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Female Terrorism: A Review

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The sharp growth in the number of publications examining female involvement in terrorism has produced a valuable but un-integrated body of knowledge spread across many disciplines. In this paper, we bring together 54 publications on female terrorism and use qualitative and quantitative analyses to examine the range of theoretical and methodological approaches in these papers. Using a content analysis, we identify six primary research foci: Portrayal in media, Feminism, Interviews with terrorists, Group roles, Motivation and recruitment, and Environmental enablers. Results revealed a reliance on secondary rather than primary data, narrative rather than statistical comparisons, and descriptions rather than explanations of events.

Keywords female terrorism, meta-analysis, motivations, radicalization, recruitment, review

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Studies into terrorism have traditionally focused on men, due to the longstanding belief that women have assumed passive, inherently less interesting roles in extremist groups.[1] However, female participation in terrorism is now widely acknowledged as having increased "regionally, logistically and ideologically."[2] As female involvement in terrorism has increased, so too has female terrorism research. This is reflected by the increase in the number of related publications and special issues dedicated to the subject.[3] Research investigates a wide range of issues and appears across a diverse range of publications encompassing disciplines such as politics, women studies, psychology, and anthropology. Deriving a coherent account of the circumstances behind female involvement in terrorism is essential to any comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and consequently, it is likely to play an important role in the development of counter-terrorism strategies.

With the burgeoning of work in this area, it is timely to draw together and critically assess the literature that has been published to date. We undertake such a review in this paper, aiming to summarise what has been learnt to date. By drawing together the published literature our review identifies trends and common features that are not forthcoming from findings drawn in a single case study. These trends and commonalities have a degree of reliability and generalizability that should help to build cumulative

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knowledge in the field. As Hammersley notes,[4] when dealing with qualitative research, the synthesis of evidence can allow the construction of longer narratives and more general theories.[5] We also provide an assessment of the adequacy of the methodological techniques and analytical methods that are currently being employed.

Background to Terrorism Research

To date, research on female terrorism has considered a myriad of different issues and, arguably, there has been no clear progression from early work to where the field stands today. Research produced in the 1970s and 1980s focused on topics such as female involvement in the Russian revolution,[6] females fighting in the guerrilla wars of Latin America,[7] and the psychological reasons that underlie female involvement in extremism.[8] The 1990s saw a continuation of the earlier focus on Latin America, but this was accompanied by a growth in research on Irish terrorists and terrorism. The 1990s also saw the publication of the only two books published which present detailed case studies of female terrorists.[9] However, while publications on female terrorism have increased since 2000, the range of foci and disparate events covered within the literature suggests an absence of both strong theory and testing of that theory. For example, between the years 2000 and 2001, research on female terrorism encompassed the psychology of female involvement,[10] an overview of female involvement in suicide terrorism,[11] and a publication detailing representations of female terrorists.[12] None of these issues were developed in research published in 2003. This lack of cumulative development echoes trends in general terrorism research found by Silke.[13]

Since the 1990s, research into female terrorism has continued to develop across a number of disciplines. Studies in psychology have examined issues such as motivation, female identity, and radicalisation,[14] as well as issues of individual difference such as the psychological underpinnings of suicide terrorism.[15] Sociologists have also made significant contributions, exploring the impact of factors that include religion,[16] societal influences,[17] and gender.[18] Other research includes a discussion of what criminology can bring to research on female terrorism,[19] work on the different portrayals of female suicide bombers in Eastern and Western media,[20] feminism and feminist theories of female terrorism,[21] women and female involvement in organised racial terrorism,[22] and female involvement in the Russian subculture.[23]

This broad range of foci results in the juxtaposition of competing hypotheses, with no comparison across and between findings. For example, the account by Victor argues that women are drawn reluctantly into terrorism and are motivated by personal, private reasons. In contrast, Cunningham argues that women hold more complex, dualistic reasons for their involvement, combining collective motivations, such as a desire for national independence, with individualistic motivations, such as the desire for equality between the sexes.[24] Such conflicting accounts mean that efforts to develop a detailed picture of female involvement have yet to provide a definitive narrative of underlying factors. Thus, there is a danger of research into female terrorism becoming "bogged down in a conceptual mire."[25]

In the remainder of this paper, we provide an overview of current publications on female terrorism. We outline our method of collating publications, including how research was identified and inclusion criteria. We then describe our approach to analysing their theoretical and analytical content. We illustrate how the research was conducted, including the type of data used and the analytical techniques employed to assess data, hypotheses, and results; and the topics of focus in the research.

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Research on Female Terrorism

Literature Search

Due to the diverse nature of research into female terrorism, articles were collated from a number of sources. First, we searched well-known bibliographic databases in the areas of psychology, sociology, and political science. Specifically, the databases APA PsycInfo, Socio Abstracts, Medline, ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts), and Web of Knowledge, were each searched using the reference words "female," "woman," "terrorist," "terrorism," "martyr," "suicide bomber," "guerrilla," and "revolutionary." Second, the Reference, Footnote, and Bibliography sections of the resulting articles were examined for as yet un-captured research papers, and this process repeated on any new papers until no new references of relevance appeared in the References or Bibliographies. Third, Internet searches were conducted by inputting the above reference terms into a popular worldwide search engine and its scholarly literature search engine.

The publications identified through the database and Internet searches were included in our review if (and only if) they focused on issues relating to female terrorism, or if they dedicated a section of their analysis to female terrorism. Publications included in the review were limited to books, articles published in peer-reviewed journals, conference reports and proceedings, PhD theses, and reports published by leading counter-terrorism centres. Newspaper articles, films, and dissertations submitted as part of a Masters degree were not included. The review was limited to research published within the past 25 years. By using these criteria, we sought to ensure that our review included contemporary, peer-reviewed academic research, rather than media reporting or personal opinion.

Analysis of Publication Content

There are a number of methods available for drawing together diverse qualitative material from across publications. In their recent review, Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Young, Jones, and Sutton distinguished nine different meta-analytical approaches to qualitative evidence, which ranged from thematic analysis to cross-case data analysis.[26] Compared to their quantitative counterparts, methodologies for qualitative meta-analysis are still in their infancy. As such, there is no consensus in the academic literature as to a preferred or superior approach. Nonetheless, meta-analyses of qualitative data have, independent of specific technique, enabled the enhancement of findings by formalizing knowledge in a way that is meaningful and useful.[27] Examples of this success appear in studies of issues as diverse as supply chain performance,[28] community action,[29] HIV and diabetes,[30] and domestic violence.[31]

Results

Our database and internet searches resulted in a collection of 54 publications on female terrorism, which included 6 books, 3 book chapters, 29 journal articles, 1 doctoral thesis and 15 reports.* Figure 1 presents the number of publications in our sample as a function of the year of publication (some years are grouped together

*A list of material included in the analysis is available from the first author or at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/taylorpj/LISN/TPV2009/

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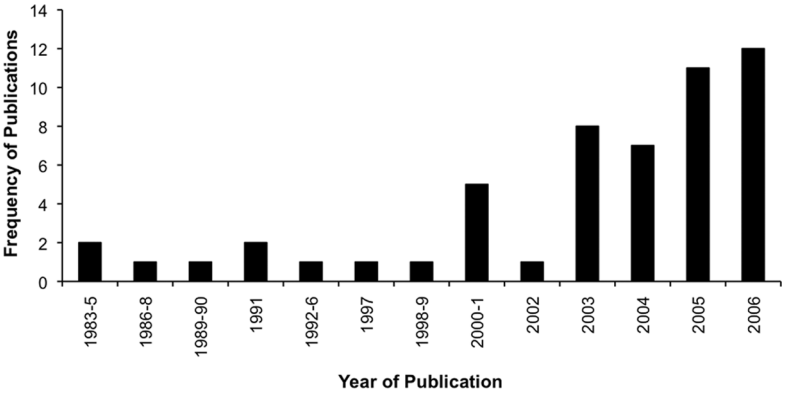

Figure 1. Frequency of publications on female terrorism from the years 1983–2006.

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due to the infrequency of publications during a year). Of the total collection, 38 publications (70%) appeared after the year 2002, which represents nearly a three-fold increase in the number of publications relating to female terrorism. Prior to 2002, publications on female terrorism were published only once or twice every two years.

Use of Research Methodology

Data Source

We considered the extent to which researchers presented first and second hand data in their papers, and also the extent to which they cite academic or media reports to support their arguments. In total, 42 of the 54 published articles (78%) relied on secondary data such as published articles or media reports. The remaining 12 articles (23%) had undertaken primary research using interviews or questionnaires. The number of interviewees on which studies were based ranged from 1 to 205 (on which a book was based), with a median of 11.5 interviews.

In terms of citations, an analysis of the bibliography sections of papers found that researchers had cited academic articles slightly more frequently than media reports, with a ratio of approximately four media reports being cited to every five articles. However, this ratio has shifted over time with more academic research and less media reporting becoming the norm in published articles. The ratio of media-academic sources cited in articles published prior to 2002 was approximately 1:1 yet this changed to a ratio of nearly 3:4 for articles published after 2002.

These figures show a reliance on secondary data, with most researchers not producing substantively new data, but reworking old material to support arguments or frameworks. These findings parallel Silke,[32] who found that over 80% of his sample of terrorism research was based either solely or primarily on pre-existing data. They also reflect a decrease in primary data gathering from 46% as reported in 1988 for general terrorism research[33] to 23%.

Method of Analysis

As Figure 2 shows, numerical analyses are infrequently employed in research on female terrorism. Consistent with Silke's previous reporting of infrequent use of statistics in terrorism research,[34] we found that 33 of the 54 studies in our sample (61%) included no numerical analysis of any kind. Of the 21 studies that did report

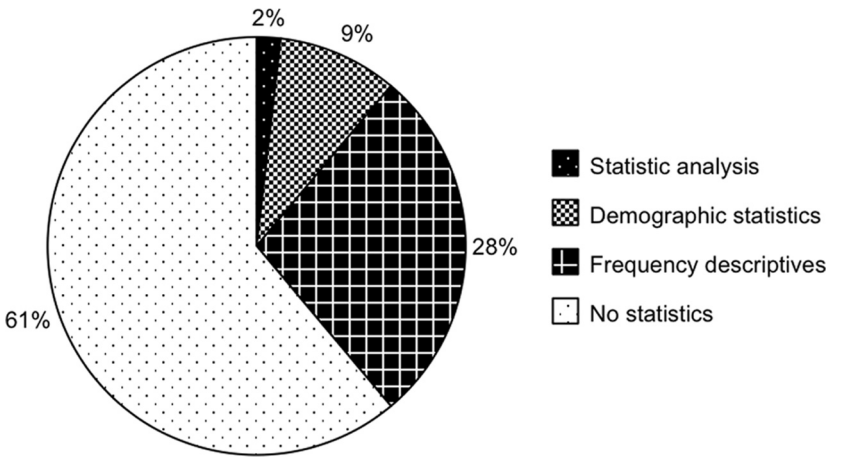

Figure 2. Frequency of studies using statistics.

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analyses, 15 (28%) used frequency-based descriptive statistics to show either the proportion of women found within specific terrorist groups, or the proportion of women who have carried out terrorist acts relative to men. A further five articles (9%) used descriptive statistics to represent demographic information about the age, marital status, and socio-economic status of the females involved in extremism. Only one paper deployed inferential statistics.[35]

Conceptual Focus of Research

To uncover more about the character of research into female terrorism, the 54 articles were subjected to a content analysis to determine their main conceptual focus. Upon reading the data, key words or phrases that seemed to capture important areas or concepts of female terrorism research were highlighted, and first impressions of the data taken. Recurrent issues or points in the text were examined, and concepts identified across studies were combined to form content categories. Thus, data were interpreted through a systematic classification process involving the identification and coding of themes or patterns.[36] For example, across studies a wide number of environmental factors were identified that impacted upon female involvement, including strategy; internal strategy; advantages to the group and social conditions. Therefore, these factors were combined to form the environmental enablers category. Thus, through a process of iterative refinement we identified an exhaustive set of themes on which to categorise the data. These emergent themes are the primary foci for the current analysis.

Overall, six primary foci were identified in the literature: History and overview of female terrorism; perceptions of female terrorists (media); roles of female terrorists; motivation and recruitment; environmental enablers, and other. The number of articles identified as adopting one of these six categories as its primary focus is shown in Table 1. To provide a more detailed analysis of the research (recognising that many studies consider multiple issues), Table 1 also identifies the secondary focus of articles. An article's secondary focus was identified as the issue that was explored in most detail after the primary focus, where failure to mention the second focus would have

Table 1. Main focus of articles on female terrorism

Article focus	Focus category	Main focus	Secondary focus
Overview of female terrorism	Overview and history of female involvement in terrorism	22	7
Details of women in specific conflicts			
Perceptions of female terrorists	Perceptions and media	11	4
Feminism, female terrorism and society	Feminism and gender studies	6	11
Women's roles	Women's roles	6	14
Motivation and/or recruitment	Motivation and recruitment	5	30
Impact of religion on female involvement	Environmental enablers	3	9
Criminology			
Countering female terrorism	Other	1	2

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left theories or arguments in the paper incomplete. The distinction between primary and secondary foci was determined by amount of coverage given to each issue.[37] We examine these foci in the following sections (in no particular order).

Historical Accounts and Overviews

As shown in Table 1, 22 of the 54 articles (41%) were found to provide generic overviews of, or accounts of the history of, female involvement in terrorism. Specifically, of these articles, 9 provided overviews of female involvement, 10 described female involvement in specific conflicts, and 3 were best characterised as intersecting both of these areas. Within these publications, authors cover a range of issues including an introduction to female terrorism research, the origins of terrorism, definitions of the word "terrorism," often along with examples or case studies of early female involvement in terrorism. The history of a specific conflict may also be given, describing causes of the conflict and how female participation evolved. All of these articles recounted existing knowledge rather than conducting primary research.

Perceptions

Studies examining perceptions of female terrorists explore the notion that we find it difficult to comprehend female involvement and that we manage this by forwarding representations based on mythical stereotypes[38] or gendered stereotypes.[39] According to Berkowitz, mythical stereotypes portray female terrorists as women warriors, beautiful, sexy, smart, and deadly.[40] This portrayal, he argues, serves two functions. It conveys news in a package with which the audience is familiar, rendering the female terrorist culturally intelligible,[41] and it serves to hide the individual activist

so that we are not forced to comprehend her as an agentic individual. In contrast, gendered stereotypes draw on issues of gender to minimise the female role. Patkin suggests that this occurs either through explanations of involvement that draw on traditional gender roles, or through a "feminising" of motivations that involves representing females' motivations as more personal and individual than perhaps they need to be.[42] The social background and family history of the female, along with her love interests (if any), are raised as possible alternative motivations, thereby providing a gendered interpretation of events.[43]

According to these articles, when neither of these stereotypes is available, then the literature portrays the female terrorist as unnatural, unfeminine, and unsexed, or as an "irrational terrorist personality." The result is a dichotomy of perception in the media, either as an irrational woman or a terrorist who is more man than woman.[44] Both of these portrayals and the resulting dichotomy minimise the perceived threat posed by female terrorists, whether or not this is the intention of the papers' presentation.

One notable feature of the perceptions research discussed so far is that it reports media representations from a Western perspective. However, studies have shown that there are significant differences between the portrayal of female terrorists in the Western and Arab media.[45] Issacharoff, in particular, found that the Western media focuses on personal aspects of the female terrorists, such as biographical details, social circumstances, and the constraining influence of a chauvinistic society.[46] Thus, behaviour is accorded to external factors and not personal motivation, with action attributed to factors over which the female has no power. This portrayal diminishes personal influence and the credibility of women as terrorists. In contrast, the Arab press is freer of gender stereotypes and downplays individual problems of female terrorists not related to the ideology of the struggle. Female terrorists are portrayed as full partners in the struggle, emphasising their religious and/or nationalistic motivations in much the same way as the Western media does for male terrorists.

Feminism and Gender Studies

Analysis of the six articles primarily focusing on feminism and gender suggests that this literature divides into those that use the female terrorism literature to advance feminist theory and those that use feminism to advance the female terrorist argument. The former examines female terrorism as an instance of a patriarchal world and the latter argues that females play active roles in the extremist groups of which they are a part. Those that use the female terrorism literature to advance feminist theory argue that women are oppressed and manipulated by men to become terrorists,[47] and that terrorism is the result of a patriarchal world.[48] For example, Berko and Erez[49] report that Palestinian women in terrorism are an aspect of systematic gender oppression and that female Palestinian terrorists are mere tools of male Palestinian society. These arguments serve to minimise women's agency in terrorist acts.

This contrasts the work of other authors, such as Alison, Gentry, and West, who demonstrate that analyzing female terrorism through a feminist lens can contribute to our understanding of the field.[50] By interviewing female terrorists and concentrating on women as agents, the perspectives of the female as disadvantaged and passive are dismantled and the contribution of women to terrorism brought to the fore. They argue that female terrorists are often taken out of context[51] and assumed to be more

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peaceful and less aggressive than men.[52] Yet, by examining first-hand accounts of female terrorists, the acts that they have perpetrated, and the motivations behind these actions, women are active agents who often play important roles in the extremist group. Indeed, a reoccurring theme in McDonald's interviews of female terrorists (with the exception of Kim Hyon Hui) was the willingness of women to participate in the actions of the group, as well as take an active role in the decision making processes of the group.[53]

Motivation

Case studies are used frequently throughout the female terrorism literature, whether for descriptive or theory building purposes, to detail motivations for terrorist activity. Table 2 outlines the five main forms of motivation that were identified as being discussed in the 54 publications. The category of social motivations were discussed significantly more than any of the motivation categories (all $\chi^2 > 4.92$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). It was, for example, frequently noted in publications examining conflicts in Latin America, where better living conditions are one of the main motivations for violence (for example, see Alison, 2003).[54] The second most common motivation, personal motivations, appeared 18 times with authors noting issues such as depression, monetary problems, and the impact of being a social outsider. These personal motivations were often invoked to explain female involvement in suicide terrorism.

Idealistic motivations, which appeared 15 times, are similar to social motivations in their altruistic impulse, but reflect more community-based motivations such as a desire for equal rights, an end to social humiliation and repression, and a fight for improved employment and education. The Idealistic motivations discussed in the

Table 2. Female motivations and their frequency within the literature

Motivation category	Example motivations	Frequency of mentions
Social	Gender equality	
	Education/career needs	34
	Humiliation and repression	
	Family problems	
Personal	Personal distress	18
	Monetary worries	
	Social outsider	
Idealistic	Religion	
	Nationalism	15
	Commitment to cause	
	Wish for martyrdom	
Key event	Loss of loved one	
	Specific humiliating instances	12
	Displacement	
	Other negative uncontrollable event	
Revenge	Vengeance	
	Anger	4

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literature are found across conflict areas, and reflect a female who acts in an effort to change a religious and nationalistic issue in the area. Interestingly, they are less likely to be found in publications discussing female motivations for suicide terrorism. Finally, key events, such as displacement, the loss of a loved one, or humiliation, were cited as motivating influences twelve times. Key events can lead to a desire for revenge, and revenge motivations have also been documented in women. However, the desire for revenge, possibly resulting from these key events, was the least frequently noted motivation, cited only four times.

Recruitment

Case study research also reveals a wealth of information regarding the recruitment or pathway to terrorism. While the issue of recruitment is seldom the explicit focus of the female terrorism literature, a number of recruitment pathways are easily identified in biographies and interviews with terrorists. In some instances, females appear to join terrorist groups voluntarily, whereas others appear to join as a result of recruitment drives by the terrorist group. Alongside these two forms of recruitment, the literature suggests a number of additional influences that persuade females to join a cause. Principal among these are peer pressure and group conformity, which has been documented as occurring in or through university networks[55] and on-line chat rooms and discussion boards.[56] Women have also been influenced by the men that they are close to and often join terrorist organizations alongside or shortly after their boyfriends, partners, or lovers. Women may also be forced to join extremist groups, as was the case with many of the female LTTE members interviewed by Ness.[57] Across the literature, no one form of recruitment is dominant or mentioned significantly more so than any other.

The number of motivations and recruitment processes identified within the literature undoubtedly reflects the complexity of the issue at hand. Yet, within the current sample, no publication has examined the interaction of motivation and recruitment. A recent study by the current authors[58] examined the interrelationships among the motivation and recruitment of female terrorists and found an interaction effect between motivation and recruitment. The study was not able to tease apart the direction of this relationship but it shows that an understanding of the relationship may provide further insights into the radicalization process.

Roles

The literature identifies a number of roles that females play within terrorist groups. Table 3 summarises these roles schematically, using dark-shaded tick-marks to identify often-cited roles and lighter tick-marks to identify roles that are occasionally cited. Our labelling of roles follows Griest and Mahon.[59] Specifically, Sympathisers are those who perform duties such as cooking, cleaning, and first aid in extremist camps; Spies are those who play a more active role by acting as decoys, messengers, or intelligence gatherers; Warriors are arguably more active again, fighting in battles on an equal status with men; and, finally, Leaders are those who are dominant forces at the top of the organisation where they are actively involved in the leadership, motivation, and strategy of the group. Griest and Mahon did not include suicide bombers in their typologies of roles, but this category was included here due to the high numbers of articles detailing female involvement in suicide terrorism.

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Table 3. Women's roles in terrorism

Group	Sympathisers	Spies	Warriors	Warrior leaders	Dominant forces	Suicide bombers	Participation grown?
European left-wing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
LTTE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Domestic Latin Am.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
IRA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
American right-wing	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
ETA	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Palestinian	✓	✓				✓	✓
Chechen	✓					✓	✓
International Latin Am.	✓						
Irish Loyalists	✓						
Al Qaeda						✓	✓

Note: ✓ = Females are often found in these roles within the group.
✓ = Females positioned in these roles are typically exceptional and rare.

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As can be seen from Table 3, the literature suggests that women do not occupy the position of Dominant forces within a group without also being active as Warrior leaders. Similarly, women are not active as Warrior leaders without also being active as Warriors, nor active as Warriors without also being active as Spies. The various roles that women can hold within a terrorist organisation are ordered in a precise way, from minor roles to more prominent and strategic positions. Terrorist organisations themselves can be ordered according to their use of women within the group, from those in which women play a minimal role to those in which women occupy a number of different positions.

The groups towards the upper rows of Table 3 are left wing-groups fighting for state independence or liberatory nationalism.[60] Their focus on breaking away from state constraints and forming a new community offers women a larger space within which to participate as combatants. The progressive outlook of the group, the potential promise of gender equality, and the revolutionary nature of the group, holds greater attraction for women in terms of active participation and a future higher quality of life.[61] Groups located towards the bottom of Table 3 are characterised by either strict religious or cultural norms, or motivations that do not envisage a change in society itself. Similarly, the Irish Loyalists and International Latin American groups are both right-wing groups that do not wish to change role structure of the society. Thus, as in society, these groups offer women only a small space within which to participate as combatants, being unwilling to admit women to roles that they do not hold in that society, or change the roles that they perform. The two groups for which this is not the case, namely ETA and American right-wing groups, appear in the middle of the diagrams. Within ETA, women are reported to play more traditional, or minor, roles such as spies or sympathisers, unusual for a liberatory

group. Within right-wing American groups, women are reported to occupy an usual breadth of roles.[62]

The one exception to the role analysis that we have discussed so far is the use of women as suicide bombers. As can be seen from Table 3, the role of suicide bombing is qualitatively different to that of all the other roles, which are comparable. Thus, the deployment of women in other roles may give little indication of when groups are likely to use women as suicide bombers. This claim is supported by the use of female suicide bombers across a range of ideological groups. This disparate use of women as suicide bombers as opposed to more "traditional" fighters in Palestine, Chechnya, and for al-Qaeda has also led to claims that the women chosen to become suicide bombers are used as sacrificial lambs[63] or are coerced and exploited.[64]

Environmental Enablers

The far right-hand column of Table 3 denotes whether or not the literature suggests that female participation has grown over time. As can be seen by Table 3, all but two conflicts are believed to have seen an increase in female participation. For example, as Alison notes, women joined the LTTE partly in response to the shortage of male combatants caused by extended conflict.[65] However, there are more factors involved than conflict duration. Figure 3 shows the different environmental enablers cited in the literature, and the frequency of their mention. The enablers are grouped under four headings: strategy, internal strategy, advantages to group, and social conditions. The most frequently cited enablers are women's strategic advantages to both terrorist attacks and the terrorist group. They have increased access to targets,[66] are incongruent with security profiles,[67] and they typically arise less suspicion.[68] Women afford several other advantages to a terrorist organisation. For example, they attract media attention and they may be recruited when there is a desire for heightened (inter)national attention.[69] Similarly, women elicit feelings of sympathy for the cause, sending out a message that times are so hard that even women are being sacrificed.[70] Finally, women terrorists can also improve the terrorist organisation as a whole. Enlisting women has been shown to enhance group stability,[71] increase motivation,[72] and provide an efficient use of the population.[73] The research indicates that

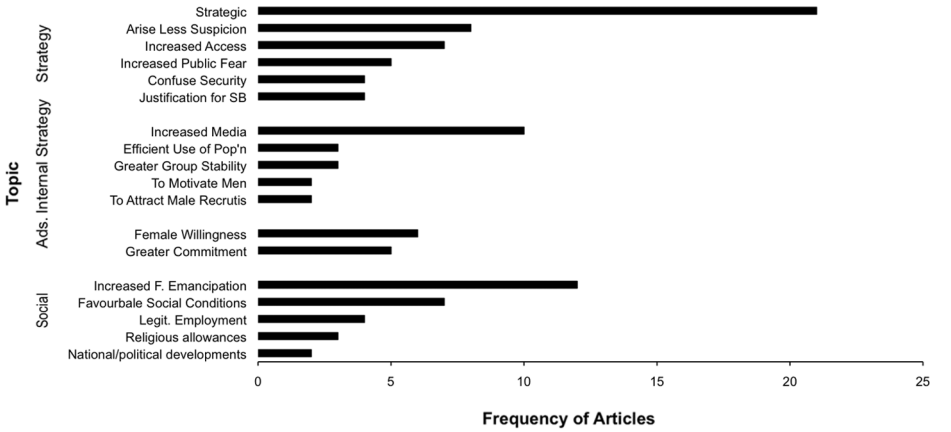

Figure 3. Environmental enablers of female participation in terrorism.

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these strategic advantages are especially salient when considering the use of women as suicide bombers.

The second most referenced category of environmental enablers is Social Enablers. Victor argues that terrorist groups appear to be willing to use women as terrorists only when public attitude is favourable towards this action.[74] In the absence of favourable social conditions, it is unlikely that women will actively participate in a terrorist group, although they may act as sympathisers. Terrorism has to be seen as legitimate for women and justified under current conditions.[75] The research indicates that national and political developments alongside religious allowances or fatwas can dictate the use of women in such circumstances. However, the most favourable social condition for women's inclusion in terrorist groups is equality of gender roles in society, which can often pave the way for equality of gender roles in terrorism, such as in the radical American right-wing groups.

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Other

Two articles did not fit within the above categories. The first examines the criminology of terrorism, noting the importance of gender and social implications when analysing a person's activities. It argues that to understand female suicide terrorism it is necessary to focus on both the offender as a person and on the social conditions giving rise to the opportunity to carry out the attack.[76]

The second study focuses on how to try and counter female terrorism.[77] It was the only study to examine security issues surrounding women's involvement in terrorism and to explore future potential threats from female terrorists. It identifies six counter-terrorism deficiencies that help explain why observers failed to anticipate the emergence and scope of female militancy. Namely their understanding, anticipation, and response to: exploitation, organisational, technological, denial and deception, tactical, and cultural-ideological factors.

Discussion

In this paper, we summarised 54 academic publications that focused on female involvement in extremism. The papers consider a range of areas, branching across historical analyses of female involvement and the societal context in which this occurred, to ideographic studies focused on the roles, motivations, and recruitment of females found to be involved in extremism. In reviewing the papers, we assessed this body of work in terms of the methodological quality of the research and the information found within.

Methodological Quality

Our analysis revealed a reliance on secondary data and a lack of statistical analysis, similar to the field of general terrorism research a few years ago.[78] The combined issues of a shortage of primary data and few statistical analyses raise questions about the reliability of results and conclusions drawn within the available research. It also reveals a lack of growth within the field as studies are not progressing from descriptions of events to the explanations that come with the building and testing of theories. As Silke notes, subject areas that fail to make the transition from

description to explanation are left with gaps in their knowledge base and an uncertainty over the true causes and factors at work.[79]

The problem of a lack of primary research is one not easily addressed by researchers in the field. Research into terrorism is difficult and even potentially dangerous. Even when within a conflict situation, ideal data collection conditions are unlikely to occur. A large proportion of primary research cited within the literature came from media sources, in particular journalist interviews with terrorists.

In contrast, the lack of statistical analysis with existing and future data can be more easily addressed. Since the 1950s, a number of methodologies, ideally suited to qualitative data, have been devised or made easier for researchers to employ.[80] Examples include grounded theory and content analysis[81] for examining interviews and personal accounts (e.g., diaries), log-linear analysis for examining the relationship among categorical or ordinal variables,[82] and sequence analysis methods for examining the life histories of targets.[83] These techniques, devised for qualitative and narrative data such as those found in terrorism research, may be easily applied to (female) terrorism. For example, Jacques and Taylor's study of female terrorism uses grounded theory combined with log-linear modelling to compare and contrast the motivations and recruitment of male and female suicide terrorists.[84] In doing this, multiple case studies and competing hypotheses were combined and tested statistically. Applications such as this can help move studies of terrorism forward from simple descriptions of cases to explanations of what is seen.

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Context

Nearly half of the articles in the current sample were an overview of female involvement in specific conflicts, or in terrorism as a whole. Such exploration and description is useful in the initial stages of a body of research.[85] However, the study of female terrorism is growing and expanding rapidly. With this increase, the field of female terrorism needs to move from a description of events to an explanation in order to avoid the "conceptual mire" that has "bogged down" research on terrorism in general.[86] For this to occur, publications need to move from outlining general details to specifics and theories detailing which women become involved, when they get involved, and how they get involved. Without these details the transition cannot be made between levels of understanding and we are left with gaps in the knowledge base and an uncertainty over the causes of events and the significant factors at work.[87]

The peril of continuing not to focus on producing evidence-based knowledge goes beyond a lack of cumulative development in the field. As the studies of perceptions have revealed, our reliance on outdated and easily digestible stereotypes are hindering our understanding of female terrorism. As terrorist organisations learn about the use and reliance on reporting stereotypes, there remains the opportunity to exploit the cultural gender clichés employed by the media and used by counter-terrorism agencies.[88] The Western media's focus on personal and situational characteristics of female terrorists also disguises the potentially harder to accept religious and nationalistic motivations reported in the Arab press. Research examining (media) perceptions of female terrorism with the goal of highlighting the risks involved with reporting only one side of the motivational story would significantly benefit security organisations and policies by highlighting bias within reporting, and possible errors in terrorist profiles derived solely form Western sources.

An important aspect of exposing the finer details of female involvement includes considering female motivations and recruitment. Within the current research, case studies and interviews with female extremists revealed many differing motivations and recruitment processes. These case studies serve as excellent illustrative pieces, detailing thought processes, aims, and actions. Yet, they also contain a wealth of unused information. The data within these articles have been described or related, but not combined, compared, or contrasted. Yet, this bringing together of data and its analysis across cases is imperative when trying to *explain* female terrorism. By collating information, examining and evaluating it, hypotheses about motivations and recruitment may be tested and old theories adjusted or new ones developed.

The reviewed papers suggest that women also hold a wide range of roles within terrorist organisations, and that there is a progression in the types of roles that women hold. How far women progress along these roles was shown to be partially dependent on the ideology of the group. Thus, social factors, including the context and aim of the conflict, should be taken into consideration when trying to predict women's involvement. One exception to this progression was the role of a suicide bomber. This role does not come as a natural progression from other forms of duty and suggests that female suicide bombers are not just fighters, but tactical deployments (willing or not). Whether this is also the case with men has yet to be investigated using similar analyses.

A number of other areas deserve further investigation. For example, only a small number of the reviewed papers focused on understanding the conditions under which women partake in terrorism. Yet, an understanding of these conditions is necessary to predict when women will become involved in a conflict; and is thus important when devising security and counter-terrorism plans. The available literature contained only one study examining the specific problems that women may pose for counter-terrorism organisations. Given the current increase in the number of female terrorists this is an aspect which has been much neglected within the field. If there are gender-specific aspects of terrorism, then security policies and counter-terrorism plans should incorporate these into their measures.

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