

# ***Women's Perception on Religious Extremism in Karachi\****

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Women's role is significant in countering violent extremism. Conventionally, gender stereotypes recognize women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence. However, various terrorist organizations have recruited women to carry out violent activities in their regions. In the extreme capacity, women can be participant, worker, supporter and on the other extreme simply a sympathizer. Nonetheless, women as perpetrator of extremism are far fewer than the women with more socially cohesive tendencies and desire for peace. In global South, the combination of theocracy and patriarchy have limited the role of women in political and social spheres. The political and social marginalization of women has allowed extremist views to spread more readily. In various violence prone communities across the world, women's involvement has helped to combat terrorism and early identification of radicalization by building social cohesion, teaching tolerance and resilience. This research attempts to address the root causes of extremism, violence and radicalization tendencies prevailing in Karachi City, from women's perspective. It intends to investigate the women's perception about religious extremism and its implications for their communities. The research is qualitative type and*

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*exploratory in nature. Both primary and secondary sources are applied to collect data. Primary data is obtained from field survey. Forty women are interviewed in total, from all seven districts of Karachi.*

## **Introduction**

The UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) recognized the role of women in peace and security negotiations. It urges international actors to increase the participation of women in different peace initiatives, to include gender perspective in UN efforts and to protect women and girls from gender-based violence particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuses at time of armed conflict. In 2015, the UNSC Resolution 2242, also proposed the important engagement by men and boys as partners in promoting women participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peace-building and post-conflict situations. Further, the resolution urges the member states to conduct and gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses.

Women in Karachi have experienced the most heinous forms of violence for years. They have also developed highly radical opinions and attitudes in many cases. Some women were the victims of extremism and violence too. The nature of gender-based violence is not only religious but cultural also.

Over the years, many studies have been done, in Pakistan's context, evaluating causes and spread of extremism, radicalization and terrorism. Women's attachment with terrorist organization, especially young girls had been highlighted too. The research focuses on women's ideas, concepts and views on extremism and radicalization, thus filling the research gap, where data is limited from gender perspective. The culture and society of the city was entirely different seventy years back. Regional and political developments have altered the city comprehensively. Mini Pakistan, Karachi, had gone through many changes — demographic, sectarian, radicalization, terrorism etc. Extremism, in any form, was

not threat to the society. It became menace, and later threat, to peace after the decade of 1970s. Today, Karachi has witnessed various forms of violence. There is a need to know whether women are supporting or rejecting radicalization and violence in the city.

The significance of the research is manifold. Firstly, it will generate primary data pertaining to religious extremism from gender perspectives. The data reveals diverse opinions in different communities of Karachi. Secondly, the results are helpful to identify the diverse factors spreading extremism. Thirdly, the conclusions and recommendations can help policy makers to frame comprehensive strategy in countering extremism and terrorism.

### **Literature Review**

Women and men, both can be the victim of violence but some are more vulnerable because of their social inequalities, for instance, women, gay, transgender, etc. Gier studies the origins of violence committed by the followers of different faiths in the name of religion. He focuses on regions of South and East Asia, where amalgamation of religion and state give rise to violence.<sup>1</sup> He indicates violence in India, Sri Lanka, Burma, China, Japan, Bhutan and Tibet. According to Gier, in pre-modern Asia, with few exceptions, violence was not religion-based, it appeared in the region with the advent of colonial rule and modernization. New identities were created on the basis of religion shaping the political clusters. Once religion was fused with nationalism for political gain, the seeds of violence were sown. He explores the awakening of Hindu nationalism, during the colonial period, to establish Hindu Empire free of Islam and Christianity. Sikh nationalism caused Sikh separatism—identity created in British rule—triggered the violence in the Punjab. With the exception of Tibet and Japan, it was primarily European colonial influence that led to the rise of religious nationalism in India, Burma Sri Lanka and China.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas F. Gier, *The Origin of Religious Violence: An Asian Perspective* (London: Roman & Littlefield, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Gier, *The Origin of Religious Violence*.

Berghof Foundation's Report has stated that hard or military approaches to fight against terrorism have not been successful, therefore, more soft non-coercive approaches are recommended focusing on dialogue and cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Hard approaches had created more violence and made the states lose their credibility and sympathy among their citizens and international observers. Inclusion of women and marginalized groups in consultations and policy making can bring more positive results, especially in conflict areas.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) recognized the gendered role in terrorism and asked the governments to engage women in countering violence extremism.<sup>4</sup> Although, gender stereotypes recognized women as victim, however, their role as perpetrator of violence could not be ignored. In the past decade, women's participation and support to the terrorist organization has reached to alarming rate. According to Alexander, women's role in violent extremism groups fall into three categories: enforcers and informants, leaders and recruiters, and influencer in their communities and families.<sup>5</sup>

Sara Mahmood's research also deviated from the conventional approach. Mahmood developed an insight into political and personal motivation of women to join terrorist groups. In Pakistan, Noreen Leghari and Bushra Cheema cases are examples as to how women voluntarily joined terrorist groups?<sup>6</sup> Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson state that both personal and political factors are key contributors in radicalization process of men and

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<sup>3</sup> Berghof Foundation's Report, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> J. Eggert, *The Roles of Women in Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement (CRaD) Processes: Best Practices and Lessons Learned from Europe and the Arab World* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> A. Audrey, "Futures without Violence: Linking Security of Women and Security of States," *Blueprint* (May 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Sara Mahmood, "Negating Stereotypes: Women, Gender, and Terrorism in Indonesia and Pakistan," *Semantic Scholar* (2019). Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Negating-Stereotypes, Corpus ID: 86868142>

women.<sup>7</sup> Motivations to join such organizations are both physical and emotional. Very often, taking revenge of their family members drive women to become part of terrorist group. Sometimes the desire to implement group ideology attracted women to join extremists.

Nika Saeedi and Rosalie Fransen find women's inclination towards extremism being either voluntarily or forced. The reason for young women joining extremist movement was to be romantic relationship or forced inclusion to serve the male terrorists.<sup>8</sup> The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Report affirms that there is no single path to radicalization leading to violent extremism. The report identifies various driving factors, such as, social-psychological, social, political, cultural and identity crisis, trauma and other trigger mechanisms, radicalizers/groomers, social media etc.<sup>9</sup>

Eggert indicates that academic literature on women's role in countering violent extremism has considerably increased after 2014 with emergence of Islamic State and its proactive recruitment of women. Many policy papers and think tank reports have contributed to the literature.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, women's involvement in terrorist organizations has increased, but they are in minority to those women folk who exhibit more socially cohesive tendencies to combat extremism. Their abilities to build social cohesion, tolerance and resilient approaches can be incorporated in peace initiatives. The UNDP Report finds

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<sup>7</sup> Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation," *The Russi Journal* 162, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> S. Nika & F. Rosalie, "Violent Extremism reopens the Conversation about Women and Peace", *UNDP Blog* posted on March 29, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Good Practices for Law Enforcement* (Vienna: OSCE, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Eggert, *The Roles of Women in Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement Processes*.

that women are more likely than men to agree that people belonging to different religions should be treated equally.<sup>11</sup>

Jamille Bigio proposes women on frontlines for countering extremism. Bigio admires the female officers protecting the local communities from violent extremism, and the female imams for preaching religious tolerance and women's effort to de-radicalize their husbands and sons. He points out that women's involvement in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has three advantages. They are well positioned to detect early signs of radicalization, to mitigate radicalization and, in capacity of female security officer their insight and information can be very helpful in peace missions.<sup>12</sup>

Chantal de Jonge Oudraat proposes multi-layered approach to prevent violent extremism. He recommends women's engagement at community, national and international level.<sup>13</sup> At community level, women must have greater understanding of security institutions including law enforcement and they can work with local governments and other actors at community level. At national level, women and women organizations should engage themselves with members of parliament and national governments.

### **Pakistani Women and Radicalization**

In Pakistan, radicalization in women is increasing at an alarming rate. In 2014, females from Jamia Hafsa openly supported Islamic State or *Daaish* and appealed Pakistani militants to join Islamic State.<sup>14</sup> The rise of Faith-based women organizations indicate the inclination of masses

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11 United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and Tipping Point for Recruitment* (New York: UNDP, 2017).

12 Jamille Bigio, "Women's Contributions to Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism," *Council on Foreign Relations* (February 27, 2018).

13 Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations," in *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, ed., Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger, Rafia Bhulai (Hadaya and Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016).

14 "Capital Jamia Hafsa declares support for Islamic State", *The News International*, December 14, 2014.

towards religious orthodoxy. Saigol argues that Pakistani feminists opposed the creation of Taliban, supported by state, clergy and the US. She delves into the nexus:

...feminists warned of the dangers of creating terrorists at time when the US, the Pakistani state and the clergy were busy educating and arming them, up until they lost control over them. The Taliban are not a departure but a consequence and continuity of imperial intervention beginning with the Afghan Jihad of 1979. Feminists were opposed to US imperialism long before the religious clerics.<sup>15</sup>

After 9/11, a new creed of faith-based feminism emerged as a counter narrative to global racism targeting Muslims as terrorist. For many, it was an opportunity to reclaim the Muslim identity within an alternative discourse.<sup>16</sup> Afiya Zia understands:

In fact, many Islamists activists now out-rightly challenge the very notion and definition of women's equal rights altogether, insisting on protection rather than rights. Such 'culturally sensitive' and 'non-offensive' awareness campaigns do not aim to change the social relationships within communities; they do not disturb the current patriarchal bonds that controls women's sexualities; and they do not empower women to activate any choice over their bodily rights or, indeed decision-making over personal matters.<sup>17</sup>

Extremist forces either religious or capitalists have managed to win the support of the State one way or other. In the seventy-three-year history of Pakistan, sane voices and resistance groups — writers, poets, journalists, artists, human rights advocates, feminists etc.—have challenged the radicalization, extremism and religious bigotry and have been consequently labelled as 'infidels', westernized by clerics and 'traitors' to the motherland by the State.

### Research Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature. Context analysis is used for data analysis. To design the questionnaire, policy papers, reports of think tanks and research of women's organization working in Pakistan and Karachi is surveyed. Field survey was conducted in all seven districts of

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15 Rubina Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), 36.

16 Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 34.

17 A. Zia, "Faced with an Impasse", *The News International*, March 4, 2012.

Karachi. After field survey, focus group discussion was arranged to verify the findings of the survey. In a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), community leaders and women activists participated. During field survey we took in-depth interviews from women by using questionnaire. The universe of the research is city of Karachi. The population of studied included Hindu, Christian and Muslim women with different sects. In the research, purposive sampling was used. Samples were cautiously selected to get the deeper understanding of women regarding religious violence and extremism. Forty general respondents, and four key respondents. Among forty, twenty-eight were Muslims, seven Christians and five Hindus.

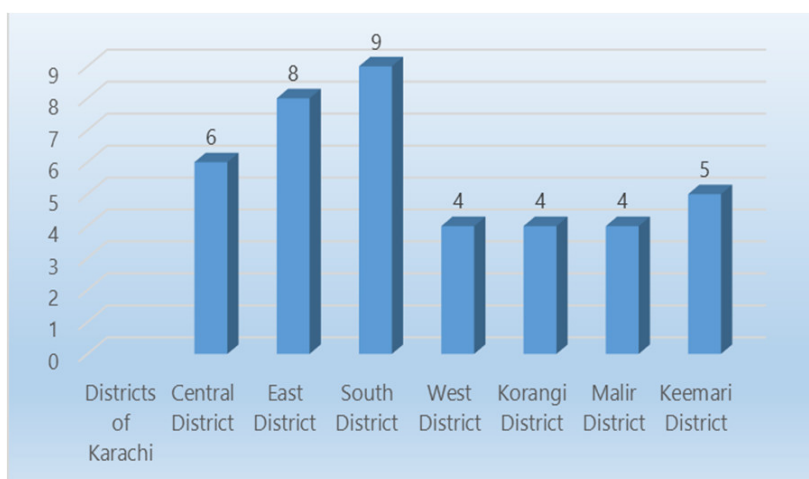
### **Profile of Respondents**

From seven districts of Karachi, forty women participated in the survey. Seventy percent respondents were follower of Islam, eighteen belonged to Christianity and twelve were Hindus. Forty percent respondents were single and sixty percent married. Majority of respondents, sixty percent were over age of 30s and forty percent belonged to age group of 18-30. Fifty percent respondents were mother of one to four children.

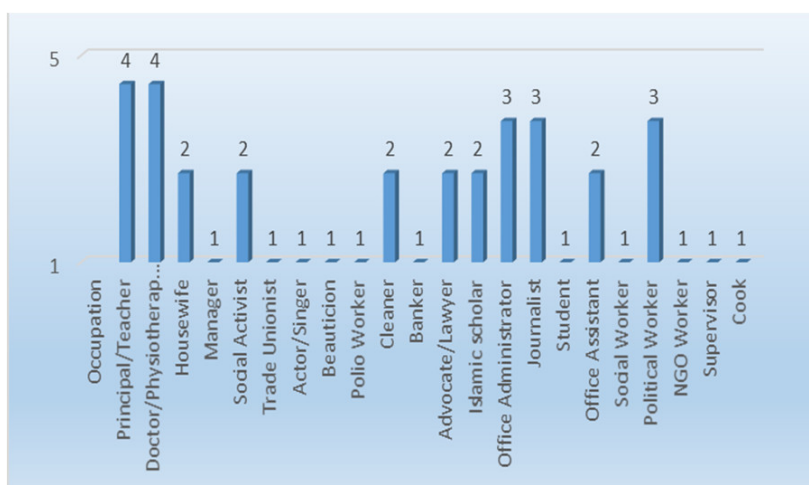
Some of the respondents' occupation/profession were house wife, school principal, lawyer, doctor, physiotherapist, polio worker, teacher, journalist, trade unionist, social activist, actor, beautician, house maid, scholar, office assistant, cook, banker, political worker, and NGO worker etc.

The key respondents were Nuzhat Shirin, Chairperson, Sindh Commission on Status of Women (SCSW), Sheema Kermani classical dancer and founder of *Tehreek e Niswaan* (Women's Movement); Mangla Sharma, Member Sindh Assembly; and Ghazala Shafique, Pastor and Human Rights Activist.





**Fig. 1:** Districts of Respondents



**Fig. 2:** Occupations of the Respondents

## Results and Discussion

As extremism and radicalization is not a simple concept, therefore, it is necessary to know the respondents' views on it.

### Extremism and Religious Extremism

Respondents' perception of extremism is quite comprehensive. Keeping in view the dictionary meaning of extremism—political, religious etc., ideas or action that are extreme and not normal, reasonable or acceptable to most

of the people.<sup>18</sup> Respondents are requested to explain the concept of extremism and religious extremism. The respondents opine the following:

- Excess of anything is extremism.
- Absence of patience and not allowing others to express their views is extremism.
- Imbalance, either in religion, emotions or relations indicates extremist mindset.
- Imposing one's opinion, ideology or likings on others.
- To establish false ideas based on personal assumptions and understanding and then asserting them on others is fanaticism.
- Prejudices based on caste and class.
- Staunch political, religious and cultural ideas.
- Imposing particular faith, concepts or culture by force is extremism.
- Believing one's own faith superior than others.

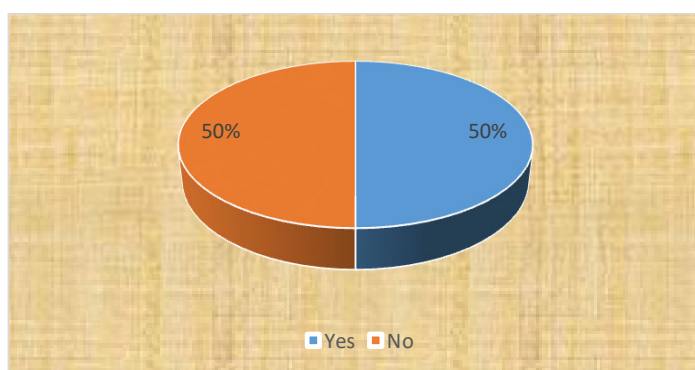
### **State and Religion Relation**

While answering the question about state religion, respondents' opinion was divided. Fifty percent respondents were of the opinion that religion of majority should be the state religion. They feel comfortable as Islam is their state religion. For them, state, religion and politics are inseparable. Half of the respondents (fifty percent) strongly supported secular nature of state. For them, religion is a private matter of citizen and it is for humans not for the states. When the state supports particular religion, against its own citizen on the basis of their faith, all those not following the state religion are marginalized, thus, creating fractions in the society. The responsibility of the state is to grant full liberty to its citizens to follow whatever faith they want. This freedom will eradicate the religious hatred and extremism in the country. The opinion of non-Muslims is also divided. A Hindu respondent clearly favours secularism. She opines that the state is the protector of its citizens against all forms of oppression. If state adopts a particular religious ideology, then followers of different ideologies are deprived of many rights and

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18 *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English*, 9th ed., 530.

privileges. She mentions the case of Pakistan, where a non-Muslim cannot hold office of the president and the prime minister. Interestingly, another Hindu respondent's view is contradictory to it. She is comfortable with state religion. The respondent argues that it is religion that teaches the humans to live in peace and harmony. It also explains how to exercise power at state/government level. Separating religion from state is not possible in this world at this time. A Christian respondent expresses that state, either theological or secular, should give equal rights to its citizens and safeguard their mental and spiritual well-being. She suggested that state should give full freedom to celebrate different religious, cultural and spiritual events.



**Fig. 3:** Relation between the State and Religion

### **Awareness of Religious Extremism in Society**

Awareness of various threats and risks indicates the level of socio-political consciousness of citizens, as it is generally assumed that women in our society are ignorant of extremist tendencies prevailing in Karachi. The research reveals that majority of respondents, ninety percent, are well aware of religious extremism in the Society. Furthermore, ninety two percent respondents consider religious extremism detrimental to their family and the society. The perceptions and experiences of respondents reflect the diversity of City; some referred it to sectarianism. A respondent, Shia doctor, disclosed that she often felt threatened because of her sect. when Shias were targeted in Karachi, she felt too insecure for herself and her family too.

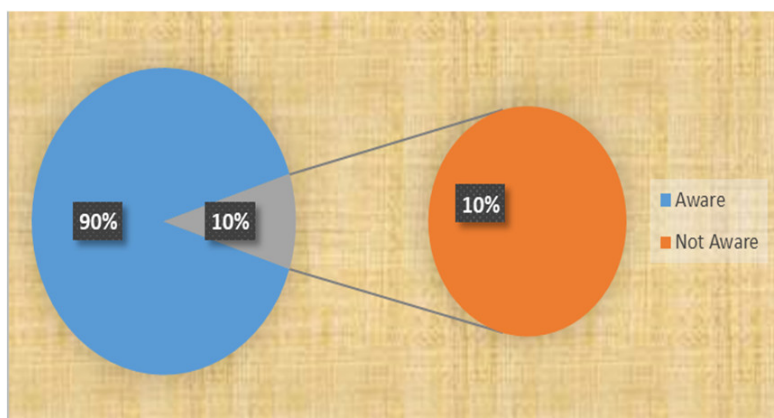
Another respondent shared that she was too afraid to send her children to madrassa because frequent rape cases were reported in media. 'I have arranged a private tutor to teach (my kids) the Holy Quran at home. I will not send my boys to any madrassa.' A non-Muslim respondent told that they do not disclose their faith publicly because of mass hatred. They try to keep their religious identity secret to avoid any conflict. She shared that their family chose Muslim names for their young ones.

A journalist said that she was fully aware of increasing religious extremism in the city. For her, it is not the religion to be blamed for, but the orthodox and radical who interpret the Holy Scriptures according to their benefits. The interpretation of holy text is very important. For political gains, religion is used as a tool. She further explained 'to get the dollars from the super power, Jihad was fanaticized in the decade of 1980s. It was not Pakistan's obligation to fight for Afghanistan. And above all, before going to war, *Jihad bil' Nafs* [Urdu: to struggle against one's own's lower self or base instincts] is mandatory for all Muslim and that aspect is deliberately ignored by the sponsored clergy. Fighting against personal evil eventually liberates a person from all negativity and ultimately brings peace which is definitely not the goal of those who are beneficiaries of chaos and anarchy.

A lawyer sees a new wave of global extremism. Orthodox and radicals are gaining power across the world. He argued, 'We see orthodox Hindu government in India, violence in Myanmar, xenophobia in Europe etc., so this region is also no exception. Karachi's metropolitan identity, with its tolerant culture, is a story of past. With the influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the last two decades, orthodoxy and radicalization have hugely impacted the city's life.'

As society has become less tolerant, a Hindu respondent felt quite insecure in the city. He stated that 'Our lives and temples both are in constant danger. It's not the state or authorities we are afraid of, but the mob triggered by clergy, who are always ready to attack our temples. Such groups are creating menace. Although authorities do provide full protection to our temples, however, they

sometimes fail to control and eliminate such radical elements in our city.'



**Fig. 4:** Awareness of Religious Extremism in Society

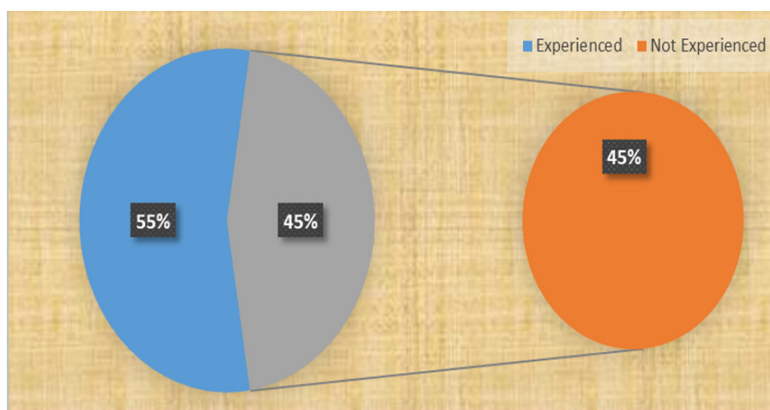
### Experience of Religious Extremist Behaviour

In reply to a question about experiencing religious extremist behaviour ever in their personal life, fifty-five percent responses are positive. A respondent shared as how her family members maligned her for watching movies and not wearing proper hijab [Urdu: Veil]. She argued and asked what sort of hijab is proper? The respondent's mother and grandmother wear *chaadar* [Urdu: Shawl] to cover their body, but now her brothers want her to cover whole body except eyes. Another respondent spells out how women are ex-communicated by family if they marry outside of their religion, sect or caste? Respondent's mother bluntly threatened to throw her out if she marries a boy who belongs to different sect. '*kafir* [Urdu: infidel] cannot be the part of their family.'

A polio worker also discloses that time and again she has been asked to change her sect. She belongs to a minority group. 'I have been constantly approached by the self-righteous male co-workers to marry them and secure place in *jannat* [Urdu: heaven].' This attitude is very offending. If any person is interested to marry, at least he should propose on merit rather than promising something after death. 'Look! how people mercilessly play with others' feelings.'

An NGO worker disclosed that she was targeted and threatened several times for supporting Ahmedis. A teacher told her dressing is criticized by colleagues. 'You wear makeup to show off and to seduce men. This is satanic way and you should follow the right path by carrying yourself modestly.' Here modest means wearing hijab. A Hindu responded sadly as 'being Hindu makes me less Pakistani and more Indian.' Though, this is not opinion of majority but she has experienced such negative behaviour in life. Another Muslim respondent was criticized by friends and family for celebrating Holi at temples with non-Muslims. Generally, it is expected to keep distance from the non-Muslims. The respondent is a secular person who believes in humanity and chose to enjoy all festivities, cultural and religious events in the city. She has been criticized on social media, too. Similar experience was shared by another respondent. 'Whenever I share something on social media – pictures celebrating Holi, Devali, Christmas etc. – some of my friends get offended. They openly call me *Kafir* (infidel)'.

A respondent belonging to Shia sect complains as how she was taunted and bothered by some extremists. They accused Shias for land grabbing: 'You people grab expensive land by building Imambarghs.' The respondent felt offended by such comment and argued that in the city, many groups have emerged as land grabbers and no authority or community has courage to speak against them, but fuelling sectarian hatred is very easy.



**Fig. 5:** Those who experienced Religious Extremist Behaviour in Personal Life

## **Religious Freedom in Society**

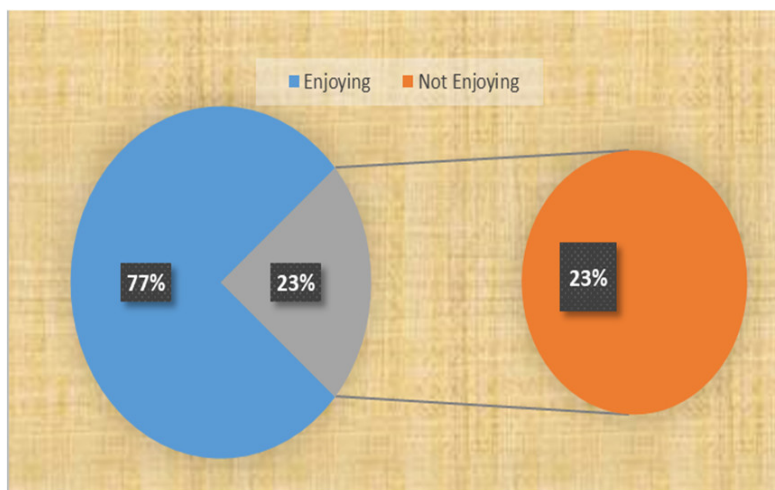
When asked about the religious freedom in family and society, majority of respondents agreed to have this privilege. Seventy-seven percent shared that they enjoy full religious freedom in their family. These respondents had no experience of religious restriction at societal level too. While, twenty-three percent respondents denied this freedom at both levels. A respondent complains that a criminal enjoys more liberty in the society than a woman who stands for her rights. A student told, elders in family constantly criticize her for not following the Islamic practices. The respondent is a student of Islamic Studies and she argued with logic and facts.

Few respondents categorically denied any type of freedom in the society. 'There is no religious freedom in our society. It's a false notion. The majority try to impose its faith and believes through soft power.' With state support, religious groups often use force to establish their power at different levels. These groups sometimes use violence to harass and exhibit their power. Another respondent expressed that women cannot exhibit their talents and qualities. Women are contained at home and the excuse given by family is none other than religion. 'Women are forced to give up their dreams in our society' to please their family, though 'every person is unique and gifted with some skills or qualities by God.'

A furious respondent expressed herself when asked about personal and religious freedom. According to her, 'Freedom, whether religious, social, cultural or political is not present in our society. If you think weaker one is given any liberty or privilege, you are mistaken. There is no such religious or political freedom in this city. Go and express yourself; you will come to know how masses would react. There is a boiling hatred and anger in our society. There are multiple factors for insane behaviour, but I think basically it is self-righteousness and absence of tolerance that has destroyed the peace and coherence of our nation.'

An interesting aspect is highlighted by a respondent as she related freedom with class division. According to her, 'Somehow class difference is also a factor for not giving liberty to women.' She explained that usually in our society,

middle class imposes more restriction on women. It is so-called honour of family which denied women to enjoy religious or civic rights. 'Here the issue is socio-cultural. To keep the women dependent, family comes up with religious justification.' The irony is, women are denied privileges and freedom granted by their religion. 'Patriarchy with religious dogmas is causing utmost harm to women.'



**Fig. 6:** Religious Freedom in Family and Society

### Religious Extremism in Women

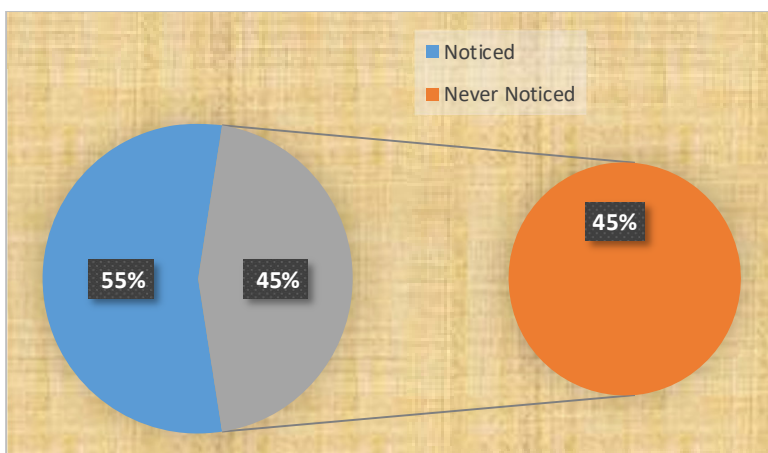
More than half, i.e., fifty-five percent, respondents have witnessed behaviour in women based on religion. Forty-five percent respondents have seen extremist behaviour in women but not based on religion. They are more of socio-economic.

Religious extremism in women transferred from men. They indoctrinate ideas in family by praising and supporting orthodoxy. Mostly, women follow what their men believe. They have limited access to outside world and their perceptions are created on the information and ideas propagated by their male family members. Some respondents highlighted the sectarian issues and extreme attitude of women against other sects. Extreme beliefs have been witnessed. These women not only refused to listen others point of view but tried to impose their beliefs by force. A respondent shares that such attitude is seen in women's religious gatherings.



A very interesting aspect is mentioned by a respondent regarding women's behaviour. She indicated religious rituals performed such as *sadqa*, *zakat*, *nazar* etc. [Urdu: Charity] women offer cash or in-kind regularly to please the spiritual authorities. 'For me, it is a kind of religious extremism.' Giving charity on regular basis, while not paying state taxes, to keep evil-eye away from family is foolishness. Furthermore, few ladies decide to offer frequent *nawafil*s (Urdu: optional-prayers) which they fail to do because of many reasons. 'Losing balance in *Ibadat* [Urdu: Religious worship] is also an extremist approach.'

According to respondents, women with extremist behaviour possess one or more traits listed: torturing and abusive, radical ideas, judgmental, assertive, insecure in life, supports patriarchy, emotionally imbalance, fear driven, negate their womanhood to get acceptance in society etc.



**Fig. 7:** Religious Extremism in Women

### **Role of Women to Counter All Forms of Extremism**

It is agreed that society can only progress and prosper with men and women working in harmony. Women's responsibilities are significant for a peaceful and coherent social order.

The following are the responses from Karachi to eliminate hatred and extremism to counter all the ills prevailing in the city. Firstly, women have to accept their power. The power, of rational human being, to bring change, to create, to

protect their family and surroundings. If women continue to believe what patriarch wants them to believe then neither change nor peace is possible. Sheema Kermani, one of the key respondents replied, 'I don't understand who else can counter? Art and women can counter extremism. Women can counter in such a way by pushing these men full of hate and anger, pushing them to a point where they understand what love is? I think women have power and the capability to reach that point. These men are hating women, they inflict violence on women. If women decide that somehow, they preach love and preach humanity then maybe they can convert some of these men to understand that living with love rather than conflict and hate relationship, they will be happier. She further said 'Women and art reveal your finer sensibilities. When one is away from music, beauty of dance, art, his or her subtle sensibilities are dead that is why one is full of anger.' Secondly, mothers have more influence on their children, it is likely that mentally strong mother would raise strong and balanced children. Nuzhat Shirin stresses that mother should teach tolerance and compassion to young ones. 'Religious teaching is not contrary to peace and progress. Children must learn to respect other faiths also.' Mangla Sharma, key respondent, pointed out that women are the first to check their children and family members. She has conducted various workshops for women on interfaith harmony and countering violence and extremism. With her experience, she elaborates that 'there are few signs when youngster mindset changes. These include, change in behaviour, change in friends circle —if your child has left old friends and spending time with strangers or new friends — if their spending's are more than their pocket-money, aggression, losing temper etc., all are alarming, women, especially mothers, have to play their role.' Interpretation of religion in accordance with present world is necessary. Though, women are considered inferior, in our society, for such intellectual and theological work, the responsibility is on men's shoulder to explain and interpret the true essence of Islam.

Kindergarten and primary school teachers leave lifelong impression on children. In our country, mostly young women are working as teachers. It is suggested by few

respondents that teaching compassion, love, honesty, equality and hope can bring positive change. Storytelling and fairy tales do inculcate love and hope at the early stage. A school teacher speaks her heart by saying that 'imagine a child deprived of toys and fairy tales, children deprived of such privileges are more inclined towards negative emotions and violence'. Tolerance is the mantra which can work miracle. Religious tolerance is not something you are born with but it is developed gradually by accepting others' views and it's the most important factor required for peaceful co-existence. Women are born with nurturing capabilities; it is not difficult for them to adopt balance and positive approach in life.' If Women want to eliminate religious intolerance from society, 'they must preach and teach humanism rather than any other ideology.'

### **Conclusion**

The perceptions of the women living in Karachi are quite diverse, as the city itself. Nonetheless, all respondents agreed that education, training, political consciousness, dialogue and debates are keys to eradicate extremism, intolerance and violence. Moreover, majority believes that Karachi's transformation from cosmopolitan to most dangerous city is the consequence of policies adopted by the state for decades. It is also argued that religious behaviour of Muslims and Non-Muslims — including those with self-righteousness and sense of superiority — is rarely violent at societal level. It becomes dangerous at state level when authorities create and support radicals and orthodox groups. Citizens do have differences of opinion, but majority refrains from using violence. Respondents agreed that Inter-faith dialogue, state's support for recreational and cultural activities, change of school syllabus, implementation of laws, safeguarding women and minority rights will surely impact the Pakistani society positively.