



التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

PSYCHOLOGICAL VULNERABILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS' INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Researcher: Nuwayyir Alqahtani
Studies and Research Department



DRIVERS OF TERRORISM

A monthly publication issued by the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition

General Supervisor

Maj. Gen. Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Moghedi

Secretary-General of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition

Editor-in-Chief

Ashour Ibrahim Aljuhani

Head of Studies and Research Department

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of IMCTC.



PSYCHOLOGICAL VULNERABILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS' INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

**RESEARCHER: NUWAYYIR ALQAHTANI
STUDIES AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**

Since the onset of terrorism, intellectual endeavors have converged to examine this phenomenon, delving into the concealed reasons and implicit motivations, whether direct or indirect, behind the rise of terrorist organizations and the involvement of individuals in these organizations. Fair-minded people align on the caution against generalization, recognizing that a specific cause or motive does not necessarily precipitate terrorism. They also agree that prevention is better than cure. Consequently, studies related to examining terrorism did not confine themselves to presenting recommendations only, they also focused on preventing anything that would drive individuals towards terrorism or render them vulnerable to embracing terrorist ideologies.

To successfully discourage any deviated thoughts or behaviors, it is crucial to harmonize such efforts by promoting the mental health and personal growth of individuals within the collective mindset. These collective minds, influenced by humanity, play a significant role in guiding millions of people, whether such guidance leans towards positive or negative outcomes.

As a result, numerous studies have emerged to delve into the psychological motivations behind terrorist behavior or to examine the factors that increase the likelihood of individuals joining terrorist organizations. The scientific exploration of terrorist behavior and its connection to the psychology and personality of individuals dates back to the publication of the inaugural book titled 'Psychology and Terrorism' by Frederick Hacker in 1979. Governments worldwide have actively sought to develop a comprehensive psychological and scientific interpreting of terrorist behavior. Notably, psychologist Jerrold Post contributed a psychological explanatory model for such conduct. The psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive, and realistic schools of thought have each progressed scientific interpretations, offering a framework to extract the fundamental idea that underlies terrorist behavior¹.

A less explored aspect of indirect motivations for joining terrorist organizations involves "psychological vulnerability". As an individual's psychological resilience weakens, there is a shift in mental balance, prompting a critical examination of imposed ideas to assess their alignment with reason and instinct. Conversely, weakened psychological resilience and entry into a phase of psychological vulnerability disrupt an individual's interaction with ideas. Thinking and psychological vulnerability are both mutually inclusive; negative thinking contributes to psychological vulnerability, and psychological vulnerability leads to the emergence of negative thoughts.

The risk associated with psychological vulnerability, as explored in this study, lies in the susceptibility of individuals in such mental state to embrace terrorist ideologies. Individuals experiencing psychological vulnerability are easily swayed by imposed ideas, lacking a robust sense of self-esteem and worthiness. Consequently, psychologically vulnerable individuals become susceptible targets for terrorist organizations, as acts of self-sacrifice in suicide operations require individuals who have diminished their own sense of identity. This manipulation is orchestrated through collective training aimed at systematically dismantling the resilient barrier that prevents the individual from assimilation into terrorist groups, ultimately leading to a state of self-denial².

This study, therefore, aims to shed light on the phenomenon of psychological vulnerability and its interaction with cognitive processes. It also outlines the root causes and effective strategies for the prevention of psychological vulnerability. The study articulates the connection and inherent risk of psychological vulnerability as an indirect cause contributing to individual susceptibility to cognitive deviations and potential involvement in terrorist organizations.



Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual definition, including denotative and connotative meaning, holds cognitive significance as it serves to distill key truths that assist both the researcher and the reader in understanding the study. Serving as a link between the researcher and the topic of study, it establishes a foundation for encapsulating relevant information. Our first step is to highlight the fundamental concepts presented throughout this study:

Psychological Vulnerability: This term is a modern concept in Psychology, classified as a form of mental disorder that drives an individual to show state of weakness, debility, and heightened susceptibility to psychological breakdown when confronted with crises and life challenges in various forms.³ It presents a challenge to numerous individuals, plunging them into negative thoughts, emotional turbulence, and psychological crises, leading them to seek solace in others to compensate for their vulnerability, and tendency towards favoring indifference in all aspects of their lives. Consequently, it makes them susceptible to frustration even in the face of seemingly straightforward challenges.⁴

Psychological vulnerability, a contemporary term in Psychology, is defined as a form of mental disorder characterized by an exaggerated susceptibility and rapid breakdown when confronting diverse challenges. Individuals experiencing psychological vulnerability tend to perceive most challenges as threats rather than integral aspects of their lives. They view such challenges as exceptions requiring extraordinary measures, resulting in heightened stress and fear. Individuals with this disposition may overlook the reality that life consists of tests rather than a constant state of complete happiness or comfort. Thus, this emotional disturbance leads them to believe that their problems exceed their capacity to endure, promoting a sense of collapse and leaving them entrapped in negative thoughts. They attribute these thoughts more significance than their actual magnitude, intensifying their exhaustion and psychological pressure.⁵

► Terrorist Organizations:

Organizations are defined as entities comprising a group of individuals working together in an organized manner to achieve a common goal under the name of the (Organization)⁶. Such entities may consist of one or more individuals gathering to achieve a specific purpose.⁷

Terrorism: The term 'terrorism' is derived from the Arabic verb "رهب" (lit, rahab), which means 'to fear'.⁸

Linguistically, terrorism is defined as the use of intimidation and actions aimed at undermining security in its broader sense, with the objective of achieving specific interests.

Moreover, from a Political-Sociology perspective, terrorism is defined as "any human behavior inclined toward the use of coercive force, including compulsion, physical harm, and the illegitimate use of weapons, as well as traditional and modern torture techniques that violate fundamental human rights recognized by divine laws and international treaties in managing human relations."⁹

Terrorism, on one hand, may be an 'action' and a 'reaction', directed in both cases at a specific group or individuals with the intention of instilling fear and panic. On the other hand, the party targeted by the act of terrorism may not be the main target per se, but rather a tool to affect another party, compelling that other party to yield to the will of the terrorist. The targeted party here is typically the weakest link, while the other party (the main focus) possesses greater strength that makes terrorist organizations avoid direct confrontation with it¹⁰.

Thinking: This term is linguistically derived from the Arabic root "فكر", which conveys the notion of 'engaging in reflection about something'¹¹. As Ibn Faris clarifies, it involves the heart's contemplation about a particular matter¹². Hence, the Arabic verb "فكر" encompasses all contemplative actions and thoughts that traverse the mind.

Thought: Refers to the mental engagement with intellectual matters, encompassing cognitive dimensions independent of subjective objectivity. It can be contemplated in its intrinsic nature, irrespective of its epistemological dimension, as illustrated by Descartes' cogito, affirming self-awareness as a precursor to acknowledging the external world. Alternatively, it can be perceived as an awareness of all occurrences within or beyond ourselves, or construed as a domain comprising perception, understanding, and judgment of things. In these various contexts, thought goes beyond emotions, sentiments, and instincts within its conceptual framework.¹³

Negative: As a noun, it is attributed to the concept of inactivity or dormancy, contrasting with taking a positive response or stance. The term is employed to describe an action as 'negative' when it culminates in failure or negativity¹⁴.

Negative Thinking: The mental activity that involves perceiving, understanding, and judging things in a manner that leads to failure and negativity.



Symptoms of Psychological Vulnerability¹⁵:

► Psychological Symptoms:

- **Anxiety, tension, and emotional instability:** Elevated levels of anxiety, tension, and exaggerated emotional reactions are indicative of an individual's psychological vulnerability. This may manifest as crying easily.
- **Low self-confidence and diminished self-esteem:** Individuals experiencing psychological vulnerability often perceive themselves as inferior to others and incapable of fulfilling various responsibilities. They constantly rely on support from others and seek constant emotional energy from those they are attached to.
- **Loss of passion:** There is a decreased sense of pleasure or enjoyment after accomplishing any task or achieving success. Moreover, individuals grappling with psychological vulnerability tend to exhibit procrastination, frequent complaints, and over exaggeration. Their behaviors are marked by indecision, and they often experience mood swings, easily saddened, quickly attached to people and influenced by their words.

► Physical Symptoms

The physical symptoms associated with psychological vulnerability include throat constriction, chest tightness, increased heart rate, and gastrointestinal disturbances. Individuals experiencing psychological vulnerability may also exhibit general physical fatigue and exhaustion even when undertaking simple tasks at home or work.

As for the causes of psychological vulnerability, the personality of an individual is influenced by two equally significant factors: the internal (related to the individual) and the external (related to the external environment or society). Understanding these internal and external factors is crucial for preventing or addressing psychological vulnerability. They are categorized as follows:

First: Internal Causes Related to the Individual

- **Social Isolation and Distancing Characterized by Lack of Social Engagement**

Undoubtedly, one of the key reasons that enhances mental strength and resilience is leading a normal life and actively participating in social interactions. Social

engagement fosters a person's cognitive development, enriches experiences, aids in navigating interpersonal relationships, enhances understanding of diversity, promotes acceptance of different perspectives, and facilitates effective dialogue. Embracing social life contributes significantly to building an individual's confidence and psychological resilience, refining their character in the process.

- **Exaggeration of Problems and Ordinary Events**

It is evident in a psychological process known as 'pain catastrophizing'. When individuals face challenges, they succumb to an overwhelming emotional state, perceiving their problems as insurmountable and feeling helpless. The language used to describe these issues tends to be excessively negative, far surpassing the actual scale of the problem. These exaggerated descriptions, confined to their imagination, not only amplify their distress but also contribute to a sense of spiritual devastation, complete psychological exhaustion, a feeling of being lost, and an ultimate loss of the ability to resist, resulting in surrender and collapse.¹⁶

- **Negative Thinking**

Negative thinking frequently arises during the initial phases of learning and biological development, as children inherit cognitive traits from their parents and the surrounding society, which is known as biological readiness. Individuals are inherently predisposed to be logical and rational, utilizing language and symbols as tools for thought. Rational behavior endures because of internal dialogue and logical thoughts. Conversely, irrational behavior persists due to repetitive internal dialogues within an individual. The ongoing deterioration of mental and behavioral health, backed by internal self-talk, is influenced by external conditions, events surrounding the individual, their perception of these events, cognitive constructs, attitudes, and interactions.¹⁷

- **Overthinking**

Overthinking, also known as excessive thinking, involves constant and continuous contemplation that causes anxiety and stress for individuals. It gives rise to adverse emotions like fear and unease, resulting in a range of mental and physical difficulties.¹⁸

Exploring the causes and effects of overthinking, most of them are associated with factors that make a person psychologically vulnerable. These factors include things like social isolation, detachment from social participation, engagement in erroneous and negative thinking patterns, self-flagellation, dwelling on the past or future, and a decline in innovation and creativity, culminating in a loss of self-confidence.



- **Yielding to emotional and reactive influences:** It leads to a lasting lack of self-confidence and an enduring feeling of helplessness in individuals. The strength of one's personality and rational thinking significantly influences self-assurance. A strong and rational personality reflects positively on one's thought processes, while a weak and unstable personality renders an individual easy to negative and pessimistic thoughts.¹⁹
- **Frustration:** Frustration is the emotional response to setbacks and feelings of insufficiency resulting from obstacles in reaching one's goals or desires. It represents a psychological condition that contributes to mental vulnerability. Certain theories propose that terrorism may emerge from political, social, and psychological frustration. Hence, this frustration may propel individuals towards participating in terrorist activities. Frustration induces a sense of discontent in individuals, motivating some towards engaging in terrorist activities. Alternatively, it amplifies the likelihood of aggressive reactions, a vulnerability exploited by terrorist organizations that demonstrate an understanding of an individual's state of frustration to encourage a shift in that state through violence, provoking provocative images by drawing on primitive and illogical connections between various elements.
- However, as previously mentioned, not all individuals may exhibit aggressive responses or engage in terrorist behaviors.²⁰
- **Surrendering to self-doubt:** When an individual succumbs to self-doubt following certain events or challenging situations that create a negative impact, often influenced by interactions with family and society, such as frequent criticism, mockery, bullying, or unfavorable comparisons with peers in the same age group or field.²¹ Experiencing such events is a universal occurrence, and it's natural to be moderately affected, facing negative emotions in response. However, if these feelings persist and evolve into a continual preoccupation, a recurring topic of conversation, and a source of ongoing distress, it can result in a decline in psychological resilience, a weakening of character, and becoming ensnared in self-doubt.
- **Ignorance of the significance of positive thinking:** Lack of awareness regarding the significance of positive thinking and the resulting emergence of negative mental attitudes.

Second: External Causes:

- **Engaging in inappropriate parenting behaviors:**

This arises when parenting becomes a source of conflicts between parents and children as the parents endeavor to guide, discipline, and impart values to their children. In the quest to establish a system that their children follow, some prevalent and improper practices include subjecting children to psychological and physical mistreatment, resorting to violence, coercing them into activities they do not wish to pursue, depriving them of recreational activities, and using offensive and hurtful language, as well as engaging in bullying.²² Further, neglecting significant aspects of raising children in families is considered wrong in educational practices. For example, when families prioritize obedience in children, regardless of the methods used, like resorting to violence, intimidation, or humiliation, it indicates improper parenting. Also, overlooking the development of children's personalities alongside academic achievements is a big risk unless parents understand that education is most effective when it contributes to a well-rounded personality, shaping behaviors in practical ways. Coercive practices in daily family life, aimed at refinement and exemplary upbringing, often have the opposite effect.²³

- **Engaging in negative thinking patterns:** Factors within the immediate environment, such as family, school, and community, have the potential to shape an individual. Continuous exposure to negative discussions and thought processes within one's close community can lead the individual to adopt similar negative thinking patterns. As outlined in the process of negative thinking, external conditions, events, and negative conversations surrounding the individual contribute to nourishing irrational thinking and keeping it persistent. This continual disruption of an individual's mental and behavioral well-being is influenced by external conditions and events, molding the individual's behavior and perception through their cognitive construction, attitudes, and interactions with these factors.²⁴



Interrelationship between Psychological Vulnerability and Involvement in Terrorist Organizations:

Motivations for terrorism can be divided into two categories: innate and acquired. Innate motivations are those passed down through genetics, not necessitating the individual

to consciously learn or acquire them through activity or practice. Innate motivation includes factors that push a person toward natural, inherited goals, predetermined by their nature and ingrained in their nervous system; hence termed innate impulses. Acquired motivations can be classified into three types:

- **First type:** A person develops these motivations through daily experiences and social interactions, irrespective of the civilization they belong to, such as social motivation. These motivations are considered universal and fundamental social tendencies, including the human inclination to live in groups and the natural tendency to connect with others, participating in their activities.²⁵
- **Second type:** Civilizational social motivations that are cultivated by certain civilizations and are reinforced within their cultural contexts. These motivations, such as the drive for control, possessiveness, and aggression, may be nurtured in specific societies while being less encouraged or absent in others.²⁶
- **Third type:** Individual social motivations include personal inclinations, emotions, and tendencies. Psychological orientations, acquired and relatively stable, shape an individual's feelings and behaviors towards specific subjects. These inclinations involve judgments of acceptance or rejection, such as biases toward one group over another or adherence to certain ideologies, principles, and social systems. Furthermore, an individual's own self can be the subject of psychological orientations, like self-love, self-respect, or resentment. These orientations play a crucial role in influencing an individual's feelings and behaviors, contributing significantly to their overall experience.²⁷ This final motivation is the one through which we will identify the impact of psychological vulnerability on involvement in terrorist organizations, considering several points:

► Interrelationship between the psychological aspect and the ways of thinking and their interaction with individuals' behaviors:

Albert Ellis, a pioneer in the field, introduced the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) theory. His early career involved psychoanalysis, and he later transitioned to psychotherapeutic writing, particularly focusing on the causes of mental disorders in 1962. Most of his writings emphasized guiding patients or those seeking psychological services directly. Ellis's theory is founded on the interconnection of an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, creating an intricate cognitive structure. He suggests that to comprehend the reasons

behind an individual's self-behavior, a thorough analytical understanding of how people develop their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of daily situations is essential.²⁸ Ellis attributes behavior to the feeling of the people, whether in balanced or disordered actions. This means that psychological factors can make someone more likely to do crimes in general and terrorist acts in particular. Top of Form.²⁹ Moreover, if someone is mentally vulnerable, they might join terrorist organizations and get ready to do terrorist acts.

Nevertheless, claiming that extremism and terrorism solely stem from mental illnesses and disorders without any distinction is both inaccurate and risky. If we assume that various forms of extremism are merely symptoms of psychological illness, it is a wrong notion; hence, this assumption would lead us to believe that encountering this phenomenon always involves a psychological condition, which is not entirely accurate in reality. Most mentally ill individuals have no association with extremist choices or terrorist organizations. Thinking this way is risky because it might make people believe that joining extremism and terrorism always involves obvious strange behaviors. This could make us miss cases where people are mentally fine and hide those who plan and spread extremist ideas and terrorist agendas. Moreover, it might deflect legal and ethical responsibility from these terrorists for the crimes they commit, attributing their actions solely to their mental illness.³⁰

The lack of a direct causal relationship between mental illness and extremism or terrorism does not allow to identify whether mental illnesses as primary vulnerability factors or not. These illnesses don't always lead to violent choices, but they might make it more likely for someone to make such choices. Some affiliations can serve as a psychological outlet for the tensions caused by crises. They may offer a kind of satisfaction for certain unhealthy feelings, moving from imagination to trying them out in real life through exposure to extremist content. Thus, mental illness alone can't explain extremism, but extremism can exploit the vulnerability of mental illness.³¹ The relationship between psychological vulnerability and terrorism can be attributed to the symptoms that extremist organizations may exploit.³²

Additionally, the findings of various studies and research have established a connection between youth violence and several psychological factors, including negative self-esteem, a sense of personal inadequacy, a pessimistic view of life, feelings of loneliness and alienation, frustration, and despair³³, all indicative of individuals grappling with psychological vulnerability.

Ellis believes that humans are always unique in their



rational and irrational thoughts (cognitive structure). Rational thinking and behavior contribute to feelings of importance, happiness, and competence, which are general traits of most mentally healthy individuals who can live in societies free from violence and terrorism. Ellis suggests that the basis of psychological disorders and individual mental health issues is rooted in irrational and illogical thinking. Therefore, the primary driver of terrorist behavior can be seen in the social standards surrounding the individual, shaped by the environment in which they live, leading to indirect motives and causes such as psychological vulnerability.³⁴ This creates a person who easily connects with others and is strongly impacted by what they say.

These are clear signs of internal weakness or vulnerability³⁵. This poses a danger to their thoughts because an individual afflicted with psychological vulnerability is easily influenced by others' words, readily absorbing their ideas regardless of their accuracy and makes them easily easy to polarization. Therefore, these organizations guide individuals to reach a point of self-denial through collective work training. This training aims to break down the barriers that keep them from blending in with others, turning them into essential members of these organizations. This matches Dr. Mahmoud Kazem's ideas in his book "Psychology of Terrorism," where he discusses brainwashing techniques that shape people's values, preferences, and attitudes. One method he highlights is the psychology of conformity, underscoring how people can easily be influenced by the opinions of others.³⁶

Individuals experiencing psychological vulnerability often struggle with social integration. In such cases, the digital world becomes an escape from reality. Online, individuals can voluntarily choose the content and components they engage with, leading to a susceptibility to digital addiction. This increases the chances of coming across extremist content and forming virtual connections with extremists who recruit individuals through social media networks. Organizational life, marked by strict control of daily activities and a structured routine for both places and individuals, becomes appealing to those struggling with this disorder. Therefore, an organized life falsely provides comfort for those dealing with anxiety. Additionally, the nature of terrorist rhetoric, which doesn't acknowledge gray areas in how it divides the world and interprets events, plays a role in influencing psychological motivators. These motivators can be manipulated to establish a state of complete subjugation between the individual experiencing vulnerability and the extremist organization, often relieving the person of the need to think or decide for themselves and turning them into a willing captive.³⁷

Moreover, profound states of depression arising from psychological traumas caused by painful events and circumstances that affect a person's self-worth and self-esteem can greatly disturb the individual's self-image. The ongoing sense of guilt and inadequacy may prompt a search for ways to self-punish and seek atonement for what the individual sees as personal shortcomings.³⁸ Some researchers in the field of terrorism psychology emphasize the process of conscience-stricken self-blame, where the feeling of guilt intensifies in individuals. They consider this psychological foundation as a potential avenue for brainwashing, something that should be seeded in the target to exert influence³⁹.

An individual suffering from psychological vulnerability lacks self-esteem and self-worth⁴⁰. As a result, psychologically vulnerable individual becomes an easy prey for terrorist organizations, especially since suicide operations require individuals who underestimate themselves. Extremists exploit this by deepening and solidifying their suicidal discourse as a form of purification or atonement. Additionally, they exploit the limited passion for life in this vulnerable group, persuading them to perceive death as a freeing solution to their depression; especially when death is introduced to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, as an absolute and swift end to pain. Consequently, the catastrophic worldview promoted by various terrorist groups aligns well with the bleak perspective of individuals suffering from chronic depression.

Meanwhile, elements of happiness and self-satisfaction become triggering factors for defensive and destructive reactions. Therefore, forms of psychological vulnerabilities that can be exploited by extremist organizations are extensive and intricate. Top of FormIt is essential to protect society from the risks of mental illnesses and disorders, addressing them seriously in terms of support, guidance, and monitoring. Particularly, close attention should be paid to the digital content consumed by affected individuals in their virtual interactions. However, this should not stigmatize the psychologically distressed in any way as extremists. Instead, there should be a focus on helping anyone in need, especially if there are indications of interest in extremist content. It's crucial not to leave individuals alone in the face of the recruitment machinery employed by extremist organizations to exploit vulnerable groups.⁴¹

► Psychological Vulnerability Treatment:

Combating involvement in terrorist organizations necessitates addressing both the individual and the environment that fosters its proliferation. This entails identifying and addressing the factors that facilitate its

spread from the very beginning. One of these critical factors is recognized as psychological vulnerability.

To avoid falling into psychological vulnerability, there are different ways to prevent and treat it. These approaches involve the individual, their close relationships, and the broader environment. There are two levels of action: one focusing on the individual and the other on the family and surroundings. Both levels address prevention and treatment. Putting more emphasis on prevention is important because, as the saying goes, "It's better, easier, and more cost-effective to prevent danger than to deal with it once it happens". Therefore, preventive programs become more important and prioritized over eradication strategies.⁴²

► At the Individual Level:

Preventive Measures:

Self-esteem and its Development:

A key step in preventing psychological vulnerability is reaching a stage of self-esteem. To get there, an individual should aim for the best and not settle for less. This involves building self-confidence, continually developing oneself, refining thought processes, addressing problems, confronting, and minimizing challenges, and finding solutions. It also involves developing one's approach to dealing with personal emotions, thoughts, and the issues one may be facing. Moreover, an individual should focus on enhancing their interaction with others and their thoughts. By doing so, a person becomes mentally resilient, making it challenging for any situation or idea to easily impact them.

Setting and Achieving Goals:

Reviving Passion through Setting Specific Goals: It is a praised strategy by some psychologists and sociologists. Frankl, in the context of meaning and life, contends that life is propelled by goals, and an individual loses their sense of purpose in the absence of a goal. Undoubtedly, the loss of meaning is one of the major causes of psychological vulnerability.

Turning Negative Thoughts into Positive Thoughts:

When an individual observes that they are starting to think negatively, it is imperative to immediately shift their mindset from negative to positive. One should not allow negative thoughts to infiltrate their thinking process.

Treatment:

Acknowledging Psychological Vulnerability:

The first step in addressing any problem is acknowledging its existence. Being aware of a specific issue makes it

easier to overcome. Hence, the initial step in treating psychological vulnerability is recognizing its presence. By doing so, an individual can initiate steps and adopt methods to eliminate this vulnerability. This contributes to the development of a healthy psyche, a strong personality, and balanced thinking.

Overcoming Past Negativities and Future Anxiety:

This involves eliminating negative influences from the past, such as incorrect upbringing or mistreatment by the environment, such as excessive exposure to criticism or bullying. To recover from psychological vulnerability, an individual must let go of memories entrenched in their mind since childhood, including negative phrases and painful memories. Shifting the focus of the mind towards positive thinking helps free an individual from the limitations of ingrained beliefs, often shaped by the criticism and bullying of others. This action is helpful in dispelling negative self-perceptions and shedding the cloak of self-doubt.

Perhaps the most effective way to achieve this is through positive self-talk, countering unconstructive criticism, and making a firm commitment not to be influenced by it.

An important skill that individuals need for dealing with psychological issues, including vulnerability, is psychological resilience. It is defined as the "speed and effectiveness of recovery after exposure to hardships, psychological pressures, or trauma and stress."

This resilience involves "returning to the levels of psychological, emotional, and cognitive activity that the person had before the exposure to stress." These stressors can take the form of poverty, separation, or psychological and functional impairment.

Embracing the Present:

Those experiencing psychological vulnerability often lack one aspect, which is living in the present. Such individuals may either dwell on the past in a negative way or worry about the future. By stopping these patterns and focusing on the present moment with a positive outlook, one can easily overcome psychological vulnerability and become mentally stronger.

Eliminating Causes of Negative Thinking:

1. Depending in thinking on the emotional and reactive influences that can lead to low self-confidence and a constant sense of inadequacy. A strong personality and rational thinking contribute to self-assurance, reflecting positively on one's mindset. Conversely, a shaky and weak personality becomes easy to negative and pessimistic thoughts.⁴³



2. Negative Thinking Resulting from Life Experiences:

Negative thoughts may arise from specific situations or experiences that weakened an individual's character, leaving a negative impression. Interactions with family and society, such as frequent criticism, mockery, bullying, and comparisons with peers, can contribute to the development of negative thinking.⁴⁴

3. Social isolation and a lack of engagement in community activities.

4. Ignorance of Positive Thinking and its negative consequences.

5. Influence of Negative Thinking in the Immediate Environment: Close environments such as family, school, and community can significantly impact an individual's thought patterns. If those in the immediate environment consistently engage in negative discussions, it is likely to influence the individual, leading them to adopt similar negative thinking. Some researchers emphasize the role of imitation and mimicry, suggesting that individuals learn thinking patterns, including negative thinking, through interaction with their surroundings—family, friends, educational resources, and media channels like television and the internet.⁴⁵

► At the Family and Environmental Level:

Preventive Aspect:

Psychological vulnerability is primarily linked to an individual's immediate environment, which directly influences the formation of the person's character from childhood. This influence extends to controlling emotions, directing thoughts, and shaping the individual's overall mindset through parenting styles and methods of interaction. The more conscious and informed the parenting approach, the lower the likelihood of an individual experiencing psychological vulnerability. Parents should employ nurturing parenting methods grounded in love, compassion, and dialogue. It is crucial for parents to be aware of their children's psychological needs.

Parents should aim to train their children from an early age in how to deal with their own emotions and sentiments towards situations, events, and thoughts. Providing a sense of security, support, and encouragement⁴⁶ within the family is vital for strengthening an individual's character. These elements contribute to prevention, acting as a shield against the development of psychological vulnerability. However, what are the right steps for helping someone deal with emotional vulnerability, as noticed by those around them?

1. Seeking to understand the reasons behind the individual's emotional state to address and help them regain balance. Without identifying the causes, effective treatment is challenging. A key aspect is focusing on building trust between the person and their family or close circle, making it easier for them to express their feelings. This can significantly impact their mental resilience and behavior.

Treatment Approach:

1. Upon identifying the cause or causes, it is crucial to consult specialists to determine the optimal methods for addressing those reasons.
2. Focusing on boosting the individual's self-confidence by acknowledging their unique qualities and skills. Assign tasks that align with their abilities to help them achieve self-realization.
3. Guiding the individual's thinking in a positive direction by training them in positive thinking techniques. Ensure the consistent application of these methods so that the individual becomes accustomed to them, gradually adopting and implementing positive thinking. Conversely, it is essential to avoid negative thinking patterns from the immediate environment, such as family, school, and society. If those in the close circle consistently engage in negative discussions, it could influence the individual to mimic such thought processes.
4. Attempting to integrate the individual into family and community life, preventing isolation to avoid the accumulation of negative emotions and thoughts.
5. Emphasizing the individual's strengths and empower them to capitalize on these strengths. Identify weaknesses and work on developing them, increasing the individual's self-confidence and psychological resilience.



Conclusion:

The psychological vulnerability exploitable by extremist organizations is highly complex. Therefore, it is essential to protect society from the risks of mental illnesses and disorders. Taking a serious approach to support, guidance, and monitoring is necessary. Specifically, careful attention should be paid to the digital content consumed by affected individuals in their virtual interactions. However, this should not stigmatize the disturbed person in any form

of extremism. Instead, the focus should be on helping anyone in need, especially if there are indications of interest in extremist content. It is crucial not to leave them alone in the face of the infernal machinery of polarization employed by extremist organizations to exploit vulnerable groups.⁴⁷

Key Findings:

To eliminate any phenomenon, it is necessary to trace everything that could be a direct or indirect cause.

Psychological vulnerability, with its various causes, does not necessarily lead to terrorism.

However, it's important to note that psychological vulnerability can still be one of the concealed and indirectly related factors that render an individual psychologically susceptible, making them an easy target for involvement with terrorist organizations.

There is a strong relationship between psychological vulnerability and thinking methods. As psychological resilience increases, an individual's balance shifts towards evaluating thoughts based on their consistency with reason and instinct. Conversely, weakened psychological resilience and entry into a state of psychological vulnerability disrupt an individual's interaction with thoughts. The relationship between thinking and psychological vulnerability is reciprocal; negative thinking contributes to psychological vulnerability, and psychological vulnerability leads to the emergence of negative thoughts.

The negative role of psychological vulnerability in the context of terrorism lies in the individual becoming a conducive environment for receiving terrorist ideas, easily persuaded by imposed thoughts. It also lies in the individual's lack of self-appreciation and pride, making the psychologically vulnerable person an easy prey for terrorist organizations. As mentioned earlier, the sacrifice of oneself in suicide operations requires individuals who undervalue their own worth, and this sense is cultivated to reach a stage of self-denial.



Recommendations

Community focus on individual development from early childhood and work on enhancing the individual's personality, strengthening their psychological resilience, and training them in positive thinking.

Introducing training programs alongside educational curricula in educational institutions that focus on intellectual aspects and positive thinking methods, contributing to character building.

Developing preventive programs specifically designed to address individuals at risk of joining terrorist organizations, providing opportunities for education, culture, employment, eradicate poverty, and build individuals' characters based on national belonging.

Researchers and specialists in psychology and sociology should direct their studies towards exploring hidden factors directly contributing to engagement in terrorist organizations, propose suitable preventive measures and therapeutic solutions to reduce involvement in terrorist organizations, and bridging the gap between theory and practice by considering practical applications in decision-makers' efforts to prevent and address engagement in terrorist organizations.

Involvement of Psychological and Social Specialists in Educational Awareness Programs, leveraging their psychological and social knowledge to enhance the success of these programs. Top of Form

Adopting Psychological and Social Protection Programs for Families to be implemented to safeguard both boys and girls from psychological vulnerability. In addition to providing love, care, and constructive dialogue with children to prevent them from turning to others to solve their problems and to accept the challenges they may face and training them in positive and rational thinking since adopting emotional support should be utilized by families to build resilience in individuals against terrorist organizations. If emotional support is lacking within the family and is found in organizations adopting such concepts, there is a high likelihood of these organizations achieving their goals in recruiting individuals⁴⁸.



► End Notes

1. Layla, Maisum. "The Psychological Perspective of Terrorism Phenomenon: An Analytical Examination of the Terrorist's Personality within the Framework of Abnormal Psychology." *Generation of Humanities and Social Sciences Journal*, no. 36 (December 13, 2017): 51. Ph.D. Candidate, Abu Bakr Belkaid University, Tlemcen, Algeria.
2. Al-Rumaih, Youssef bin Ahmed. "Analysis of the Terrorist Personality." *Al-Jazirah*, November 16, 2014, no. 15382.
3. Editorial Team. "Psychological Vulnerability: Understanding, Symptoms, and Treatment Approaches." *Al-Najah Electronic Magazine*, February 12, 2023. Accessed on <https://www.annajah.net/>.
4. Al-Suwaileh, Saud Sati. "Psychological Vulnerability." *Al-Watan Newspaper*, June 28, 2020 - 07 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1441 H. Accessed on <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/1049636>.
5. "Psychological Vulnerability: Definition, Symptoms, Treatment Approaches." *Al-Bawaba*. Published on March 11, 2021.
6. Hamza, Marwa. "Definition of Organization." *Sotor*, November 24, 2020. Accessed on <https://sotor.com/>.
7. Hamza, Marwa. "Definition of Organization." *Sotor*, November 24, 2020. Accessed on <https://sotor.com/>.
8. *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasit: Arabic Language Academy*. Part 9, Page 317. Mukhtar Al-Sahah: Mohammad Al-Razi. Beirut: Lebanon Library, 1993. Page 722.
9. Dr. Kamal Al-Nis explores the concept, causes, and motives of terrorism in the article "The Phenomenon of Terrorism" available at <https://www.labodroit.com/>.
10. Dr. Kamal Al-Nis explores the concept, causes, and motives of terrorism in the article "The Phenomenon of Terrorism" available at <https://www.labodroit.com/>.
11. *Dictionary of Lisan al-Arab*, (by Ibn Manzur), Muhammad bin Karam Ibn Manzur, 3rd edition, Dar Sader, Beirut, 1414 AH, 5/65, article (Fikr).
12. *Dictionary of Language Standards*, (by Ibn Faris) Ahmed bin Faris bin Zakaria Abu Al-Hassan, edited by Abdul Salam Haroun, Bidun edition, Dar Al-Fikr for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1399 AH / 1979 AD, 4/446, thought material.
13. *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Evidence*, Jalal al-Din Saeed, ed.: Bidaun, Dar al-Janoub Publishing House, Tunisia, 2004, p. 329.
14. *Kalimat website*, <https://kalimmat.com/define/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A/>
15. An article entitled: (Psychological Vulnerability: its definition, symptoms, and treatment methods), publication date: March 11, 2021 AD, on the portal website, <https://www.albawaba.net/ar/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%90-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%90/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%8C-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%8C-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7-1415809>
16. An article entitled: Psychological Vulnerability, Saud Sati Al-Suwaihi, June 28, 2020 - 07 Dhul-Qi'dah 1441 AH, *Al-Watan newspaper*, on the *Al-Watan website*, <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/1049636>
17. The psychological perspective on the phenomenon of terrorism: An analytical reading of the personality of the terrorist in light of psychopathology, Maysum Laila, an article published in the *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, issue 36 / page 51.
18. An article entitled (What is overthinking, what are its harms, and how to get rid of it), on the Middle East Training Blog website, <https://course-me.com/detail/blog/57>
19. An article entitled: (Negative thinking...its causes and methods of treatment), 4/18/1445 AH, on the University's Message website, <https://rs.ksu.edu.sa/issue-1289/3957>
20. *Psychology of Terrorism (Islamic Perspective)*, prepared by Professor Dr. Saleh bin Ibrahim Al-Sanaie, 1st edition, Al-Rushd Library, 1435 AH / 2014 AD, pp. 94-95.
21. An article entitled: (Negative thinking...its causes and methods of treatment), 4/18/1445 AH, on the University's Message website, <https://rs.ksu.edu.sa/issue-1289/3957>
22. *Terrorism (the phenomenon and its psychological dimensions)*, Dr. Majid Maurice Ibrahim, 1st edition, Dar Al-Farabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, p. 188.
23. *Terrorism (the phenomenon and its psychological dimensions)*, previous reference, p. 188.
24. An article entitled: (The psychological perspective on the phenomenon of terrorism: An analytical reading of the personality of the terrorist in light of psychopathology), Maysum Laila/PhD student/Abu Bakr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, Algeria, *Generation Humanities and Social Sciences Magazine*, Issue 36, 12/13/2017 AD., p. 51.
25. *The Psychology of Terrorism*, Professor Dr. Mahmoud Kazem Mahmoud Al-Tamimi, Dr. Maytham Abdel Kazem Hashem, Al-Mustansiriya University, College of Education, 1st edition, Dar Degla, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2019 AD / 1440 AH, p. 94.
26. *The Psychology of Terrorism*, op. cit., p. 95.
27. *The Psychology of Terrorism*, previous reference, p. 69.

28. The psychological perspective of the phenomenon of terrorism: An analytical reading of the personality of the terrorist in light of psychopathology, Maysum Laila, an article published in the Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, issue 36, page 51.
29. The Psychology of Terrorism, Ali Hijazi Muhammad, Dar Ghaida for Publishing and Distribution, 2018, p. 75.
30. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
31. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
32. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Thought, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
33. Violence among university youth, Tahani Muhammad Othman Munir and Azza Muhammad Suleiman, Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, 1/7/2007 AD, <https://nup.nauss.edu.sa/index.php/sr/catalog/book/93>.
34. See the psychological perspective on the phenomenon of terrorism: An analytical reading of the personality of the terrorist in light of psychopathology, Maysum Laila, an article published in the Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, issue 36, page 51.
35. An article entitled (Psychological Vulnerability: What are the causes and ways to get rid of psychological vulnerability), Shaima Hassan, July 13, 2022 AD, <https://freecoursesandbooks.net/45646/>
36. The Psychology of Terrorism, previous reference, p. 147.
37. See, edited: Extremism's Exploitation of Mental Disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Thought, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
38. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Thought, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
39. The Psychology of Terrorism, previous reference, p. 147.
40. An article entitled: (Analysis of the terrorist personality), Dr. Youssef bin Ahmed Al-Rumaih, Al-Jazeera, 11/16/2014 AD, Issue: 15382,
41. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Thought, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
42. The path to combating extremism: its early discovery, Abdel Moneim Shehata Mahmoud, Arab Journal for Security Studies, Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, May 16, 2022 AD, p. 4.
43. An article entitled: (Negative thinking... its causes and methods of treatment), University Message website, <https://rs.ksu.edu.sa/issue-1289/3957>
44. An article entitled: (Negative thinking... its causes and methods of treatment), University Message website, <https://rs.ksu.edu.sa/issue-1289/3957>
45. See Psychology of Terrorism (Islamic Perspective), Prof. Dr. Saleh bin Ibrahim Al-Sanaie, Al-Rushd Library, first edition, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, 1435 AH/2014 AD, p. 105.
46. See Psychology of Terrorism (Islamic Perspective), op. cit., p. 277..
47. Extremism's exploitation of psychological disorders, an invitation to discussion entitled: (Is there a relationship between intellectual extremism and mental illness), Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology, November 20, 2022, on the website <https://etidal.org/>
48. The Psychology of Terrorism, previous reference, p. 147.

