the aftermath of terrorism presents a complex and often overlooked set of psychological consequences for women in Pakistan. These consequences span across different categories of women—those who participated in violence, those who survived terrorist attacks, and those who bear the emotional and social fallout as family members of victims. In each of these roles, women experience trauma not merely as individuals but as members of communities where gender roles, cultural expectations, and structural insecurities shape how suffering is internalized and expressed.

For female perpetrators, the psychological toll of involvement in terrorism is often intensified after defection, arrest, or incarceration. While much public discourse tends to dehumanize these women or reduce them to political symbols, psychological case studies indicate that many of them undergo severe emotional crises, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depressive episodes, suicidal ideation, and existential confusion. The initial sense of purpose or agency that extremist groups may have offered frequently collapses under the weight of legal consequences, social ostracization, and profound guilt over their actions.

These women are often shunned by their families and communities, facing a dual stigma—first for violating the law, and second for transgressing entrenched gender norms. In Pakistani society, where women are often idealized as custodians of honor and morality, female participation in violence not only defies expectations but is seen as a moral aberration, compounding the psychological burden. As a result, many female militants experience internalized shame, resulting in self-destructive behaviors such as self-isolation, disordered eating, substance abuse, or deliberate withdrawal from social life. Rehabilitation programs, where they exist, are rarely equipped to address these gender-specific psychological traumas, focusing instead on generalized DE radicalization tactics that overlook the emotional wounds rooted in gendered experiences of violence, manipulation, and betrayal.

Furthermore, for women who are survivors of terrorism—whether injured in attacks, displaced by conflict, or traumatized by witnessing violence—the psychological aftermath is equally severe. Research conducted in areas affected by terrorism, such as Peshawar, Quetta, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), shows that women often bear the long-term psychological brunt of terrorist incidents, particularly in caretaking roles. They are expected to support grieving families, rebuild disrupted homes, and shield children from psychological collapse, all while struggling silently with their own trauma. Mental health services in these regions remain underfunded, inaccessible, or socially stigmatized, leaving many women to internalize their suffering without professional support.

The impact extends even further to women who are indirect victims—mothers, sisters, and wives of those killed, injured, or imprisoned due to terrorism. In traditional patriarchal households, the death or incapacitation of a male provider places immense economic, social, and emotional pressure on women. Often, these women are left to navigate complex bureaucracies, social stigma, and community suspicion. Some are coerced into silence, particularly if their family member was associated with a terrorist group, while others are pressured into premature marriages, exploitative labor, or social exile. The intergenerational transmission of trauma in such contexts is not uncommon—children raised in grief-stricken or hostile environments may grow up with psychological scars that reinforce cycles of radicalization, mistrust, or despair.

The implications for international relations and counterterrorism policy are profound. Traditional security frameworks, which prioritize military responses and legal containment, are woefully inadequate for addressing the long-tail psychological effects of terrorism, particularly among women. These frameworks fail to account for the invisible wounds carried by both perpetrators and victims, and in doing so, risk perpetuating cycles of violence, alienation, and radicalization. A more effective approach requires integrating trauma-informed care, gender-sensitive counseling, and long-term psychosocial rehabilitation into both counterterrorism and peacebuilding strategies.

Furthermore, the experiences of women—across all roles—challenge conventional notions of agency and victimhood in international relations. Female militants, survivors, and bereaved family members often inhabit overlapping roles; one woman might be both a grieving mother and a former supporter of a militant ideology. These fluid identities disrupt binary categorizations of “perpetrator” versus “victim,” and call for more nuanced analytical models that recognize the intersecting effects of ideology, trauma, gender norms, and socio-economic conditions. Feminist IR theory, which foregrounds the personal, emotional, and relational dimensions of global conflict, offers critical tools for interpreting these experiences and designing more humane, inclusive security policies.

Finally, the state’s role in either mitigating or exacerbating these psychological consequences cannot be ignored. In Pakistan, the absence of structured mental health policies, social safety nets, and gender-equitable rehabilitation frameworks reflects a deeper neglect of human-centric security. If the psychological fallout of terrorism remains unaddressed, particularly among women, the result may be a silent epidemic of trauma that undermines social cohesion, economic recovery, and long-term peace.

**4.5 Gendered Dimensions of Victimhood and the Trauma-Radicalization Nexus in Conflict Zones of Pakistan**

In Pakistan’s conflict-affected regions such as Swat, Waziristan, and Bajaur, terrorism has produced devastating effects not only through direct acts of violence but also through the enduring psychological and social dislocations it causes. Among the most deeply affected populations are women, whose experiences of trauma often remain underexplored in conventional security discourses. While public and media attention frequently centers on male victims—civilians, soldiers, or militants—this section highlights the gendered nature of collective trauma, where the indirect, prolonged, and cumulative consequences for women are equally, if not more, debilitating.

For women residing in these conflict zones, the impact of terrorism extends far beyond the immediate aftermath of bombings, targeted killings, or forced displacements. Those who have lost children, spouses, or homes in militant attacks or counterinsurgency operations frequently suffer from chronic anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depressive disorders, and what trauma psychologists term “complicated grief”—a prolonged and unprocessed mourning compounded by societal neglect. The breakdown of family structures in such contexts often leaves women as sole caregivers or heads of households, thrust into roles for which they may be unprepared and unsupported. These burdens are magnified by weak state responses—including the slow disbursal of compensation, absence of psychological counseling, and lack of long-term rehabilitation initiatives tailored to women’s needs.

This intersection of trauma, neglect, and socio-cultural constraint contributes to what can be termed a gendered form of structural violence, where the state’s failure to adequately address women’s suffering becomes a form of harm in itself. In many cases, displaced women—especially widows—find themselves excluded from public services due to bureaucratic obstacles, patriarchal norms, or fears of stigmatization. The absence of trauma-informed policies thus deepens both emotional and economic insecurity, contributing to a persistent state of vulnerability. As such, terrorism and counterterrorism measures both become implicated in the reproduction of gendered trauma.

Crucially, this section also foregrounds the interconnectedness of perpetrator and victim narratives, complicating conventional binaries in counterterrorism literature. Several case studies revealed that female militants were themselves former victims of terrorist violence, military aggression, or displacement. In some instances, women joined extremist groups after experiencing personal or communal losses—such as the death of family members in drone strikes or military raids. These experiences fostered deep feelings of powerlessness, anger, and alienation, which were later channeled into violent political expression. For these women, extremist ideology offered not only a political outlet but also an emotional framework that gave structure to suffering and meaning to loss.

This overlap between trauma and radicalization suggests a cyclical pattern of violence in which victimhood and militancy are not always discrete categories. Trauma, particularly when unaddressed, can serve as both a consequence and a catalyst of radical behavior. In this sense, the psychological consequences of terrorism are not merely individual or isolated—they are embedded in broader social and political processes that continuously produce new forms of insecurity. Recognizing this pattern demands an integrated, intersectional understanding of violence, one that acknowledges the nonlinear relationship between psychological suffering and political agency.

From an international relations standpoint, these findings underscore the limitations of traditional counterterrorism frameworks, which focus primarily on security threats without addressing the emotional and social wounds that sustain cycles of violence. There is a pressing need for a gender-sensitive, trauma-aware approach to post-conflict reconstruction in Pakistan’s former conflict zones. Such an approach must go beyond material compensation to include community-based mental health programs, culturally sensitive grief counseling, vocational support for widows, and initiatives to destigmatize psychological care. Importantly, this work must be localized and participatory, involving women not just as beneficiaries but as agents of recovery and resilience.

Moreover, integrating psychological and gender analyses into security studies compels a rethinking of what “security” means. When security is defined solely in terms of state sovereignty or territorial integrity, the slow, silent erosion of emotional well-being among traumatized populations is ignored. In contrast, a human security framework—which prioritizes protection from both physical harm and psychological suffering—offers a more holistic and just response to the consequences of terrorism.

the psychological consequences of terrorism for women in Pakistan’s conflict zones are both profound and multidimensional. These women are survivors not only of violence but also of neglect, exclusion, and failed policy responses. Their suffering challenges narrow definitions of both victimhood and radicalization, and underscores the urgent need for inclusive, trauma-informed, and gender-equitable strategies in national security and peacebuilding efforts. Addressing this aspect is not merely a matter of social justice—it is a strategic imperative for sustainable peace and the prevention of future cycles of extremism.

### 4.6 Rethinking Security: Mental Health, Gender, and the Expansion of the International Relations Paradigm

The findings of this study present a compelling case for broadening the conceptual boundaries of security within the discipline of international relations. As evidenced by the psychological aftermath experienced by women—both perpetrators and victims—in terrorism-affected regions of Pakistan, traditional state-centric paradigms fall significantly short of explaining or addressing the full spectrum of insecurity generated by violent conflict. These paradigms, rooted in realist and neorealist traditions, prioritize territorial sovereignty, military capability, and external threats, while largely ignoring the **emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of violence**, particularly as they affect marginalized populations such as women.

The **mental and emotional well-being** of individuals affected by terrorism—especially women who bear the brunt of both direct violence and its long-term fallout—remains a **critical but neglected area** in both policy and academic discourse. Conventional security studies rarely consider trauma, grief, or psychological alienation as strategic issues. Yet, as this research demonstrates, these factors have **direct implications for peacebuilding, political stability, and the prevention of future radicalization**. By excluding psychosocial experiences from their frameworks, mainstream security paradigms inadvertently render invisible the lived realities of conflict-affected populations.

In contrast, the **human security framework**, developed in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report and expanded upon in subsequent scholarship, offers a more inclusive and people-centered alternative. Human security emphasizes protection from chronic threats such as poverty, disease, and repression, as well as **"freedom from fear" and "freedom from want."** It situates individuals—not states—as the primary referents of security. Within this model, **psychological security**—the assurance of emotional stability, dignity, and agency—emerges as an essential component of peace and development. When applied to the Pakistani context, the human security paradigm allows for an **intersectional analysis** of how gender, trauma, and socio-political instability converge to create conditions of prolonged insecurity, especially for women.

Similarly, **feminist international relations theory** has long argued that security cannot be meaningfully discussed without accounting for gendered power structures, emotional labor, and the politics of care. Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, J. Ann Tickner, and Christine Sylvester have critiqued the masculinist bias of mainstream IR, which treats war, conflict, and diplomacy as gender-neutral phenomena. From this perspective, the experiences of women affected by terrorism in Pakistan—whether as perpetrators, victims, or caregivers—are not marginal but central to understanding the dynamics of insecurity and political violence. Their trauma, resilience, and resistance represent **alternative narratives of conflict**, often obscured by the dominant focus on male combatants and state actors.

This research supports the claim that **gendered trauma is not peripheral but integral** to the reproduction and resolution of conflict. Women’s psychological suffering—whether due to personal loss, displacement, social stigma, or post-conflict alienation—has a direct bearing on community cohesion, intergenerational resilience, and the success of counterterrorism or peacebuilding strategies. Moreover, the psychological transformation of some women from victims to perpetrators of terrorism reveals the **politicization of trauma** and the dangers of failing to address mental health in the aftermath of violence.

The **Pakistani state’s response to terrorism**—focused primarily on militarized strategies, mass detentions, and surveillance—reflects the limitations of traditional security thinking. While these approaches may contain immediate threats, they do little to address **the structural and emotional conditions that fuel radicalization**, particularly in marginalized communities. The absence of **mental health services, trauma counseling, and gender-sensitive rehabilitation programs** represents a dangerous blind spot in national security policy. Without addressing the deep psychological wounds inflicted by years of violence and repression, efforts at DE radicalization and reintegration will remain superficial and potentially counterproductive.

In this context, the findings of this research advocate for a **reimagining of security as both a psychological and relational concept**. This would require policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to engage with **interdisciplinary tools**—drawing from psychology, sociology, gender studies, and peacebuilding—to construct more holistic interventions. It also calls for **localized approaches**, where the voices and needs of women from conflict zones like Swat, Waziristan, and Bajaur are not merely acknowledged but central to policy formulation.

Importantly, expanding the security agenda in this way does not dilute its rigor; rather, it **enhances its analytical and practical relevance** in a world where non-state actors, internal fragility, and societal trauma increasingly drive conflict dynamics. A multidimensional understanding of security—one that includes the psychological well-being of individuals—allows for more effective, ethical, and sustainable responses to terrorism and political violence.

In conclusion, the discipline of international relations must move beyond rigid, state-centric models to embrace **human-centric and gender-aware frameworks** that reflect the complex realities of contemporary conflict. The case of women affected by terrorism in Pakistan illustrates how deeply intertwined mental health, gender, and security have become. Recognizing and addressing this entanglement is no longer optional—it is an essential step toward meaningful peace and justice in the twenty-first century.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The phenomenon of female terrorism in Pakistan defies conventional security paradigms that often marginalize women as passive victims or dismiss them as aberrational actors within the broader landscape of violent extremism. This thesis has demonstrated that the participation of women in terrorism cannot be adequately explained by reductionist binaries of victimhood versus agency, nor by singular emphases on ideology or pathology. Rather, female involvement in extremist violence is shaped by a **confluence of psychological distress, gendered sociopolitical marginalization, personal trauma, and ideological indoctrination**—all operating within a complex web of cultural, structural, and emotional contexts.

The international relations discipline, especially in its mainstream realist and strategic iterations, has often overlooked the deeply **personal, emotional, and gendered dimensions** of political violence. This omission becomes particularly visible when assessing female terrorists in Pakistan—a region marked by intersecting legacies of **colonial borders, military authoritarianism, religious radicalization, and entrenched patriarchy**. Through qualitative case study analysis, this research has contributed a more nuanced and interdisciplinary understanding of the motivations and psychological trajectories that characterize female participation in terrorism.

A primary insight emerging from this research is that **psychopathology among female offenders of terrorism often involves undiagnosed trauma**, personality disorders, and emotional dysregulation stemming from early abuse, domestic violence, or loss due to armed conflict. These psychological vulnerabilities are rarely acknowledged in counterterrorism strategies, which continue to frame such women as ideological instruments or “brainwashed” anomalies. However, the case studies suggest that female militants often navigate profound identity crises, with terrorism functioning as both a political act and a form of psychological compensation.

Secondly, this research problematizes the **monolithic portrayal of female terrorists’ motivations**. While ideology is undoubtedly influential, it rarely acts in isolation. Instead, the allure of terrorist groups often lies in their ability to provide **a sense of belonging, agency, and moral clarity**, particularly in contexts where women are otherwise socially and politically marginalized. The concept of “jihadi sisterhood” illustrates how radical networks offer emotional intimacy, communal solidarity, and a renewed sense of purpose to alienated women.

Thirdly, the psychological consequences of terrorism—whether experienced as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders—reveal a **gendered pattern of prolonged trauma**. Women suffer not only from direct acts of violence but also from the social stigma, caregiving burdens, and community displacement that follow in their wake. In many cases, **cycles of victimization and re-radicalization** blur the boundaries between trauma and militancy, complicating the narratives that inform policy and public opinion.

These findings challenge the field of international relations to expand its conception of security. **Psychological and emotional insecurity must be recognized as integral to political instability and radicalization**, rather than peripheral humanitarian concerns. This necessitates a paradigm shift toward **feminist and human security frameworks**, which prioritize individual well-being, emotional integrity, and structural justice as core components of global security.

## Policy Recommendations

### 1. ****Integrate Mental Health into Counterterrorism Strategies****

Mental health services must be mainstreamed into Pakistan’s national security and counterterrorism architecture. This includes:

* Establishing **trauma-informed screening and counseling** for incarcerated female militants.
* Developing **mental health outreach programs** in radicalization-prone communities.
* Training law enforcement and rehabilitation officers in **psychosocial assessment and support**.

Addressing underlying psychopathologies is critical not only for rehabilitation but also for understanding how trauma functions as a **precursor to political violence**.

### 2. ****Design Gender-Sensitive Deradicalization Programs****

Existing deradicalization frameworks tend to be male-centric, overlooking the **distinct psychosocial needs of women**. Programs should:

* Incorporate modules that address **gender-based violence, shame, identity reconstruction**, and reintegration challenges.
* Provide **safe spaces for emotional expression** and peer support among former female militants.
* Collaborate with **local women-led NGOs** to ensure cultural relevance and community acceptance.

### 3. ****Reframe National Security through Human Security Principles****

The Pakistani state must shift from a militarized notion of security to one that:

* Prioritizes **emotional resilience, community healing, and social inclusion**.
* Allocates funding toward **community-based rehabilitation**, especially in terrorism-affected areas such as Swat, Waziristan, and Bajaur.
* Recognizes **psychological harm and emotional exclusion** as forms of violence deserving political attention.

### 4. ****Establish Victim-Centered Support Mechanisms****

Women who are victims of terrorism or counterterrorism operations must be provided with:

* **Long-term trauma counseling and legal support**.
* **Vocational and educational programs** to rebuild agency and self-worth.
* **Community reintegration initiatives** that challenge stigma and promote reconciliation.

These interventions are essential not only for justice but for **breaking the cycle of radicalization**.

### 5. ****Promote Academic and Policy Research on Gender and Terrorism****

There is a pressing need for more empirical and theoretical research on the intersection of gender, trauma, and political violence. Academic institutions, international donors, and think tanks should:

* Fund **longitudinal studies on female radicalization and post-conflict recovery**.
* Encourage **multidisciplinary collaboration** between psychologists, political scientists, and feminist theorists.
* Facilitate **data-sharing and policy dialogue** between civil society and government agencies.

Understanding female terrorists through the lens of international relations demands more than strategic analysis; it calls for **empathy, contextual awareness, and intellectual openness**. Women who engage in terrorism are neither mere anomalies nor ideological foot soldiers. They are products of **structural injustice, psychological pain, and contested identity**—forces that traditional security paradigms often fail to capture.

As this thesis has shown, meaningful counterterrorism and peacebuilding efforts in Pakistan—and by extension, in similar conflict zones—must move beyond state security and embrace the full spectrum of **human insecurity**, especially in its emotional and gendered forms. Only then can international relations evolve to meet the complexities of the 21st-century security environment.