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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20557640) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20557640)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20557640)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20557640>**Gender Mainstreaming to Prevent Radicalization & Extremism: A Case Study of Women's Seminars in Pakistan****Dr. Tehmina Aslam (Corresponding Author)**

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**Abstract**

Female students pursuing education in religious seminaries often face challenges in accessing the same social, political, and professional opportunities available to women educated through mainstream educational institutions. In Pakistan, the formal education system, which emphasizes disciplines such as science, mathematics, technology, and English, is generally associated with greater access to employment opportunities, public representation, and participation in national decision-making and policymaking processes. Consequently, female graduates of religious seminaries may experience varying degrees of social exclusion and limited representation within mainstream society. This study seeks to explore avenues for enhancing the inclusion and representation of female seminary graduates at the national level, thereby facilitating their integration into mainstream social, political, and economic structures. Such inclusion may contribute to reducing feelings of marginalization and strengthening resilience against extremist narratives and radical influences. Adopting a qualitative research paradigm, the study will employ an exploratory research design. Data will be collected through structured, standardized, and open-ended interviews with female students and teachers from religious seminaries, as well as legislators and policymakers who may play a role in developing relevant policies and legislative frameworks. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities related to the mainstreaming of female seminary graduates. The findings of the study will provide evidence-based recommendations for improving the social and political inclusion of women educated in religious seminaries. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the development of inclusive policies and institutional mechanisms that promote social cohesion, empower female seminary graduates, and mitigate factors that may increase susceptibility to radicalization and extremism.

## 1. Introduction

According to the 2023 Population and Housing Census, Pakistan's literacy rate stands at approximately 63%, with a notable gender disparity: the literacy rate among males is 68%, compared to 52% among females. Despite the critical role of education in national development, Pakistan allocates only around 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the education sector. Furthermore, of the country's total population of approximately 240.5 million, women constitute 49.2%, highlighting the significance of female educational participation and empowerment for the country's socioeconomic progress and sustainable development. (Rana, 2024). In Pakistan, per capita earning capacity is also low. It stands at around 60 per cent population living on less than two dollars a day, with rural areas experiencing further poverty compared to their urban counterpart. In a society predicated on the patriarchal system, women find fewer opportunities and less space for sovereignty (Din, 2023). Women's education is still not a priority. Religious seminaries (madrasas) offer an alternative path to seeking education. There are more than 40,000 religious seminaries in Pakistan (Hayat, 2009). Of them, around 2000 are registered for females only, tutoring 2,36,000 girls per year (Butt, 2009; Fayyaz, 2023).

Since the end of the Cold War in 1991 (1946-1991), the world has moved along the lines of modernity, embracing democratic liberal ideals and economic independence. The addition of globalization through the internet has offered a necessary stimulant to free speech (Aamir, 2023). Against this background, in Pakistan, women are still not exposed to circumstances changing the world in the post-Cold War era. No doubt, females have access to seminaries outside their homes to seek religious education, but they are not equipped with the knowledge and skills that could make them independent (Mir, 2016). Religious education opens limited possibilities for employment. Females from public schools and colleges (whether earned degrees in the Urdu or English way of seeking education) outclass females from religious seminaries (no matter what kind of degree has been obtained) in the employment market. Religious seminaries seem to be oblivious to this challenge.

Compared to the pre-1991 era, though the situation of women's empowerment has improved a lot in Pakistan, the mode of education is offering a major hindrance to making females competitive in this challenge-laden age. Females with education sought in religious seminaries face the problem of adjusting to the system running along worldly knowledge and skills (Andrabi et al, 2006). This discrepancy is keeping such females marginalized in society and vulnerable to various pressures ranging from violence, male dominance, domestic abuse, acid burning, and honour killings, thereby identifying the disempowerment of women in Pakistani society (Din, 2023).

This study aims to find ways to represent females (who have sought education at religious seminaries) at the national level to mainstream them, thereby preventing their slide towards radicalization and extremism.

### 1.1 Account of Women as agents in P/CVE and their importance

In the security and peacebuilding aspects of International Relations, women play a critical role and have been the subject of greater debate. Due to traditionalism and subjugation, women have been suffering their role of being a potential players in peacemaking is severely

undermined. Bloom(2017) contributes to this debate by presenting a duality reflected in the paradox of conservative society, i.e., if women aren't searched, a security gap arises, making them the "ideal stealth operatives". If in case they are searched, militants do it harshly, further fueling extremist narratives. This deems a lose-lose situation, but nevertheless reflects the importance of women in the security landscape (Bloom, 2017). Callway(2012) further adds to this debate by arguing that women are seen primarily in the roles of mothers and wives. This, in conflict-related situations, adds a contradicting element as it reinforces traditional gender divisions. Due to this, men continue to be seen as the primary actors while women are confined to a domestic role only (Callway, 2012). Kaufman and Williams(2012) present an alternative perspective on women in the roles of mothers and wives by stating that women potentially use these identities as a source of power rather than a limitation by turning these identities into a legitimate platform for activism. Therefore, women "integrate what would be the traditional and private with the public and often feminist to take a political stand" (Ingram, 2021).

Stenger and True(2024), in a Global Centre report, present a regional account on Southeast Asia and provide a nuanced view of how gender shapes violent extremism and plays a role in P/CVE responses. Firstly report highlights that violent extremists engage both men and women, but in different capacities. But both of them are potential agents who can influence radicalization as well as deradicalization. Women, however, aren't just passive victims. Rather, they are agents of influence, activism on one hand, and agents of perpetration and radicalization on the other hand. To understand the gendered dynamics of P/CVE, it is pertinent to break away from stereotypical assumptions about women. The reason is explained in the second aspect of the report, ie, gender matters in both understanding the root cause and in cultivating solutions. Women's role is critical in this regard for the early detection of the menace of radicalization within families and communities. Therefore, inclusion of women in policymaking roles, peacebuilding efforts, and security initiatives is pertinent for strengthening resilience and for effective interventions. Lastly, women and men suffer different impacts, with women facing vulnerabilities, discrimination, and limited mobility due to patriarchal norms and social stigma that affect and undermine their potential role in P/CVE efforts (Stenger and True, 2024).

According to Bhulai and Nemr (2018), women's role in P/CVE has undergone multiple phases of evolution. This evolution reflects a shift in understanding women's roles, current accounts, and limitations of the current norms and values. With this, Bhulai and Nemr (2018) stress the importance of having a detailed understanding of gender dynamics and multiple roles of women in violent extremism and P/CVE. Women were primarily considered a weaker gender. Due to this subjugation, they have been the passive victims of terrorism and extremism. But as time passed and society evolved, in contemporary times, women's roles have also been shifted. No, women are seen as agents of peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. Women, in conflict-affected regions, play an important role in the peace and security aspect by safeguarding communities against violence, recognizing early signs of radicalization to eradicate them at the earliest, and providing rehabilitation to dissuade individuals from joining terrorist groups. Parallel to this positive role, women have also become sympathizers, are complacent, and perpetrators of violent extremism. The bottom line is that on either side, women are now agents rather than

just victims. Despite this, international as well as regional norms and policy measures have loopholes with regard to utilizing the potential of women for peacebuilding and P/CVE efforts. They remain rudimentary, and despite having legislation and resolutions on gender equality, they aren't prioritized in P/CVE plans, and the inclusion of gender is more symbolic than operational. (Bhulai and Nemr, 2018)

For P/CVE efforts in Pakistan, the role of women is critical and multifaceted. Firstly, as mothers and caregivers, women are early detectors of signs and symptoms of radicalization. They often are the first ones to notice behavioural changes, and a close relationship plays a role in intervention with sensitivity. Therefore, they can support early signs at a microcosm that a male-dominated security approach could miss (WANA Institute, 2017). Secondly, for peacebuilding efforts and social cohesion at the grassroots level, women are primary agents for community resilience. As important agents in the community, they promote dialogue, tolerance, and put in effort for conflict resolution within families, neighbours, and the community as a whole. Their role challenges the narrative of hate and promotes social integration for a better cause. Women's community networks like TOLANA provide a good case practice for mediating local conflicts and helping in the prevention of individuals from joining extremist groups. Lastly, through education, women play a leading role in shaping narratives and, through public outreach through network cells, they help in countering violent ideologies and promote alternative peace ideologies rooted in religion, civic values, and human rights (Qadeem, 2019).

Despite their multifaceted roles, women are under-recognized actors in P/CVE efforts due to the havoc of social evils like patriarchy, gender inequality, and under-prioritization. Firstly, due to deeply rooted extremism and intolerance, women suffer threats and hence are under the clouds of insecurity (Basit et. al, 2019). Secondly, on the policy level counter terrorism and counter-extremism have historically neglected the gender perspective; hence, women are nowhere in the equation and are structurally excluded from the formal P/CVE decision-making process (UN Women, 2019). Thirdly, socio-economic norms deeply rooted in structural patriarchy add up to a gender inequality crisis and limit the mobility, hence women's participation remains restricted. Furthermore, women's identities are limited to a role of mother and wife, rather than seeing them as autonomous individuals and decision makers undercuts this gender's broader contributions (Zehra, 2025).

### **1.3 Research problem: Lack of women's mainstreaming in CVE frameworks**

The post-Cold War era (1991 onward) affected Pakistani society (men, women, and even children) by promoting trends of radicalization and extremism, the main driving source of which remained religion, though it brought a bad name. Whereas men remained a focus of de-radicalization, women were overlooked. To address the issue, the 18th Constitutional Amendment 2010 offered a special quota (10%) for educated females to participate in the executive domain by passing the examination of the Central Superior Services in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2020). Subsequent years saw educated females joining various executive professional groups, including the Police and District Administration. The inclusion not only empowered women but also narrowed down the gender gap in decision-making and policymaking at the national level. However, some females remained outside of this ambit by not having access to

the requisite education. These females were those who had been seeking traditional religious education at seminaries dedicated to females, but not worldly education, to avail themselves of the constitutional opportunity to join the national mainstream in decision-making and policymaking. No study has been conducted so far to find ways to include these females in the national mainstream in an attempt to forestall their radicalization and extremism.

#### **1.4 Research objectives & questions**

##### **1.4.1 Main research question**

How the inclusion of female students (who studied at religious seminaries) in the national mainstream through a legal framework that could empower them to participate in decision and policy making may prevent their radicalization and extremism.

##### **1.4.2 Sub-research questions**

- What role does the existing curriculum of female religious seminaries play in radicalizing them?
- How can the existing curriculum of female religious seminaries be changed to make the female students compete academically at the national level with female students from schools and colleges?
- What reforms can be introduced in the Madrasa education to equip females with knowledge and skills to compete with their counterparts at the national level?
- To what extent are female students of religious seminaries willing to change the future course of their careers to worldly affairs?
- How can legislators be persuaded to permit female students from religious seminaries to join national decision-making and policy-making?

##### **1.4.3 Objectives, scope, and significance of the study**

- The study of the syllabus (primary source) would offer an insight into the areas that need improvement: to prevent female students from getting radicalized and extremists, and to move female students towards the goal of competing with their counterparts studying in schools and colleges.
- The study would highlight the importance of change in the syllabus to meet the worldly needs
- The study would help understand the importance of allocating a certain percentage of quota for female students studying at female religious seminaries to get them mainstreamed.
- The study would contribute to existing research literature on prospects of women's mainstreaming through modifications in education and changes in law to forestall radicalization and extremism.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Understanding Radicalization & Extremism**

#### **2.1.1 Definition**

The term “cognitive opening,” coined by Wiktorowicz (2005), is crucial to understanding for defining radicalization. According to Wiktorowicz (2005), cognitive opening is a moment when a victim of discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, and political repression tries to understand life at a point when his or her belief system is already shaking. At this moment of vulnerability, they become a target and get receptive to radical ideology (Trip et al., 2019).

In the light of the concept of cognitive opening, Radicalization is a process that motivates an individual to opt for the path of violence primarily to attain political goals. According to Doosje et al. (2016), radicalization is defined as a 3-phased process. The first phase involves developing sensitivity to radical ideology. This is done by igniting emotions. The second phase is recruitment into an extremist group. The third phase is of implementation, reflected in readiness to act on ideological underpinnings. (Doosje et al., 2016). According to Abbas (2023), the September 11 attacks in 2001 gave a trending start to study the concept of radicalization and explore it through a multifaceted lens, especially from a psychological paradigm. The motive is to explore cognitive aspects and personality traits that incite an individual to take this big step, leading towards developing normalcy towards violence and extremism. (Abbas, 2023).

### **2.1.2 Factors (push and pull) and Pathways of Radicalization**

Push factors refer to external yet structural conditions that motivate and compel an individual to join or adapt to a radical mindset. Such factors create an environment that breeds fertile ground for radicalization by making an individual vulnerable. Common push factors include social marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, poverty, limited opportunities, poor governance, lethargic rule of law, relative deprivation, unresolved disputes, and historical grievances. Moreover, factors that attract individuals towards joining a radical group, known as pull factors, are those appealing aspects of radicalization that draw the attention of individuals in a way that joining a radical group would be solution-oriented and would breed rewards. Some examples of pull factors are beliefs justifying violence, a sense of belonging, an appeal towards the charisma of leaders, emotionalism, and sentiments (UNODC, 2018). Push and pull factors are interlinked as push factors create vulnerabilities and pull factors offer solutions. Both these factors have cognitive, sociological, and psychological underpinnings.

Pathways through which an individual acts on radicalization materializing, push and pull factors are routes through which individuals move ahead towards the pathway of extremist ideologies. The common pathways are offline and online pathways, and hybrid pathways are an emerging one. Through offline pathways, individuals adapt to radicalization through real-world face-to-face interactions in communities serving as a hub for radicalization. Some of the characteristics of offline pathways include direct social contracts with in-groups and charismatic leaders, local networks, and hubs like mosques or religious places. Such pathways enable interpersonal bonds, strong social group identity, and in-person contact. Having a stronger embedded social network, offline pathways have empirically proven to be more successful in carrying out violent attacks, even before detentions. Some characteristics of online pathways include online interactions on social media apps, self-directed and asocial interaction with like-minded individuals in groups, bots, Discord, etc. (Binder and Kenyon, 2022). Through online pathways, radicalization occurs through exposure to the digital world, online interactions, social media forums, and encrypted apps. Through algorithms and bots, echochambers are created that, when exposed to vulnerable individuals, potentially reinforce extremist content. The heads of radicalized hubs use mainstream platforms as a pathway to spread extremist ideologies and attract the targeted masses (Hussain and Jhandad, 2025).

### 2.1.3 Theoretical underpinnings

The first psychological underpinning of radicalization, its push and pull factors, and pathways is highlighted in Dollard's (1939) Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis. Dollard states that "the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration," defined as an "interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response," with aggression as a possible consequence. The theory links frustration and aggression and has been applied across psychology, criminology, sociology, and security studies (Breuer & Elson, 2017; Nickerson, 2023). Push and pull factors provide catalysts for aggression, which manifests when opportunities arise. Social and economic frustration from relative deprivation—poverty, unemployment, marginalization—ignites aggression and can drive terrorism. Political frustration, caused by injustice, discrimination, corruption, and authoritarian governance, further pushes marginalized groups toward radicalized actions. (Dollard, 1939).

The second underpinnings is cognitive in dimension, reflected in Moghaddam's 2005 theory "The Staircase to Terrorism." According to Stritzke (2009), acts of terrorism, radicalization and extremism are "politically motivated violence, perpetrated by individuals, groups, or state-sponsored agents, intended to instill fear and helplessness in a population to influence decision-making and to change behaviour" (Stritzke, 2009) that Moghaddam (2005) explained radicalization through the metaphor of stairs, illustrating push and pull factors of terrorism. The staircase represents psychological processes across six floors, where remaining on a floor depends on perceived choices. On the ground floor, feelings of relative deprivation and injustice dominate, leading to marginalization in social, economic, and political contexts. Individuals are drawn to radical ideologies that justify frustration, and on the second floor, aggression is displaced through extremist narratives, reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality. On the third floor, moral disengagement leads to joining radical groups, while the fourth floor involves commitment, violence training, and normalization of killing. The final floor represents the point of no return, culminating in acts of terrorism such as suicide bombings, where violence is fully enacted. (Moghaddam, 2005).

The third underpinnings is sociological, expressed in Tajfel and Turner's 1979 Social Identity Theory. In Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979), radicalization occurs when individuals identify with an in-group and perceive out-groups as threats, creating conflict and potential violence. People categorize themselves by religion, nationality, or ideology (social categorization) and deeply adopt in-group ideologies (social identification), justifying hostility toward out-groups. Stronger in-group identity increases conformity and acceptance of violence. Social identity provides belonging, purpose, and self-worth through shared values. Key stages include social categorization, social identification, social comparison, in-group/out-group formation, and positive distinctiveness, which reinforces in-group pride and out-group prejudice, driving radicalization and intergroup conflict. (McLeod, 2023).

The last underpinning is another psychological perspective highlighted in the Adlerian model of Psychology, also known as Individual Psychology. This school of thought helps explain how an individual becomes a perpetrator. Adler's psychology explains that humans are motivated by social connections, interactions, and the pursuit of superiority, with feelings of inferiority

driving goal achievement. Psychologically healthy individuals compensate through growth, while unhealthy individuals may turn to violence and radicalization. Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga, in *Courage to Be Disliked*, argue that experiences do not inherently cause success or failure; individuals assign meaning to them. Humans are self-determining, shaping life through chosen meaning. The past influences life as a lens, not a blueprint, guiding but not dictating actions (Kishimi & Koga, 2018). Adlerian psychology helps explain criminal behaviour and the mindsets behind it. Criminals often lack social interest (Shon & Barton-Bellessa, 2015), with childhood experiences between ages 4–6 shaping personality. Criminals “hide their feelings of inadequacy by developing a cheap superiority complex,” targeting others to assert dominance. Crime reflects failed social interest, where inferiority is expressed through aggression rather than constructive change. Two childhood types lead to criminality: unappreciated children, who feel rejected and lash out, and pampered children, who develop entitlement and narcissism. Both cultivate victimhood, entitlement, and a lack of accountability.

## **2.2 Role of Women in P/CVE (Global Evidence)**

### **2.2.1 Denmark’s Aarhus Model**

Aarhus Model of Denmark is a community-based, multifaceted initiative to curb the menace of radicalization through preventive measures, with emphasis on early dialogue, reintegration, rather than solely depending on punitive measures. It was a pilot initiative that began in 2007 as part of the broader crime prevention strategy of Aarhus Municipality. The core idea behind this initiative is preventing radicalization, be it political or religious, through involving youth and women to foster safety and inclusivity in society. The model is based on three pertinent principles. The first principle is of early engagement and awareness. This step is executed through workshops, public outreach, and training on early detection of signs of radicalization. The second principle is of collaboration and cooperation, encouraging respectful yet assertive dialogue with local communities and is seen as an essential step to reduce marginalization and discrimination. The third and last principle is of support and intervention for individuals showing risk factors of radicalization through risk assessment, counselling, mentoring, and redirecting their frustration towards progression rather than aggression. This peacebuilding initiative by Denmark has gathered substantive international highlights and has been ever since serving as a good case practice to be adapted for P/CVE efforts (European Commission, 2024). It is deemed notable for the model’s focus on reintegration rather than sole criminalization and holistic social approach (Käsehage, 2021). Involvement of women as a primary agent is the pertinent aspect of this model that serves as a case study for women’s role in P/CVE efforts on a broader spectrum. Women as caregivers are the first ones to notice early signs, hence aligning with the model’s early preventive measures strategy. Secondly, in Denmark, women are involved in community networks and dialogues through their contributions in NGOs and put in efforts for trust building, hence making the Aarhus model a successful effort for P/CVE efforts. Thirdly, in the Aarhus programme, women, especially mothers, are selected for mentoring programmes to engage with supportive figures for a mutual cause, i.e., preventing violent extremism (GAFAROVA, 2018).

### **2.2.2 Morocco's Morchidat Program**

Similar to the Aarhus model, good case practices of involvement of women in P/CVE efforts are also found in Muslim majority states. The prime example in this regard is of Morocco's Morchidat Program, which is a national initiative to train and female female muslim leaders working as spiritual educators and community counsellors. The program came into being in 2006 as a response to the 2003 Casablanca attack. The female preachers, under these initiatives, are trained and provided with Islamic education at institutions like Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Morchidines (male guides) and Morchidates to spread moral guidance and cater to community support, promoting moderation and tolerance. They are trained under a curriculum blended with Islamic Theology and subjects like humanities, community support and services. The trained female Islamic leaders work in mosques, schools, orphanages, prisons and even villages (Alarabiya English, 2020). The graduates are further appointed regionally to serve under local religious councils and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (Davis, 2020). Ever since its inception, Morocco's Morchidat Program have been a key player in P/CVE efforts to curb radicalization effectively and efficiently. Women, being an important agent for P/CVE efforts, play a key role under this program by contributing to preventing radicalization through mentoring efforts and offering alternative and positive pathways rooted in religious doctrines and tolerance. They also play a vital role in youth guidance, gender equality, and consequently building peace and contributing to a broader strategy of social cohesion (Alarabiya English, 2020).

### **2.2.3 Indonesia's Women Ulama Congress**

Following Mocoorro's Morchidat Program, Indonesia Women's Ulama Congress, abbreviated as KUPI, is another good case practice from the Muslim world for P/CVE efforts that involves women as primary agents of peacemaking. KUPI is a series of congresses that brings together Ulama, ie women Islamic scholars from all across Indonesia under a single platform to discuss, decide and contribute to solving social issues and radicalization through Islamic principles put into practice. The congress held in 2017 and produced the Kebon Jambu Pledge, recognizing women's role in religious authorities as primary for engaging in the provision of justice from an Islamic perspective. The second congress held in November 2022 resulted in the Bangsi Jepara Pledge, which emphasized the pertinence of empowering women to combat violence and extremism. The third congress is the most recent one held in December 2025 and has been groundbreaking. This congress produced a pledge affirming to strengthen women's leadership in the religious sphere and rooted in principles of equity, justice and equality (Permana, 2025). In collaboration with Women Ulama Movement, KUPI has been active in P/CVE efforts to curb radicalization and extremism through collaboration with NGOs and supporting efforts to influence socio-legal reforms (Antara News, 2022).

### **2.3 Pakistan's CVE Context**

Whereas radicalization and extremism, whether or not in the name of religion, prosper more in the fringes of society, mainstreaming women is another term to retrieve women from those margins. In Pakistan, in 2010, the 18th Constitutional Amendment offered educated women a 10% quota to join national decision-making and policymaking at the national level. They had to pass the yearly country-wide examination of the Central Superior Services. The quota was

in addition to the facility to join the Civil Services on open merit (18th Constitutional Amendment, 2010). Dozens of educated females have joined the professional groups that were considered in the past the male domain, such as the Police Service of Pakistan, besides the Pakistan Administrative Service (UN Report, 2023). This facility has been used by educated females who have finished studying humanities or sciences in colleges and universities, local or overseas. However, educated females who finished studying in religious seminaries are still not able to avail themselves of the facility of getting mainstreamed to avoid marginalization, which makes them vulnerable to radicalization and extremism in the name of religion (Butt, 2009).

It is not just that the kind of education given in religious seminaries (madrasas) makes students in general radicalized or extremists, but it is that the kind of opportunities to exist in society after completing education matter a lot (Singer 2001). If the kind of education sought in the religious seminaries cannot help students participate in competitions held country-wide, the students become more prone to radicalization and extremism.

After 2010, the government has also made several attempts to reform education delivered in religious seminaries to bring it on par with the worldly secular education dispensed in schools, colleges, and universities, which are run in the government or private sectors. The effort had been to hold the slide of religious seminaries into the fold of religious radicalization and extremism, as some alumni from these seminaries were found to be involved in radical and extremist activities harmful to society. The government's major focus had been to reform the syllabus by removing the material leaning towards an extremist militant ideology and by including worldly knowledge related to sciences such as mathematics and biology, and also information technology. Moreover, the reform effort has permitted a degree obtained to be recognized as equal to the degrees obtained from schools and colleges. The effort was to include the graduates of religious seminaries in the national mainstream by making them capable of getting employed in the government or private sectors, besides getting self-employed and running their own businesses. Much has been done, but some has been left to be done, such as focusing on female graduates of these religious seminaries who remain sidelined in society compared to their male counterparts.

Religious seminaries are facing a myriad of challenges in preparing their students for a life full of challenges, especially in the domains of economics and politics (Andrabi et al, 2006). Furthermore, religious education imparted in religious seminaries is not enabling students to cope with the fast-changing world now led by technology, such as social media and artificial intelligence. Addressing the issue of radicalization and extremism, though, launching a military operation is insufficient. Society needs a basic overhaul. It is the responsibility of the government and civil society to look into the causes of radicalization and extremism to take measures to address these menaces. There is not only a gender gap (male-to-female ratio), but there is also an intra-gender gap (female-to-female ratio), as is the case with worldly educated females getting mainstreamed but religiously educated females getting marginalized (Din, 2023).

Terrorism and radicalization disrupt the very fabric of society and have severe consequences on a psychological as well as political level. One of the most harmful consequences of radicalization is the polarization of society, which creates tensions and insecurity as a ripple

effect. Non-Muslims blame Muslims for terrorism, and hence, a level of mistrust is created between segments and groups of a society. Moreover, due to radicalization fear, terror, feeling of insecurity and threat are instilled in the minds of people. (Feddes et al., 2020)

### **2.3.1 National Action Plans**

The National Action Plan (NAP) 2014 was created in response to the APS Peshwar tragedy in December 2014. NAP 2014 is a 20-point document that aimed to bring security, governance and political departments together united on one page to combat the prevailing terrorism and extremism. With regards to P/CVE, NAP 2014 proved to be a right yet necessary step in the forward direction with time sensitivity. For P/CVE, it combined both kinetic and non-kinetic measures. Kinetic measures included security operations, crackdowns and the establishment of military courts. Non-kinetic measures included regulating media, narrative building, reforming madrasahs and outlawing militant outfits. Secondly, NAP 2014 empowered institutions like NACTA for monitoring and coordination efforts on the federal as well as on the provincial level (NACTA, 2014). Thirdly, NAP 2014 strictly countered hate propaganda spreading extremist and intolerant narratives through publications and media platforms (Elahi, 2025).

NAP 2014 bore positive results in toning down the threats of extremism. Moving ahead to 2021, the National Action Plan was revised in response to the evolving threat environment due to the revival of the Taliban with the withdrawal of the USA in 2021. With the Taliban government in office, the insurgency renewed, and hence NAP 2014 underwent reorientations and revisions for a more effective P/CVE efforts (Gul, 2025). Sustaining the fundamental structure of the 2014 NAP, NAP 2021 adapted to new threats and devised measures to tackle such threats. NAP 2021 included more updated CVE measures addressing militant spill-over and cross-border issues. Moreover, NAP 2021 emphasized restoring provincial rules for stronger implementation and effective results (Express Tribune, 2022).

In late 2024 and early 2025 federal government approved the National Policy on Preventing Violent Extremism (NPVE) in order to fill loopholes and gaps identified in the previous plans. Unlike previous plans, NPVE focused on preventive measures for P/CVE efforts. With NPVE in action, there was a shift from emphasis on security actions to preventing radicalization through early detection methods, with the motive to curb the disease before the spreads. NPVE has a whole of security approach and engages stakeholders from multiple sectors, including education, media, youth groups, NGOs, and civil societies. This plan further inculcates curriculum reforms and, through education and social change, aims at building tolerance, peace efforts and developing critical thinking as a preventive measure from falling into extremist ideas. Moreover, through NPVE rehabilitation and reintegration efforts are taken into action. Lastly, to ensure smooth execution of all the targets, there is a structured coordination effort being conducted between federal and provincial bodies (Daily Pakistan, 2025).

### **2.3.2 Role of Home Departments, CoE-CVE, PP&PS**

Home departments at both the federal and provincial levels serve as a hub for strategic and policy leadership for P/CVE. They oversee the execution and implementation of P/CVE policies by facilitating the coordination and collaboration with law enforcement departments, administrative hubs and community stakeholders like civil societies and NGOs. Punjab Centre of

Excellence on CVE is a primary example of such a home department responsible for P/CVE efforts in Punjab. Moreover, at the federal level, NACTA holds this responsibility. Such home departments work to implement the guidelines for NPVE 2024 (Daily Pakistan, 2025).

Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism, abbreviated as CoE-CVE, is a Research Hub for P/CVE in Pakistan that conducts Evidence-Based Research and devises strategies on P/CVE efforts in areas like KPK as well as Punjab. Being a leading research and strategy hub, CoE-CVE dedicates its efforts to study and investigate the root causes of extremism and then develop frameworks to address them in order to propose implementable and practical solutions. For this, they work with educators, social workers, law enforcement, and community actors to build awareness and skills to prevent extremist tendencies (Daily Pakistan, 2025).

Punjab Probation & Parole Service (PP&PS) is a criminal justice agency working on P/CVE initiatives by providing rehabilitation, reformation, and reintegration services to those who could relapse to criminal activities, like radicalization activities. For this PP&PS, focus primarily on deradicalization and social reintegration through high-level seminars, policy workshops and therapy services, along with collaboration with academia and community services organizations (Daily News, 2025).

#### **2.4 Existing gaps in integrating women into prevention models**

Ehsan Mehmood Khan, in his 2013 book *Human Security in Pakistan*, gives a detailed account of the status of human security in Pakistan, focusing on multitude of paradigms from social to financial, political to economic. One of his main focuses was on women's security. According to Khan(2013), women in Pakistan are vulnerable targets, and issues revolving around them are the complex nexus linked with the cobweb of insecurity. He further gives statistical data from sources like the UN. In 2010, Pakistan ranked at 125 out of 169 on the UN Development Index, reflecting Pakistan being virtually at the bottom. The causes highlighted were bodily weakness, which was exploited instead of being empowered, male domination, an ill-understanding of Islam, and social taboo. More than a decade later, the status of women in Pakistan still seems to be in an alarming situation, with Pakistan being the lowest on gender equality. Pakistan's gender equality index score has fallen, resulting in the country ranking last out of 148 nations in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2025. Pakistan's overall parity score is 56.7%, with declines in economic participation and political representation. While there has been modest progress in educational attainment, this has not been enough to offset the broader systemic inequalities. According to Mehmood, in order to improve the situation, women's empowerment through improved social attitudes towards gender and meeting legal demands is the need of the hour. This can be ensured through legislative representation, equal opportunities, equal property rights, and financial independence (Khan, 2013).

In terms of P/CVE, Fayyaz(2018) holistically presents the gaps. According to Fayyaz(2018), due to deeply rooted structural patriarchal norms, women are marginalized and disfavoured as their competency is questioned based on gender. Due to this, women face social exclusion if they take a step to join P/CVE efforts and security forces for this motive. The society of Pakistan, especially in tribal areas, is highly male-dominated and due to this, the perception of

counterterrorism is highly hypermasculinized. Due to this hyper masculinity, women are subjugated, threatened and even harassed, killing their spirit and potential to put into efforts for P/CVE and counterterrorism efforts. (Fayyaz, 2018)

Education of females is already challenging in a society that is still embracing the patriarchal system to drive families, though in cities, there are found pockets of female independence, turning the passive role of females into an active one (Bradley and Saigol, 2012). Similarly, the education of females is challenging in a society that is still conservative to its core and that is resisting change in the domain of rigid roles assigned to its male and female members (Din, 2023). The constitutional attempt to mainstream educated females through offering them a 10% quota has encouraged females to come out of seclusion and do studies to join the national decision and policy making bodies. A similar incentive can be replicated for females studying in religious seminaries.

There is a school of thought that is opposed to both education and employment of women (Bradley and Saigol, 2012). However, there is another school of thought that favours both education and employment of women as a measure to reduce the chances of radicalization and extremism, especially in the name of religion, which started with the word “iqra” meaning “read” (Cockcroft et al, 2009). Otherwise, obscurantism has made people prone to accepting anecdotes, spurious claims, and radical thoughts. Moreover, religious seminaries tend to construct one kind of worldview compared to the one created by secular institutions, and this is where the main difference lies between the thoughts and actions of their alumni. It is orientation that matters. (Din, 2023).

### **2.5 Women's Seminaries in Pakistan: An overview of women's madrasa networks**

Pre-1947, before the inception of Pakistan, in the broader South Asian region, Madarassahs were heavily male-dominated, and the idea of women's inclusion into madarassahs is relatively recent and contemporary. Due to failure or dissatisfaction with formal schooling, parents started to send their daughters to female-focused and gender segregated madarassahs. Following this development over time, the registration of females in madarassahs reached around 2000 enrollment, around 15% the total madarassahs in Pakistan, hence educating “around a quarter of a million women”. Due to this female-only madarassah, despite being in a minority became a notable stream of education in the backdrop of cultural resistance and conservative mindset regarding co-education and gender-mixed formal schooling system (Butt, 2009). Due to this cultural resistance and conservatism, Madarassahs, in the matter of time, became an accessible venue to gain education, particularly the religious education that the women might have missed earlier in their lives. Now the access to madarassahs for education has become egalitarian, with madarassahs admitting women irrespective of socio-economic background, ethnicity, age or even prior level of education. Today, even women from marginalized or remote areas can obtain at least religious schooling if not a formal worldly education. For families, in the contemporary era, sending their womenfolk to madarassah has become accessible because for them, madarassah education is associated with “girls’ decency” and improves their marital prospects/status within a traditional Islamic society (Zafar, 2020).

In terms of curriculum taught, the syllabi are narrow and limited, with little or no inclusion of modern education pertinent to the employability factor. The curriculum is heavily focused on the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence, relatively ignoring secular subjects like science, mathematics, languages, and vocational training. The female madarassah also lacks teaching methodology, training programs and skill development initiatives, which are required to meet contemporary needs, hence restricting females' employability in future. In District Karak of KPK lack of professional vocational training and a sensitive job-oriented syllabus; women suffer an employability crisis compared to women acquiring mainstream education, hence suffering from a lack of economic independence or broader social mobility. Moreover, in terms of the societal and cultural landscape, Pakistan, being a relatively male-dominated patriarchal society, has the support for female madrasahs are limited with several socio-cultural barriers hindering the path. A large number of female madrasahs aren't registered under formal boards, and hence they operate independently with home-based models. Furthermore, the socio-cultural barriers remain a big challenge in the way of systemic reform and affiliation with formal education systems. (Shaheen et. al, 2025)

### **3. Integrated Framework and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Conceptual Framework-Women Peace Security(WPS) Agenda**

The research is heavily built upon the UN's WPS agenda as a primary conceptual framework. UN's Women Peace Security Agenda was launched in 2000 under the resolution called UNSCR 1325 by the UN Security Council, being the first time that the UN formally recognized the potential role of women in peace and security. UN WPS is a holistic and normative policy-oriented framework aimed at recognizing women's participation, protection, and ensuring women's potential is fully utilized for peace efforts. At its core, WPS frames women beyond a victim infact under WPS, women are active agents. The WPS agenda is built upon four pillars, i.e. protection, prevention, participation and recovery. These pillars are structured and interconnected. First pillar, i.e. Participation calls for full, equal and meaningful contribution at women's end in the areas of peacemaking, mediation, P/CVE efforts, decision-making and governance. The second pillar is on Protection, aiming to ensure women's rights, dignity and autonomy are fully protected because, according to the accounts of history, women have been a primary victim of violence, wartime rape, sexual harassment and subjugation. The third pillar is on prevention, and it ensures taking measures beyond reactive protection and emphasizes tackling structural drivers of conflict that lead to violence against women and other genders. Such measures include early warnings, gender-sensitive conflict analysis, and gender equality. The fourth and last pillar is about Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction. This pillar advocates for post-conflict reconstruction and insists inclusion of women in decision-making, social recovery, humanitarian assistance and reintegration efforts. (United Nations, n.d.)

#### **3.2 Grounded theory approach**

The paper utilized a grounded theory approach through integration of theories from multiple disciplines of psychology, cognitive studies, security and sociology in order to analyze women's role in P/CVE through a holistic lens. For the grounded theory approach, security force multiplier theory, gender mainstraming theory, social learning theory, community influence

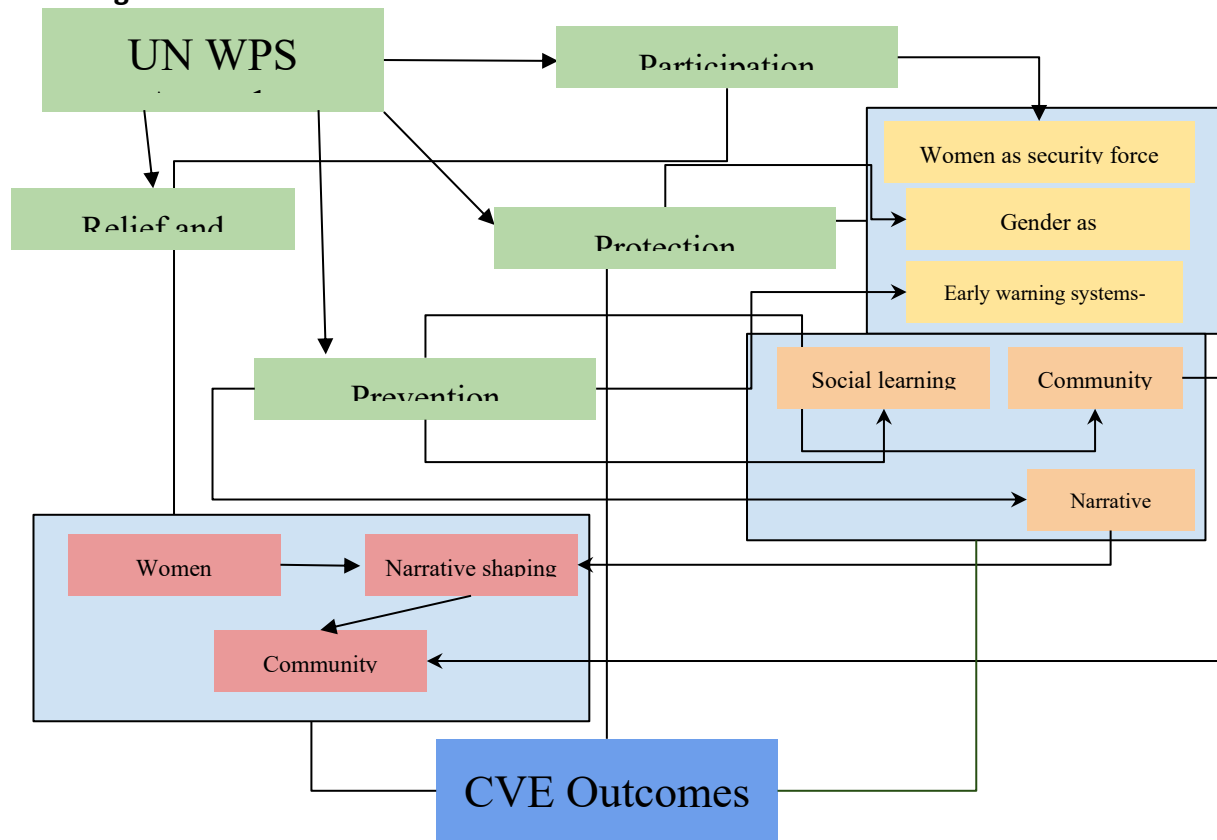
theory, narrative construction theory, and early warning system theory are integrated to analyze women's roles as primary agents and apply them to the case of female madrasahs and their role in P/CVE efforts in Pakistan.

In security studies, the "security force multiplier" theory explains the dynamics of factors that increase effectiveness, outreach and impact of the security operations beyond the conventional domains. In P/CVE efforts, women are seen as a primary agent for force multiplying as they can access information in communities due to their role as caregivers that men typically cannot reach (Kristiansen, 2019). In CVE, Gender mainstreaming theory refers to systemic integration of gender into all stages of policy, programmes and practice so that a holistic perspective is taken into the effort to reach effective outcomes for P/CVE efforts. It involves examining gendered experiences and dimensions to understand how certain experiences impact genders differently, e.g. discrimination and marginalization of women diminish their potential role in P/CVE efforts, rigid masculinity norms that reflect structural patriarchy roots in society (Peredaryenko and Heng, 2019)

In psychology, social learning theory refers to a framework that explains that learning and behaviour adoption of people by observing others. It also explains the consequences of their actions derived from the basis of their experience and reinforcement. The core idea is that people learn by watching others, be it parents or peers, leading to a vicarious yet indirect reinforcement, and based on this, they mould and adjust their behaviours (McLoed, 2025). Parallel to this, community influence theory explains the role of community as a social environment that shapes a person's behaviour, influences their thought and impacts their decision-making skills. The core idea of this theory reflects reciprocity between individual and community and states that individuals conform to community norms and adapt to its values, consequently (McMilan and Chevis, nd).

Narrative construction theory explains the phenomena of narrative, how it is built, structured and how the meaning is given by writers, politicians, thinkers or even speakers. The theory sees narrative and a meaning construction tool as the basis of this theory claims that narratives are constructed through interlinkages between events (Millear et al., 2017). Lastly, Early Warning Systems(EWS) is an integrated framework that explains the process of identifying hazards, risks and their monitoring, evaluation and impacts so that individuals and the community are warned before events. The theory is built upon prevention is better the prevention-is-better-than-cure maxim. In this regard, women are primary caregivers in the role of mother and are seen as the first line of detection (Ivan Benussi, 2018).

**3.3 Diagram of framework**



**3.4 Methodology**

The qualitative research paradigm is used to perform an exploratory case study. A total of six female religious seminaries would be marked for study in three different cities of Punjab, to make it three seminaries per city. In each selected seminary, primary research would be done by studying and analyzing the syllabus. Through using the purposive method, interviews of both students and their teachers would be conducted. The interviews would be structured, standardized and open-ended to know the point of view of the respondents. Similar interviews of some legislators (around nine) would be conducted to understand their point of view and the possibilities of legal changes on the floor of the House. The collected data would be analyzed by doing thematic analysis to reach findings. Accordingly, a way forward would be identified, and policy recommendations would be suggested.

The study, therefore, is qualitative in approach as a building block for the inquiry. Inculcating principles and maxims of qualitative study, the research is focused on evaluating context and contents in depth (Bhandari, 2025) through understanding viewpoints and reading between the lines of data available. Building upon the maxims of qualitative research, the study approach relies on secondary data gathered through policy documents, academic papers, journal articles, news reports, and books. For primary sources, interviews are conducted by Sampling selected women seminaries in the geographic spread from Punjab, KP, and Sindh.

Primarily, research is focused on gathering new information through personal communications. Secondly, research is focused on data available at online resources. (Voxco, 2023) The study integrated an interdisciplinary approach combining peace studies with psychology and sociology to produce a holistic analysis covering multiple dimensions. The research aims to utilize an interdisciplinary approach to firstly understand the role of women in P/CVE efforts, secondly to investigate it from a psychological lens using a case study approach, and lastly to address the existing gaps by providing policy recommendations (Kuraishi, 2022). The research incorporates content analysis to decode and analyze the data collected for identifying patterns and recurring factors. Hence, for analysis, qualitative data collected through interviews, journals, seminars, audios, and research-based documents will be examined to present meaningful patterns within data and provide original analytical insights comprehensively of the complex problem (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In order to conduct the analysis, Braun and Clarke's six-phase process is utilized. The six steps include

1. Familiarising oneself with data by reading and re-reading time and again to grasp the crux in depth
2. Systematically coding data across entire datasets
3. Developing themes from the initial coded data
4. Combining and placing different codes into a potential theme identified
5. Reviewing and refining themes to ensure the accuracy of the data collected
6. Concisely naming and defining themes. Providing and producing a coherent narrative presenting analysis in an organized written report (Yardley, 2024)

Lastly, ethical norms of social sciences research are taken into consideration, and hence the study ensures privacy concerns, cultural respect, investigates the issues with honesty, promotes mutual respect, adherence to accountability, avoidance of falsification of data or results, sustaining objectivity, and avoidance of bias.

#### **4. Analysis & Findings: Mapping the Role of Women's Seminaries**

##### **4.1 Status and Role in P/CVE as Early Detectors**

Applying the interjected framework on the case of Pakistan's P/CVE landscape to map the role of women seminaries, it is implied that women gaining madarah education have a significant impact on youth identity, behaviour, and thus play a decisive role in P/CVE and counterterrorism efforts due to being first in line of detecting early warning signs. Deep immersion in religious texts helps them build a strong narrative rooted in salient Islamic identity that advocates for peace, brotherhood and non-violence. These teaching further enhances women's primary role as caregivers, making them agents for early warning detection through moral guidance and preservers of faith. Moreover, women who are taught in madarassahs do not inherit a radical mindset; rather, on the contrary, they emphasize morality, God-consciousness, and discipline. In this aspect, the police officer was investigated and was asked, "From your perspective, do women play any role, positive or negative, in the spread or prevention of extremist ideologies in your jurisdiction?" They responded and said, "As reported and perceived, women play a minor role in spreading extremist ideologies and the same in prevention. 99% of the time, men are used for

spreading extremism, because men are flexible in nature when motivated. They can perform harder tasks, and they can move around the area easily.” Therefore, women's seminaries hinder the path of social disintegration and simultaneously play an important role in ensuring social mobility while sustaining religious identity. However, due to a lack of secular education, they do suffer from an employability crisis, political irrelevance and social exclusion. Shaheen et. al(2025) from a sample of 410 female madarasaah students found that female seminaries suffer from limited job prospects due to a limited and narrowed syllabus (Shaheen et al, 2025). While Islam teaches following worldly education in parallel to religious education in female madrasahs, Islamic knowledge is rarely connected to democratic principles, human rights frameworks, and gender equality doctrines, all of which are elements that Islam has been preaching via sources like the Last Sermon, etc. In the light of the WPS framework, the pillar of participation isn't implemented, due to this, the risk of their vulnerability becomes high hindering in way of implementation of another pillar of protection. Hence, while women's seminaries have a potential role in P/CVE efforts, they are still underutilized, and due to a lack of formal institutionalism, female seminaries play the role of opinion leaders nevertheless. In a semi-structured interview, when a police officer was asked, “What has been your experience with women religious seminaries (madrasahs) in your area in terms of their cooperation or involvement in community policing and CVE efforts?” They responded and said that “Pakistan is very sensitive and conservative in terms of religion and women in Madaris. Women Madaris play a very little Cooperative role in CVE efforts unless there is a direct human source in the Madrasah.” Despite a lack of formality, women seminaries still play the most important role through informal networks as the first in line to detect the early warning signs. Due to a more informal structure, female seminaries maintain a long-term and closer proximity with the community. This helps them to keenly observe their students as well as children and to monitor their emotional states and conduct. This helps them notice the cognitive shifts before escalation and to then take preventive measures like counselling, redirection and religious guidance.

#### **4.2 Gaps & Challenges**

In a semi-structured interview conducted to inquire about ground realities, a police officer was asked, “What are the main challenges law enforcement faces when attempting to engage with women's seminaries?” To which they responded, “Our society is the main challenge LEAs face. As most LEAs have a negative image in society thus it is very difficult to penetrate such facilities. The administrators of these *Madaris* can be a huge resistance in these matters.” The response reflected that women’s seminaries in Pakistan, due to socio-cultural norms, are marginalized and rarely integrated into national plans of education. Hence, in the realm of education, they suffer isolation and limited transition opportunities into mainstream education. Building upon this, the following primary challenges are identified.

##### **4.2.1 Curriculum gaps**

According to Zafar(2022), curriculum relevance and lack of modernization in madarassah education are a big challenge pertinently in the realm of women's seminaries networks as institutions of madarassahs for females, they heavily rely on traditional, theological curricula with little attention given to secular subjects. Moreover, despite the norms, results have been uneven

and female madrasahs still operate in old ways, missing the ability to equip women with contemporary skillsets (Zafar, 2022).

#### **4.2.2 Lack of digital literacy**

On a border spectrum, according to Abid et. al. (2021), the education sector of Pakistan is in havoc of crisis, and lack of necessary digital facilities is amongst the top and most prevalent during pandemic times. (Abid et al., 2021). Building upon the curriculum gap, lack of digital literacy is another challenge, and in the age of contemporary world order, where security threats are nonconventional, the radicalization pathways have also become multifaceted beyond offline and including online as well as hybrid pathways. According to Khan and Shah (2025), the online trends on radicalization among youth have a high risk factor and national policies on countering these narratives and the development of digital literacy skills are insufficient overall and considerably low in female madrasah setups (Khan and Shah, 2025). Due to these multifaceted pathways and a lack of digital literacy amongst the women seminaries, they suffer a greater threat of vulnerability to online extremism as they lack digital skills to combat it. Firstly, women's seminaries would be unable to counterpropagate narratives. Secondly, a lack of digital literacy hinders in the way of constructive engagement in digital spaces. And lastly, due to these, they suffer isolation from P/CVE digital efforts (Khan and Shah, 2025).

#### **4.2.3 Socio-economic pressures influencing radical narratives**

With Pakistan being a structurally patriarchal society, women seminaries suffer from societal pressure and economic challenges in pursuit of contributing to P/CVE efforts. Women in a female madrasah are marginalized and economically constrained. They have limited economic and growth opportunities to contribute to civic participation for bringing a meaningful change. According to Ibrahim et al(2023), Islamic education rooted in ontological theology is instrumental for women's empowerment and their inclusion in matters of society and even politics. Islamic education offers a pathway to women for social participation, making them important agents for P/CVE efforts. In this aspect, female madrasahs have the potential to be a hub for P/CVE efforts. But in the case of Pakistan, socio-economic constraints hinder the way to reaching this full potential. Restricted access to modern education, deeply rooted conservatism, gender bias curricula and structural patriarchal norms are such barriers inflicting socio-economic pressures (Ibrahim et al, 2023)

#### **4.2.4 Limited CVE training for female seminary educators**

In a semi-structured interview series, a police officer was asked the question, "Have you received any training or sensitization programs related to engaging female religious groups or incorporating gender-sensitive approaches in CVE?" To which they respond, "No, but with the experience gathered over the years will help engage these groups if they are approachable by any means." Due to socio-economic constraints and gaps in the education curriculum, female madrasahs are deprived of specialized training facilities for P/CVE for countering radicalization. According to Khan and Shah(2025), the role of women seminaries for P/CVE, counterterrorism and deradicalization is severely underutilized due to a lack of training and development programs. Even though civil societies put in efforts to fill the gap but due to a lack of coordination

and scalability at the national policy-making level end the efforts are deemed to be futile (Khan and Shah, 2025).

### **4.3 Opportunities for Positive Engagement**

#### **4.3.1 High trust levels within communities**

Despite the gaps and challenges, women's seminaries in Pakistan continue to play an important role and, despite structural barriers, contribute to positive engagement and efficiently grab opportunities. Amongst such opportunities, a pertinent one is the high-level trust factors. Women's association with honour makes them a target of killing; on the other hand same honour attaches dignity to them, making them a trusted figure for positive change in society and to eradicate the menace of radicalization. As mothers and caregivers, women are deemed to hold a primary position as early detectors of warning signs and to notice shifts in behavioural patterns. This potential role is highly recognized by NACTA for its peacebuilding efforts on a broader spectrum. According to NACTA, females from madrasahs and seminaries networks are contributing strongly to peacebuilding and unity through CVE dialogue and their efforts in social cohesion. Due to this, women from madrasahs are positively influencing the national security framework and Pakistan's efforts in peacemaking (NACTA, nd). This high trust coefficient is leveraged rightly by women's seminaries as they embed their social positioning by bridging religious teaching with CVE initiatives.

#### **4.3.2 Strong moral authority**

Women, due to association with honour, hold a strong moral authority as bearers of religious knowledge in a normative framework, if not formal. This moral authorship serves as a great P/CVE and peacebuilding opportunity as women's seminaries shape and frame religious knowledge with moral reasoning and an authentic social contract that further helps in reintegration and diversion from aggressive to a progressive outlet of frustration. According to Sabreen and Niazi(2022), women who attained knowledge and education from madrasah act as counterextremist agents initially at the household level and progressively at a community level, leveraging their moral authority. Through moral authority and the ability to detect warning signs at early stages, they intervene to end the menace before spreading through counselling, consultation and moral grounding, fostering community resilience with religious and moral credibility (Sabreen and Niazi, 2022).

#### **4.3.3 Countering extremist narratives through Islamic scholarship**

Immersed in Islamic teachings and principles of nonviolence, justice and peace, women seminaries' expertise in Qur'anic exegesis, fiqh (jurisprudence), and Hadith are key players for P/CVE. This is so because women and faith-based tools are important aspects for P/CVE. Women, through their expertise, utilize Islamic knowledge for efforts in spreading faith-based counter-narratives with authenticity at the community level (Islam, 2024).

#### **4.3.4 Opinion leaders for peacebuilding**

Madrasah networks for women are informal, but through this, women play an influential role as opinion leaders for peacebuilding efforts and spreading the narrative of peace. Despite a lack of formal recognition, women seminaries aren't passive figures but, utilizing their community-based roles, they are active participants and strong opinion leaders carrying forward

the message of peace and contributing to resolving disputes, putting in efforts for mediation and sustaining security, be it comprehensive, human or national (Qadeem, 2019).

## **5. Policy Recommendations in light of WPS agenda: Women Mainstreaming Framework for Pakistan**

In the semi structured interviews, conducted for this research a police officer was asked “In your opinion, what strategies could enhance the involvement of female religious leaders or seminaries in peacebuilding and CVE programs?” to this they responded “Female political leaders can play a vital role in terms of approaching these facilities frequent visits and donation can also smooth the penetration process regarding gaining their trusts and building relationships on good terms.” Building upon this WPS framework is integrated into the case of Pakistan, and the following policy recommendations are devised

### **5.1 Incorporating gender analysis**

Incorporating gender analysis, according to Ingram(2024), is pertinent for seeking diverse perspectives on P/CVE. Incorporation of gender analysis helps in multifaceted ways. Firstly, it strengthens the understanding of violent extremism and its propaganda. Secondly, following development nuanced understanding, gender analysis introduces a holistic framework of representation that further helps in breaking down the strategic mechanisms of extremist groups that use gender roles. Thirdly, it helps decode their messaging and identity. Lastly, it helps in dissecting the propaganda inflicted by extremist groups. Gendered analysis is done on three levels: macro level for understanding overall ideology, meso level for understanding linkage of gender roles to missions by groups and micro level for understanding how, at the individual level, gendered messages influence appeals and missions. For smooth P/CVE communication, taking gender into account for the national and regional framework is a necessity for Pakistan. Following the direction of gender analysis would pave the way for capacity building initiatives for women seminaries and for embedding gender equality in P/CVE frameworks for inclusive, efficient and gender-sensitive outcomes (Ingram, 2024).

### **5.2 Partnering women's seminaries with universities & policy institutes**

UN’s WPS agenda calls for and advocates for strong participation of women as its primary pillar. From participation, the agenda moves forward and calls for partnership initiatives as another important pillar to ensure success in peacebuilding efforts for P/CVE. To inculcate and implement the pillars of WPS, it is important to liaison and partner with women's seminaries with universities and the policy sector for collaborative efforts for a collective goal (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, nd). The goal of such partnerships must be dedicated to gender-sensitive peacebuilding efforts and to ensure the inclusion of women seminaries in the efforts. Think Tanks are the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, which provides a good case practice through their efforts in engaging universities with peacebuilding networks in dialogues and grassroots policy measures (PIPS, 2012).

### **5.3 Training female scholars in digital literacy & counter-narrative tools**

As highlighted in the analysis section, the lack of digital literacy undermines the potential role of women's seminaries in combating online radicalization. To fill this gap, it is pertinent to fund and initiate training programs and certification on digital learning, skill-building and capacity

building for female madarassah networks. For this government partnership with NGOs and INGOs is recommended for the provision of basic internet facilities, critical assessment skills, media literacy toolkits, etc. UN Women's initiatives on digital literacy training programs are a good case practice for Pakistan to adapt (UN Women, nd). Moreover, on the national level, PODA's initiative on Empowering Women through Digital Literacy and Online Safety is another good case practice to be adapted, as through this initiative, PODA has been successfully empowering rural women on digital literacy and contributing to their safety (PODA, 2025). This policy recommendation ensures implementation of two WPS pillars, ie participation of women in the digital landscape for countering online radicalization and protection of women from online threats of violence immersed in extremist ideology.

#### **5.4 Curriculum enhancement modules: civic education, critical thinking, peace studies**

Zafar et al(2022) call for the need for reforms in the education system and curriculum in madarassah networks, especially that of female madarrasahs. The current system and curriculum are underserved and outdated, leading to marginalization of women in P/CVE and peacebuilding efforts (Zafar et al, 2022). For this, firstly, integration of the peace and conflict studies discipline is needed. Peace education is a core component of learning that helps in strengthening students to develop a holistic understanding of nonviolence, dialogue, conflict resolution and helps in promoting positive civic engagement (Khan et al, 2019). Secondly, inclusion of civic education is needed as this discipline plays a role in strengthening civic learning and develops a sense of being a responsible citizen. Currently in Pakistan, there is a moral crisis amongst youth, and to curb this crisis, women seminarists are important gatekeepers. Including civic education in their curriculum would polish their roles and inculcate in them skills of democratic engagement, development of counter-violent narrative and attaining political literacy (Bukhari et al, 2025). Lastly, inclusion of critical thinking is needed in the curriculum as the skill of critical thinking helps in investigating issues without bias and from multiple lenses. This skill will further prove helpful for women's seminaries to counter harsh and absolutist reasonings with logic and fact-based evidence

#### **5.5 Collaboration with other stakeholders**

The recent initiative of seminars on P/CVE held at Punjab University and co-hosted by PP&PS is a good case practice and an important step taken with regard to the need for time, as 2025 Pakistan witnesses an escalation in violence. Such seminars demonstrated the importance of collaborative efforts, evidence-based dialogue between various stakeholders like academia, home departments, peace works and security analysts for devising shared strategies for P/CVE involving community engagement (Daily News, 2025). Following these PU efforts, collaboration with the female madrasah network with stakeholders like PP&PS, civil society, home departments and academia is recommended for an action-aligned approach. This policy recommendation is pertinent because in Pakistan, security and peace workers often lack gender-sensitive approach and their abilities in engaging with women are limited. This puts harmful consequences on women's seminaries (Peters and Saeed, 2018). This policy recommendation, therefore, calls for an inclusive framework development ensuring the say of women seminarists is advocated through healthy collaboration.

## 6. Conclusion

Women play a critical role in security and peacebuilding, yet traditionalism and subjugation often undermine their potential as peacemakers. In Pakistan, women detect early signs of radicalization as caregivers, foster community resilience, and promote dialogue and social cohesion. Networks like TOLANA mediate conflicts and prevent extremist recruitment, while education and outreach help counter violent ideologies. However, women face threats due to extremism, are excluded from formal decision-making, and socio-economic patriarchy restricts their mobility and broader contributions. Ehsan Mehmood Khan (2013) highlights the precarious status of women in Pakistan, linking their vulnerability to a complex nexus of social, political, and economic insecurity. The research identified important gaps and challenges in the female madrassahs' networks, i.e. Curriculum Gaps, Lack of Digital Literacy, Socio-Economic Pressures, and Limited CVE Training. The study also identified some positive opportunities and strengths, i.e. high trust factor, moral authority of women, strong grip on Islamic scholarship and women's role as opinion leaders. The research concluded with policy recommendations aligning with the WPS agenda, ie integrating gender analysis, partnership with universities, capacity building for digital literacy, reforms for curriculum, and multifaceted collaborations with various stakeholders.

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