



Sajjan M. Gohel

February 3rd, 2025

The 'Misogyny Trap' is the first step on the road to radicalisation



Many men who commit ISIS-inspired terrorism have a history of misogyny. Understanding this is key to preventing radicalisation, writes Sajjan M. Gohel.

Following the deadly vehicle terrorist attack in New Orleans during the early hours of New Years Day, US authorities began investigating if the perpetrator was inspired or directed by ISIS and their radical anti-US message.

However, the perennial issue that is often neglected is the role misogyny and hatred towards women plays in pushing and triggering individuals to engage in violent acts. Shamsud-Din Jabbar actions in New Orleans attack are no exception. There is a "misogyny trap" that shapes the paths of individuals who are drawn to ISIS or al-Qaeda.

The trajectory of individuals drawn into extremist ideologies, often reveals personal struggles intertwined with **deeply ingrained misogyny**. Examining the motivations behind ISIS-inspired attacks in the West reveals a pattern: a blend of personal grievances and ideological frameworks that channel private disappointments into public acts of terror. The case of Jabbar, who pledged allegiance to ISIS, is illustrative of this connection. His story, along with others, highlights how misogyny serves as a gateway for men to justify their actions and find meaning through violence.

Jabbar's life was marked by a series of **personal failures**: three unsuccessful marriages, financial debt, and unwillingness to fulfil his support payments for his children. His behaviour was described as erratic in the months before the New Orleans attack, which included online threats of violence against his own family. These elements reflect a sense of personal frustration, common among individuals who turn to violent ideologies. Men like Jabbar often externalise their setbacks, blaming women or society at large for their perceived emasculation or lack of control over their lives.

Misogyny to violence

At its core, ~~ISIS ideology is deeply misogynistic~~. Women are seen as subordinate to men, whose honour and purpose are tied to controlling and dominating them. This worldview appeals to men who already harbour misogynistic attitudes or have a history of domestic violence. It validates their beliefs and actions. Violence against women, in this context, is not just tolerated but often celebrated as an assertion of male dominance and a fulfilment of divine will.

The narratives propagated by ISIS offer men like Jabbar a scapegoat for their personal limitations. Instead of examining their own actions or circumstances, they are encouraged to blame women for their impediments. This misogynistic lens transforms private grievances into public justifications for violence. In Jabbar's case, his history of broken marriages and threats against his family aligns with this pattern, suggesting that his embrace of ISIS ideology was partly a way to rationalise and channel existing anger and frustration.

Jabbar's case is not an isolated incident and mirrors other attacks in the West, committed by men with a history of domestic violence or misogynistic traits. Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, responsible for the 2016 attack in Nice where he drove a truck into a crowd celebrating Bastille Day and killed 86 people, was abusive to his wife and had a broken marriage. Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Florida, had a history of domestic abuse towards his wife, and his violent tendencies were exacerbated by his sexual identity and extremist ideology. **Khalid Masood**, who attacked pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in 2017, also exhibited abusive behaviour toward women. Similarly, **Rachid Redouane**, involved in the London Bridge attack, displayed controlling behaviour toward his wife.

The common thread in these cases is the "misogyny trap" that ISIS exploits. Many men drawn to the group have histories of violence, control, and misogyny. Misogyny becomes a gateway, reinforcing the idea that their problems are not their own doing but the result of societal failings. This trap is particularly compelling when combined with the promise of divine purpose and redemption through violence as a way to reclaim a sense of agency. It allows them to transform their private grievances into public actions, reframing personal failings as a holy mission.

Methodology of hate

The New Orleans attack bore similarities to some of these past ISIS-inspired attacks where individuals used vehicles to plough into crowds.

Jabbar's choice of misusing a Ford F-150 vehicle as a lethal weapon symbolically and practically aligns with his motives. From a practical standpoint, it is a heavy-duty truck is capable of causing significant destruction and loss of life due to its large size.

Symbolically, the use of a truck like the F-150 reflects underlying themes of masculinity and misogyny for Jabbar. There is cultural perception that the F-150 is viewed as a “man’s car,” associated with ruggedness, dominance, and traditional male identity. For someone like Jabbar, who already felt emasculated due to his failed marriages and financial problems, driving such a vehicle during the attack could serve as a very warped attempt to reassert his masculinity and dominance.

The contrast between Jabbar—a figure consumed by anger and the weight of personal grievances—and the joyful revellers celebrating with loved ones on New Year’s reflects a stark divergence in worldview that aligns with both ISIS’s agenda and the misogynistic underpinnings of their ideology. For Jabbar, his isolation and bitterness resonate with the broader narratives promoted by ISIS, which often cast the modern world as corrupt, sinful, and unworthy. The partygoers at the French Quarter, enjoying their lives and relationships, embody the freedom, happiness, and social connection that extremists like Jabbar view with resentment and disdain.

Understanding the role of misogyny in radicalisation has important implications for counter-terrorism efforts. Recognising the overlap between domestic violence and extremism can help identify individuals at risk of radicalisation. Patterns of domestic abuse, threats of violence, and misogynistic behaviour can serve as early warning signs of potential escalation.

Addressing misogyny as a societal issue is critical to preventing radicalisation. The notion that ISIS has made a comeback following the New Orleans attack belies the fact that that that hatred towards women has never left society. The case of Jabbar and other ISIS-inspired attackers underscores the role of personal grievances and misogyny in the creepy radicalisation process.

Counter-terrorism agencies need to understand and address these dynamics to disrupt the misogyny trap and reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies. Combating misogyny is not just a matter of social justice but a critical component of preventing terrorism and promoting security.

Photo credit: Pexels

About the author

Sajjan M. Gohel

Dr Sajjan M. Gohel is a Visiting Fellow at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace, and Security and also a guest teacher at LSE’s International History Department. He is the International Security Director at the Asia-Pacific Foundation and Chairman of NATO DEEP’s Global Threats Advisory

Group. His book: Doctor, Teacher, Terrorist: The Life and Legacy of Al-Qaeda Leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was published in 2024.

Posted In: Gender-based Violence



© LSE 2025