https://doi.org/10.20896/saci.v12i2.1508

SPECIAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Feminisation of Extremism as a Socio-Psychological Phenomenon

Ainura Bolysbayeva,[†] Zharkynbek Abikenov,[¥*] Aigerim Bolysbayeva,[ſ] Raya Taskymbayeva,[ˡ] and Assem Sarsenova[Ī]

Abstract

Today, religious extremism, transforming and evolving, has appeared before the world community in a new form of feminist extremism. Since the radicalisation of women affects all levels of society, from everyday life to political institutions, this problem is the most pressing at present. Therefore, this study aims to make a socio-psychological portrait of a female terrorist. The article analysed video and print interviews of six women who were convicted under the article "Terrorism". In order to fully consider this problem, media materials devoted to these women were studied. The study explored the history of feminisation of extremism, its impact on society, and methods of prevention, as well as constructed a sociological portrait of a woman influenced by extremism and indicated her motives for radicalisation. The obtained data can be used to create programmes to counter extremism and terrorism, gathering information for public lectures.

Keywords: Muslim Women; Women's Activism; Terrorism; Salafism; Feminisation of Extremism

[†] PhD Scholar, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 al-Farabi Ave., Almaty, 050040, Kazakhstan
[¥]Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda State University, 29A Aiteke bi Ave., Kyzylorda, 120014, Kazakhstan
[*]Corresponding Author E-mail: abikenovkz@gmail.com
[ſ] PhD Scholar, K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, 34 A.Moldagulova Ave., Aktobe, 030000, Kazakhstan
[ˡ] Master of Pedagogical Sciences, K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, 34 A.Moldagulova Ave., Aktobe, 030000, Kazakhstan
[Ī] Master of Humanitarian Sciences, K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, 34 A.Moldagulova Ave., Aktobe, 030000, Kazakhstan
© 2024 Bolysbayeva et al. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction

Religious extremism and terrorism have emerged as paramount concerns on the global agenda, posing significant threats to international peace and security. In the contemporary era, religion – one of the most sensitive and vulnerable dimensions of human existence – has been increasingly exploited for destructive purposes. With the advent of globalisation, the risk of radicalisation looms over all religions, transforming them into potential vehicles for violence. The appropriation of religious rhetoric to justify violent acts serves to legitimise these crimes in the eyes of certain religiously motivated individuals, thereby driving them towards terrorism. Historical precedents reveal that individuals across various religious denominations have resorted to terrorism under the guise of religious beliefs. For instance, the Christian terrorist group "Army of God" (Jefferis, 2011), the massacre of 30 Muslims by Jewish doctor Baruch Goldstein on February 25, 1994 (Hoffman, 1994), and the sarin gas attack by the Buddhist sect "Aum Shinrikyo" in Tokyo (Jones, 2008) are stark examples of such extremism. However, in the current geopolitical landscape, religious terrorism and extremism are predominantly associated with Islam.

American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) presciently noted in the late 1990s that the post-Cold War world would undergo significant transformations, bringing the issue of religion to the forefront of global discourse. He predicted that Islamic extremism would become one of the most critical threats facing the world. This projection has materialised, primarily because terrorist groups exploiting the name of Islam have become highly institutionalised, evolving into sophisticated entities that promote radical Islamisation. The academic consensus is that this process is exceedingly dangerous, potentially destabilising not only individual states but the entire international community.

In an interview with the *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* newspaper, expert Ainur Abdrasilkyzy (2016) provided a comprehensive analysis of the feminisation of extremism, highlighting its manifestation on a global scale. Several distinct aspects characterise this phenomenon: the increasing number of women among radical group members, their active participation in propaganda, mainly through social media, and their utilisation as military personnel. Additionally, women play crucial roles in assisting the wounded in conflict zones, and they are often coerced into providing intimate services under the pretence of "sexual exploitation" or forced into roles as "sex workers." This multifaceted involvement of women in extremist activities underscores the complex dynamics of modern terrorism and the strategic use of gender by terrorist organisations.

The feminisation of extremism in Kazakhstan exhibits distinct characteristics that warrant detailed examination. Several critical aspects of this phenomenon are particularly noteworthy.

Firstly, female adherents of non-traditional jamaats (Islamic congregations) play a significant role in the upbringing of their children, often under the directives of their spouses. This involvement frequently leads to the imposition of restrictions on their children’s rights and freedoms, aligning their upbringing with non-traditional and extremist ideologies. Such practices manifest in various adverse consequences, including the enforcement of strict dress codes, such as compelling daughters to wear the hijab. Additionally, these children are often prohibited from attending certain school subjects and extracurricular activities. Subjects like "Self-knowledge," "Biology" (particularly "Anatomy and Physiology"), and "Drawing" are frequently avoided, while participation in physical culture, art, and dance groups is banned. These restrictions stem from a critical stance against the secular education system, leading to a refusal to vaccinate and other medically recommended practices.

Secondly, women from families involved in non-traditional religious movements engage in several significant actions that reinforce extremist ideologies:

They idealise a lifestyle based on the extreme views of isolated Salafi jamaats, promoting this way of life among members.

- They reject secular lifestyles and education, positioning them as opposites to their religious beliefs.
- They propagate unconventional views within the Jamaat, spreading extremist ideologies.
- They deny the legitimacy of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan when its provisions conflict with their beliefs.
- They cultivate critical perspectives that reject the principles of a secular state, advocating instead for governance based on Sharia law.

Thirdly, the wives of individuals convicted of religious extremism play a crucial role in maintaining and developing their spouses' connections with the Jamaat while in prison. This is supported by the continuous material assistance provided by representatives of non-traditional religious movements to the families of the incarcerated. These women often perceive themselves and their families as victims of secular state legislation, portraying the secular system as unjust and disseminating views that challenge the secular principles of the state. They actively work to sustain the ideological commitments of their spouses and reinforce the narrative of victimisation and resistance within their communities.

Fourthly, the wives of those who have travelled to military conflict zones in Syria participate significantly in the activities above. Their involvement underscores the global feminisation of extremism, reflecting the increasing and multifaceted roles women play in supporting and perpetuating extremist ideologies (Akmetova, 2016).

In a similar context, Katharina Von Knop's (2007) analysis of women's participation in the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation elucidates that the concept of women's jihad involves women engaging in political acts by supporting their male relatives, indoctrinating their children with extremist ideologies, and facilitating terrorist operations. This participation underscores the significant and multifaceted roles women play within terrorist organisations, extending beyond traditional perceptions of passive involvement.

The feminisation of religious extremism affects all spheres of social life, from political institutions to individuals' daily lives. Women's active roles in extremist movements contribute to the dissemination and perpetuation of radical ideologies within their families and communities. This widespread impact underscores the urgency of addressing the feminisation of religious extremism, as it poses a significant threat to global security and societal stability. Consequently, this issue has become a critical concern for the international community, necessitating comprehensive strategies to mitigate the influence of women in extremist networks and to prevent further radicalisation. Addressing this phenomenon requires a nuanced understanding of the socio-political and psychological factors driving women's involvement in extremism and the development of targeted interventions to counteract their influence. The study begins with a review of the literature to critically reflect on the gap that this study wants to close. Then, it discusses the history of women's terrorism, followed by the methodological issues in this study. In the final sections, it critically discusses the results.

Literature Review

The study of women's participation in extremist and terrorist groups, though relatively recent, has generated considerable scholarly interest. Researchers have delved into the motivations behind women's involvement in these groups, exploring both subjective motivations and how these organisations use scientific, religious, and legal frameworks to legitimise their actions.

A significant contribution to this field is Mia Bloom's *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists*. In this work, Bloom (2011) employs psychological insights to reveal the compelling stories of women who have engaged in terrorism. She challenges traditional gender stereotypes by examining the complex factors that drive female violence, arguing that while female terrorists can be as ruthless as their male

counterparts, their motivations are often more nuanced and multifaceted. Through detailed case studies, Bloom demonstrates that while some women volunteer as martyrs, many more are coerced through physical threats or other forms of social control. Another important work in this field is *Women in Modern Terrorism* by Davis (2017), which uses a unique dataset compiled over a decade to analyse women's roles in terrorist organisations since the inception of modern terrorism. This book addresses both religious and ethno-nationalist terrorism, providing a comprehensive overview of women's inclusion in groups such as Hizballah, Chechnya, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and Al Shabaab. Davis (2017) argues that the inclusion of women in these organisations is often a pragmatic decision made by the groups. The text also highlights the exchange of ideas between terrorist groups, showing how strategies and ideologies are shared and adapted across various contexts.

In a slightly different context, David Cook (2005) in his article *Women Fighting in Jihad?* delves into classical religious and legal texts to contextualise the arguments supporting women's participation in jihad in the present times. His work highlights the doctrinal justifications used to recruit women into jihadist activities (see also, Perešin, 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015; Spencer, 2016).

Similarly, Dronzina (2011), a professor at Sofia University, explores the involvement of women in religious suicide terrorism through her work *Women's Face of Terrorism*, using case studies from Chechnya and Palestine to illustrate this phenomenon.

Scholars such as Berko and Erez (2007) and Naaman (2007) extensively document the integration of Palestinian women into Hamas and provide insights into the specific roles and motivations of these women within the organisation. Seemingly, Von Knop (2007) points out that, in addition to being suicide bombers, women also provide ideological support and facilitate terrorist operations.

Likewise, the role of women as suicide bombers in Boko Haram in Nigeria has been thoroughly analysed by Markovic (2018), highlighting a significant aspect of female involvement in terrorism.

The global expansion of this phenomenon of feminisation of extremism is particularly linked to the activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is a transnational Sunni rebellion group actively functioning primarily in eastern Syria and western Iraq. In their study, Cook and Vale (2018) provides statistical analyses of women's inclusion in ISIL, revealing the extensive geographic diversity of these recruits. Scholars such as Bakker and de Leede (2015), de Leede (2018) and Anne Speckhard (2020) have investigated the motivations driving Western women to join ISIL. In this context, Speckhard's (2015) work *Bride of ISIS: One Young Woman's Path into Homegrown Terrorism* examines explicitly the case of a teenage girl from the United States, offering a detailed look into the personal and ideological factors leading to her radicalisation and eventual involvement with ISIS.

Indeed, several scholars have made notable contributions to studying women's participation in terrorism, significantly enhancing our understanding of this complex phenomenon. For instance, Spencer (2016) critically analyses the cross-pollination of ideas between different terrorist organisations, showing how strategies and ideologies are shared and adapted across various contexts. His research underscores the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of global terrorist networks and how women contribute to the spread and sustenance of extremist ideologies. Collectively, these studies provide a multifaceted view of women's involvement in terrorism, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address this issue and prevent further radicalisation.

Moreover, Orozobekova's (2022) book offers an in-depth examination of jihadism's emergence, roots, and gradual evolution, highlighting its detrimental impact on human lives. Orozobekova's research is enriched with insightful interviews with ISIS fighters and

women who joined ISIS, providing firsthand information on the root causes and motivations behind their radicalisation. The book introduces the non-enigma cycles radicalisation theory, positing that two primary cycles – grievances, resentment, and radical ideology – are the most significant drivers. Orozobekova also addresses the current situation of approximately 70,000 women and children, family members of ISIS fighters, trapped in the desert following the group's defeat in Syria and Iraq. The work explores the incentives for joining ISIS, the nature of jihadist ideology, the emergence of a "family jihad," and the roles of women and children within the so-called caliphate. Additionally, it discusses state policies for dealing with captured ISIS fighters and their family members.

Given the evolving nature of the feminisation of extremism, studying this topic remains highly relevant. This research stands out by focusing on Kazakhstani Muslim women who were involved in terrorism and became members of ISIS. The study aims to provide new insights into this phenomenon, contributing to the broader understanding of women's roles in extremist activities and informing strategies to counteract their influence.

History of Women's Terrorism

There is a long history of women's involvement in various terrorist groups, though these have typically been isolated incidents. Islamist movements that have chosen to participate in the legal, and political process in their countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Party for Justice and Development in Morocco, Hizbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine, among others, have paid great attention from the outset to the role women could play in furthering their political goals and agenda (Abdellatif & Ottaway, 2007). Women's involvement in the hierarchical structures of Islamist organisations represented a new development. In the Muslim Brotherhood, the dominant Islamist organisation before the 1970s, women had not held organisational roles that entailed responsibility paralleling those assigned to men. The Brotherhood's primary interest concerning women was to educate them in the principles of Islam and practices to be cultivated within their homes. The ideal Muslim woman was seen as a "homebound but religiously enlightened woman who left the home only to carry out the task of educating other women" (Ahmed, 2011:47).

Over time, however, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to involve women "as recruiters and advocates of the puritanical ideology" (Ahmed, 2011:76). Consequently, women slowly became involved in the vanguard of terrorist groups; the process of the feminisation of Islamism as a complete social phenomenon corresponds to the latter half of the 20th Century. This is evidenced by terrorist acts in Lebanon (1985-1987), Sri Lanka (1987-2008), Turkey (1996-1999), Chechnya (2000-2004), and Palestine (2002-2006) (Dronzina, 2011).

The first female suicide bombing was carried out in 1985 in southern Lebanon, when Lebanese woman Sana'a Mehaidli, who was driving a lorry loaded with explosives, crashed into an Israeli convoy, killing two Israeli soldiers. Sana'a was a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). Since then, the list of organisations using women as live bombs has grown. Currently, female suicide terrorism is primarily associated with Palestine (though the acts of terror themselves are committed in Israel), in addition toSri Lanka, Russia (Chechen "black widows"), Turkey, and several other countries, totalling no less than fourteen (Dronzina, 2005).

Women have been particularly active in suicide terrorism in the Chechen conflict, with some studies suggesting that women were involved in 81 per cent of all suicide attacks between 2000 and 2005, resulting mainly from voluntary recruitment. However, cases of coercion or deception by spouses and family members have been noted. Terrorist groups active in Iraq have also used female suicide bombers, with 28 total attempted and achieved attacks between 2003 (when the first attack in Iraq by a woman was recorded) and 2008. Boko Haram has increasingly used female suicide bombers since 2011. Of the 434 suicide bombers deployed by the group between April 2011 and June 2017,

244 were positively identified as female. The use of girls in suicide attacks also increased over the same period. Girls accounted for 75 per cent of all child suicide bombers between January 2014 and February 2016. A total of 55 girls were used in suicide attacks between January and August 2017 alone. Al-Shabaab has mobilised women as suicide bombers, with three suicide attacks between 2007 and 2017 being carried out by women.

However, it is within ISIS that the involvement of women in the ranks of extremists has moved to a new level, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Kazakhstani researcher Yerlan Karin explains the so-called —family jihad— phenomenon for several reasons. The first is the comparative accessibility of travelling to Syria. For example, one must fly or drive to Iran and then walk for 30-40 days to reach Afghanistan. The second is the provision of real estate, land, and cars to those who come for the so-called jihad.

When the declaration of the so-called Caliphate was announced in 2014, ISIS developed a unique jihadist strategy that immediately recognised the importance of bringing women more actively into propaganda and recruitment efforts. Declaring a Caliphate meant that new energies had to be directed toward state-building efforts. A key aspect of creating statehood was ensuring that ISIS territory and its jihadist constituency continued beyond this generation (Saltman & Smith, 2015). This led to the publication of several *fatwas* encouraging women to join ISIS to support the fighting spirit of their brothers. These *fatwas* provided an ideological basis for the belief that women would find husbands there, build families, and realise their Muslim identities as they understood them. Thirteen Tunisian women were the first to respond to this call, and later, women from Western European and Arab countries made it a mass phenomenon (Aitzhanova, 2019).

According to statistics from various sources, there are between 20,000 and 200,000 migrants in the Islamic State alone, of which 500 are women from European countries (Baltanova, 2016). Some of these women are minors, and there are also confirmed reports of human trafficking. A striking example is the story of Shamima Begum, who was deprived of her British citizenship. Her attorneys insist that the girl was a minor and was a victim of human trafficking (Baker et al., 2023). As of 2021, more than 1,000 citizens of Kazakhstan participated in foreign military operations under the umbrella of terrorist organisations, including 600 people, 413 of whom were children, and 34 of whom were orphans evacuated during the special operation "Zhusan." About half of those mentioned are women and children. Since January 2019, the National Security Committee (NSC) has conducted five special operations to return Kazakhstanis from Syria and Iraq as part of the aforementioned humanitarian special operation "Zhusan."

This data indicates the extensive involvement of women in ISIS and other extremist groups, reflecting a strategic shift in how these organisations utilise female members. Women's roles have expanded from support functions to active recruitment, propaganda, and combat participation. The trend of using women in such capacities is not only a tactical decision but also serves to perpetuate the ideology and operations of these terrorist organisations across generations. Understanding the history and evolution of women's involvement in terrorism is crucial for developing effective counter-terrorism strategies that address the specific challenges posed by the feminisation of extremism. We discuss the methodology in the next section.

Methodology

William Isaac Thomas (1863-1947) and Florian Znaniecki(1882-1958) pioneered the biographical method in sociological research in their seminal work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927) Applying the biographical method to the study of religiosity is a relatively new approach. Two key methodological collections that have significantly contributed to this field are *Religious Conversion* (Knoblauch et al., 1998) and *Biography and Religion: Between Ritual and the*

Search for Oneself (Wohlrab-Sahr, 1995). These researchers analysed the religiosity of converts – Europeans who converted to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. – marking a fundamental cultural shift in the religious landscape of Europe during the mid-1990s.

Several scholars in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries[1] have utilised the biographical method, especially narrative interviews, to study religiosity. While Ostrovskaya (2016) focused on the Jewish community, G. Sabirova (2006) studied practising Muslim Tatar women in Moscow, Russia, and Dosanova (2010) examined Muslim women in Astana, Kazakhstan. Our study analyses the biographies of six women convicted of terrorism. We conducted a re-analysis of their narratives through in-depth interviews. Additionally, we analysed documents related to this issue to uncover the respondents' biographies. This comprehensive approach aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the socio-psychological factors influencing women's radicalisation., particularly ISIS, or who were convicted of promoting terrorism.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the causes of women's radicalisation and construct a socio-psychological portrait of women ensnared in radical currents. Therefore, the object of the study is Muslim women who have returned from Syria and were former participants of ISIS. We examine the process of radicalisation within the social groups.

Therefore, the primary aim of the study is to form a socio-psychological portrait of Muslim women who participated in ISIS. To achieve this, the following tasks were set:

- To consider the history of the feminisation of extremism.
- To examine the reasons why women join terrorist groups.
- To study the factors that make a woman prone to religious extremism.
- To explore ways of preventing and combating the feminisation of extremism.

Hypotheses of the Study

Having defined the object and subject of the study, along with the aims and objectives, we formulated the hypotheses. Considering the scope of the study, we propose the following hypotheses:

- Neophytes who have not received or completed their education in mosques or madrassas, that is, who lack formal religious education, are most susceptible to radical ideas. This group often includes recent converts to Islam.
- Women prone to religious extremism often lack not only religious education but also higher education.
- Women from this group can often be considered victims of manipulation, blackmail, and abusive treatment.

The research methods employed include document analysis and interviews with women who were members of destructive organisations, particularly ISIS, or who were convicted of promoting terrorism. These methods aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-psychological factors that contribute to women's radicalisation and involvement in extremist activities.

Results and Discussion

Our study reviewed the biographies and conducted in-depth interviews with six women convicted under the article, Terrorism. Through this comprehensive analysis, we aimed to uncover the socio-psychological factors that contributed to their radicalisation and involvement with extremist organisations such as ISIS.

[1] Include the countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Akmaral

Akmaral was born in Aktobe, Kazakhstan, in 1987. She embarked on a journey to Syria on 25 August 2013, arriving via Turkey on 02 September 2013. On 09 May 2019, she was repatriated to Kazakhstan as part of the Zhusan special operation. Akmaral is a mother of five children: her eldest son is 15 years old, her daughter is 11 years old, and her third son is 7 years old. Additionally, she gave birth to two children, Albara and Nissanour, in Syria in 2015 and 2017, respectively (Musabayeva, 2019).

While living in Aktobe, Akmaral became influenced by the radical teachings of the Izmailov brothers, who were known by the pseudonyms Abu Hanifa and Abu Daut. These brothers were prominent propagandists of Salafism, a fundamentalist Islamic movement. Their lectures inspired her to leave Kazakhstan and join what she believed to be a true Islamic state. Reflecting on her decision, Akmaral noted, "Abu Hanif, whom I knew as a preacher, and his family, who were closely acquainted with mine, encouraged me to migrate to a land where Islam is professed and practised devoutly. He , assisted with housing, and facilitated my marriage there."

Before departure from Aktobe, Akmaral worked as a trader at the Shygyz market but did not hold any official employment. Her family faced significant financial difficulties, often living in rented accommodations. Throughout her time in Syria, Akmaral married seven times and had two children there. It should be noted here that Akmaral moved to Syria as a married woman, without filing a divorce from her husband based in Kazakhstan. In Syria, she also married a Daesh member. In 2017, four years after her initial relocation, her first husband divorced her while she was still in Syria.

In Syria, following the death of her Azerbaijani husband, Akmaral married an Iraqi citizen. This marriage was short-lived due to disagreements, and she subsequently married a Dagestani man in June 2014. However, he was killed in October 2014 when a bomb struck his vehicle while he was transporting water to a conflict zone. At that time, Akmaral was pregnant with their son, Albara. Following his death, ISIS compensated her $2,500. In 2017, the father of her daughter Nissanour, who was also a fighter in the ranks of ISIS, was killed. This series of personal losses and the harsh realities of life under ISIS eventually led Akmaral to decide to return to Kazakhstan (Musabayeva, 2019).

Her proficiency in Arabic allowed her to play an active role within the extremist group, where she led a "women's mahar," an administrative unit for women involved in the organisation (Kolmakova, 2022). This role involved organising and overseeing various activities and responsibilities assigned to women within the group, indicating a significant level of involvement and influence.

Upon her return to Kazakhstan, Akmaral took a position at the Ansar Information and Analytical Centre, which she obtained through the labour exchange. At the centre, she collaborates with theologians and psychologists, participating in round tables and seminars. Her current role involves sharing her personal experiences and stories to educate others about the dangers of radicalisation and to help prevent individuals from falling into the same extremist paths. Her work is crucial in countering the narratives used by extremist groups to recruit vulnerable individuals, particularly women.

Samal

Samal, a 37-year-old resident of the Atyrau region and mother of four children, two of whom tragically died in Syria, was convicted under the article Terrorism. She was repatriated to Kazakhstan during the Zhusan-2 special operation. Samal has an incomplete higher education in psychology.

In 2012, Samal and her then-husband began practising and preaching Hanafi Islam, adhering to the canons of the Hanafi madhhab. Over time, they started listening to the sermons of Daryn Mubarov and later to the works of Said Buryatsky, Muhammad Hasan, and Elmir Kuliyev. Samal recalls:

I read Ibn Kasir's books *The Story of the Prophets*, *My Companions are like stars*. We thought this was the right path. Before leaving the country for

Atyrau, I used to walk around in a mask. After moving to Syria, I started wearing black and covered my face. All women there, even those who do not recite namaz, walk with their faces covered.

In 2012, Samal’s husband was sentenced to 23 years in prison for a fatal offence in Atyrau. Following this, Samal divorced him under Sharia law and, left with two sons, decided to go to Egypt to study and began making preparations. However, a friend informed her about the emergence of the Islamic State and the possibility of religious study and life there under Sharia law. After much deliberation, Samal consented to the plan.

In 2014, Samal, her two sons, aged 9 and 10, and her friend with her three children fled the country and travelled to Syria. Upon their arrival in Turkey, they were met by a man who further facilitated their move to Syria.

By 2016, Samal began reconsidering her decision and contemplating a return to Kazakhstan. She recounts:

I was frightened to see the ruthlessness and cruelty in Syria, which I had not even dreamt of in my terrible dreams. People who wanted to leave the ranks of ISIS were shot. We have seen people beheaded, hanged, and burned alive in the streets. People were blowing themselves up. We were given lessons on Shariah. But I realised that there were many errors in their beliefs. However, it was too late. In 2015, I married a man who had fought in the ranks of ISIS. I gave birth to three sons. When my husband died, I was pregnant with my fourth child.

In February 2019, Samal managed to escape to a Kurdish camp. She returned to Kazakhstan in May 2019, thanks to the special operation "Zhusan," and gave birth to her fourth child in Kazakhstan. Samal reflected on her escape:

When we were fleeing from DAISH, we slept in fields for seven days on the way. People get used to hunger. But the worst thing is when you can't find food for your child... In Syria, we saw with our own eyes the injustice, the death of many innocent people. There is no clean water; we drank from the Euphrates River. When we fled to the Kurds, my 15-year-old son fell behind us. He never came back. Five days later, I was told that he had been hit by a bomb and died (Sarieva, 2020).

Aida

Aida was born on 10 September 1995 in the Kazygurtovsky district of the South Kazakhstan. In Syria, she was known by the nickname Umm Ishaq. Her educational background includes a year of study at a madrasa for girls in Shymkent. On 31 August 2015, Aida, along with her family members, flew from Shymkent to Antalya, Turkey, with the ultimate goal of crossing into Syria to join ISIS. This action initiated a criminal case under paragraph 1 of Article 256 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Interpol declared an international search for her. Upon reaching Syria, she married Abu Zeid al-Azeri, a militant, at her father’s insistence. Subsequently, the Turkestan Regional Court sentenced her to five years’ imprisonment.

Aida's radicalisation was significantly influenced by her family, particularly by her father and brother. Her brother Nurdaulet was the first to fall into the radical currents, having been influenced during his time in Astana, where he went to seek employment. On his return to their native village, he began to preach Salafism. Initially, their father, who was a school teacher, was opposed to Nurdaulet’s radical views. However, his perspective shifted over time, and he embraced these radical ideologies. Eventually, this ideological shift led to the family's decision to move to Syria (Kusayynuly, 2021).

Upon their arrival in Antalya, they were met by facilitators who helped them in executing their plan to join ISIS. After living in Turkey for approximately 1.5 months, they crossed into Syria on 16 October 2015. During their time in Syria, Aida married Abu Zeid al-Azeri, as mentioned above, a marriage orchestrated by her father to ensure her integration into the ISIS community.

Aida’s life in Syria was marked by the harsh realities of living under ISIS rule. The transition from her life in Kazakhstan to the conflict zones

in Syria involved significant cultural and ideological shifts, which were often reinforced through the structured, radical environment of ISIS. Her marriage to a militant further entrenched her within the organisation's social and operational framework.

In 2019, after spending several years in Syria, Aida was repatriated to Kazakhstan during the special operation "Zhusan 2." This operation was part of a broader initiative by the Kazakh government to return its citizens who had joined terrorist organisations abroad. Upon her return, Aida was imprisoned under the charges previously laid out by the Kazakh authorities.

Yerkezhan

Yerkezhan was born on 03 June 1993 in the Almaty region of Kazakhstan. She is married and a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan. On 10 November 2016, under the influence of her religious connections, met through the Internet and having deceived her family members, Yerkezhan left for Syria with her two-year-old son via Turkey. Upon arrival, she joined ISIS and settled in the town of Idlib. She was sentenced to two years and seven months under Article 172 of the Criminal Code for her involvement.

ISIS recruiters meticulously orchestrated the process of Yerkezhan's radicalisation and recruitment. They initially made contact with her and gradually gained her trust. The recruiters began by collecting detailed information about her, inquiring about her beliefs (aqeeda) and the environment within her family. They exploited her lack of fundamental religious knowledge, her susceptibility to influence, and the unfavourable conditions in her family. Yerkezhan herself reflects on this manipulation, stating:

> Next, people from ISIS used my family situation and my lack of religious knowledge; they noticed that I am quick to trust and quick to give in... You have to make hijrah. Leave the country. They gave an assessment that it was not an Islamic state.... I didn't notice how I fell into their net (National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019a).

Anastasia

Anastasia was convicted of terrorist activity and sentenced to six years' imprisonment under Article 257 of the Criminal Code for "participation in the activities of a terrorist group or acts of terrorism committed by it." Although this article typically mandates a sentence of eight to twelve years of imprisonment with confiscation of property, the court mitigated her punishment, considering that Anastasia was raising a young daughter.

Anastasia's mother, Nina, who resides in the town of Shemonaikha, described her daughter as a kind, cheerful, and trusting individual. However, significant changes were observed in Anastasia's behaviour and appearance by the time she finished school. She became withdrawn and adopted a strict religious dress code consisting of loose clothes, long skirts, and a headscarf. In the 11th grade, Anastasia converted to Islam. Unknown to her family, her newfound faith was rooted in Salafism. While the change in her religious beliefs was neither welcomed nor condemned by her family, it set the stage for her subsequent radicalisation (Zakon.kz, 2019).

As Anastasia herself noted in a video interview, she initially lacked a spiritual adviser, did not attend religious courses, and did not go to a mosque; instead, she studied religion independently. Her mother recalls that Anastasia married a man whom she met on social media, VKontakte. He indoctrinated her with radical ideas, and together, they travelled to the Middle East "to fight for the faith." Her husband was subsequently killed in one of the battles there.

According to Anastasia, she has only recently realised that she was a victim of propaganda and manipulation. Speaking from her current perspective, she admits that she became a religious fanatic, blindly believing everything that was said without analysing the words and actions of the Internet preachers and her husband, who adhered to Salafism and professed radical, extremist views.

Anastasia described her relationship with her future spouse, Yerlanbek. Initially, Yerlanbek seemed like a good man, and they communicated frequently, discussing topics mainly related to Islamic issues. However, after they married and began living together, Anastasia realised that she had been wrong about him. Despite her growing concerns, she felt obligated to fulfil her duties as a Muslim wife, which included obeying her husband. Yerlanbek established contact with DAISH militants and decided to support them with weapons. This decision led them to Iraq.

In Iraq, Anastasia found herself in a dire situation. She was responsible for cooking for the fighters and looking after the children of their group members. Yerlanbek, too, began to question whether their actions aligned with the canons of their faith, but by the time he saw the reality of their situation, it was too late. He was killed in one of the skirmishes. Anastasia, who was pregnant at the time, received the news of his death with the words, "Congratulations, your husband has become a shahid"[2] (Zakon.kz, 2019).

After his death, she wanted to return home to Syria, but her attempts were unsuccessful. She was detained, threatened, and coerced into staying. During her detention, she was interrogated and forced to denounce others who were also planning to leave the extremist ranks. Additionally, there were attempts to remarry her, purportedly under Sharia law (Zakon.kz, 2019).

She was subsequently imprisoned in Turkey before being deported to Kazakhstan. On 20 May 2018, she arrived at a prison facility in the Republic of Kazakhstan. She was convicted under Article 257 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan for "creation, leadership of a terrorist group and participation in its activities." Currently, Anastasia is serving her sentence in colony OV-156/21, located in the Zharma district of the East Kazakhstan region (Zakon.kz, 2019).

[2] Shahid means becoming a martyr

Elizaveta

Elizaveta was sentenced to eight years in a penal colony on charges related to terrorist activity. She was charged under three articles of the Criminal Code: Articles 256, 257, and 259. Each charge carries a potential sentence of up to twelve years of imprisonment, along with the confiscation of property (Zakon.kz, 2019).

Elizaveta recounts her journey to becoming a Muslim woman:

> I got married, and my husband began asking me to convert to Islam. I listened, learned to read namaz, and studied the Quran. I changed my social circle and found Muslim sisters. I communicated mainly on the Internet because there was no jamaat in Zyryanovsk. Through the Internet, I received literature and knowledge (Zakon. oz, 2019).

It is noteworthy that her husband converted to Islam while serving a sentence for a crime. He then attracted Elizaveta to radical Islam. Elizaveta began listening to sermons from radical Islamists via the Internet. This exposure led her to view her friends, relatives, and even other Muslims who held differing views as infidels and polytheists. She harboured a strong desire to go to Syria to participate in armed jihad but was unable to realise this plan. Instead, she began preparing her brother for jihad, sincerely hoping that he would become a shahid (martyr) and die in the process. Fortunately, her brother eventually reconsidered and did not follow through with these plans.

Elizaveta is currently serving her sentence in colony OV-156/21, located in the Zharma district of East Kazakhstan (Zakon. kHz, 2019).

Socio-Psychological Portrait of a Female Terrorist

It is inherently challenging to delineate a comprehensive and universal portrait of women involved in terrorist organisations due to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals. However, this study aims to construct an 'ideal type' of a woman at risk of

radicalisation and participation in terrorist activities based on the analysis of various case histories.

Upon examining the narratives of women involved in terrorist activities, we identified several common external circumstances and personal attributes that appear to predispose individuals to radical influences. These factors collectively form a socio-psychological profile that highlights the vulnerabilities and characteristics that may render women susceptible to extremist ideologies.

To begin, it is crucial to identify the primary channels through which women become radicalised. The foremost channel is the use of Internet resources and social networks. Saltman and Smith (2015) highlight the role of the online magazine *Dabiq* and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, Khairolla Mametayevich Nishanbayev's research further elaborates that the recruitment and dissemination of radical ideas predominantly occur through popular social networks like Facebook, VKontakte, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and messaging platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, Imo, and Odnoklassniki (Tengrinews, 2019).

These digital platforms played a significant role in the radicalisation process of all six women studied. For instance, Akmaral's radicalisation was heavily influenced by lectures, accounts, and pages on social networks. Yerkezhan also met a male extremist on the Internet and accepted his beliefs as the ultimate truth. This reliance on digital media underscores the pervasive and potent nature of online radicalisation efforts, particularly in the recruitment of women into the ranks of ISIS and other extremist groups.

The second most significant channel for transmitting radical experiences is familial relationships. Bloom (2011) identifies five primary reasons for women's involvement in terrorism: revenge, ransom, kinship, respect, and violence. Among these, kinship stands out as the most influential factor. If a woman is related to a known insurgent or jihadist, she is likely to follow in his footsteps. Aida Amangeldi is a prime example in this context, illustrating how familial connections can play a critical role in radicalisation.

Often, the two channels—Internet resources and familial relationships—can intersect, as seen in the cases of Anastasia and Elizaveta. Anastasia embraced Islam and began studying it through online literature; subsequently, her husband, Yerlanbek, played a significant role in her radicalisation. Similarly, Elizaveta converted to Islam under her husband's influence and later deepened her understanding of the religion through online lectures.

Having identified and analysed the primary channels of radicalisation, we now turn to the socio-psychological portrait of women influenced by extremist ideas. This portrait captures the common characteristics and circumstances that make women susceptible to radical ideologies.

Dysfunctions within educational institutions, including religious education, significantly contribute to the emergence of deviant behaviours such as religious extremism. A lack of education and insufficient funding for educational opportunities lead to the marginalisation of individuals, making them more susceptible to extremist ideologies. This is corroborated by a survey conducted by Hussein Abd al-Majid Shawaar, a researcher specialising in religious terrorism and extremism. The survey, which sought to understand the motivations of individuals involved in terrorist organisations, revealed the following key findings:

- Religious illiteracy: 56.67% of respondents had a very poor understanding of the Quran or were only familiar with what had been taught to them by Islamists.
- Passion for profit: 50% of respondents were motivated by the prospect of easy financial gain (Al'-Obeyd, A. b. S., 2004).

A distinctive feature observed among the women in our study is their lack of fundamental religious knowledge. This deficiency can be attributed to several factors. One significant factor is the atheistic ideology that prevailed

during the Soviet Union era, which contributed to the dismantling of religious institutions in the constituent countries. As a result, several generations grew up with a substantial gap in religious education.

This historical context has left many individuals without a strong foundation in religious knowledge, making them more vulnerable to radical interpretations and extremist ideologies. The absence of comprehensive religious education creates a void that extremist groups are quick to fill, offering their version of religious teachings as the definitive truth. This manipulation is particularly effective among those who are already marginalised and seeking meaning or belonging.

Another factor is personal reluctance due to laziness, lack of critical thinking, and a general lack of knowledge. Furthermore, many individuals do not have sufficient free time to attend long theology courses or read and comprehend large amounts of complex religious literature. Consequently, women often seek out easier learning methods, such as video lectures and simplified religious literature provided by specific individuals. The data obtained in the course of the research indicate that the convicted women lacked formal religious education, did not attend mosque courses, received their knowledge primarily through the Internet, and did not read the Quran in depth.

Furthermore, in the era of religious revival that post-Soviet countries have entered, there is often a process of religious conversion. This phenomenon is evident in the cases of Elizaveta and Anastasia, who converted from different religions. Conversion often brings about a heightened zeal and a search for identity, making individuals more susceptible to radical ideologies if they lack proper guidance and education.

Additionally, the financial instability of these women at the time of their radicalisation is another contributing factor. Many of these women were in difficult financial situations, which made them more vulnerable to extremist recruitment. For instance, Akmaral did not have official employment and only worked part-time at the Shygys trade market in Aktobe. This economic hardship can push individuals toward radical groups that promise financial stability and a sense of purpose.

In addition to educational and financial factors, psychological issues often play a significant role in the radicalisation of women. Recruiters for extremist groups frequently employ highly effective techniques, leveraging their intuitive psychological insights. They target individuals who lack a positive outlook on their future and struggle to formulate personal life strategies. These recruiters promise their victims a meaningful and adventurous future, framed as the salvation of their souls in a sinful world, ultimately leading to paradise. Due to their religious illiteracy and psychological vulnerabilities, many individuals succumb to these influences and embark on the path of extremism (Aitzhanova, 2019).

Psychological instability and mental health problems can thus serve as catalysts for radicalisation. For instance, Samal was undergoing a tumultuous divorce from her imprisoned husband during her radicalisation. Similarly, in her interview, Yerkezhan indicated that the microclimate in her family was unfavourable, contributing to her vulnerability. Aida also described a family dynamic where her father's word was law, and the opinions of other family members were often disregarded.

These psychological factors, compounded by personal and familial stressors, create an environment where individuals are more susceptible to extremist ideologies. Addressing these psychological vulnerabilities is crucial in developing comprehensive strategies to prevent radicalisation. By understanding and mitigating these psychological factors, interventions can be more effectively tailored to support at-risk individuals and reduce the appeal of extremist narratives.

Another significant trait contributing to women's radicalisation is their susceptibility to manipulation and excessive gullibility. This vulnerability is evident in the cases of Anastasia and Yerkezhan, both of whom, along with Yerkezhan's son, travelled to meet Internet

acquaintances who influenced their radicalisation. Similarly, Akmaral accepted an offer to go to Syria from individuals she did not know personally. Aida was compelled to travel to Syria and marry a man she did not know due to her father's insistence.

Kadyr Malikov, a doctor of political science and Islamic studies at the Autonomous University of Madrid, provides further insight into this phenomenon. He notes that "sex volunteers" are often divorced women or widows who have unsuccessfully tried to remarry. There have also been instances of married women leaving their families to engage in 'sex-jihad.' These women typically have a history of experiencing domestic violence. Additionally, very young girls who dream of meeting their soul mates are also susceptible to this form of manipulation, viewing sex jihad as a form of romantic adventure (Arkin, 2015).

Thousands of well-paid, financially stimulated, and psychologically trained provocateurs seek to exploit women's unsettledness and romanticism (Aitzhanova, 2019). Evidence suggests that women who become victims of radicalisation often struggle to realise themselves in their personal lives. For example, Samal and Yerkezhan are both divorced, while Akmaral left her husband and children to travel to Syria, where she remarried a terrorist.

As noted earlier, the primary characteristics of women influenced by extremist and terrorist groups include a lack of fundamental religious knowledge and financial difficulties. Psychologically, these women tend to be highly susceptible to others' opinions and manipulation, suffer from depression, lack personal boundaries, and exhibit aggressiveness. Women with these qualities are frequently drawn into the networks of extremist groups.

In this context, Saltman and Smith (2015) identified several major push factors that drive Western women to migrate to ISIS-controlled territories. These factors are often similar, if not identical, to those influencing their male counterparts:

- Feeling isolated socially and/or culturally: this includes questioning one's identity and feeling uncertain about belonging within a Western culture.
- Perception of violent persecution: there is a belief that the international Muslim community is being violently persecuted.
- Emotional responses: Anger, sadness, and frustration over a perceived lack of international action in response to this persecution.

Analysing the data obtained during the research, it becomes evident that many women who have been radicalised often experience an identity crisis, marked by a disparity between social norms and personal values. For instance, Samal recounted that while she was in Atyrau, she wore a medical mask to conceal her face. She attributed this to the social disapproval and secularism in Kazakhstan, which made it impossible for her to wear the niqab openly.

Upon adopting Islam, the social circles of converts such as of Elizaveta and Anastasia significantly narrowed as they began to seek out fellow believers. In Elizaveta's hometown of Zyryanovsk, there was no local jamaat (Muslim community), prompting her to seek connections online, where she found other Muslim women. This search for a sense of belonging and community is a common theme among radicalised women.

Frequently, these women are exposed to narratives that portray the Muslim community as being severely persecuted. Examples of Islamophobia in various countries are highlighted to evoke feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration over the perceived lack of international response to this persecution. This emotional manipulation often leads women to feel a personal responsibility to assist their fellow Muslims.

Elizaveta, for example, attempted to travel to Syria to aid the Muslim cause. When her plans failed, she sought to help through other means, notably by encouraging her brother to join the conflict. In a video interview, she expressed her internal wish for her brother to become a shahid

(martyr), believing that his death in combat would bring her spiritual reward:

> I myself had a wish inside me that he would become a Shahid. Because I sincerely believed that if he got there, if he died in some operation and became a shahid, I would get my reward (National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019 b).

Anastasia, as reported by her mother, travelled to the war zone to fight for the rights of her fellow Muslims.

In addition to the push factors previously mentioned, several pull factors draw women towards radicalisation:

- Idealistic goals of religious duty and building a utopian ‘Caliphate state’
- Belonging and sisterhood
- Romanticisation of the experience (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p.13).

Many women who travelled to Syria cite their desire to perform hijrah and live in an Islamic state as their primary motivation. They sought to become part of the true Muslim Ummah. This sentiment is echoed in the words of Yerkezhan, who stated in an interview, “...You have to make hijrah. Leave the country. Gave an assessment that it's not an Islamic state.... I did not notice how I fell into their net.” (National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019 a)

Samal recounted:

> In 2014, a friend mentioned that the Islamic State had been created, where everything would be according to Sharia law, and we could study there. She suggested going to Syria. I walked around thinking about it. I knew it was a war zone, but I was told that the war was happening elsewhere (Sarieva, 2020).

Similarly, Akmaral shared in a video interview that "Abu Hanifa called for migration to the path of Allah, where Islam is professed and practiced." Aida’s family also decided to make a hijrah, reflecting a similar narrative.

Unmarried women/divorced women or even widows are often exploited by ISIS recruiters, who present themselves as romantic men ready to take full responsibility for a woman. This romanticisation and promises of a life governed by Sharia law can be highly persuasive.

While these are prominent factors, there are numerous other reasons why women join ISIS. Nevertheless, the aforementioned factors—idealistic goals, a sense of belonging, and romanticisation—are particularly significant. Therefore, it is imperative to undertake awareness-raising efforts to dismantle myths surrounding religious duty, the "Caliphate State," the Muslim Ummah, and the romanticisation of the experience. By addressing these misconceptions, it is possible to counteract the allure of extremist ideologies and prevent further radicalisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the recruitment of women into extremist organisations is poised to gain momentum. This trend is underscored by the recent identification of a "female wing" of the terrorist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan (Interfax, 2023). To effectively counteract terrorism and extremism, the state needs to implement a comprehensive strategy that fosters collaboration between religious organisations and governmental bodies, aiming to dismantle destructive currents and prevent their reinforcement.

A dual-level approach to preventive measures is paramount. First, efforts should be made to uncover and mitigate the destructive influence of Islamist currents. Second, there should be a concerted effort to enhance religious education across the population, including among imams. Enhanced religious literacy significantly reduces the risk of individuals being drawn into destructive sects.

To address the growing issue of women being recruited into extremist organisations, we recommend the following measures:

- Formation of Information Groups: Establish information groups of scholars, university staff, and religious leaders

from traditional religions. These groups should conduct activities, training, and seminars with well-designed, competently prepared materials, and easily understood by diverse audiences. The content must be tailored to different social groups and educational levels, considering their unique behaviours and worldviews. These educational efforts must be genuine and substantive, as superficial or formalistic approaches will be ineffective. Particular attention should be directed towards at-risk groups, identified through careful monitoring.

- Integrate the teaching of the history and philosophy of religion into secondary and higher education curricula without aligning it with any particular religious doctrine. This approach aims to cultivate logical and critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to recognise and reject teachings that are dangerous to society.
- Involve parents, schools, educational organisations and children's creative and youth centres in developing cultural and productive leisure activities for young people. Diversifying leisure activities can help prevent youth from being drawn into extremist ideologies.
- Tackle youth employment issues by providing job opportunities, distributing educational grants, and allocating quotas for socially vulnerable segments of the population. Economic stability can reduce the allure of extremist groups.
- Work with residents susceptible to the influence of destructive organisations to explain that extremist beliefs are inconsistent with Kazakh traditions and mentality. Use high-quality video materials featuring real stories from individuals who have left destructive organisations to enhance awareness efforts.
- Increase the availability of free religious literacy courses near mosques to limit the spread of non-traditional religious ideologies by improving public understanding of Islam.
- Enhance the professional training of imams to increase their credibility and the trust and respect they receive from the Ummah.
- Create an association to facilitate targeted explanatory and methodological work with Muslim women, addressing their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

The following measures should be taken to combat extremism directly:

- Continuous monitoring and blocking of social media sites and accounts that promote non-traditional religious ideologies. This ongoing effort is necessary as new accounts often appear quickly after the removal of others.
- Provide comprehensive social support for women influenced by destructive religious movements. Establish hotlines in all cities of Kazakhstan and create social centres offering free psychological assistance.

Implementing these recommendations is likely to significantly contribute to preventing the feminisation of extremism in Kazakhstan. By addressing the root causes of radicalisation, enhancing religious and cultural education, and providing robust support systems, a resilient society capable of resisting extremist influences can be developed.

References

Abdellatif O., and Ottaway M. (2007). *Women in Islamist Movements: Toward an Islamist Model of Women's Activism*. Carnegie Middle East Center. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec2_women_in_islam_final1.pdf.

Ahmed, L. (2011). *A Quiet Revolution* (1st ed.). Yale University Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/1089873/a-

quiet-revolution-the-veils-resurgence-from-the-middle-east-to-america-pdf

Akhmetova, A. (2016, 22 October). Sila Ubezhdeniya. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. https://kazpravda.kz/n/iskusstvo-pereubezhdeniya/

Al'-Obeyd, A. b. S. (2004). Ugrozy Terrorizma I Bor'ba S Nim. Aziya I Afrika Segodnya (4). *Digital Library of Tajikistan*. https://library.tj/m/articles/view/УГРОЗЫ-ТЕРРОРИЗМА-И-БОРЬБА-С-НИМ

Arkin, D. (2015, 25 September). Dzhikhad al'-nikakh. Zheny seks-miloserdiya. *Karavan* https://www.caravan.kz/gazeta/dzhikhad-alnikakh-zheny-seksmiloserdiya-86920/

Aitzhanova, D. (2019). Fenomen Zhenskogo Radikalizma I Metody Yego Profilaktiki. *Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz*. 22 (2), 127-136 https://ca-c.org.ru/journal/2019/journal_rus/cac-02/11.shtml

Baker J., Obeidat S. and Kent J (2023, 22 March). Friend who inspired Shamima Begum to Join IS Mocks her as Non-believer. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65031943

Bakker, E. and de Leede, S. (2015). European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring and Under-Researched Topic. *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague*. 6 (2) 13p

http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2015.2.02

Baltanova G.R. (2016). Zhenskiy islamizm - Fenomen XXI veka. *Vestnik Ekonomiki, Prava i Sotsiologii*. (1), 224-229. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zhenskiy-islamizm-fenomen-hhi-veka

Berko, A., & Erez, E. (2007). Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(6), 493–519. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701329550

Bloom M. (2011). *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists*. London: Hurst Publishers.

Cook, D. (2005). Women Fighting in Jihad? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 28(5), 375–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180212

Cook, J., & Vale, G. (2018). *From Daesh to'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State. International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*

Davis, J. (2017). *Women in Modern Terrorism: From liberation wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State.* Rowman & Littlefield.

De Leede, S. (2018). Western Women Supporting IS/Daesh in Syria and Iraq – An Exploration of their Motivations. *International Annals of Criminology*. 56(1–2), 43–54. DOI:10.1017/cri.2018.9

Dosanova, G. M. (2010). Gorodskiye Zhenshchiny V Khidzhabe. Novyy Fenomen V Kazakhstane?. Vestnik Rossiyskogo Universiteta Druzhby Narodov. *Seriya: Sotsiologiya*. (3), 5-11. https://journals.rudn.ru/sociology/article/view/6359

Dronzina, T. (2005). Terroristki-Smertnitsy: Tendernoye Izmereniye Fenomena Novogo Global'nogo Terrorizma. *Vestnik Yevrazii*. (1), 154-177. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/terroristki-smertnitsy-tendernoe-izmerenie-fenomena-novogo-globalnogo-terrorizma

Dronzina T. (2011). Terrorizma Zhenskiy Lik (rezul'taty mezhdunarodnogo issledovaniya). Astana

Hoffman, D. (1994, 25 February). Doctor to Victims Turns Violent. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/02/26/doctor-to-victims-turns-violent/ca56505d-8f11-4c41-ab7e-e6e7b7f56188/

Huntington, Samuel P. (1997). *The Clash Of Civilizations And The Remaking Of World Order*. New York: Touchstone

Interfax (2023, 15 March). *V Kirgizii Vyyavili "Zhenskoye Krylo" Terroristicheskoy Organizatsii "Khizb Ut-Takhrir"*.https://www.interfax.ru/world/891187

Jefferis, J. (2011). *Armed for Life: The Army of God and Anti-Abortion Terror in the United States*. Praeger.

Jones, J. W. (2008). Aum Shinrikyo: Violence And Terrorism In Japanese Buddhism. In *Blood That Cries Out From The Earth: The Psychology Of Religious Terrorism* (online ed.). Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195335972.003.0004

Knoblauch H., Krech V., Wohlrab-Sahr M. (1998). *Religi se Konversion. Systematische und Fallorientierte Studien in Soziologischer Perspektive*. Konstanz

Kolmakova, V. (2022, 12 November). V Siriyu Za "Luchshey" Zhizn'yu: Chem Zakonchilas' Istoriya Odnoy Kazakhstanki. *Nur.kz*. https://www.nur.kz/society/1996855-v-siriyu-za-luchshey-zhiznyu-chem-zakonchilas-istoriya-odnoy-kazahstanki/

Kusayynuly, A. (2021). *Akem Men Agamnyn Mayitin Taba Almadym: 14 Jasynda Syriadagy Sogyska Ketken Zhigittin Okkinishi*. https://azattyq-ruhy.kz/person/23030-kem-men-agamnyn-m-iitin-taba-almadym-14-zhasynda-siriiadagy-sogyska-ketken-zhigittin-okinishi

Markovic, V. (2018). Suicide Squad: Boko Haram's Use of the Female Suicide Bomber. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 29(4-5), 283–302. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2019.1629153

Musabayeva, D. (2019, 26 July). Aktyubinku Cherez 6 Let Vernuli Iz Sirii I Otdali Pod Sud. *Diapazon*. https://diapazon.kz/news/91712-aktyubinku-cherez-6-let-vernuli-iz-sirii-i-otdali-pod-sud

Naaman, D. (2007). Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 32(4), 933-955. https://doi.org/10.1086/512624

National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan. (2019 a). *Şırmawdağı gülder (Flowers in chains)* [Video]. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bX8-4DeYH2o

National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan. (2019 b). Tsvety v okovakh (Flowers in Chains) [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSDt9_Gb7pM

Orozobekova Ch. (2022). *Foreign Fighters and International Peace. Joining Global Jihad and Marching Back Home*. Hamilton Books

Ostrovskaya, E. (2016). Religioznoye «Yevreystvo»: Opyt Biograficheskogo Narrativa V Zakrytoy Gruppe. *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya*. (2), 110–118. https://www.socis.isras.ru/article/6064

Perešin, A. (2015). Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS. *Perspectives on Terrorism*. 9(3), 21–38. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297379.

Sabirova, G. A. (2006). *Formirovaniye Religioznoy Identichnosti V Megapolise: Na Primere Zhenshchin-Tatarok, Obuchayushchikhsya Na Religioznykh Kursakh V Moskve* [*Formation Of Religious Identity In A Metropolis: The Example of Tatar Women Studying Religious Courses in Moscow*] (Candidate of Sociological Sciences dissertation, Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation).

Saltman, E., & Smith, M. (2015). *'Til Martyrdom Do Us Part'. Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

Sarieva, U. (2020, 17 February). Syriaga Barganima Katty Okinemin. *Durbi*. http://durbi.kz/2020/02/17/siriiaga-barganyma-qatty-okinemin/

Speckhard, A. (2015). *Bride of ISIS: One Young Woman's Path Into Homegrown Terrorism*. Advances Press.

Speckhard, A. (2020). *Perspective: Ireland's Lisa Smith is a Test Run on Repatriation of ISIS Women.* Homeland Security Today.

Spencer, A. N. (2016). The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic

State. *Journal of Strategic Security*. 9(3), 74–98 http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.3.1549

Tengrinews (2019). *Kak Kazakhstantsev Verbuyut V Sirii, Rasskazali V* KNB. https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kak-kazahstantsev-verbuyut-v-sirii-rasskazali-v-knb-361430/

The Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan https://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K1400000226

Thomas, William Isaac and Znaniecki, Florian(1927). *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Alfred A. Knof. New York. https://archive.org/details/polishpeasantine01thom/page/n7/mode/2up

Von Knop, K. (2007). The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 30 (5), 397–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701258585

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2019). Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism. *United Nations*. https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/17-08887_HB_Gender_Criminal_Justice_E_ebook.pdf

Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (1995). *Biographie und Religion*. Zwischen Ritual und Selbstsuche. Frankfurt. N.Y.

Zakon.kz (2019). *Zhitel'nitsa VKO Obshchalas' S Terroristami, Nakhodivshimisya Na Territorii Sirii I Iraka*. https://www.zakon.kz/redaktsiia-zakonkz/4963960-zhitelnitsa-vko-obshchalas-s.html

Ethical Approval

Since the study only used information freely available in the public domain (newspaper reports, online articles, online interviews), it does not require ethical review.

Conflict of Interests

We declare that there is no conflict of interest, financial or non-financial, related to the manuscript submitted to the Journal Space and Culture, India.

Authors Contribution Statement

Ainura Bolysbayeva: Methodology, writing initial drafts, proofreading, and finalising the draft

Zharkynbek Abikenov: Results and discussion

Aigerim Bolysbayeva: Results and discussion

Raya Taskymbayeva: Review of Literature

Assem Sarsenova: Review of Literature

Informed Consent

We declare that we have taken all the required permission (where necessary) before submitting the manuscript to the Journal Space and Culture, India.

Funding

The study did not receive any funding support from an external agency.

Data Availability Statement

We confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable input, which has substantially improved the manuscript.