



Mental Health Vulnerabilities and Women's Pathways into Crime-Related Radicalisation: Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because it challenged traditional assumptions that viewed women only as victims rather than active agents; however, the role of mental health vulnerabilities in shaping women's pathways into such criminal activities remained insufficiently examined, particularly within urban African contexts. This study examined mental health vulnerabilities influencing women's pathways to crime-related radicalisation and extremism in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study focused on identifying key psychological, socio-economic, and cultural factors that heightened women's susceptibility, as well as proposing evidence-based mental health and psychosocial intervention strategies. Guided by feminist criminology and psychosocial vulnerability frameworks, the study adopted a mixed-methods research approach. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to adult women identified as vulnerable to or affected by crime-related radicalisation and extremism in Nairobi County. Qualitative data were generated through in-depth and key-informant interviews with mental health professionals, community leaders, law enforcement personnel, and civil society actors involved in prevention and rehabilitation efforts. A multistage sampling approach incorporating cluster, purposive, and random sampling. The research instruments comprised semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistical techniques, while qualitative data was analysed thematically. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data was undertaken to enhance the validity and robustness of the study findings. The study established that socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and marginalisation, combined with restrictive cultural norms, religious indoctrination, and discrimination, further eroded personal agency and justified violence through grievance-based ideologies. The study recommends accessible, gender-sensitive mental health services and trauma-informed interventions that foster resilience via healing, identity reconstruction, social inclusion, and economic empowerment.

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Introduction

Women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism has increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention, challenging long-held assumptions that extremist violence is predominantly male-dominated (Mondani et al., 2021). Traditionally, women have been perceived as custodians of social norms, moral values, and cultural continuity, playing central roles in nurturing families and promoting social cohesion (Kulehile & Sekonyela, 2024). However, emerging research demonstrates that women are not merely passive victims or bystanders in extremist movements; rather, they actively participate as recruiters, financiers, propagandists, and, in some cases, direct perpetrators of violence. Given their socially ascribed roles as moral and cultural gatekeepers, women's engagement in extremist ideologies has profound implications for communities. When women adopt radical beliefs, these ideologies can normalise within households and transmit to children and broader social networks, reinforcing cycles of crime, radicalisation, and violent extremism (Seifi & Nourmohammadi, 2020). This shift reframes Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) discourse by positioning women as stakeholders and actors in peace, security, and development, rather than solely as beneficiaries of protection. It urges SDG discussions, particularly on gender equality (SDG 5), peace and justice (SDG 16), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10), to adopt gender-responsive, evidence-based approaches that address women's agency, pathways into radicalisation, and roles in prevention and reintegration. Consequently, policies must emphasise inclusive security, women's empowerment, and structural reforms tackling inequality, exclusion, and crime as interconnected drivers of unsustainable development (Blaustein et al., 2018).

According to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), women make up approximately 10–15% of terrorist group members worldwide, showing notable rather than marginal involvement (United Nations, CTED). Reports indicate that women and girls accounted for around 20% of foreign terrorist fighters from Belgium, 29% from France, 10% from Germany, 30% from Norway, 39% from Serbia, and about 15% from the United States (Security Council Report). These figures demonstrate female participation across various political, cultural, and socio-economic environments, underlining the need for country-specific and gender-sensitive counter-extremism policies (Onditi & Odera, 2021). In Europe, counter-terrorism assessments estimate that 10–20% of Westerners joining terrorist groups were women, challenging ideas of peripheral or purely supportive roles (CIDOB). Documented cases include all-female extremist cells, such as teenage girls in France planning attacks, highlighting women's capacity for organised operational involvement (CIDOB).

Beyond direct violence, United Nations reports emphasise women's roles as recruiters, propagandists, financiers, intelligence gatherers, and logistical supporters in groups like ISIS and Boko Haram, amplifying their influence in extremist ecosystems. Female-perpetrated acts often garner greater media attention than male-perpetrated acts, thereby incentivising organisations to recruit more women (Sutten, 2009). Studies on the Islamic State (ISIS) reveal that about 13% of foreign recruits travelling to Iraq and Syria were women, with ages ranging from 15 to 63 years, confirming their active contributions to transnational movements (Cook & Vale, 2018). Africa is no exception. Between June 2014 and February 2018, Boko Haram in Nigeria recruited or forced around 468 women and girls into suicide attacks, resulting in nearly 1,200 deaths and thousands of injuries. Broader data from the Lake Chad Basin shows that at

least 56% of Boko Haram suicide bombers from 2011 to 2017 were women and girls, highlighting how groups exploit gender norms to promote violence and avoid detection (Nnum et al., 2018).

In Kenya, women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and violent extremism, especially in urban areas connected to groups like Al-Shabaab, is documented. However, quantitative data on female combatants remains limited (Ndung'u et al., 2017). Women often take on indirect roles, such as recruitment, intelligence gathering, logistical support, and facilitating radical networks, rather than engaging in frontline combat. This reflects socio-economic hardships, familial ties, and ideological manipulation shaping their pathways. Ndung'u et al (2017) describe women as providing the "invisible infrastructure" for Al-Shabaab through supplies, shelter, medical care, radicalising family members, and funding facilitation. Based on focus-group discussions and interviews with returnees, their analysis links these roles to gendered socio-economic pressures and cultural norms that confine women to enabling positions, maintaining networks without attracting attention. Badurdeen (2018) documents women's agency as recruiters in coastal regions, utilising relationships and grievances to enlist others, intersecting ideology with familial ties to broaden reach in urban settlements and challenge victim narratives in counter-terrorism discourse.

As guided by the study objectives, psychological, socio-economic, and cultural vulnerabilities combined can increase women's susceptibility to crime-related radicalisation and extremism. Women experiencing trauma, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic or sexual violence, economic deprivation, social isolation, or unresolved distress are especially vulnerable to narratives promising belonging, purpose, protection, or moral clarity (Schulten, 2024). Extremist groups exploit these vulnerabilities by offering emotional support, identity validation, and empowerment to marginalised women. While mental illness does not solely cause radicalisation, it can impair judgment, foster dependence on manipulative relationships, and heighten vulnerability to indoctrination. Despite growing recognition of women's roles in violent extremism, empirical research gaps persist in examining mental health vulnerabilities influencing women's pathways into crime-related radicalisation, especially in urban Kenyan settings. This study addresses these gaps by investigating pathways and identifying gender-responsive, mental health-informed interventions to mitigate radicalisation and extremism among women in urban contexts.

Theoretical Basis

Associations between various vulnerabilities and crime-related radicalisation and extremism have been extensively documented in the literature; however, mental health vulnerabilities among women, especially in urban settings, remain considerably underexplored. From a feminist criminology perspective, women's involvement in crime and radicalisation cannot be understood outside the broader gendered social structures that shape their lived experiences. Feminist criminology stresses that women's exposure to violence, marginalisation, and unequal power relations often creates structural conditions influencing their pathways into crime. In this regard, neglecting women's mental health vulnerabilities has broader societal implications, particularly for achieving sustainable development goals, as women play central roles in families, communities, and social institutions (Morgades-Bamba et al., 2020). When women's psychological needs and mental health challenges are ignored, their increased susceptibility to radicalisation not only affects individual well-being but may also weaken social cohesion, community resilience, and crime prevention efforts. Therefore, understanding and addressing

women's mental health vulnerabilities is crucial for developing gender-responsive interventions aligned with feminist criminological principles. This study thus contributes new knowledge by examining how mental health vulnerabilities intersect with gendered structural inequalities to influence women's pathways into crime-related radicalisation within an urban African context, specifically in informal settlements.

Trip et al. (2019) demonstrate that psychological vulnerabilities such as trauma, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, identity crises, and unresolved experiences of violence significantly contribute to women's susceptibility to crime-related radicalisation and extremism. These psychological stressors align with the psychosocial vulnerability framework, which conceptualises radicalisation as a process influenced by the interaction between individual psychological distress and broader social pressures. Women who experience domestic violence, sexual abuse, displacement, or chronic stress may seek belonging, protection, or purpose through criminal or extremist networks that exploit their emotional distress and unmet psychological needs. In urban environments, additional stressors such as social isolation, economic pressure, and limited access to mental health services further intensify these vulnerabilities. Despite growing recognition of these psychological factors, empirical research examining women's mental-health-specific pathways into crime-related radicalisation remains limited, particularly in African urban contexts such as Nairobi. By focusing on psychological vulnerabilities among women in Nairobi County, this study extends existing literature by identifying context-specific mental health factors that may increase susceptibility to crime-related radicalisation. The findings, therefore, provide a deeper understanding of how psychological distress interacts with urban social conditions to shape women's radicalisation pathways.

Beyond psychological factors, socio-economic vulnerabilities also significantly influence women's mental health and their involvement in crime-related radicalisation. Okere et al. (2025) argue that poverty, unemployment, informal labour conditions, limited educational opportunities, and economic dependence contribute to heightened psychological distress and restricted access to mental health services and support systems. From a feminist criminology perspective, these structural inequalities reflect gendered patterns of economic marginalisation that may push women towards survival-driven forms of criminal engagement. In urban environments characterised by inequality, overcrowding, and high crime rates, women may face increased exposure to exploitation and coercion. Extremist and criminal groups often exploit these socio-economic vulnerabilities by offering financial incentives, social mobility, or material support, thereby boosting women's participation. However, the connection between socio-economic deprivation, mental health outcomes, and women's radicalisation remains insufficiently examined in African urban settings, highlighting the need for context-specific research in Nairobi County (Kurtenbach, 2025). This study addresses the socio-economic knowledge gap by exploring pressures in an urban environment and how they interact with women's mental health vulnerabilities to influence involvement in crime-related radicalisation. The findings offer empirical insights into how economic marginalisation and psychological distress jointly shape women's susceptibility to recruitment into extremist or criminal networks.

Cultural norms and religious interpretations also greatly influence women's mental health experiences and their vulnerability to crime-related radicalisation and extremism. Feminist criminology emphasises how patriarchal cultural structures and restrictive gender roles can limit women's autonomy, suppress their voices, and restrict their ability to seek psychological support or resist coercive influences (Brown, 2020). Furthermore, distorted religious narratives

may be exploited to legitimise violence, reinforce obedience, or depict women's participation in extremist activities as a moral or spiritual duty (Brubaker, 2015). In multicultural urban environments such as Nairobi, conflicting cultural expectations and identity struggles can heighten psychological stress and identity conflicts, which are central aspects within the psychosocial vulnerability framework. These dynamics can foster conditions where women become more vulnerable to radical ideologies that offer a sense of belonging, identity, or empowerment. Despite these links, gender-sensitive analyses exploring the interplay between cultural norms, religion, and women's mental health in the context of radicalisation remain scarce.

This study, therefore, advances knowledge by examining how cultural and religious influences interact with mental health vulnerabilities to shape women's radicalisation experiences in Nairobi County. Such insights help develop culturally sensitive and gender-responsive prevention strategies. Mental health and psychosocial interventions are vital in preventing women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism. Interventions such as trauma-informed care, community-based psychosocial support, cognitive-behavioural therapies, and gender-responsive counselling have been demonstrated to reduce psychological distress, enhance resilience, and support social reintegration. From both feminist criminology and psychosocial vulnerability perspectives, effective prevention strategies must address not only individual psychological needs but also the structural and social conditions that contribute to women's vulnerabilities. Incorporating gender-responsive mental health interventions into crime prevention and counter-radicalisation strategies in urban areas like Nairobi County fosters more holistic approaches that simultaneously tackle psychological distress, socio-economic marginalisation, and gender-based inequalities.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore mental health vulnerabilities and women's pathways into crime-related radicalisation in Nairobi County. This area is characterised by dense informal settlements, significant socio-economic disparities, and diverse cultural and religious dynamics, making it especially relevant for understanding urban risks of radicalisation. The target population included residents aged 15–65 years, based on data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) 2019. A multi-stage, stratified random sampling technique was used to select 383 survey respondents from four purposively chosen informal settlement sub-counties — Mathare, Kibra, Kamukunji, and Kasarani — proportionally. Purposive sampling was also used to identify 20 key informants, including chiefs, Nyumba Kumi elders, Officers Commanding Stations (OCS), and civil society representatives, bringing the total sample size to 403 participants. Data collection involved structured questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and review of police records and local administrative crime registers to contextualise crime and radicalisation trends. Quantitative data were analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In contrast, qualitative data were examined thematically to identify key patterns related to gendered vulnerabilities and pathways into radicalisation. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, and maintaining confidentiality and professional conduct among all research team members, in line with established research ethics standards.

Analysis of Findings

The discussions were conducted in relation to research objectives that sought to analyse psychological vulnerabilities contributing to women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism in Nairobi County, Kenya; examine the socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors influencing women's mental health vulnerabilities; and recommend evidence-based mental health and psychosocial interventions to prevent such involvement. The study sought 403 participants for the research. As seen in the table above, 383 questionnaires were distributed. Out of the 383, 338 were returned, which was 89.0% response rate; all 20 participants set for the interview participated. The study's overall response rate was 85.0%, which was deemed adequate to address the concerns of the study. Sataloff and Vontela (2021) observed that a response rate of 60% or higher is adequate for addressing the concerns of a study. Psychological vulnerabilities that contribute to women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism. To ascertain the psychological vulnerabilities that contribute to women's involvement with crime-related radicalisation and extremism that cripple sustainable development, the respondents gave their opinions during the data collection exercise as follows:

Table 1

Psychological Vulnerabilities Contributing to Women's Involvement in Radicalisation and Extremism

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral		Total				
	F	%	F	%	F	%	N	Mean	SD
Women feel socially excluded or marginalised, which makes them more open to groups that offer a sense of belonging.	274	81.1	37	10.9	27	8.3	338	4	1
Women's experiences of personal trauma or abuse make them more likely to accept extreme ideas or groups.	310	91.7	18	5.3	10	3.3	338	4	1
Women feel that societal injustices and discrimination justify taking part in radical or extreme activities.	298	88.2	27	8.0	13	3.8	338	4	1
Women are motivated to join groups or movements that make them feel important or valued.	244	72.2	71	21.0	23	6.8	338	4	1

Source: Author (2026)

The data show that the majority of respondents see psychological vulnerabilities as key factors in women's involvement in radicalisation and extremism. Specifically, most women agreed that feelings of social exclusion (81.1%), personal trauma or abuse (91.7%), and perceived societal injustices (88.2%) increase susceptibility to extremist groups. Additionally, a large proportion (72.2%) reported being motivated by a need for recognition or significance. The mean score of 4 and a low standard deviation of 1 across all items indicate a strong consensus among

respondents that these psychological factors significantly influence radical behaviour. Respondents who are psychologists from civil society groups said:

"Untreated trauma and chronic emotional pain make women susceptible to extremist groups that offer validation, stability, and meaning." "Radical engagement often reflects an adaptive response to unmet psychological and identity-related needs rather than pure ideological commitment."

The two quotes indicate that women's pathways into crime-related radicalisation are strongly mediated by unresolved psychological distress and identity-related vulnerabilities. This aligns with Oberg et al. 2023, who demonstrated that untreated trauma, mental health issues, and chronic emotional pain create conditions where extremist or criminal groups can serve as surrogate support systems, providing perceived validation, stability, and meaning. These groups exploit identity crises rooted in social marginalisation, gender-based exclusion, or isolation by offering structured roles and moral narratives that transform personal suffering into a purposeful struggle. In this context, radical engagement functions less as an Expression of ideological commitment than an adaptive response to unmet psychological and emotional needs.

Furthermore, relational dynamics and perceptions of unfairness can act as key triggers for radicalisation. Emotional dependence in close or family relationships diminishes autonomy and critical thinking, making it easier to conform to extremist or criminal norms. At the same time, experiences of gender inequality, discrimination, or personal loss are cognitively reshaped into moral grievances through extremist narratives that justify violence or crime as legitimate resistance. Overall, these findings emphasise that women's involvement in radical or criminal groups is influenced by a mix of psychological vulnerability, relational factors, and grievance-driven meaning-making, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed and gender-sensitive prevention and disengagement approaches. Socio-economic, cultural and religious factors influencing women's mental health vulnerabilities associated with radicalisation and extremism. To ascertain social-economic, cultural and religious factors that contribute to women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism that cripple sustainable development, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 2

Factors influencing women's Mental Health: Vulnerabilities associated with Radicalisation and Extremism

Statements	Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Total		
	F	% F	% F	% F	% F	M	S	D	
Poverty and limited economic opportunities increase vulnerability to extremist ideologies.	204	61.3	3.0	21.3	6.3	3.3	3.8	2.4	
Limited access to education and social awareness increases women's vulnerability to radicalisation.	63	18.8	23.9	7.36	1.0	3.3	2.8	1.6	
Restrictive cultural expectations or gender norms make women more likely to be influenced by extremist groups	254	75.5	4.1	1.41	1.3	3.4	1.8	1.5	

Restrictive gender norms and cultural expectations increase women's susceptibility to extremist influence.	280	8 44	1 14	7	2	4 3 4 1	2	3	8
Pressure from family, peers, or religious communities can influence women toward radical or extremist activities.	274	8 41	1 23	7	2	6 3 4 1	3	8	8
				8	0				
				1	2				
				1	1				

Source: Author (2026)

The data shows that socio-cultural and religious factors play a significant role in influencing women's mental health vulnerabilities linked to radicalisation and extremism. A majority of respondents agreed that exposure to radical religious interpretations (82.8%), pressure from family or community (81.1%), and restrictive cultural norms (75%) increase susceptibility to extremist influence. Limited economic opportunities were also seen as a contributing factor by 60.4% of respondents, while lack of education was less strongly perceived, with only 18.6% agreement. The mean scores of 3–4 and low standard deviations indicate a consensus that cultural, religious, and economic pressures affect women's vulnerability. Respondents had this to say: *"Poverty and lack of opportunities make women feel powerless, and extremist groups seem like a way to regain respect and purpose."* Another one had this response: *"Socio-economic hardship and restrictive cultural norms create vulnerabilities that extremist groups exploit to recruit women."* The response suggests that socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping women's psychological vulnerability to radicalisation by eroding mental well-being, agency, and perceived life trajectories.

Chronic poverty, unemployment, and financial dependency generate ongoing stress, feelings of powerlessness, and diminished self-efficacy, which can increase susceptibility to groups that promise economic support, social recognition, or moral purpose. These pressures are intensified by restrictive cultural norms and gendered expectations that limit women's autonomy and emotional expression, fostering internalised feelings of inadequacy and entrapment. Within such contexts, radical or extremist ideologies may be seen as alternative frameworks through which women can reclaim dignity, status, or voice otherwise denied in their socio-cultural environments. The analysis further shows that religious meaning-making and experiences of discrimination interact to increase mental health vulnerabilities. During times of psychological distress, selective or politicised religious interpretations may provide moral clarity, emotional comfort, and justification for sacrifice or resistance, thus boosting openness to extremist narratives. At the same time, intersecting forms of marginalisation based on gender, religion, ethnicity, or class cause cumulative psychological harm, including feelings of alienation and resentment, which extremist discourses frame as collective injustice (Abu-Raiya, 2016).

These dynamics demonstrate that women's pathways into radicalisation are shaped by the combination of structural deprivation, culturally mediated identity constraints, and grievance narratives, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive, culturally informed, and socio-economically responsive prevention strategies. The findings indicate that socio-economic hardship, restrictive cultural norms, and religious influences can interact to shape women's mental health vulnerabilities linked to radicalisation and extremism. Poverty, limited opportunities, and financial dependency seem to contribute to psychological strain and reduce agency, while gendered cultural expectations may limit women's autonomy and increase

susceptibility to external influences. Additionally, exposure to certain religious interpretations and pressure from family or community networks can influence beliefs and decisions during periods of distress. Overall, these factors suggest that structural deprivation, identity constraints, and perceived grievances may merge to heighten vulnerability, underlining the need for gender-sensitive, culturally aware, and socio-economically responsive prevention strategies.

In the case of evidence-based mental health and psychosocial interventions for preventing women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism. The respondent suggested the evidence of mental health and psychosocial interventions for mitigating women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation and extremism as seen in Table 3. The data indicate that respondents strongly perceive mental health and psychosocial interventions as effective in preventing women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation. A vast majority agreed that timely, affordable, and culturally appropriate mental health services (90.8%) and gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions (83.7%) are critical. Community-based mental health services (74.6%) and early trauma counselling (62.4%) were also seen as important, while peer support networks (60.1%) had slightly lower agreement. The mean scores of 3–4, with low standard deviations, suggest a consensus that these interventions can mitigate emotional distress, strengthen resilience, and disrupt pathways to radicalisation. One key informant had this to say: *“Timely, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed mental health interventions can disrupt the pathways by which extremist groups exploit women’s emotional and psychosocial vulnerabilities.”*

This indicates that limited access to timely, affordable, and culturally appropriate mental health services significantly heightens women's vulnerability to crime-related radicalisation.

Table 3

Evidence-based Interventions for Preventing Women's Involvement in Crime-related Radicalisation and Extremism

	Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Total F	Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%		Mean	SD
Providing timely, affordable, and culturally appropriate mental health services reduces women's vulnerability to crime-related radicalisation.	307	90.8	29	8.6	2	0.6	338	4	1
Early trauma counselling helps women cope with emotional distress and prevents recruitment into extremist or criminal groups.	211	62.4	94	27.8	33	9.8	338	4	1
Peer support networks for women are effective in alleviating feelings of isolation and decreasing susceptibility to radicalisation.	203	60.1	100	29.6	35	10.4	338	3	1
Community-based mental health and psychosocial services strengthen women's personal agency and resilience against extremist influence.	252	74.6	63	18.6	23	6.8	338	4	1

Implementing gender-responsive and trauma-informed interventions addresses the impact of gender-based violence and identity disruption, thereby preventing involvement in crime-related radicalisation	283	83.7	30	8.9	25	7.4	338	4	1
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Source: Authors (2026)

Respondents' reflections suggest that early psychosocial interventions, particularly trauma counselling, peer support, and community-based mental health services, could have mitigated emotional distress, reduced reliance on maladaptive coping strategies, and strengthened personal agency. Trauma-informed and gender-responsive approaches were especially critical, as they acknowledge the cumulative effects of gender-based violence, relational dependency, and identity disruption. Such interventions were perceived as effective not only in alleviating psychological symptoms but also in disrupting pathways through which extremist or criminal groups exploit emotional pain and unmet psychosocial needs. In practice, such interventions may include community-based mental health and psychosocial programmes tailored to women's lived experiences in informal urban settings. Local health facilities and community organisations could provide trauma-informed counselling delivered by trained mental health practitioners and psychosocial workers familiar with gender-based violence and cultural contexts.

Women's peer support groups and mentorship initiatives, facilitated by community associations or youth centers, may offer safe spaces for sharing experiences, reducing social isolation, and strengthening emotional resilience. Community outreach efforts involving social workers, faith leaders, and civil society actors could also promote mental health awareness, early identification of trauma, and referrals to counselling services. These initiatives might be complemented by economic empowerment and skills development programmes, which could help women rebuild self-confidence and financial independence while potentially reducing vulnerability to recruitment into extremist or criminal networks.

Conclusion

Women's involvement in crime-related radicalisation is primarily driven by unresolved psychological distress, identity crises, and relational vulnerabilities. Untreated trauma, mental health challenges, and emotional pain create openings for extremist or criminal groups to provide perceived belonging, validation, and meaning, reframing personal suffering into purposeful engagement. Socio-economic deprivation, restrictive cultural norms, religious indoctrination, and discriminatory experiences further heighten psychological vulnerability. Poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and marginalisation undermine women's agency and mental well-being, while selective religious narratives and grievance-based ideologies justify violence or crime as moral resistance. Limited access to timely, gender-responsive mental health services significantly increase risk, whereas trauma-informed, community-based psychosocial interventions strengthen resilience. Sustainable prevention requires long-term support systems that promote healing, identity reconstruction, social inclusion, and economic empowerment.

Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening access to trauma-informed and gender-responsive mental health services, particularly at the community level. Expanding community-based mental health services would enable early identification and treatment of trauma, depression, and other psychosocial challenges that may increase vulnerability to crime-related radicalisation. In addition, early psychosocial screening and intervention mechanisms should be integrated for women exposed to vulnerable crime involvement. The study also recommends promoting women-centered community initiatives, including support groups, mentorship programmes, and safe spaces that foster social belonging, emotional resilience, and peer support. Such initiatives can help reduce isolation while strengthening women's coping mechanisms and social networks.

Furthermore, expanding economic empowerment and educational opportunities is critical to reducing financial dependency and enhancing women's agency, thereby limiting the appeal of extremist or criminal groups that exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities linked to crime radicalisation. Supporting culturally and religiously sensitive prevention programmes that counter extremist narratives without stigmatising communities, and that involve community leaders, faith-based organisations, and civil society actors, could promote positive messaging and inclusive dialogue. In addition, long-term reintegration and follow-up psychosocial support should be prioritised for women who may have been exposed to radicalisation pathways, ensuring sustained recovery, social reintegration, and contributions to broader goals of peace, resilience, and sustainable development.

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