

## **Differential Associational in Learning Religious Extremism/Violent Behavior: A Case Study of Central Jail Rawalpindi**

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### **Abstract**

The study aims to explore the role of association with respect to family members and peers in learning of violent extremist behavioral patterns. The differential association theory, proposed by Sutherland has been applied in the study advocating that extremist behavior is the product of learning from the family members, peer groups and teachers. The qualitative methodology was used in the study and 12 respondents who were extremists and terrorists were selected from the central jail Rawalpindi for in depth interviews. The study found that the extremist behavior is a learned behavior and mostly the extremists learn this behavior from the family members, including parents and siblings, peer groups, including class fellows and cousins and teachers. The study recommends that in order to address the extremism, the micro and macro level strategies need to be introduced by involving all the relevant stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Violent religious extremism, Association, Behavior, Family, Peers,

### **Introduction**

Individual lives a social life where one gets attached to their respective groups leading to a sense of belongingness to one's own group and sense of non-belongingness with respect to others. Individuals get caged to the radical dogmas making them to operate in ethnocentric behavioral patterns alongside the others in socio-cognitive settings giving rise to foundational situation to indulge in violence. Religious extremism is witnessed by human societies throughout the history. But in recent few decades the surge in extremism impacted the lives of individual almost all over the globe in one way or other. It is a much debated term after the terror attacks of 9/11 on the United States of America. Since occurrence of 9/11 terror attack by non-state actors and subsequently starting of a war on terror by the western world under the leadership of the United States of America made the issue of religious extremism on the focal point of international affairs. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by the allied forces together with chaotic

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situation in Syria not only resulted in huge material and non-material losses but also highlighted the lethal phenomenon of violent religious extremism. Pakistan is playing a role of front line state in war on terror, where she faced huge losses on multiple fronts from military to economy, from individual to collective levels. It is estimated that more than seventy thousand humans including both military personnel and civilians have killed on the Pakistani soil during this ongoing war on terror. But the phenomenon of the religious extremism is not a new phenomenon to the country. As even well before the war on terror, Pakistan has faced the issue of religious extremism right from the independence from British in 1947.

Extremism on the basis of religious interpretations is witnessed by the global community through the history. Pakistani society is not exclusion to these extremist behavioural patterns as the stability in the society is threatened by the fixed approaches. Since its independence, the country is facing the ideological turmoil due to the violent extremism (Majeed, 2010). It is considered that revolution in Iran in 1979 together with Islamization policies under the Zia regime in Pakistan played a vital role in expansion of extremist ideologies. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 further fueled the situation in the region where religious groups were supported by the United States of America and Pakistan in order to fight war in Afghanistan against the invader Russia. Russian invasion of Afghanistan has worsened the situation as the non-state actors got significant strength and reach out to such an extent where they can operate with the support of state resulting in a threat for the Pakistani state in particular and region in general. The extremism situation is multi-pronged as a range of factors are proposed to be involved in the phenomenon of religious extremism in the country. The extremism needs to be understood with respect to the theoretical dimensions as well and there are multiple theories existing in this regard. However, the differential association theory proposed by Sutherland seems appropriate in understanding the deviant or extremist behaviors of the social actors.

### **Problem Statement**

Pakistan is facing extremism at multiple societal levels for the last few decades and that has severely affected almost all the segment of the society and state. Conventionally, the class system, broken families and psychological pathological conditions were associated and explained in the context of the violent extremism. Religious extremism can be assessed as a product of state policies and ever increasing influence of local non state actors. The role of regional and international politics together with multiple factors within the country itself has influenced the phenomenon of religious extremism. As a group of scholars

mentioned in their study that the role of social institutions is significant in the spread of extremist activism against the others in inter-group conflicts resulting in hampering of social cohesion in the society (Schwartz et al., 2009). The violent religious extremism in Pakistan is a complex phenomenon due to the involvement of the multiple factors across the time and space. There is a need of intensive research work to look into the deep rooted facts to analyze the complex situation prevailing in the Pakistani society in context of construction of religious extremism. This study aims to explore and analyze the role of family and peer groups in influencing the learning patterns of the individuals with respect to the violent religious extremism.

### **Significance and Justification of Study**

Many studies conducted across the globe that looked into the phenomenon of religious extremism by identifying multiple factors responsible for violence. By carrying out thorough analysis of the already conducted researches propose that there are quite few failings in highlighting the various aspects related to the topic under study. One of the vital failing in this regards is lack of applicability of Differential Association theory with its theoretical framework to study the religious extremist behavioral patterns not only across the scholarly world but most significantly with respect to Pakistani society. The theoretical framework of Differential Association is one of the significant logical elaborations of the criminal behavioral patterns as an outcome of learning. It is assumed that same theoretical approach can be utilized to study the other forms of deviant behavioral patterns prevailing in any society. However, it is traditionally considered that the practical application often minimizes the significance of seemingly sound theoretical approaches. Hence, the researcher is interested in researching Sutherland's theory of differential association to see its validity and applicability on Pakistani society in the local context. The role of socialization needs to be understood in the formation of violent religious extremist behavioral patterns. Additionally, the findings of the study are helpful for the society in general and policy makers in particular.

### **Review of Literature**

Mueller (2009) in his book, "Reason, religion and democracy" discussed the relationship of religion and its impact on liberal democracy. He proposed that religion is an essential factor of traditional society. But at the same time, the extremist religious teachings are considered to be the significant constraint in progressive and liberal thinking, which are the regarded as essential principles of the modern society. Blanchard (2007) focused the relationship between the

religious institutions in Pakistan and terrorism. The study proposed that the event of 11 September, 2001 generated the interests of the Americans in the religious schools of Muslims and it became one of the trait of American foreign policy. The study concluded that madrassa plays significant role in formulation of extremist behavioral patterns. Javid (2011) in a study analyzed the origin and impacts of religious extremism in Pakistan. He proposed that in-depth analysis of the causes of religious extremism in Pakistan indicates that it's a multi-leg phenomenon, as the situation is having much intricacy. But one of the significant factors, in this regards, is the phenomenon of deprivation leading to a sense of frustration. The author proposed in the study that this sense of frustration is utilized by the terrorist outfits in getting their organizational goals. A group of scholars urged that the propositions highlighting the social process of interaction is the focus of the differential association theory and it is the social interaction processes which have given the foundation to the differential association theory (Curran and Renzetti, 2001). Ian (2006) proposed in his studies that for comprehensive understanding of differential association theory with respect to its applicability in various social settings, two significant factors need to be understood i.e., the content and process of learning. Firstly, the content of what is learned in the interaction includes the technique committing crimes, attitudes, and motivations. Secondly, it is a similar process involved in how an individual learns other behavioral patterns prevailing in respective societies.

Zakira (2012) proposed that social learning theory and strain theory are most significant ones in explaining the deviant behavioral patterns, specifically with respect to the suicide bombers activity in Indonesia. The study argues that the social learning theory focus on the process of communication in formulation of deviant behavioral patterns. The proximity among the individuals and deviant individual will result in closer ties, further leading to acquisition of criminal behavioral patterns.

A group of scholars conducted a study with focus on the family backgrounds in relation to adaptation of criminal behaviors. A sample size of 11,397 respondents was used in the study. The study concluded that in great majority of cases the criminal had family background with the record of incarceration (Langdon and Greenfield, 1980).

### **Research Gap**

The studies conducted till now in explanation of violent religious behavioral patterns with traditional outlook. After the terror attacks on the United States of America, Scholars in social sciences endeavored to explain the phenomenon of terrorism across the world. Previous studies suggested that there is

link between religious extremism and terrorism. After a thorough reviewing the literature, few gaps have been identified. The research highlighted the role of religious extremism but the religious behavioral patterns are considered as black box. The traditional outlook is a significant constraint to understand the process of religious extremism, which further leads to the phenomenon of terrorism. One of the significant constraints in achieving comprehensive understanding in the quoted literature is the lack of applicability of differential association theory in explaining the formation of violent religious extremist behavioral patterns. Keeping in view these gaps, this research study has been conducted with respect to the application of differential association theory to get the comprehensive understanding with respect to the formation of violent religious extremist behavioral patterns.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Differential Association theory proposed by Sutherland is well recognized as a social learning theory which looked into the socialization process. The theory was proposed by Sutherland in late 1930s to explain the criminal behavioral patterns but at the same time it can be functional to elaborate other types of deviant behavioral patterns prevailing in any society as well. The core proposition is that deviant behavioral patterns are learnt through the process of social interaction with respect to attachment with others, just as learning of conformist behavioral patterns. Babbie (1980) made it simpler by proposing that the socialization process in essence is identical, irrespective of the meaning being communicated to the people by the social settings are in conformist behavioral patterns or deviant behavioral patterns.

Sutherland emphasizes a person will learn more from people in the surrounding who are in association with each other with respect to the frequent exposition, interaction for longer period of time, especially in the early part of life and particularly the people who hold prominent status in the social life. It is assumed that extremist behavioral patterns in the Pakistani society can be better analyzed by looking into the role of socialization process. There are many theoretical frameworks which looked into the aspect of socialization in learning the attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, the differential association theory is a distinct theoretical framework, to analyze the role of socialization in creating extreme deviant behavioral patterns in the masses in societies across the globe. In this study the theoretical framework of Sutherland Differential Association theory is tested with respect to Pakistani society. The nine propositions of the said theory are considered to be as the basic orientation of the study. The focus of the study is exploring the role of learning in adopting the extremist behavioral patterns. For said purpose to get the comprehensive understanding of the respective

phenomenon of the social learning, only two assumptions out of total nine assumptions of the Differential association theory was tested to explore the applicability of the theory in context of Pakistani society. The two assumptions of the Differential Association theory are as follows:

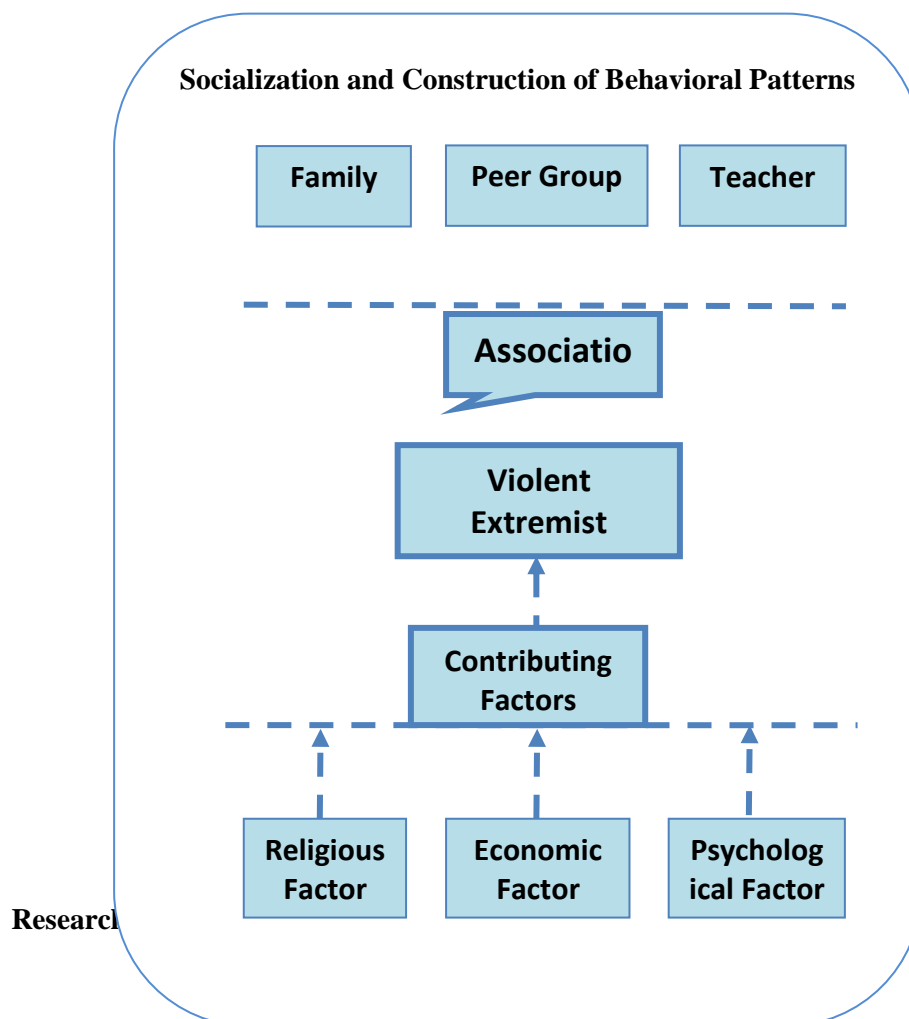
- (a) Criminal behavior is learned.
- (b) Criminal behavior is learnt by social interaction with other peoples belonging to intimate personal groups in a process of communication.

This study considers the criminal behavior as the deviant or the extremist behavior.

### Conceptual Model of the Study

The conceptual model of the study is given as follows;

**Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model of the Study**



*Source; Developed by Authors (2019)*

The main focal point of the research was to explore the violent extremism in universe of the study as a socially learnt behavior. This part of the thesis explains the methodology comprehensively with respect to the data collection and its further tools of analysis to get the better understanding of the issue. The reliable facts can only be gained by utilizing the research methodology relevant to the environment in which research is being conducted.

#### **Qualitative Approach**

In this study, the qualitative style is utilized to undertake the study. This style of research has given a vital worth to the view points of the respondents in the universe of the study. The respondents in the study area were given fully freedom to share their viewpoints in order to reach out their way of thinking and in-depth feeling, so that a comprehensive picture responsible for the violent extremist behavioral patterns is attained and that may be forwarded to the researcher's community for further analysis and study.

The study has been conducted in Punjab which is one of the most populated province of Pakistan, nevertheless, due to the larger geographical area and huge population, the geographical area was specified and identified keeping in view the relevant target audiences and thus, Central Jail Rawalpindi was selected. This selection of central jail was made due to the availability of the respondents who are not only involved in violent extremist behavioral patterns but also are punished for the same acts by the judicial institutions.

#### **Sampling and Target Audience**

Purposive sampling method has been used for the selection of the sample. Experts believe that purposive sampling is most relevant in attaining the reliable facts and results in comprehensive understanding of a specific problem. Since the topic was sensitive and respondents had to be selected from a particular background (Violent extremist). Therefore, due to particular requirements, the method of purposive sampling was used to approach the audience. The sample size for this research study was 12 respondents, depending on the point of saturation. The violent extremist individuals, who were involved in violent activities in the context of the religious extremism and were punished by the judicial institutions by imprisoning the law violators in the Central Jail Rawalpindi, were selected as the respondent of the study.

#### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The in depth interview guideline or the semi structured questionnaire was devised to collect the data from the respondents. The guideline was comprised of open ended questionnaire to get rich data on a particular issue. In order to get the detailed data from the respondents, all the protocols and norms were followed by coordinating with the officials of Police Department and necessary measures were

also taken. To create a friendly environment with the respondents, the interview guide started with the basic introductory questions including name, age, area, occupation and education. Afterwards, the interview guide was comprised of information about the family and family affairs and peer groups influence on the religious ideology of the respondents.

### Results and Discussion

The research explains that there are multiple factors such as family, peer group; media, education etc. influence the violent behavior of the people at every stage of life. All the respondents were interviewed from jail and most of them were in Central Jail Rawalpindi. Majority of respondents were married except three prisoners. Terrorists in general are illiterate and few were educated and two thirds of extremists were illiterate or less educated. There were only two prisoners having higher education, one was MBBs and other did master degree, while the majority of the respondents were less educated or illiterate. Overall the economic condition of the violent extremists was not good and they use to live in a joint family. However, few were also living as a single family. The nature of crime was not same for all the criminals; nevertheless, some were involved in target killing, suicide bombing, planners and facilitators. The demographic detail about the respondents is given as follows;

**Table 1: Demographic Details about the Respondents**

S.No.	Name	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Nature of Crime	Location
1	Mr. A	M	35	10 <sup>th</sup>	Nil	Target Killing	Central Jail Rawalpindi
2	Mr. B	M	50	8	Nil	Target Killing	Central Jail Rawalpindi
3	Mr. C	M	33	5	Nil	Target Killing	Central Jail Rawalpindi
4	Mr. D	M	50	10	Religious	Target Killing	Central Jail Rawalpindi
5	Mr. E	M	20	10	Arms Dealer	Target Killing	Central Jail Rawalpindi

6	Mr. F	M	28	3	Cobbler/Father	Murder	Central Jail Rawalpindi
7	Mr. G	M	30	5	Arms Provider	Murder/Informant	Central Jail Rawalpindi
8	Mr. H	M	36	12	Shop	Planner	Central Jail Rawalpindi
9	Mr. I	M	32	16	Civil Engineer	Suicide Bombing	Central Jail Rawalpindi
10	Mr. J	M	32	Mbbs	Business	Facilitator	Central Jail Rawalpindi
11	Mr. K	M	28	Nil	England national	Murder	Central Jail Rawalpindi
12	Mr. L	M	43	8	Nil	Suicide Bomber	Central Jail Rawalpindi

*Note: Real names of respondents are confidential*

*Source; Developed by Authors (2019)*

All the respondents were in tight security and while interacting with them, most of them seem in good health, confident, cooperative, and talkative with no or less sense of guilt and few were not much talkative and cooperative and having great sense of guilt for their violent behavior. Most of the extremists were married and one third were unmarried, apparently marriage has not a strong relation with violence, there are many other factors which contribute to this phenomenon. Mostly of the violent extremists were from the remote, backward and rural areas of the country where the illiteracy rate is high and the proximity of the government or administration is not on everyday basis. However, a few were also from the urban area with high qualification but influenced by particular ideology.

Violent extremism behavioral pattern is a learnt behavior and these learning patterns come through many ways in individuals. However, in this regards, the family, peer group and teachers play a highly significant role with respect to internalization of behavioral traits. The research study has focused separately on the association of family, peer group and teachers in learning violent extremist behavioral patterns.

#### **Violent Extremist Behavior and Association with Family**

The results of the study proposed that less than half of the respondents were found to be influenced by the association of the family. The study revealed that violent extremist behavioral patterns are learned from family in general and specifically parents have significant impact on the children in comparison to the influence of siblings. The results indicated that spending more time with family has led to the deep learning with respect to the violent extremist behavioral patterns. Furthermore, it was found in the respondent that along with duration, the higher levels of intensity in relationship with parents in synchronization with promotion of violence convinces the individuals easily to adopt violent extremist behavioral patterns in social settings.

When the respondents during the course of in depth personal interviews were asked about their nature of relationship with their respective family members, the respondents shared that they were quite close to their family and were enjoying emotional ties. The respondents mentioned that the role of father, mother and elder brother can be taken as the most crucial factor in the life of individuals. The ideology or exposure of decision makers in family is disseminated to other members of the family. One of the interviewee stated that *“When I did not follow the religious teachings, my father threatened me and even used violence. My father was very strict religious man and he forced me to perform all the Islamic practices on time.”* This excerpt indicates the relationship of learning violence by becoming victim of violence. Usually, after learning through violence from elders, the violent behavior is repeated by the learners and it becomes a normal thing for them in practicing daily life. The results of the study also indicates by observing a response shared by the respondents that if children are not getting involved in religious matters like do not offer prayers or read Quran, the violence becomes fair and necessary to encourage them towards religion.

#### **Violent Extremist Behavior and Association with Peers**

The study proposed that majority of the respondents was influenced by the association of the peer group. The outcome of the data in the study explained that violent extremist behavioral patterns are learnt from peer group of multiple categories like friends, cousins, class fellows etc. It was found that spending more time with peer group who are involved in the religious extremism, seriously impacts the learning of the individuals. In the case of association of learner with respect to the peer group, the level of intensity matters as the greater the level of emotional intensity in association with peer group greater will be the chances of adopting violent extremist behavior. The violent extremist behavior is learned from peer group and consuming more time with friends involved in violence may lead to the violent extremist behavior. The factor of intensity cannot be ruled out

as the level of intensity in relationship with deviant friends, higher will be the chances of indulging in delinquent behavioral patterns.

One of the respondent's in the study was of the view that *"I learned extremism from the Madrassa fellows; we were taught that Jihad has a great thing and it is fair to be violent against non-Muslims. This perception was solidified due to the peer group in Madrassa as we all supported each other in internalization of same extremist traits in to each other."*

Respondents in the study informed that religious extremist behavior is learnt through the acts of friends, cousins and class fellows. They explained that their *Madrassa* fellows and cousins were very prone towards the extremism. They used to regular interact with their friends and cousins and with the time, they also became the part of their activities. The regular interaction with best friends (deviant) and intensity in relations give a way towards the acceptance and adaptation of the criminal behavioral patterns for the individuals. Hence the more intensity in relationship with deviant friends increases the acceptance of the delinquency for individuals.

#### **Violent Extremist Behavior and Association with Teachers**

The half of the respondents believed that the influence of the teachers was much crucial and violent extremist behavior is learned from teachers. Further results showed that the more someone consume the time with teachers, the more he became violent. The role of the teachers was found to be involved in formation of violent extremist behavioral patterns. The relationship between teacher and student were found to be linked with the factors of duration and intensity.

It was found that the violent extremist behavioral patterns were learned from teachers due to their influential as they directly influence their students particularly with the excessive time with teachers. The regular interactions resulted in learning and adaptation of the violent religious extremist behavioral patterns. They shared that though teachers were quite kind and cooperative but they became aggressive and violent when it comes to the sensitive religious issues. It was revealed that *Madrassas'* teachers encouraged the extremism by justifying that in order to serve the Islam, the violence was necessary. In addition, the students learned and idealized their teachers and if teachers are prone towards extremism, definitely students will be moved in the same direction. Teachers used violence to teach them and they learned this behavior from their teachers. They copied and repeated the same behavior of teachers in their homes. First of all, they tried to implement the Islamic values on their family and for the sake of implementation; they had to use violence advertently or inadvertently. The important thing was that their parents were happy and always appreciated such acts for pushing siblings towards religion through violence.

### **Violent Extremist Behavior and Religion, Economic and Psychological Factors**

The study establishes and verifies the point that individuals learn from family, peer group and teachers, nevertheless, it goes one step ahead and explored those factors which directly or indirectly influenced the process of learning of the individuals and found that economic, psychological and religious factors had regularly contributed in the process of learning of violent extremist behavior.

Religion is the main motivation behind the violent extremist behavior as the name of religion has been used to achieve the particular vested objectives. They were of the view that religion is the most important thing in the life and it is the duty of every Muslim to work for its promotion. One respondent in the study elucidated that, *"The religion of Islam is not only true but actually is the final religion for the world and every Muslim should work for it."* The teachings of Islam should be reached to the non-Muslims. Individuals in their personal capacity try to gain power and implement it on the state. The state has been cooperating with the non-Muslim states against the Muslims; therefore people must stand against this injustice.

Few respondents shared that poverty was the main factor which pushed them towards the terrorist activities. The more prosperous and educated people are less inclined towards the violent extremisms. People link the violent extremist behavior with their sense of deprivation and Individuals who become terrorists often are unemployed, socially alienated individuals who have dropped out of society. Few respondents shared that the economic condition of their family was not healthy and this poverty motivated them to become extremist. One of the respondents made clear by sharing that, *"I was working for a militant organization for the sake of amount not for religion"*.

The motivation behind the violent extremism of the extremists was not only to meet the wish to impose Islam but multiple factors contributed to their motivation. One of the interviewees stated *"My family was not a religious family and just to take the revenge of the murder of my father, I joined an extremist organization. The involvement in violent activities gave him a sense of satisfaction."*

One observation about the violent extremist behavior usually seems that it is all about the social learning, nevertheless, it is much complex to understand the human behavior particularly in the context of the violence. It can be the outcome of biological, psychological and sociological and even depend on personality to personality.

### **Recommendations**

Extreme violent behavior is a serious challenge to the harmony within families and society. There is an utmost need to undertake this issue and devise some comprehensive policies at micro and macro level. In view of the findings of the study, the poor or negative socialization of children directly or indirectly influences the thought process of children. The nature of interaction with family, peer group or schools shapes the personality of children and they practice what they learn. The role of parents is dominant and therefore, they must be cautious and well aware about their importance. Moreover, in order to eliminate the radical behaviors of the people, there is severe need to teach every individual. Similarly, while living in the modern world and innovative ideas, the Madrassa System should also be updated and modernized as per moderate values. Since Pakistan is a multi-cultural and multi sect society, therefore religious scholars, politicians and civil society activists must work for the promotion of harmony while supporting the peaceful coexistence of each actor.

### **Conclusion**

The social learning theory is the persuasion that people learn to be aggressive by observing others acting aggressively to achieve some goal or being rewarded as a direct result of committing violent acts, specifically dedicated to the areas of terrorism and counterterrorism as the basis for the understanding, identification and elimination of terrorism. When first developed, the social learning theory directly associated criminal behavior with individual learned traits through varying and dynamic human interactions in an environment conducive to violent and unrestrained behavior. Violent extremism is a learning behavior and there are many ways to learn however, the most prominent role is played by the family and peer group. Whatever is taught by the family leaves a long term impact on the psychology of individuals. Individuals believe that the teachings of family regarding religion, particularly mother, are quite sagacious and reliable which should not only be accepted rather needs to be preached further.

However, just as social learning contends that all behavior (including criminal behavior) is learned through the typical learning processes (i.e. classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and vicarious observation), social learning also posits that learned behaviors can be *unlearned*. The important question then centers on whether such a tenet of social learning applies equally to terrorist behavior. Thus, the issue revolves around determining if the sense of rage, frustration, and injustice that terrorists feel can be channeled in a non-aggressive manner, particularly after being so effectively trained for the infliction of fear through violence.

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