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## Characteristics of Female Terrorism: Psychological Motives, Social Roles, Recruitment Methods

**PAVEL N. KAZBEROV**

Research Institute of the Federal Penal Service of Russia, Moscow, Russia, mr.kazberov@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2233-0230>

### Abstract

*Introduction:* the need for effective psychocorrective work with persons convicted of terrorism-related crimes, focused on the correction of these persons, does not raise any doubt. Even greater relevance to the problematic issues considered in the publication is given by the fact that we are talking about females. A not so significant number of convicts in this category, as well as gender psychological characteristics, determine the relevance and significance of aspects of psychological work with women convicted of terrorism-related crimes. *Purpose:* to determine roles and psychological motives of women in the commission of terrorism-related crimes and disclose methods of their recruitment. The study (83 women convicted of terrorism-related crimes) was conducted in the period from 2014 to 2022 with the help of the following *methods:* survey and analytical, providing a theoretical analysis of literary sources; empirical, involving the use of psychodiagnostic techniques, author's questionnaires and questionnaires designed to determine general and socio-psychological characteristics of persons convicted of terrorism. The study covered 83 women convicted of terrorism-related crimes. The analysis of empirical material and scientific sources helps identify key trends of female terrorism, the role, psychological motives of behavior and methods of recruiting potential terrorists. Recommendations for conducting psychocorrective work with the appropriate category of persons are developed. *Conclusion:* the experience of psychocorrective work of correctional psychologists with women convicted of terrorism-related crimes has not been sufficiently studied due to the small number of this category in correctional institutions; the analysis of scientific data makes it possible to determine key reasons for women's involvement in terrorism-related crimes, as well as the roles and motives for which they were involved. Understanding mechanisms and motives of women's involvement in terrorism-related crimes, psychologists of correctional institutions can conduct psychocorrection with this category of convicts.

**Keywords:** convicted women; gender aspect; socio-psychological characteristics; terrorism; psycho-correctional work; correction; penal system.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and security psychology (psychological sciences).

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### *Introduction*

The Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia has considerable experience in psychocorrective work with convicted women, as well as experience in their correction. Nevertheless, the experience of psychocorrective work with such a category of convicted women as those convicted of terrorism-related crimes is unique in its own way and understudied, primarily due to the small number of representatives of this category in penitentiary institutions. In the total number of convicts who have committed terrorism-related crimes, women make up no more than 10–12% [4]. The purpose of the study is to determine roles and psychological motives of women in the commission of terrorism-related crimes and reveal methods of their recruitment, as well as determine reasons for women's involvement in the commission of terrorist acts.

### *Theoretical background and overview of the problem*

The entire volume of currently available domestic and foreign scientific literature on the issue of mechanisms of involvement in terrorist organizations (commission of crimes) can be presented in two meaningful planes: works revealing external conditions (social, economic, etc.) that promote involvement (I.B. Bovina, Baudrillard J., K.G. Gorbunov, S.N. Enikolopov, A.L. Zhuravlev, Yu.P. Zinchenko, S. Milgram, K.G. Surnov, A.D. Tikhonova, A.V. Yurevich, etc.) and research results, determining internal (socio-psychological) reasons for such involvement (R. Borum, O. Galand, M. King, R. Koneisa, S.V. Kulakova, N. McWilliams, T.A. Nestik, S.S. Oganessian, V.A. Sosnin, A.D. Tikhonova, S. Taylor, etc.).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the absolute majority of these authors apply mainly a hypothetical approach to the study of the mechanisms of adherents' involvement in terrorist organizations, as one of the above researchers (Sosnin V.A.) frankly writes about. This circumstance determines the direct need to study the issue of this mechanisms using sources based on the collection of empirical material [2–6] and results of our own research [1–4, 7].

The experience of practical work and methodological support of psychological work with women who have committed terrorism-related crimes allowed the article author to determine the uniqueness of methods of involvement in terrorism associated with the history of their criminal activity. Undoubtedly, certain trends observed in the past and in the present of our society, as well as social roles and psychological motives of women's behavior played a role in the involvement of women in this type of criminal activity [6, p. 215; 8, p. 437].

### *Materials and methods*

When preparing the article, the author studied the practice of psychological work with these persons, author's questionnaires designed to identify mechanisms of adherents' involvement in terrorist organizations, as well as structured interviews with persons belonging to the category under consideration. The study covered the period from 2014 to 2022, the following methods were used: survey and analytical, involving a theoretical analysis of literary sources; empirical, including analysis of normative legal and organizational-methodological sources, criminal-legal characteristics (materials of personal files, court verdicts, etc.), results of psychodiagnostic research, and practice of organizing psychological work with this category of convicts. The study involved 83 women convicted of terrorism-related crimes serving sentences in penal institutions of the territorial bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service, which are part of the Ural, Volga and Siberian Federal districts, as well as employees of psychological and educational services directly interacting with them. Since, as a rule, only 1–3 convicts of this category are held in a correctional facility, it took us many years to collect materials.

### *Results and discussion*

#### *Women as terrorists: key trends*

By analyzing the results of empirical research and scientific literature, the main trends in women's terrorism, roles and motives of terrorist behavior, including suicide bombers, are determined.

It is worth noting that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries there were only a few female revolutionaries who committed terrorist attacks, risking their health and lives. Women's participation in terrorist activities has become

more quantitatively pronounced in the modern world. Figure 1 shows the historical dynamics of the content of the roles and pre-existing psychological motives of female terrorists [1; 6; 7; 9–11].

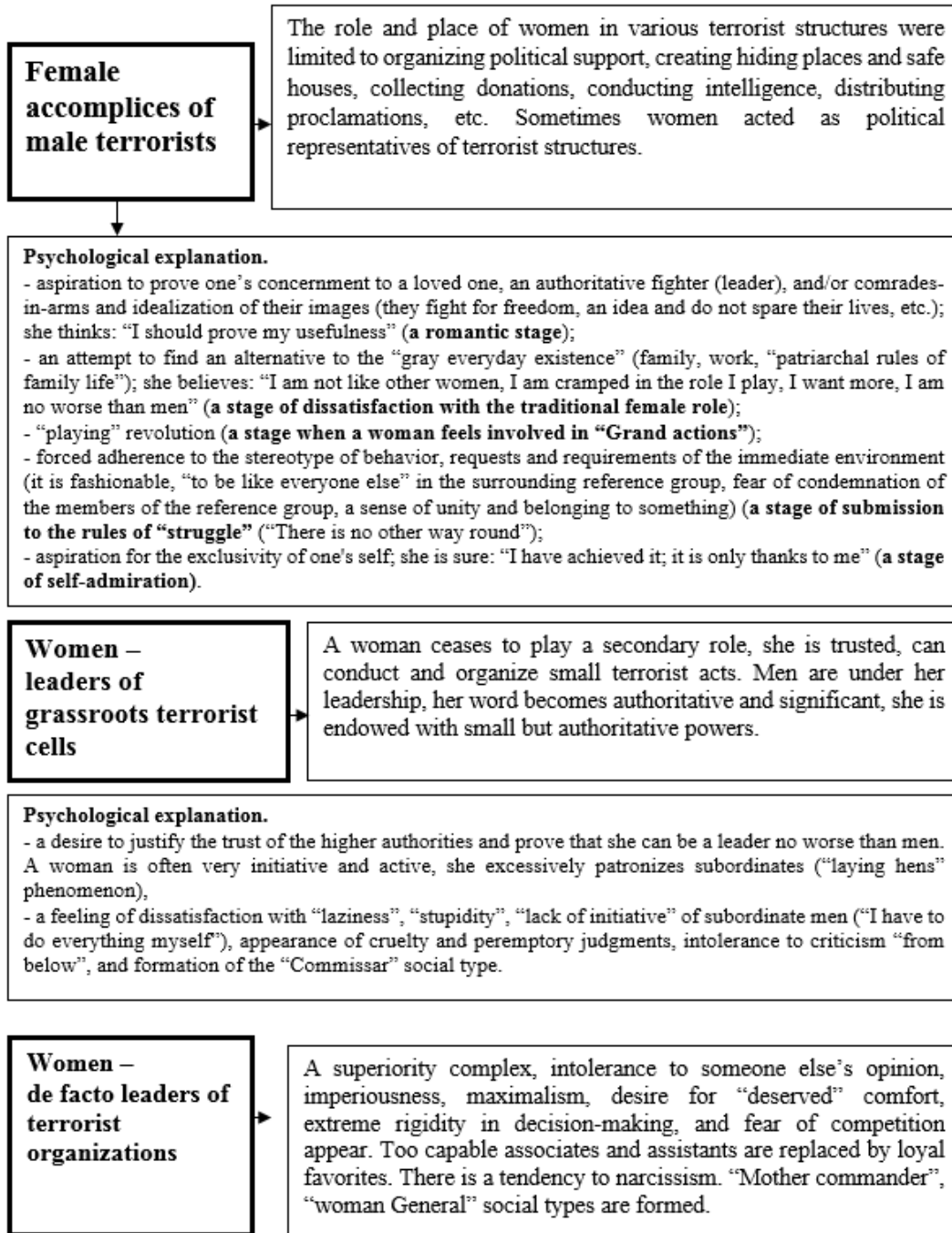


Figure 1. Stages of the evolution of the role of women in terrorist activities

*Methods of involving women in terrorism*

It is important for prison psychologists to know the methods of involving women in terrorism, since it is they who, basically, objectively determine the content and forms of further

psychocorrective work with them, focused ultimately on their correction [10, 12]. It should be noted that, thanks to the data obtained during the research work on the results of the study of the practice of penitentiary psychological activ-

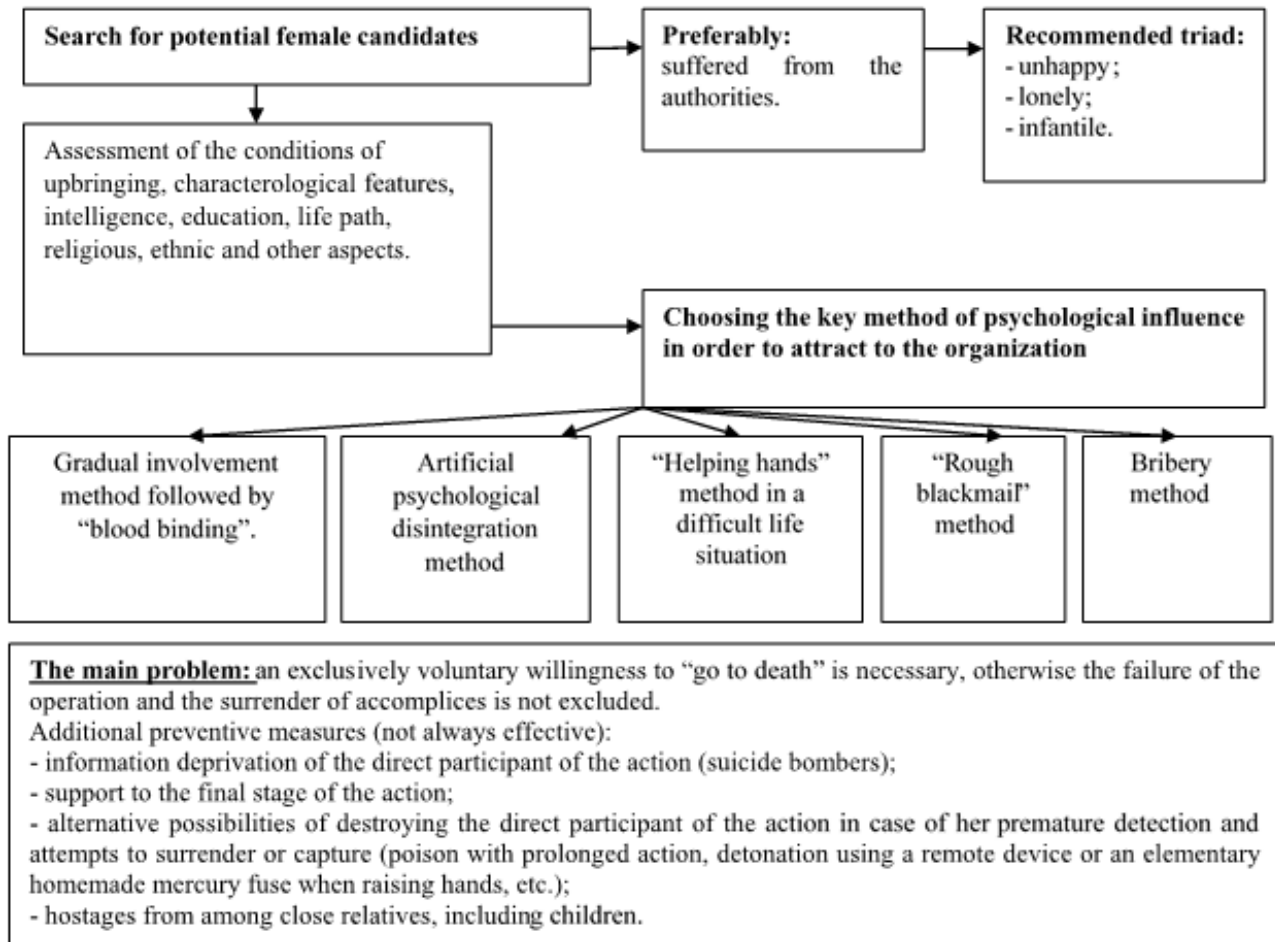


Figure 2. System and methods of recruiting potential terrorists

ity with this category, the system and methods of recruiting women through their questionnaires and interviews are investigated.

It is determined that the mechanisms of recruiting women are based on deception and coercion (Figure 2):

- the situation of artificial social deprivation eliminates alternative sources of objective information [13, p. 122];
- the intensity of all types of preparations (combat, tactical, theological, etc.) for terrorist acts leaves no time for doubt and reflection;
- the scheme of mutual responsibility and “internal information” help to quickly identify doubters.

Using the available material, prison psychologists can reproduce a system for recruiting female terrorists, their psychological and ideological training, and identify their “weak points”, in order to determine psychocorrective work with survived female terrorists who have been trained in terror training camps.

The thesis contradicting the Koran about a place guaranteed to female terrorists in paradise is the main religious, and, consequently, in many respects, ideological deception. Paradise in Islam is a purely male place, but female adepts cannot compete with the Gurias who are tempted in seduction [12, p. 97]. There is no question of restoring family relations with previously deceased husbands at all. There may be a local area for Muslim women in the Muslim paradise somewhere, but the holy books do not mention it [14, p. 59; 15, p. 23–25].

The practice of distorting the true meaning of the holy books in order to spread the ideology of terrorism further actualizes the need for interaction between penal system employees, in particular psychologists, and representatives of the Islamic clergy who are able to explain to truly believing convicts the true meaning of the verses of the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad [14, 16, 17].



*Typological characteristics and compilation of a socio-demographic portrait of a convicted female terrorist*

Despite a small number of female convicts in this category, the analysis of empirical data made it possible to determine their typological characteristics and make a socio-demographic portrait [2, p. 89]. Thus, a female terrorist, aged 24–30, often comes from the North Caucasus region. Unlike the majority of female convicts, half of the representatives of this category of convicts have never been married, and also have not had children.

Female terrorists are fit (most of them have no addictions, chronic diseases, etc.). Besides, many of them have been brought up in full wealthy families. The majority of convicts of this category have not worked anywhere before their conviction [7; 18]. They do not consider themselves as radically inclined to religion, describing themselves, as a rule, Sunni Muslims, believers since childhood [9, 19].

We find it reasonable to take into account the following circumstances of female terrorists' life when conducting preventive, psychodiagnostic and psychocorrectional work:

- presence in her family or among close relatives of persons who are or have been previously involved in terrorist activities, including those who have died or are serving long sentences (early, from childhood under the influence of parents, relatives, formation of a critical attitude towards the current government and state institutions) [20]. All this can actualize the idea of fighting against injustice, the motive of revenge, including blood;

- presence in her family of a cultivated atmosphere of male veneration, when, for example, all women, regardless of age, must get up when a five-year-old boy enters a room, which causes difficulties when working with this category of female employees;

- adherence to non-traditional religious cults, for example, radical Wahhabism, instilling from early childhood a system of uncritical subordination to religious dogmas and elders in the family, alienating from the real surrounding reality;

- a difficult economic situation in the family and poverty, which additionally contribute to the formation of feelings of inferiority, hopelessness and hatred, provoking the desire to

take revenge on “offenders”, others and “the whole world”;

- upbringing in an isolated community, strict regulation of family life and high intolerance and dependence on other people's opinions.

Young Muslim women who have lost their virginity out of wedlock are more vulnerable to the influence of terrorist organizations. It is suggested to them that only by entering “the path of struggle” and dying “with honor”, they will atone for “their sin”. Therefore, the sexual abuse of a potential suicide bomber often acts as a powerful and effective “psychotechnological means”. Hence, abductions of brides and fictitious weddings, when brides meet their grooms for the first time, are rather widespread.

The gradual involvement method (Figure 2), as a rule, is not applied to “one-time” female suicide bombers due to its complexity, duration and high risk of failure. It is more acceptable in relation informants, “saviors” who work with future female suicide bombers and help them with “advice and deed” to get out of a difficult life situation (often artificially created), owners of safe houses, etc. As a rule, older women with certain life experience to influence the immature consciousness of a confused 13–18-year-old future shahid act as mentors.

On the other hand, some leaders of terrorist organizations (Sh. Basayev) prefer more adult and ideological women who have lost their loved ones, their meaning in life and sought only revenge for the role of suicide bombers. These women can themselves play the role of mentors in communication with each other and younger companions, consolidating the idea of “merciless struggle with the enemy”. In these cases, it is only necessary to control and suppress doubts, express understanding and sympathy, stimulate the idea of “a friendly family united by a common idea and hatred of the enemy”.

Such differences in preferences for a higher age limit for future female suicide bombers are dictated not by moral considerations (although they are also taken into account for propaganda purposes), but by purely technical limitations, tasks and tactical goals. Persons who have not reached the majority age attract less attention and do not arouse suspicion and are best suited for the role of shahids. In addition, they are more easily amenable to psychological and ideological training. However, if they are

not orphans, they have close relatives whose behavior may not always be predictable.

Due to their immaturity, they can easily be converted, physically and psychologically forced to testify and cooperate with law enforcement agencies (if they are detained alive), etc. In addition, it is difficult to place even one shahid belt with a sufficient amount of explosives on the body of a teenage girl unnoticed by others. As a rule, a female shahid puts on two shahid belts for a terrorist act, one with explosives and the other with damaging elements (screws, nuts, nail clippings, ceramic fragments, etc.).

The shahid belt itself is a converted regular military unloading or, most often, its improvisation (it is necessary to tightly connect explosive components to each other in order to avoid their premature spread during detonation, therefore the partitions of inner pockets are removed). The weight of one shahid belt is significant even for an adult, and interconnected pockets make person's figure shapeless and noticeable. All this also limits possibilities of the combat use of such a shahid.

In addition, methods of gradual involvement in a terrorist organization provide for the level of education and specialty, place of residence and place of work of a possible candidate for recruitment. To work with female shahids and support their terrorist acts, preference is given to authoritative elderly women with many children and without a good education, who have firmly assimilated stereotypes of patriarchal rural life and unconventional dogmas of extreme religious movements. Residents of large cities with a good education, certain connections and a profession, especially related to work in municipalities or law enforcement agencies, are more suitable for organization of safe houses, intelligence and target selection, contacts with the media, human rights and other organizations, etc. The main condition for securing these persons in the organization is that they themselves or people important to them have the prospect of social collapse in connection with the exposure of a previously committed crime (more often corruption-oriented or indirect complicity in the action that caused the death of many people).

As a rule, such members of a terrorist group are protected, they are extremely rarely directly

involved in combat operations and practically do not fall within the competence of the penal system. Within the framework of this publication, it makes no sense to dwell in detail on the methods of gradual involvement in a terrorist organization, it is enough to mention that manipulation, blackmail, bribery, and exploitation of life illusions are used. Understanding general mechanisms of involvement, roles and motives of terrorist behavior is relevant for both law enforcement officials and penal system employees.

The use of the artificial psychological disintegration method (Figure 2) is carried out mainly for the purpose of recruiting suicide bombers. This method requires less time and other costs. Its essence lies in manipulating the consciousness of a person in a crisis situation. Such situations are often created artificially.

#### *Conclusions*

1. The results of the analysis of literary sources, own experience of practical work with the category of convicts under consideration, determine that the problematic issue of psychological mechanisms of involvement of adherents, women in particular, in terrorist organizations remains largely unresolved. The author, based on the results of empirical material interpretation, as well as his own research, offers schematically designed data on the historical dynamics observed in the content of the roles and prevailing psychological motives of female terrorists, as well as on the system of methods used to involve in terrorist activities, recruitment of potential terrorists.

2. As the practice of penitentiary psychologists shows, schematic data on the dynamics of the content of roles and prevailing psychological motives of female terrorists, as well as on the system of methods used to involve them in terrorist activities, are an effective methodological basis for psychological work with women convicted of terrorism.

At the moment, the issue of the effectiveness of psychocorrective work with persons convicted of terrorism-related crimes already has a pronounced relevance. The main reference point in the process of ensuring this effectiveness should be reliable methodological materials (recommendations) and scientific literary sources on the area of work of penitentiary psychologists under consideration.

In addition to the issues of recruitment, roles in crimes and psychological motives of female terrorists, many other aspects characterizing their socio-psychological characteristics are

subject to thorough study, knowledge of which makes it possible to effectively carry out psychocorrective work.

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#### INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**PAVEL N. KAZBEROV** – Candidate of Sciences (Psychology), Leading Researcher at the Department 3 of the Research Center-2 of the Research Institute of the Federal Penal Service of Russia, Moscow, Russia, mr.kazberov@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2233-0230>

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