ROLE OF WOMEN IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A CASE OF GARISSA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, violent extremism has emerged as a pressing global concern, with increasing involvement of women in such activities. This study focused on examining the drivers of women's involvement in violent extremism specifically in Garissa County, Kenya. The research aimed to explore the roles of women in violent extremism, Guided by the Securitization and Social Identification theories, a mixed-method research design was employed. Utilizing purposive and snowball sampling techniques, the study engaged 297 respondents, including women from affected families, officials from the National Counter Terrorism Center, ATPU, community leaders, religious leaders, and representatives from Womankind Kenya. Data collection was facilitated through questionnaires and KIIs, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The questionnaires featured a mix of closed and open-ended questions, with qualitative data interpreted through narratives and statements, while quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 28. Findings revealed complex dynamics regarding women's roles in extremism. Although 74% of participants rejected women as combatants, many perceived them positively as recruiters (57.2%) and supporters (63.6%). A significant majority (80.9%) dismissed the idea of women being primarily suicide bombers, emphasizing their involvement in logistics and familial roles. The study recommended improved coordination among stakeholders, effective reintegration strategies, and gender-sensitive policies in counter-terrorism efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Women involvement in violent extremism is a global concern that crosses geographic borders and is shaped by many socio-political, economic, and cultural elements. In several countries, extremist organizations have progressively recruited women as sympathizers, active participants, soldiers, and ideologues, therefore challenging conventional gender norms and expectations. Schmid (2022) asserts that the emergence of violent extremism resulting in terrorism (VERLT) has created new dynamics, notably the growing participation of women, challenging the conventional belief that violent extremism is mostly male-dominated. This trend underscores the need for holistic, gender-sensitive strategies in combating violent extremism (CVE) that recognize women as both victims and catalysts of radicalization. The radicalization of women into violent extremism in the United States has become more alarming, especially among far-right and Islamist extremist groups. Contrary to the perception of passive observers, women in the U.S. have been identified as active participants in extremist factions, including ISIS and neo-Nazi groups. These women

are often driven by a combination of personal grievances, internet radicalization, and the pursuit of belonging (Shapiro & Maras, 2020). In the U.S., women have also functioned as recruiters and propagandists, especially on social media platforms, where extremist organizations aggressively enlist and radicalize women (Zelin, 2020). Daymon and Margolin (2022) observe that many women join these organizations because to a perceived feeling of strength and purpose, often seeing these movements as a reaction to their disadvantaged position or discontent with mainstream culture. This problem necessitates measures that tackle the intricate emotional and psychological factors of radicalization, along with the distinct positions' women occupy in the recruiting process.

The radicalization of women in Pakistan has been mostly influenced by the ascendance of Islamic extremism and the adversities encountered by women in conservative, conflict-affected areas. Women in Pakistan, particularly from disadvantaged rural regions, have been enlisted by organizations such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ISIS, driven by socio-political grievances and ideological indoctrination. Khan (2021) asserts that these women often undergo radicalization due to a confluence of compulsion, deception, and a quest for empowerment within an oppressive societal framework. Radicalization in Pakistan is often associated with enduring political instability, sectarian conflict, and the accessibility of extremist ideas that provide an escape from socio-economic deprivation. Women occupy many positions within these organizations, from providing logistical assistance to engaging in violent actions, including suicide bombings.

The continuing civil conflict in Libya has resulted in the recruitment of women by violent extremist organizations, notably ISIS and Al-Qaeda. After the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's dictatorship, Libya plunged into disorder, providing extremist groups with a conducive environment to expand, often using women in many capacities within their factions(El-Katiri 2020).In Uganda,Okello (2021) asserts that Uganda's nearness to war zones in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, together with socio-economic difficulties, has rendered women in northern Uganda more susceptible to extremist ideas. Women are often recruited by the ADF with assurances of financial security and social standing; yet, once their involvement, they assume pivotal roles as warriors, recruiters, and supporters (Titeca & De Herdt, 2020). Yeşiltaş and Shihundu (2024) observe that the positions of women in Al-Shabaab have undergone substantial evolution throughout time. Initially, women were mostly assigned to supportive positions; now, they are progressively being used in active combat activities, including suicide bombings. Somali women, especially from rural regions or refugee camps, are often recruited via ideological indoctrination and promises of empowerment. The Somali diaspora has been a crucial recruiting source for Al-Shabaab, with women assuming vital roles in fundraising, logistics, and overseas recruitment (Hassan, 2020).

Garissa County in Kenya has become a prominent center for the recruitment of women into violent extremism, chiefly by the Al-Shabaab terrorist organization. Due to its proximity to Somalia, Garissa is especially susceptible to radicalization. Holla (2020) and the Garissa Plan for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (2018) indicate that women in this area are recruited into extremist organizations via family ties, social networks, and economic adversity. A multitude of women are attracted to extremist organizations by the prospect of financial security and social validation in areas marked by restricted economic prospects and deep-rooted gender disparity. Moreover, some women are enlisted to act as caretakers or suicide bombers, with Al-Shabaab using them in capacities that enable the organization to evade identification by security agencies. The participation of women in violent extremism in Garissa exemplifies a wider phenomenon in the Horn of Africa, where the interplay of gender, identity, and socio-political marginalization catalyzes radicalization (Kármán, 2022).

Radicalization, De-Radicalization, drivers, terrorism, violent extremism, counter terrorism

Statement of the problem

Violent extremism (VE) has become a global concern, with a growing number of young people, including women, becoming involved. Traditionally, VE was associated with young men, but according to the World Youth Report (2020), this trajectory has shifted as more women engage in these criminal activities. Cases of women and girls being indoctrinated into extremist organizations, such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, are prevalent across various regions, including Africa. This shift challenges traditional gender stereotypes that portray women as less inclined toward violence (Amusan et al., 2019). Such misconceptions hinder effective counterterrorism strategies and overlook the role women can play in preventing radicalization within their communities.

Garissa County has been plagued by persistent violent extremist activities, which have overshadowed the region's rich resources. The tragic killing of 147 students at Garissa University in April 2015 stands out as a grim reminder of the extremism plaguing the area. The County remains deeply entrenched in cycles of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism, particularly among the youth. Stakeholders involved in drafting the Garissa County Action Plan (GCAP) found evidence of active operatives, collaborators, and returnees of violent extremism within the County.

Women appear to be more involved in attempted and completed terrorist attacks, claims Bourekba (2020, September). Between 2014 and 2017, there were 142 plots (almost one out of every five) featuring women in Europe. Similar numbers of women (20%) were detained in the EU in 2018 on suspicion of offenses related to terrorism. Three teenage girls who planned to carry out a suicide bombing at a Lyon synagogue were part of a terrorist cell that was broken up by French authorities in August 2014. Ten female IS terrorists, ages 15 to 30, who planned suicide bombs around the nation, were taken out by Moroccan police in October 2016. A lady suicide bomber injured nine people when she detonated herself in Tunis, Algeria, in October 2018, two years later.

Bourekba (2020, September) reports that between 2011 and 2016, women made up approximately 17% of the European foreign fighters who joined extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. In contrast to the drop in male travel, women traveled to Syria and Iraq at a higher rate during 2016 and 2017, particularly from Western nations.
Despite evidence demonstrating that women can be highly effective and influential within extremist and terrorist groups, their roles and motivations remain under-explored and misunderstood. Understanding the drivers behind women's participation in violent extremism, including socio-political, economic, and psychological factors, is essential for creating comprehensive security policies that address the root causes and complexities of this phenomenon.

Role of Women in Violent Extremism

Previous studies on women's roles in violent extremism have provided valuable insights into the diverse roles that women play within extremist groups. These roles range from being victims and supporters to perpetrators of violence. Wojtowicz (2013) argues that women's involvement in violent extremism is not a new phenomenon. The author notes that women's participation in violent extremism can be traced as early as the late 1800s. While their roles have been perceived to be supportive throughout the years, the author contends that their involvement and roles have expanded over time. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) agrees with these arguments of the author, noting that, indeed, over the years, women have actively and voluntarily supported terrorist organizations while playing various roles within these organizations (UNODC, 2019). Women's involvement in violent extremism surpasses passive engagement; they actively recruit and disseminate extremist ideologies, driving radicalization (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017). According to Bigio and Vogelstein (2019), women are active recruiters within online pro-ISIS/Daesh communities. Their findings underscored the heightened efficacy of female recruiters due to their stronger network connectivity, enabling them to propagate the group's ideology more effectively than male recruiters. Their unique social networks and boundary-transcending abilities make women potent influencers and recruiters for extremist causes. Additionally, (Dawson and Neumann, 2018) contend that women function as facilitators and influencers within their communities, leveraging their social circles to disseminate extremist beliefs and enlist individuals who might be susceptible to radicalization.

Across historical contexts, women have consistently provided auxiliary support to violent extremist organizations, assuming roles as sympathizers, supporters, and mobilizers (Ndungu, 2017). Mothers have a substantial influence in constructing the beliefs and identities of their children, often in support of revolutionary causes (Bloom, 2017). Fink et al. (2016) highlights traditional roles such as wife and mother, arguing that these roles empower women to transmit cultural values, potentially encouraging family members, including children, towards martyrdom and supporting violent extremist organizations. However, these perspectives overlook the diverse motivations driving women's roles in violent extremist networks.

Women's participation in suicide bombings has been noticeable across various conflicts and regions globally. According to Bloom (2007), women, historically relegated to supporting roles in conflicts, are now assuming more active roles, particularly as suicide bombers. Bloom highlights that the current focus on women as suicide bombers overlooks their long-standing involvement in political violence (Bloom, 2007). Galehan's study in 2019 on female suicide bombers within Boko Haram sheds light on how this extremist group in Nigeria leverages women and girls to carry out suicide attacks. The research findings indicate that Boko Haram favors using women as suicide bombers over male combatants due to their effectiveness in garnering media attention, instilling fear within populations, and their ability to infiltrate targets without arousing suspicion (Galehan, 2019). The study attributes the group's increasing preference for female suicide bombers to their capacity to evade security scrutiny and avoid weapons searches more easily than male militants.

Women can also be involved in violent extremism through aiding radicalization. As a concept of extremism, radicalization involves inculcating false and incorrect ideologies and narratives to paint the opposing side as the enemy (Vergani et al., 2020). Radicalization into extremist groups often uses propaganda through the use of text messages, specific teachings from religious texts, video clips spread through social media, and other methods that are appealing to young people. For their role in radicalization, women often use their maternal appeal and psychological techniques to radicalize the afflicted people by making the false propaganda to be personal, emotional, provoking, and triggering. Through their female appeal, women in extremist groups can infiltrate a social setting, provide a sense of belonging to desperate fellows, and create social bonds with their target groups. They can then use these social bonds and networks to recruit and radicalize them as well as manipulate the radicals into convincing other prospective recruits (Gøtzsche-Astrup., et al., 2020)

Margolin (2019) examined the evolving roles of women within violent Islamist groups. The author suggests that women in these extremist groups have taken on recruitment efforts. The study discusses the changing dynamics, highlighting women's increasingly active roles within these groups. It further explores how women become more involved in operational activities, including recruitment, fundraising, and logistics. The study emphasizes that their roles surpass traditional support functions. Fink et al. (2016) agrees with Margolin's findings, noting the varying roles women play in violent extremism. According to the authors, women can be victims of violent extremist activities, perpetrators of violence, passive bystanders, or agents of change in preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. The authors argue that terrorist organizations have been recruiting women for decades. For instance, starting in the mid-1980s, Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) aggressively recruited women for combat, while in Northern Ireland, women were active in republican paramilitaries. They also note instances of female suicide bombers used by Chechen separatists, Islamic groups in Palestine, ISIS in Iraq, and Boko Haram in Nigeria. The authors further emphasize that women play a vital role in prevention

efforts, including but not limited to identifying warning signs of radicalization, mobilizing support networks, and participating in policy and programmatic solutions to conflicts.

Wulan (2020), in her research study "Enhancing the Role of Women in Indonesia to Counterterrorism," contends that women's involvement in terrorism and violent extremism is on the rise in certain groups such as Boko Haram and Pakistan Taliban. The author suggests that women in Indonesia play varied roles in terrorism, conflict, and violence, including as supporters, facilitators, and perpetrators. Further, she argues that women have been involved in recruitment, fundraising, and spreading extremist propaganda. The author notes that women's inclusion in these extremist group activities has increased their effectiveness as they are considered more loyal to their duty and often viewed with less suspicion by security forces. Bigio and Vogelstein (2019) agree with the author that, indeed, women are greatly involved in extremist group activities. According to the authors, extremist groups rely on women to gain strategic advantage as they take up key roles that include being facilitators. While Wulan's study findings offer valuable insights into women's increasing roles in extremist groups, this study was carried out in Pakistan, which presents a different context compared to the study area.
Ndungu and Salifu (2017) argue that there exists a significant gap in understanding the extent of women's participation within al-Shabaab across the East Africa region. Despite the stringent adherence of al-Shabaab to Sharia Law, their study illuminates the engagement of women within this terrorist organization. Their research findings delineate the recruitment of women into diverse, supportive roles within the group, encompassing activities such as fundraising, culinary tasks, intelligence gathering, and taking care of the wounded combatants. Badurdeen's (2023) analysis aligns with the conclusions drawn by Ndungu and Salifu, showing the substantial involvement of women within the Al-Shabaab terrorist group. Notably, Badurdeen elaborates on various roles women assume within the organization, encompassing functions as diverse as fundraising, strategic planners, active combatants, and supporters of terrorist operations (Badurdeen, 2023). Moreover, the author acknowledges women's engagement in customary domestic responsibilities, including culinary duties, housekeeping, and caring for the injured. However, Badurdeen highlights a critical aspect regarding the perception of women's roles within the extremist group, noting that these roles are often regarded as low in status or arduous, leading to disassociation or disengagement from the group.

Finances pose a significant challenge for violent extremist groups, and women frequently assume pivotal roles in alleviating these financial obstacles (Poni et al., 2021). Acting as financiers, women facilitate the advancement of violent extremists' interests and ideologies, ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of their activities. Women contribute directly to the organizations by providing finances, as observed by (Lokmanoglu and Veilleux-Lepage, 2020). In financial shortfall, women within these groups are noted to offer donations to the active personnel on the ground, such as foodstuffs, medical aid, and other essential supplies. Moreover, women often take on

the roles of transporters and porters, moving cash, ammunition, documentation, and intelligence from one location to another on behalf of the organization (Hossain, 2018). In Nigeria, the violent extremist group Boko Haram was found to exploit women by recruiting and luring young girls to areas where they could be captured and held for ransom (Cochrane & Smith, 2021). Kidnappings serve as a primary funding source for several well-known extremist groups, with women contributing significantly to these abductions, thereby establishing a dependable funding stream.

Women's role in prevention and combating violent extremism must be addressed. The studies by Qadeem (2018) and Idris (2020) highlighted the important role of women in countering violent extremism (CVE). Qadeem emphasized women's substantial contribution in mobilizing communities to combat extremism in Pakistan, showcasing their unique influence in household dynamics and local networks (Qadeem, 2018). The author depicts women as agents of positive change, capable of fortifying communities against extremist ideologies.

Idris (2020) indicated that women are increasingly challenging gender norms, assuming leadership roles, and advocating for peace (Idris, 2020). However, Ndungu and Salifu's (2017) study on Al-Shabaab activities in Kenya presented a different perspective. Contrary to the prevalent belief of women solely engaged in counter-extremism, their research suggested diverse roles within extremist groups, ranging from victimhood to involvement in intelligence gathering, recruitment, and even perpetration of violent acts (Ndungu & Salifu, 2017). Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of women in violent extremism in Garissa County.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to offer a comprehensive and descriptive understanding of women's involvement in violent extremism in Garissa County, Kenya. The quantitative approach involved collecting numerical data to quantify the extent and demographic characteristics of women's involvement, providing a broad overview of the prevalence and patterns of violent extremism.

Target Population

The target population for this study was 1,155 people, including 600 Women from affected families in Garissa County, 100 Officers from the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), 400 Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU), 20 Community Leaders, 10 Religious Leaders, 20 Womankind Leaders in Kenya, and 5 County Officials.

Table 1 Target Population

Category	Population (N)	Percentage (%)
Potentially affected families	600	51.94
NCTC	100	8.65
County officials	5	0.43
Community leaders	20	1.73
Religious leaders	10	0.89
ATPU	400	34.63
Wokike leaders	20	1.73
Total	**1,155**	**100**

Source: Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (2022)

Sampling Techniques

Participants in the study were identified and selected through purposive sampling techniques and snowball sampling methods. For purposive sampling, the samples were not chosen randomly but based on the researcher's judgment, with these cases being selected with a specific purpose in mind. Purposive sampling was then used to identify respondents from NCTC and ATPU, including county administration and religious leaders. Purposive sampling was again reinforced by snowball sampling as it allowed sampled participants to propose other participants with experience who were well versed in the study topic. Snowballing was then used to select women from affected families to participate in the study.

Table2 Sampling Techniques

Category	Sampling technique
Potentially affected families	Snowball
NCTC	Purposive
County officials	Purposive
Religious leaders	Purposive
ATPU	Purposive
Community leaders	Purposive

Sample Size Determination

Using Slovin's formula, the sample size was as follows:

$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$

Where:

n=Number of samples,

N = Total population

e = margin of error (0.05)

Therefore:

$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$

$n = 1155 / (1 + 1155x0.05^2)$

n = 297 respondents

Table 3 Sample Size

Category	Sample (n)	Percentage (%)
Affected families	154	51.94
NCTC	25	8.65
County officials	1	0.43
Religious leaders	23	0.89
ATPU	103	34.63
Community leaders	11	3.70
Total	**297**	**100**

Source: Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (2022)

Instruments and Tools

The study used drafted closed and open-ended Likert scale questionnaires and key informant guide.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Social Identity Theory by Tajfel, Turner, and Austin (1979) and Securitization Theory by Ole Waever, Buzan, and Van De Walle (1998).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a theoretical framework in social psychology that offers an understanding of how individuals define themselves based on their group membership (McLeod, 2023). Henri Tafel and John Turner proposed this theory in the 1970's. The theory considers the consequences of personal and social identities on individual perceptions and group behavior. SIT theory is instrumental in understanding why women become involved in VE by focusing on the dynamics of identity, social categorization, and intergroup relations.

Social identification reflects that people generally do not perceive social situations as detached observers. Instead, they see who they are and how they relate to others as typically implicated in how they view other individuals and groups around them (Ellemers, 2024). The theory portends that women may categorize themselves into groups based on various identities, such as religion and ethnicity. As a result, this social categorization and the perception of belonging to a particular group can influence behavior and attitudes. The theory believes that social comparison determines a group's relative value or social standing and its members (Ellemers, 2024). The theory is important to the study as women may compare their ingroup status with perceived outgroups, feeling that their ingroup is unfairly disadvantaged. The theory can be used to explain the notion that extremist groups can exploit feelings of inequality and injustice. In addition, the involvement of women in VE can offer a sense of validation and recognition. Further, intergroup conflicts may draw into VE as extremist groups. This can be attributed to the assumption that extremist groups thrive on intergroup conflicts and have a duty to protect their ingroup from real or imagined threats posed by outgroups. The theory elucidates how identity influences behavior and perceptions.

Role of Women's Influence on Violent Extremism

Women Combatants or Fighters

The study sought to determine the role of women as combatants/fighters in violent extremism. Respondents were asked to state their perception of whether women serve as combatants. The findings are indicated in Table 4 below which shows Strongly Disagree (74%), Disagree (12.1%), Neutral (4.6%), Agree (5.8%) and Strongly Agree (3.5%) with a mean of 1.526 and a standard deviation of 1.05415.

Table 4 Roles of Women Influence on Violent Extremism

n=173

Category	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Combatants/Fighters	74	12.1	4.6	5.8	3.5	1.526	1.05415
Recruiters/Propagandists	4.6	5.2	27.2	5.8	57.2	4.0578	1.21383
Supporters	4	4.6	20.8	6.9	63.6	4.2139	1.16411
Suicide Bombers	80.9	4.6	6.4	4	4	1.4566	1.05358
Logistics and Intelligence	5.2	6.4	2.9	17.3	68.2	4.3699	1.14202
Wives and Family Members	4	4.6	1.7	10.4	79.2	4.5607	1.02473
Medics and Caregivers	27.7	13.9	45.1	5.8	7.6	2.5145	1.17437
Community Mobilizers	5.8	4	8.1	3.5	78.6	4.4509	1.16348

Source: Research Data, 2024

Key: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), SA (Strongly Agree)

The findings in Table 4 reveal that an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 74%, strongly disagreed with the notion of women serving as combatants. An additional 12.1% of the respondents also disagreed with the statement, further strengthening the view that women are not widely perceived as direct participants in violent extremist activities as fighters. The mean response of 1.526, on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), demonstrates that the average perception among the respondents leans heavily towards strong disagreement.

These findings suggest that the prevailing perception among the sample is that women do not serve as combatants in violent extremist activities in Garissa County.

Several themes emerged from the interviews regarding the specific roles women play within these VE groups. Informants consistently mentioned that women often serve in supportive roles, such as providing logistical assistance, gathering intelligence, and facilitating communication between members. They also highlighted women's involvement in recruitment, particularly in persuading other women and youth to join the extremist groups. Another recurring theme was women's role in fundraising and resource mobilization for VE activities. Informants noted that women leverage their social networks and engage in various fundraising strategies to secure financial support for the groups.

While the questionnaire indicates a majority view that women are not directly involved in combat, studies in other contexts have documented instances of women's participation as suicide bombers and combatants. For example, research has shown women's involvement in violent activities in Sri Lanka (Cunningham, 2003), Chechnya, and Palestine (Bloom, 2012).

Furthermore, some studies have noted cases of women assuming leadership positions within extremist groups, challenging the dominant narrative of men's exclusive control over leadership (Blee, 2005). This diverges from the key informant interviews in

Garissa County, which emphasized men's dominance in decision-making and leadership roles.

The alignments between existing literature and the findings from Garissa County highlight the commonalities in women's roles across different contexts of violent extremism. The prevalence of supportive roles, recruitment activities, and the influence of gender stereotypes emerge as recurring themes in both the Garissa County study and the wider body of research.

Women as Recruiters or Propagandists

Respondents were asked to state their views on the role of women as recruiters or propagandists in VE in Garissa County. The findings are presented in Table 4.3 above. Table 4.3 shows Strongly Disagree (4.6%), Disagree (5.2%), Neutral (27.2%), Agree (5.8%) and Strongly Agree (57.2%) with a mean of 4.0578 and a standard deviation of 1.21383.

The findings, as presented in Table 4., reveal a significant level of agreement among the respondents regarding women's involvement in these specific roles. A striking majority of the respondents, 57.2%, strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief that women actively participate in recruitment and propaganda activities for VE groups in Garissa County.

A key informant noted that,

> *"Despite some women's involvement in peacebuilding and counter-extremism efforts through empowerment programs and collaboration with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), their recruitment activities are a significant concern. Women act as recruiters for Al-Shabaab, leveraging their roles as mothers to influence and propagate extremist ideologies within their families and social networks."* (KII 10, 06/2024)

The above sentiment stresses the role women play in violent extremism in Garissa County, illustrating that while direct combat involvement is minimal, women contribute significantly to recruitment.

One notable study that resonates with the findings from Garissa County is the research conducted by Saltman and Smith (2015), which explores the phenomenon of women's involvement in the Islamic State (ISIS). The authors highlight how women have been instrumental in recruiting other women to join the extremist group, often using social media platforms and personal networks to spread propaganda and attract new members. This study emphasizes the strategic role women play in expanding the reach and influence of extremist ideologies.

Similarly, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (2017) on the journey to extremism in Africa emphasizes the significance of women's recruitment

efforts. The report notes that women are increasingly being recognized as effective recruiters, leveraging their social and familial connections to draw others into extremist networks. This finding aligns with the strong perception of women's involvement in recruitment, as evident in the Garissa County survey.

Women as Supporters in VE

Respondents were asked to state their perceptions on the role of women as supporters in violent extremism and the findings are indicated in Table 4 above. Table 4 shows Strongly Disagree (4%), Disagree (4.6%), Neutral (20.8%), Agree (6.9%) and Strongly Agree (63.6%) with a mean of 4.2139 and a standard deviation of 1.16411.

The findings, as presented in Table 4, reveal a strong consensus among the respondents about women's involvement in supportive roles within VE groups. A significant majority of the respondents, 63.6%, strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief that women actively engage in supporting VE activities in Garissa County. This high level of strong agreement suggests that the role of women as supporters is widely acknowledged and recognized within the community.

Women as Suicide Bombers

Respondents were asked to state their views on the role of women as suicide bombers. The findings are indicated in Table 4 above. Table 4 shows Strongly Disagree (80.9%), Disagree (4.6%), Neutral (6.9%), Agree (4%) and Strongly Agree (4%) with a mean of 1.4566 and a standard deviation of 1.05358.

The findings, as presented reveal a strong consensus among the respondents, with a significant majority expressing strong disagreement with the notion of women's involvement in this role. A striking 80.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief that women do not actively participate as suicide bombers in Garissa County. This overwhelming level of strong disagreement suggests that the role of women as suicide bombers is not widely recognized or accepted within the community.

Women in Logistics and Intelligence in VE

Respondents were asked to state their perception of the role of women in logistics and intelligence. The findings are indicated in Table 4.3. Table 4.3 shows Strongly Disagree (5.2%), Disagree (6.4%), Neutral (2.9%), Agree (17.3%) and Strongly Agree (68.2%), with a mean of 4.3699 and a standard deviation of 1.14202.

The findings, as presented in Table 4., reveal a strong majority view that agrees with the notion of women's involvement in these particular roles. A significant 68.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief that women actively participate in logistics and intelligence roles in Garissa County. This high level of strong agreement suggests that the involvement of women in these roles is widely recognized and acknowledged within the community.

Key informants noted the role of women in logistics and intelligence. A key informant noted,

> *"As brides of Al-Shabaab, women sometimes spy for extremist groups and provide logistical support, including facilitating the transportation of weapons to evade detection. Women's roles often involve less scrutiny by security agencies, which can aid extremist activities by allowing for the transportation of weapons and other support functions" (*KII 09, 06/2024*)*

The above statement reinforces the survey findings on women as providers of logistical support and intelligence to violent extremist groups.

One study that aligns with the findings from Garissa County is the research conducted by Dhami and Careless (2019), which examined the role of women in intelligence analysis. The authors found that women's participation in intelligence analysis has been increasing, and their unique perspectives and skills are recognized as valuable assets in the field. This finding supports the perception of women's significant involvement in intelligence roles, as expressed by the majority of respondents in Garissa County.

Women's Role as Wives and Family Members

Respondents were asked to state their views on the role of women as wives and family members. Findings are indicated in Table 4 above. Table 4 shows Strongly Disagree (4%), Disagree (4.6%), Neutral (1.7%), Agree (10.4%) and Strongly Agree (79.2%), with a mean of 4.5607 and a standard deviation of 1.02473.

The findings, as presented in Table 4, reveal a strong majority view that strongly agrees with the importance of women's roles in these particular capacities. A substantial 79.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief in the significance of women's roles as wives and family members in Garissa County. This high level of strong agreement suggests that the value and centrality of women's familial roles are widely recognized and acknowledged within the community.

Women as Medics and Caregivers

Respondents were asked to state their perception of the role of women as medics and caregivers. The findings are presented in Table 4 above. Table 4 shows Strongly Disagree (27.7%), Disagree (13.9%), Neutral (45.1%), Agree (5.8%) and Strongly Agree (7.6%), with a mean of 2.5145 and a standard deviation of 1.17437.

The findings, as presented in Table 4., reveal a mixed response, with a significant proportion of respondents remaining neutral on the matter. The most striking finding is that 45.1% of the respondents expressed a neutral stance on the role of women as medics and caregivers. This high level of neutrality suggests that a considerable portion of the community may not have a strong opinion or may be uncertain about the extent of women's involvement in these roles. This could be attributed to various factors, such as limited exposure to women in these professions, a lack of awareness about their contributions, or a general ambivalence towards the topic.

Women as Community Mobilizers

Respondents were asked to state their views on the role of women as community mobilizers. The findings are indicated in Table 4 above. Table 4 shows Strongly Disagree (5.8%), Disagree (4%), Neutral (8.1%), Agree (3.5%) and Strongly Agree (78.6%), with a mean of 4.4509 and a standard deviation of 1.16348.

As presented in Table 4, the findings reveal a strong consensus among the respondents, with an overwhelming majority expressing strong agreement with the statement. The most striking finding is that 78.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that women play a significant role as community mobilizers in Garissa County. This high level of strong agreement indicates that the community widely recognizes and values the contributions of women in mobilizing and organizing community efforts. It suggests that women are seen as key agents in bringing people together, raising awareness, and driving collective action on important issues.

research by Nazneen and Sultan (2014) on women's political empowerment in South Asia highlights the gender inequalities and power dynamics that women navigate in their roles as community leaders and mobilizers. The study reveals how women often face resistance, discrimination, and limited support from male counterparts and community members, which can undermine their efforts and leadership potential.

Conclusion

The findings from the study on the roles and factors influencing women in violent extremism reveal a multifaceted landscape that underscores the importance of recognizing women's contributions and challenges in this realm. While a significant majority of respondents dismissed the notion of women as combatants or suicide bombers, they acknowledged women's roles as recruiters, supporters, and community mobilizers, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of how women can influence extremist agendas.

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