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Authors: Stacey Chamber and Rosalie Fransen

Actor:
Qadims Lumiere School and College

Contributors:
Layout and Design - Abdelazim Saafan and Lauren Mellows

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CASE STUDY

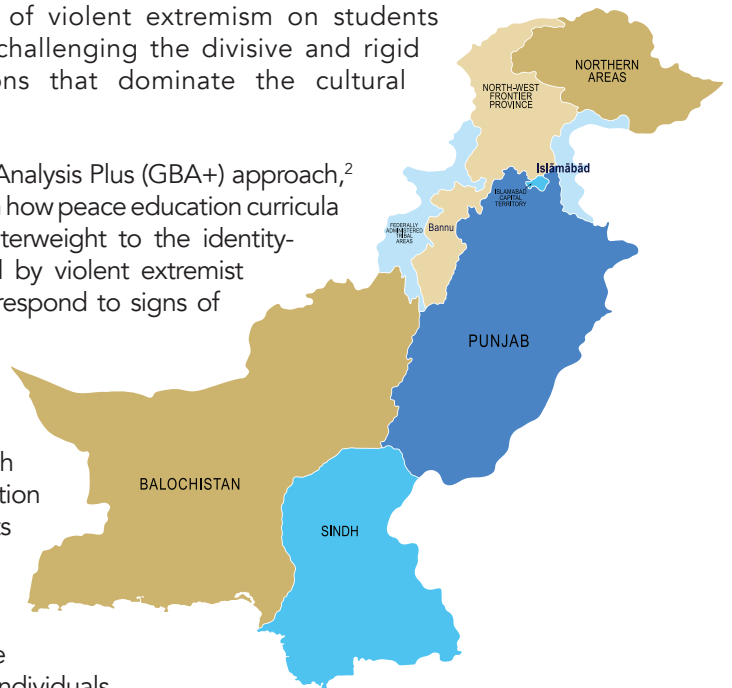
SIGNS OF THE TIMES: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND GENDER IN SHAPING THE CULTURAL MINDSET IN PAKISTAN

A Case Study on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms¹

SUMMARY

Bushra Qadim Hyder, founder and director of the Qadims Lumiere School and College in Peshawar, Pakistan, developed a peace curriculum to promote understanding, acceptance, critical thinking, and open discussion of different ideas. She has partnered with private schools and madrassas to train teachers and integrate peace education into their curricula which has mitigated the impact of violent extremism on students and their parents by challenging the divisive and rigid religious interpretations that dominate the cultural mindset in Pakistan.

Taking a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach,² this case study focuses on how peace education curricula provide a positive counterweight to the identity-based divisions fostered by violent extremist groups in Pakistan and respond to signs of violent extremism in the larger Pakistani culture. It discusses how taking a broad educational approach enables direct intervention with students and parents to prevent their joining violent extremist groups, promoting community resilience rather than stigmatizing individuals.



The structure of Pakistan's education sector encourages division and intolerance between students of different genders, religions, and socio-economic classes, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist actors. Increasingly, Pakistani schools – particularly madrassas and public schools – teach a rigid religious and nationalist ideology. By promoting the primacy of conservative religious identity, they undermine other aspects of human identity and foster exclusion and rejection of the "other" as threatening and inferior. This ideology is reinforced by strict gender norms that assert women's subservience to men.

1. The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) was commissioned by Global Affairs Canada to produce this set of case studies on the role of gender and intersectional identities in countering violent extremism and counterterrorism. For more information or to contact the authors please email info@icanpeacework.org.
2. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical process that provides a rigorous method for the assessment of systemic inequalities, as well as to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and gender diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. More info on the GBA+ approach is accessible [here](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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Education systems that encourage divisions and hierarchies between students of socio-economic, religious, and gender identities create a society vulnerable to capture by violent extremist actors. Structural siloing of identity groups; curricula that promote patriarchal gender stereotypes, assert a singular religion as central to national identity, and erase the experiences of minorities; and teaching methods that eliminate complexity and critical thinking all foster division, inequality, and intolerance.
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Gender inequality is reproduced and deepened by class and religious divisions. In conducting a gender analysis, it is important to take an intersectional approach that considers how socioeconomic status and levels of religious tolerance impact attitudes and beliefs on gender equality.
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Signs of rising extremism are not only observable at the individual level, but they also manifest and can be tracked at the societal level, for instance through changes in fashion, decreased communication and socialization between identity groups, and limited ability to question authority figures. While reacting to individual level changes in dress or religious practice can foment stigma, these indicators should not be disregarded as signs at the societal level.
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Peace education provides a counterweight to identity-based divisions by teaching universal messages about humanity, exposing students to religious and cultural teachings of other communities, encouraging critical thinking and discussion, and incorporating elements of arts and literature.
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Personal, preventative, and restorative approaches - rather than punitive or securitized methods - are central to ethical and culturally sensitive work on early warning signs. Addressing signs of extremism in youth requires opening channels of communication with parents and students, providing positive alternatives to concerns about radicalization, and encouraging discussions with mentors, peers, and networks. Rather than labeling and punishing youth for their religious or cultural thought and practices, such approaches serve to build community resilience to violent extremism and resource those who have higher risk factors.
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 Transforming signs of radicalization and violent extremism necessitates both interventions targeted at **individual attitudinal and behavioral change**, such as discussions and **direct mentoring, and interventions aimed at broader structural change**, such as integrating peace curricula and teacher training across the education system.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Pakistan's national identity has been intertwined with Islam since its independence from British colonial rule in 1947. While initially the country's diverse linguistic, ethnic, and religious minority groups enjoyed tolerance and freedoms, the ascension to power of General Zia-ul-Haq in the late 1970s and early 1980's marked a turning point for the country. Under his rule, Zia-ul-Haq initiated an Islamization process, invoking orthodox, Wahhabi-inspired interpretations of Islam.³ The process included the imposition of a new education policy to prioritize the teaching of Islamic thought and ideology, and the introduction of Hudood Ordinances, a set of laws to criminalize adultery and non-marital sex that have led to the imprisonment of thousands of people – primarily women - for "honor" crimes.⁴ The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought an influx of funds, weapons and fighters from U.S and Arab allies to the country that further fostered radicalization and extremist activity, resulting in the creation of the Taliban and home-grown Islamist militias.⁵

The proliferation of Islamist groups in Pakistan has led to growing popularity of violent extremist ideology, and marginalization of more moderate voices. In the past two years, Pakistan has seen a resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant extremist organization fighting against the Pakistani state and notorious for its brutal attacks on civilians.⁶ The Taliban's return to governance in Afghanistan in August 2021 has energized the TTP's violent insurgency and expanded the potential of the group, deepening links with other militant groups in the region such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Following their return to power, the Taliban released TTP leaders and provided them with continued support including freedom of movement in Afghanistan.⁷

Markers and Myths of the Pakistani Education Sector

In the Pakistani context, the growth of violent extremism is closely linked to the expansion of religious seminaries –

3. Waterman, D. (2014). Saudi Wahhabi Imperialism in Pakistan: History, Legacy, Contemporary Representations and Debates. ([access here](#))

4. Human Rights Watch (HRW)(2006). Pakistan: Proposed Reforms to Hudood Laws Fall Short. ([access here](#)).

5. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2014). Reclaiming the Progressive Past: Pakistani Women's Struggle Against Violence and Extremism. What the Women Say, Brief 10. ([access here](#)).

6. Jadoon, A (2021). The Evolution and Potential Resurgence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. Special Report, the United States Institute of Peace, no 494. ([access here](#)).

7. Mir, A. (2022). After the Taliban's Takeover: Pakistan's TTP Problem. United States Institute of Peace. ([access here](#)).



In the past two years, Pakistan has seen a resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant extremist organization notorious for its brutal attacks on civilians.

or madrassas. Zia-ul-Haq's 1979 education policy offered new economic incentives for opening madrassas, leading to the formation of over 2,000 of them. During the Afghanistan war, madrassas trained terrorist leaders and ideologues, as well as foot soldiers who responded to the call for jihad.⁸ They also provided food and clothing, often attracting poorer students, and functioning as orphanages for children who lost their parents to war. Today, radical madrassas are often supported by foreign donations, such as funding from Islamic philanthropists, religious-political parties, sectarian militant organizations, and charities based in Saudi Arabia and Sunni Arab Gulf states.⁹ Higher government institutions have limited oversight over madrassas and their activities, allowing extremist perspectives that promote hate speech, sectarianism, and militarism to be integrated in curricula unnoticed.¹⁰

Since the 9/11 attacks and growing international attention to terrorism, madrassas have gained a controversial reputation in the West as broadly responsible for fostering militancy and Islamic extremism. Only a minority of madrassas, however, teach extreme forms of Islam: of the 45,000 madrassas in Pakistan today, an estimated 10-15% teach are associated with Wahhabi and Deobandi schools of Islam.¹¹ This number reflects less than 1% of school enrollment in the country as many families send their children to public and private schools, which have expanded in recent decades.¹² There is growing evidence that the notion of a direct link between madrassas and militancy has been largely overstated by the West, and that violent extremist recruits come from a wide variety of educational institutions.^{13 14} Recent studies have found that, beyond madrassas, extremist and divisive

rhetoric is embedded in Pakistan's mainstream public education system. One study cited an association between public education expenditure and terrorism, noting the role of public education curriculum and pedagogy as tools for radicalization.¹⁵ Across all school types, Pakistani students indicate moderate-to-high sympathy for the Taliban.¹⁶ As we will see in forthcoming sections, radicalization in the Pakistani school system is less a function of direct connections between specific schools and Islamic militants, and more of the way in which the system at large produces divisions, inequality and intolerance in Pakistani society.

Divide and Conquer: Education as a Tool for Weaponizing (Gender) Identity

The Pakistani education system, through both its structure and content, drives divisions, inequality, and intolerance between identity groups, creating conditions that leave students vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist actors. Pakistan's primary and secondary education system, which consists of public schools (taught in Urdu), private schools (often taught in English), and madrassas, is structured according to socioeconomic class. Well to-do families send their children to private, English-speaking schools. Children of lower-middle-class families attend state-run public school, and working classes send their children to madrassas, which offer free religious education, meals, and accommodation.¹⁷ While English-speaking schools prepare students for careers and study abroad, madrassa and public-school curricula offer little in the way of valuable economic

8. Khan, A. (2005). The Terrorist Threat and the Policy Response in Pakistan. SIPRI paper 11. Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute. ([access here](#)).
9. Basit, A. (2015). Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization Initiatives. Islamabad Policy Research Initiative (IPRI) Journal XV, no 2, 44-68 ([access here](#)).
10. Email exchange with Bushra Qadim Hyder, February 2022.
11. Singer, P. (2021). Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education, not Jihad. Brookings Institute. ([access here](#)).
12. Andrabi, Tahir; Das, Jishnu; Khwaja, Asim Ijaz; and Zajonc, Tristan. Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data, World Bank ([access here](#)).
13. Hanif, S., Ali, M. H., & Shaheen, F. (2019). Religious Extremism, Religiosity and Sympathy toward the Taliban among Students across Madrassas and Worldly Education Schools in Pakistan. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/09546553.2018.154
14. Nazar, Nazia (2021). Physical Punishment, Acceptance of Violence, Tolerance of Diversity, and School Burnout: A Comparative Study of Three Educational Systems in Pakistan, Abo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland ([access here](#)).
15. Johnston, D, et al. (2016). Countering Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Strategies for Engaging Conservative Muslims. International Center for Religion and Diplomacy.
16. Hanif, S., Ali, M. H., & Shaheen, F. (2019). Religious Extremism, Religiosity and Sympathy toward the Taliban among Students across Madrassas and Worldly Education Schools in Pakistan. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/09546553.2018.154
17. Nazar, N. (2021). Physical Punishment, Acceptance of Violence, Tolerance of Diversity, and School Burnout: A Comparative Study of Three Educational Systems in Pakistan, Abo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland ([access here](#)).

skills.¹⁸ At madrassas, curricula often focus only on rote memorization of religious subjects and forgo teaching of basic skills such as science, math, or geography.¹⁹ As a result, the educational system reproduces conditions of socioeconomic inequality, maintaining a vertically stratified status quo that conditions madrassa and public school children to accept their lower status in the class structure.²⁰ The siloed system leads to children only meeting and socializing with peers that have the same or similar social class, gender, and religious identities and backgrounds, and allows for little exchange or interaction across diverse identity groups and campuses.²¹ This has implications for participation in violent extremism, with growing evidence of the correlation between socio-political inequality and radicalization.²² It also has consequences for gender equality: gender discrimination in Pakistan has been found to be more pronounced in lower socio-economic classes, with higher status women less likely to be discriminated against.²³

The sheer variety of religious schools has strengthened perceptions of religious differences and resulted in Muslims not socializing with one another or praying in each other's mosques.

The educational system also contributes to increased religious intolerance in Pakistani society. The sheer variety of religious schools has strengthened perceptions of religious differences and resulted in Muslims not socializing with one another or praying in each other's mosques. The curricula of the madrassas that teach an ultraconservative version of Islam position Islamic religious identity as superior to other aspects of human identity, generating exclusion and rejection of other religious, national, and ethnic groups as threatening and inferior. The content of some radical madrassa textbooks targets certain ethnic groups, glorifies war against India and other non-Muslim countries, and depicts the creation of Pakistan as a "jihad against the infidels."²⁴ ²⁵ Divisive rhetoric can also be found in Pakistan's national public school curriculum, which highlights Islam as central to Pakistani identity, contains biases and incendiary language by, for instance, condemning Christianity and other non-Muslim

religions, and despite recent reform efforts does not accurately represent Pakistan's diverse communities.²⁶ ²⁷ Middle school social studies curricula encouraged students to develop "aspiration for jihad" and sacrifice their lives for it.²⁸ The potential of religious intolerance to lead to radicalization is exacerbated by students' limited knowledge about religion, lack of critical thinking skills, and personal grievances or experiences of injustice - often as a result of their lower class status. Like with socio-economic class, low religious tolerance, such as beliefs that non-Muslims should have fewer rights than Muslims, correlated with negative views of gender equality, such as believing that boys are more intelligent than girls and that women should follow what their husbands decide.²⁹ Low religious tolerance and negative attitudes towards gender equality are both more pronounced in madrassas and public schools.³⁰

While there are a few co-educational private schools in Pakistan, the majority of schools are segregated by gender and reinforce patriarchal norms in their teaching.³¹ The number of female-only madrassas is growing: in 2009, there were already 1,900 registered all-female madrassas, making up 15% of the total madrassas in the country, a marked increase from the 1970s.³² All-female Deobandi madrassas espouse conservative social values, particularly in terms of gender relations, and emphasize differences between women and men. Curricula teach young women to be mothers, to transmit Islamist values to their children, and to act with subservience to their husbands.³³ A review of Deobandi madrassa curriculum reveals they use rigid and selective interpretations of religious texts to inculcate an ultra-conservative version of Muslim womanhood that enforces traditional gender norms, teaching women that their power lies in their submission to men.³⁴ Girls are taught their defense of their husband, wealth and property, kindness to their family, and service to their husband will bring them happiness.³⁵ Deobandi madrassas also impose restrictions on women's movement: girls are prohibited from going for walks outside the madrassa and learn specific physical movements of prayer, teaching female bodies to conform to conservative Islamic, societal expectations. Beyond madrassas, Pakistani public school textbooks are dominated by a male-centric perspective, with the vast majority of historical figures and personalities mentioned being male.³⁶ Women are shown in a gendered context, portrayed as helpless and pious figures supporting their husbands.³⁷ By

18. Butt, T. (Jul-Dec 2012). Social and Political Role of Madrassa: Perspectives of Religious Leaders in Pakistan, *South Asian Studies*, vol 27, no 2, 387-407 ([access here](#)).

19. Ibid.

20. Ullah, H. and Ali, J. (July 2018). Schools and Families: Reproduction of Class Hierarchies through Education in Pakistan, *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, vol 10, issue 3, 86-105 ([access here](#)).

21. United States Institute of Peace (2020). The Current Situation in Pakistan. ([access here](#)).

22. Franc, Renata and Pavlovic, Tomislav (2021). Inequality and Radicalisation - Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2021.1974845 ([access here](#)).

23. Delavande, A. and Basit, Z. (2013). Gender Discrimination and Social Identity: Experimental Evidence from Urban Pakistan, FRB New York Staff Report, No 593 ([access here](#)).

24. Email exchange with Bushra Qadim Hyder, April 2022.

25. Nazar, N. (2021). Physical Punishment, Acceptance of Violence, Tolerance of Diversity, and School Burnout: A Comparative Study of Three Educational Systems in Pakistan, Abo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland ([access here](#)).

26. Syed, S., Saeed, L., and Martin, R.P. (2015). Causes and Incentives for Terrorism in Pakistan, *Journal of Applied Security Research*, vol 10, issue 2, 181-206 ([access here](#)).

27. Irfan, A. (2021). Pakistan Schools to Re-Open Amid a Controversial New Curriculum Rollout: How the new school curriculum in Pakistan may hurt the very things it is trying to fix, *New Lines Magazine* ([access here](#)).

28. Bloom, M. and Horgan, J. (2019). *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Cornell University Press. ([access here](#)).

29. Nazar, N. (2021). Physical Punishment, Acceptance of Violence, Tolerance of Diversity, and School Burnout: A Comparative Study of Three Educational Systems in Pakistan, Abo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland ([access here](#)).

30. Ibid.

31. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2014). Reclaiming the Progressive Past: Pakistani Women's Struggle Against Violence and Extremism. What the Women Say, Brief 10. ([access here](#)).

32. Ibid. and Butt, R. All Female Madrassas Boom in Pakistan (2009). *The Guardian*. ([access here](#)).

33. Ibid.

34. Farooq, M. (2016). Disciplining the Feminism: Girls' Madrasa Education in Pakistan ([access here](#)).

35. Ibid.

36. Masud, H. (2017). Curriculum, Textbooks and Gender Stereotypes: The case of Pakistan, *Education International* ([access here](#)).

37. Ibid.

reproducing gender hierarchies, socioeconomic class divisions, and religious intolerance, the Pakistani educational system shapes a society where identity groups and genders are divided and in conflict, rather than one guided by unity, diversity, and equality. This provides fertile ground for activity by violent extremist movements who capitalize on identity-based divisions in their recruitment and retention of members, fostering a sense of “us vs. them” to legitimize acts of violence against their targets.

By reproducing gender hierarchies, socioeconomic class divisions, and religious intolerance, the Pakistani educational system shapes a society where identity groups and genders are divided and in conflict, rather than one guided by unity, diversity, and equality.

The origin of madrasa education reveals a different story about the potential of religious education, one of unity and cross-cultural exchange instead of division. The al-uffah madrasa, the first in the Madinah, offered students from different cultural traditions the opportunity to live near a teacher and learn a variety of skills, knowledge, and practices which they later contributed to shape the religious and political movements of their societies.³⁸ During medieval times, madrassas facilitated an exchange of cultural knowledge between the European and Islamic worlds. In fact, some early madrassas brought together students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, emphasizing messages of fraternity and unity in Islam. In Pakistan, madrassas also provide spaces of refuge for members of marginalized identity groups. Founded by a transgender woman, Pakistan’s first transgender-only madrasa offers a place for transgender people – a highly stigmatized and impoverished community in Pakistan - to worship and learn about Islam.³⁹ To give an example from another context, Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia called pesantren are run by both female and male Islamic scholars (ulama), and promote moderate, peaceful, and pluralistic interpretations of Islam that proclaim gender equality as a foundational basis of Islamic teachings.⁴⁰ Over the past two decades, women ulama have begun collaborating with Indonesian women’s rights activists to use Islamic tradition to improve the economic, social, and psychological condition of women in Indonesian society.⁴¹ Religious education, thus, can be a significant force for unity and equality, and a tool to challenge extremist interpretations of religious texts.

Warning Signs of a Divided Society

Signs of divisions and growing extremist ideology are visible in Pakistan’s larger culture, society, and mindset, not only among religious groups but across all social classes including professional, educated elite. Often, these societal signs play out on the terrain of women’s bodies: Pakistani women used to wear the traditional chador of various colors, but the burka emerged around two decades ago and has increasingly become a symbol of religiosity. While religious women, including those who support violent extremist groups wear the burka, many other women have started to wear it as a fashion symbol. In this way, elements from violent extremism seep into the larger culture, blurring the lines for what constitutes radicalization. Religious leaders and teachers are more likely to dress in accordance with their identity group. The dress code for younger children in school has changed as well, with children being asked to wear trousers instead of shorts. Modern textbook illustrations more frequently display girls wearing headscarves. It is essential to note that dressing religiously or conservatively is not inherently extremist, and equating dress with extremism is a fallacy that can lead to stigma at the individual level. However, observing such broad fashion trends at the cultural level can serve as a proxy indicator for tracking rising levels of extremist ideology in a society.

While typical work on early warning signs focuses on individual signs of radicalization, witnessing broader societal changes enables the tracking of rising extremist ideology at the cultural level.

In addition to signs of growing influence of extremist groups manifested in fashion, Pakistan has seen a marked decrease in communication and socialization among different identity groups, with people criticizing others as “un-Islamic.”⁴² Distinctions between mosques are sharper and more amplified, and if one makes the mistake of entering the “wrong mosque”, he or she is at risk of being the recipient of threats or attacks.⁴³ Pakistan’s cultural mindset is increasingly informed by traditional gender norms and religious dictates, which has further entrenched division between identity groups and genders. Today, boys are more likely to be recruited by violent extremist groups than girls, who live with cultural and religious restrictions on their mobility. However, girls raised in a home environment that emphasizes discussion of religious ideology are at elevated risk of recruitment.⁴⁴ While typical work on early

38. Butt, M. and Khalid, M. (2017). The Role of Madrasa Education in Inter-Cultural and Cross-Cultural Exchange, Bulletin of Education and Research, vol 39, no 1, 61-74 ([access here](#)).

39. Pakistan’s first transgender-only madrasa breaks barriers (2021). Al Jazeera ([access here](#)).

40. Holmes, M. and Franssen, R. (2021). Heiress to the Prophet: Women Religious Scholars Transforming Violent Extremism in Indonesia. A Case Study on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) ([access here](#)).

41. Ibid.

42. Email exchange with Bushra Qadim Hyder, February 2022.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid, April 2022.

warning signs focuses on individual signs of radicalization, witnessing these broader societal changes enables the tracking of rising extremist ideology at the cultural level.⁴⁵

Qadims Lumiere School and College

Bushra Qadim Hyder is the founder and director of the Qadims Lumiere School and College in Peshawar, Pakistan.⁴⁶ She teaches boys and girls from ages 3-16 and works with both male and female teachers. In 2009 she witnessed the impact of violent extremism and trauma on her students. She observed, for instance, how girls in her class began reenacting violence by tearing limbs off of their dolls. In response, Hyder was inspired to develop a peace curriculum.⁴⁷ It was designed to address historical prejudices, socio cultural biases and beliefs and celebrates diversity. To provide a positive alternative to the divisions Pakistani violent extremist groups have created between identity groups, Hyder's approach focuses on critical thinking to foster a pluralistic educational environment which promotes questioning and open discussion of ideas. By drawing on examples from history and daily life, she helps students understand how a problem can be perceived in different ways. She encourages them to approach problem solving as a mutual process of analyzing, strategizing, and evaluating different options.

[Hyder's] teaching emphasizes the potential of religion to broaden one's mind, the importance of critical thinking, religious debate, and asking questions.

To transcend the identity and gender-based divisions that strengthen and are reinforced by violent extremist groups, Hyder's teaching incorporates universal messages about humanity. Rather than questioning religious dictates directly, her teaching emphasizes the potential of religion to broaden one's mind, the importance of critical thinking, religious debate, and asking questions, and the focus on a practical application of the Qur'an. She introduces the topic of gender and raises awareness about gender roles.⁴⁸ The peace curriculum exposes students to the religious and cultural teachings of other communities. The curriculum includes anger management skills, lessons on developing empathy and managing negative emotions, discussion of human rights and religious freedom, and the topics of diversity, tolerance, and acceptance. It also touches on literature for peace, with renowned writers, poets and columnists reading excerpts from their writings about peace and tolerance to students. A key component of the peace curriculum is the recognition of multiple identities, embracing shared identities as well as differences. The inclusion of diverse perspectives within



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literature, the arts, and religion supports the values of respect, empathy, and critical thinking.⁴⁹

The Impact of Pluralistic Teaching

Hyder has started partnering with other private schools and madrassas to integrate peace education into the curriculum. Based on her trusted relationships with educators, she has since trained 240 teachers from ten schools and five madrassas in the peace curriculum, reaching out to 3,000 students annually. While she has invited public schools to join them in select activities, the set curriculum of public schools restricts the time and openness of teachers to adopt her curriculum. When students from private schools and madrassas come together, they engage in art competitions, peace theaters, debates, competitions, and sports which foster trust and communication between them.⁵⁰

Teachers who have applied the peace curriculum report more creativity, understanding of religion, responsibility, and friendships among their students.⁵¹ One teacher observed how she taught a student to control his anger and vengeful thoughts through the peace curriculum. When this student was approached by a local terrorist group and given material to persuade him to join, he decided not to do so because he learned that taking revenge was not a solution. Today, he provides scholarships to students who have lost a parent to terrorist attacks.

Hyder maintains close relationships with students and parents and encourages them to take ownership of the process of building social cohesion together. Recognizing the influence of mothers with their children, she engaged them from the beginning, inviting them to speak to her classes on the impact of terrorism so her students could learn how others had been affected by hatred and intolerance.⁵² For

45. Interview with Bushra Qadim Hyder, January 2022.

46. Facebook page for Qadims Lumiere School and College ([access here](#)).

47. Hyder, B. (2015). Fear and Hope in Peshawar. Inclusive Security ([access here](#)).

48. Interview with Bushra Qadim Hyder, January 2022.

49. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2017). Education, Identity, and Rising Extremism. From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equality and Pluralism (PREP). ([access here](#)).

50. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2017). Bushra Qadeem Hyder on Fighting Extremism with Education in Pakistan. ([access here](#)).

51. Interview with Bushra Qadim Hyder, January 2022.

52. Ibid.

example, one mother lost her son who served as a doctor in the Pakistan army and was killed by extremists. She wanted to share her story of trauma with the students to illustrate the negative effects of violent extremism.

The Role of Trust and Networks in Detecting Extremism

In 2017 Hyder heard reports from older students in her school that several boys wanted to join the call for jihad to support the Rohingya in Myanmar. She asked their mothers if they had observed any of these signs, as they are often well positioned to detect changes in their children including emotions, withdrawal, or attending mosque more regularly with a new group of friends.⁵³ and when they had, Hyder invited the mothers and youth to a meeting. They discussed the Rohingya crisis at length and the meaning of words like "martyr" and "jihad." Hyder reviewed the different stages of jihad in Islam, using examples from the Prophet Muhammad's life, and verses from the Qur'an.⁵⁴ She argued that becoming a martyr may be an easy path but results in death, whereas staying alive and doing good work is the true jihad; it's difficult but more beneficial to Islam. The students stayed. Building capacity for critical thinking and reasoning and illustrating a positive alternative to masculine concepts of duty and honor, helped the boys to hold discussions with their peers.⁵⁵

[Hyder] argued that becoming a martyr may be an easy path but results in death, whereas staying alive and doing good work is the true jihad; it's difficult but more beneficial to Islam.

International counterterrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions focused on early warning signs have, in some cases, asked local actors to collect and report information on fellow community members or family members to prevent their participation in violent extremist groups. Such interventions have been subject to growing criticism, particularly regarding their engagement of women in securitized roles and as intelligence-gatherers.⁵⁶ As a backlash to this approach, critics have characterized women-led civil society's engagement with violent extremism as top-down and "instrumentalized" by the global CT and CVE agenda.⁵⁷ Hyder's approach to early warning signs, however, is much different: through her knowledge of the local context she operates in, she has established trusted relationships with students, teachers, and parents, who approach her with their concerns. She can then engage them in ways that introduce and harness positive approaches to extremism, rooted in culture and religious traditions. Her approach prioritizes the creation of networks of parents and students, equipped



The peace curriculum builds capacity for critical thinking and reasoning among students and illustrates a positive alternative to masculine concepts of duty and honor.

to raise their voices against violent extremism. The peace curriculum is intended to build bridges and open channels of communication among students of public, private schools and madrassas as well as schools belonging to minority groups. People who understand the curriculum and the role it can play are now asking to join the network. Hyder's initiatives which originate from her own assessment of her community's needs demonstrate that work on signs can be both locally-driven and avoid securitizing and stereotyping women's roles.

Hyder's affiliation with PAIMAN Alumni Trust provides another example of the role of women's networks in noticing and addressing signs. Using the format of mothers' peace groups, they have educated and sensitized 15,000 female community members on the Quran and signs of violent extremism, building trust and connections between the women. Many of the teachers with whom she has worked have joined as well. The peace groups are able to contribute to community reconciliation, trauma-healing and stabilization during difficult and uncertain times in their area, due to the trust that they build within their communities. They work with school management committees, teachers, and parents in disseminating peaceful messages and organizing student peace groups in madrassas and schools.⁵⁸ Rather than stigmatizing individual youth for displaying "at-risk" behavior, Hyder and the women's networks take a broad educational approach, akin to public health preventive models, to resource students with knowledge and skills and increase their resilience to violent extremism.

Combatting violent extremism in the education sector requires not only increased resources but broader reform through peace curricula which teaches the knowledge and skills of peace, resilience, equal rights, and pluralism (PREP).⁵⁹ Hyder's approach demonstrates the impact of individual attitudinal and behavioral change through discussions and direct mentoring of students, as well as the need for structural change through the integration of peace curriculum and teacher training across various schools. Funding and the support of international donors can sustain advocacy for the inclusion of peace education, while local community networks underpin and strengthen the need for such education to shape cultural change.

53. Qadeem, M. (2018). Engendering Extremism: Women Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan ([access here](#))

54. Interview with Bushra Qadim Hyder, January 2022.

55. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2017). Pakistani peacebuilder, Bushra Hyder, fighting off call for jihad for Rohingya. ([access here](#)).

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