Promoting peaceful Islam: Strengthening religious moderation and P/CVE strategies for Indonesian female migrant workers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study was to examine the involvement and vulnerability of Indonesian female migrant workers (FMWs) in violent extremism and terrorism, as well as to explore their potential role in promoting peaceful Islamic values as a counter-narrative.

Method – The population of this study consisted of 100 Muslim women who were formerly migrant workers. Data collection was conducted through a survey of all participants and in-depth interviews with 15 respondents using open-ended questions. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of vulnerability and opportunities for empowerment.

Result – The results showed that some Indonesian FMWs have been targeted and even recruited by extremist groups. However, the findings also indicate that with proper empowerment, FMWs can serve as agents of peace, strengthening religious moderation both domestically and internationally.

Implication – This study suggests the need for systematic programs that reinforce peaceful Islamic narratives, resilience, and empowerment among migrant communities as part of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

Originality/Value – This research provides one of the first empirical insights into the nexus between female migrant workers and violent extremism in Indonesia, highlighting their strategic role as peacebuilders in P/CVE efforts.

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Kata kunci:

Mencegah dan menangani ekstremisme kekerasan, pekerja JID | 278 migran perempuan, dan pemberdayaan.

Abstrak

Tujuan – Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengkaji keterlibatan dan kerentanan pekerja migran perempuan Indonesia (PMPI) dalam ekstremisme kekerasan dan terorisme, serta mengeksplorasi peran potensial mereka dalam mempromosikan nilai-nilai Islam yang damai sebagai narasi alternatif.

Metode – Populasi studi ini terdiri dari 100 perempuan Muslim yang pernah menjadi pekerja migran. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui survei terhadap semua peserta dan wawancara mendalam dengan 15 responden menggunakan pertanyaan terbuka. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif untuk mengidentifikasi pola kerentanan dan peluang pemberdayaan.

Hasil — Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa beberapa FMW Indonesia telah menjadi sasaran dan bahkan direkrut oleh kelompok ekstremis. Namun, temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa dengan pemberdayaan yang tepat, FMW dapat berperan sebagai agen perdamaian, memperkuat moderasi agama baik secara domestik maupun internasional.

Implikasi – Studi ini menyarankan perlunya program sistematis yang memperkuat narasi Islam yang damai, ketahanan, dan pemberdayaan di kalangan komunitas migran sebagai bagian dari upaya pencegahan dan penanggulangan ekstremisme kekerasan (P/CVE).

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Penelitian ini memberikan salah satu wawasan empiris pertama tentang hubungan antara pekerja migran perempuan dan ekstremisme kekerasan di Indonesia, menyoroti peran strategis mereka sebagai pembangun perdamaian dalam upaya P/CVE.

Introduction

The scourges of radicalism, violent extremism, and terrorism continue to plague many regions worldwide. According to the Global Terrorism Index, these threats pose significant risks to national security, impacting trade, aid, investment, tourism, international relations, and development. These dynamics endanger the lives, resources, and reputations of countless individuals. The economic toll is equally alarming, amounting to US\$52 billion in 2017 alone. Interestingly, countries with higher economic development are not immune; in fact, data from the Global Terrorism Index 2023 shows that several upper-middle-income and high-income countries-such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the United States—consistently appear in the top 30 countries affected by terrorism incidents, driven not by poverty or armed conflict but by ideologically motivated attacks, JID | 279 including far-right and religiously inspired extremism (Gu et al., 2024; Zhou & Liu, 2024). This trend indicates that factors beyond conflict and poverty—such as ideology and identity—play a crucial role.(Amit & Kafy, 2022; Makki & Akash, 2023; Nguyen, 2024) Women frequently emerge as both victims and actors in the landscape of global conflict. Traditionally, women have been seen as secondary players—providing logistical or emotional support, caregiving, and fulfilling domestic responsibilities (Breivik et al., 2024; Uddin & Hoque, 2025). However, modern extremist movements have increasingly targeted and recruited women for more active roles, including as operatives and even suicide bombers. Women often appear as both victims and perpetrators in the global conflict landscape. A notable example is the May 2018 suicide bombing in Surabaya, Indonesia, where a woman brought her children into a church bombing carried out by a family affiliated with Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an ISIS-linked group. This tragic event illustrates a transformation in terrorist networks-from hierarchical structures to "family cells"-and a shift in ideological affiliation from Al-Qaeda (via Jamaah Islamiyah) to ISIS-influenced groups. (Almog, 2021; O'Brien, 2021)

Many countries, including Indonesia, have prioritized the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). However, in a country with the world's largest Muslim population, promoting peaceful Islam—one rooted in moderation (wasatiyyah), compassion, tolerance, and antiviolence-must be central to any strategy. Peaceful Islam serves as both a theological and sociocultural framework that can counteract extremist narratives. It strengthens resilience, nurtures positive identity, and builds inclusive societies that are less susceptible to radical ideologies. Thus, the pursuit of effective P/CVE practices necessitates an approach or intervention model with a proven track record of success in implementation. Ineffective or poorly designed deradicalization or counter-terrorism initiatives not only squander valuable resources but also heighten the risk of terrorism and violent radicalization due to inadequate risk assessment or erroneous treatment methods.

Recent studies show that radicalism, violent extremism, and terrorism continue to occur in Indonesia, with an increasing number of women shifting roles from victims to active participants, including fighters and martyrs. Recent national security reports indicate that between 2018 and 2023, the Indonesian National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) recorded multiple cases of female involvement in terrorism, including several women arrested for plotting attacks in Jakarta, Bekasi, and Makassar (Damayanti et al., 2024). Importantly, within these cases, several perpetrators and suspects were identified as current or former female migrant workers (FMWs),

particularly those returning from Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Middle East (Cheng, 2021). These findings demonstrate that radicalism and violent extremism are not isolated phenomena but continue to intersect with Indonesia's large migratory workforce. Among these vulnerable groups, Indonesian female migrant workers (FMWs) have become specific targets for recruitment by violent extremist and terrorist organizations. Some FMWs have even been directly involved in terrorist acts. A growing body of evidence indicates that violent extremist groups have increasingly identified female migrant workers as strategic targets, recognizing their potential roles in facilitating and, in some cases, participating in acts of violence (Bunn et al., 2024; Tomaro, 2025). For instance, data from Densus 88 and BNPT show at least 19 attempted or planned attacks between 2016 and 2023 involving women with migrant-worker backgrounds, illustrating a clear and persistent pattern of radicalization pathways linked to overseas environments and online networks.

This study addresses a critical research gap; despite the rising visibility of FMWs in terrorism-related cases, scholarly analysis has largely overlooked how peaceful Islamic values can serve as protective factors against radicalization among this group (Thijssen et al., 2024). The novelty of this research lies in integrating P/CVE perspectives with gender-sensitive religious frameworks to demonstrate how FMWs are not merely vulnerable subjects but can be empowered as agents of peace capable of countering extremist narratives within transnational contexts.

The system of transnational labor work (TLW) constitutes a global network that primarily supplies labor to economically advanced nations. Nevertheless, the structural conditions under which many of these workers live and work often expose them to heightened vulnerability, including social isolation, precarious employment, and exploitation (Cubrich et al., 2022; Hopfgartner et al., 2022). It can be seen from Figure 1 that these intersecting challenges not only undermine their well-being but also create an enabling environment that increases their susceptibility to radicalization and extremist recruitment.

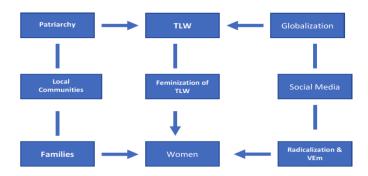


Figure 1. The Interconnectivity of Policy, Systems, and Globalization

Women's involvement in violent extremism is often linked to deeply personal experiences, including exposure to sexual abuse, domestic violence, and family conflict. Such traumatic conditions can generate psychological vulnerabilities that, in certain cases, make women more receptive to manipulative extremist narratives offering false promises of honor, liberation, or a renewed sense of purpose. These dynamics underscore the urgency of advancing inclusive and peace-oriented religious guidance that meaningfully responds to women's lived realities. Within this framework, peaceful Islam—grounded in principles of justice, mercy, empathy, and human dignity—serves as a critical resource for countering extremist narratives (Akhtar, 2024; Kirazli,

2024; Qadri et al., 2024; Yusuf, 2024). While men statistically constitute the majority of individuals involved in extremist networks, the increasing visibility of women—particularly Indonesian female migrant workers (FMWs)—in recent cases of radicalization highlights a rapidly evolving trend that remains understudied. This research, therefore, focuses on FMWs not because they represent the largest group, but because their unique sociocultural position, emotional vulnerabilities, and transnational living conditions create specific pathways to radicalization that differ from men. Moreover, women's involvement often takes place in more concealed or domestic spheres, making their radicalization harder to detect and necessitating dedicated scholarly attention (Hashmi & Adnan, 2024; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2023).

For Indonesian female migrant workers (FMWs), these challenges are compounded by their JID | 281 status as foreign nationals navigating unfamiliar socio-cultural environments. Many of them, particularly in non-Muslim majority countries, endure conditions of social isolation and precarious employment that intensify their susceptibility to radicalization. In response, they frequently seek connections through online platforms or informal migrant networks as mechanisms of psychological and emotional coping (Liu & Yeo, 2022; Muswede & Sithole, 2022; Yen et al., 2021). While these networks can provide temporary relief, they also create avenues for exposure to extremist content, particularly when access to inclusive and credible Islamic communities is absent.

Existing research suggests that women in contexts of emotional or social vulnerability may exhibit heightened receptivity to ideological discourses, particularly when these are framed in absolutist or radicalized terms (Mohamed, 2023; Tollu, 2023; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2023). In such cases, the absence of moderate voices online leaves women vulnerable to distorted teachings propagated through digital platforms. Exposure to radical interpretations of Islam in virtual spaces—without parallel access to inclusive and peace-centered narratives—significantly increases the risk of recruitment and indoctrination.

Addressing this challenge requires the deliberate promotion of peaceful Islam within migrant communities. This involves expanding access to inclusive religious education, strengthening support networks that integrate emotional and spiritual well-being, and amplifying tolerant Islamic teachings through digital platforms. When religious discourse is framed through the values of coexistence, compassion, and nonviolence, it becomes a powerful counterweight to extremist ideologies, offering meaningful alternatives for migrant women seeking a sense of belonging and purpose (Maneri, 2025; Mudhofi et al, 2023; Stockhammer, 2025).

The targeting of female migrant workers by extremist recruiters is further facilitated by their digital literacy, relative independence, and transnational networks. Many possess foreign language skills, stable incomes, and social mobility that extend beyond traditional communal boundaries characteristics that make them particularly attractive to online radical networks (Ares & van Ditmars, 2023; Jetten et al., 2021; Robertson & Robarts, 2022). However, these same capacities also create opportunities for empowerment: with adequate access to peace-based Islamic outreach - both online and offline - FMWs can develop the intellectual and spiritual resilience necessary to critically assess, resist, and reject extremist ideologies.

Documented cases of radicalization among female migrant workers, although relatively rare, reveal the urgent need for preventive interventions. The 2016 arrest of two former Indonesian migrant workers planning suicide attacks-motivated by their online exposure to what they perceived as a "purer" form of Islam-demonstrates how extremist narratives exploit women's vulnerabilities (Bouchama, 2025; Hotait & Ali, 2024; Ingram & Campion, 2024). Similarly, the JID | 282 2017 case of an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong leading a pro-IS network, and the 2019 arrests of domestic workers in Singapore for suspected terrorist financing, illustrate how radical groups strategically exploit migrant women's networks and digital access. Extremist organizations have effectively weaponized platforms such as Telegram, Twitter, and Facebook to disseminate radical content. However, these same platforms also present critical opportunities to reclaim digital spaces by amplifying balanced and tolerant Islamic narratives that promote dialogue and reject violence (Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Haq, 2025; Salma, 2025).

> Ultimately, advancing peaceful Islam among Indonesian female migrant workers is both a preventive and empowering strategy. By equipping women with inclusive religious knowledge, supportive community structures, and critical awareness, such initiatives enhance resilience against extremist ideologies while simultaneously positioning FMWs as ambassadors of peace and moderation. In doing so, these efforts contribute to reframing the global image of Islam as a faith rooted in compassion, justice, and coexistence, while strengthening the role of migrant women as pivotal actors in the broader struggle against violent extremism.

Research Methods

This research was conducted in Indramayu Regency, a district in West Java, Indonesia, which has long been recognized as one of the country's primary regions of origin for female migrant workers (FMWs). Situated approximately four to five hours by car from Jakarta, Indramayu is characterized by its predominantly rural landscape, where traditional agricultural practices, particularly rice farming, continue to serve as the primary source of livelihood for the majority of its residents. The agricultural workforce, locally referred to as petani (farmers), reflects the district's dependence on subsistence and small-scale farming as an economic foundation. Beyond documenting the socio-economic trajectories of these women, the study aimed to investigate the extent to which peaceful Islamic values—such as moderation (wasatiyyah), compassion (rahmah), and nonviolence—were integrated into their religious identity.

Furthermore, it aimed to assess how these values might function as protective mechanisms against the appeal of radical ideologies. By adopting this analytical lens, the research not only interrogates the vulnerabilities that heighten the risks of radicalization but also foregrounds the transformative potential of peaceful Islam as a counter-narrative (M. Ahmed et al., 2025; Mursaleen, 2022; Yasmin, 2023). This framework positions Islamic principles of justice, empathy, and coexistence as integral resources for strengthening resilience, promoting empowerment, and enabling migrant women to serve as agents of peace both within their local communities and in transnational contexts.

This study focuses on a specific group of Muslim women (n = 100) who were formerly migrant workers, incorporating both survey data and in-depth interviews with 15 participants (n = 15) using open-ended questions. While some participants had permanently discontinued overseas

employment, others were in a transitional phase, preparing for potential redeployment abroad. This sampling design allowed the study to engage diverse perspectives within the migrant worker community, thereby enriching the analysis (Agudelo Suárez et al., 2022; A. Ahmed et al., 2022; Primecz et al., 2023).

To enhance methodological rigour, additional procedures were implemented in response to the reviewer's comments. First, participants were selected using clearly defined criteria: (1) Muslim women aged 20-55; (2) former migrant workers with at least one completed overseas contract; (3) residents of Indramayu for a minimum of two years; and (4) willingness to participate through informed consent (Millum & Bromwich, 2021; Pietrzykowski & Smilowska, 2021). The sampling technique combined purposive sampling—used to select participants meeting these criteria—with JID | 283 snowball sampling, which enabled access to FMW networks that are often difficult to reach.

Second, data analysis followed a systematic multi-step procedure. Survey results were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, while interview data underwent thematic analysis. The coding process involved (a) initial open coding to identify recurring patterns, (b) axial coding to cluster categories related to religious moderation, vulnerability, and P/CVE strategies, and (c) selective coding to synthesize core themes aligned with the study's conceptual framework (Karki, 2025; Khasawneh & Belton, 2025).

Third, the study employed several strategies to establish qualitative trustworthiness: (1) Credibility: triangulation between survey responses, interview narratives, and field observations; member checking with a subset of participants; and peer debriefing with two external researchers (Almusaed et al., 2025). (2) Transferability: thick description of socio-cultural and religious contexts to enable applicability to other migrant-sending regions in Indonesia (Malamassam, 2023). (3) Dependability: development of an audit trail documenting data collection decisions, coding steps, and analytical memos (Michl et al., 2023). (4) Confirmability: reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' voices (Karcher et al., 2024).

The research explores three key areas: the lived experiences of migrant workers and their susceptibility to radicalization, the participants' levels of religious moderation and tendencies toward violent extremism, and their perspectives on solutions to counter extremism. The primary objective of this paper is to emphasize the significance of advancing a vision of peaceful Islamanchored in the principles of tolerance, compassion, and moderation, as a central strategy in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

Result and Discussion

The notion of Islamic moderation, or wasatiyyah, has long been deeply embedded within Indonesian cultural values and local wisdom. As a foundational element of peaceful Islam, wasatiyyah embodies principles of tolerance, equilibrium, nonviolence, and respect for diversity. These values are not only internalized by Indonesian Muslims but are also continuously enacted and preserved in their everyday practices, both domestically and within transnational contexts. Within the lived experiences of Indonesian communities, wasatiyyah functions as a normative framework that mediates religious identity, social interaction, and engagement with pluralistic environments.

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Building on this conceptual grounding, the present section presents the empirical findings of the study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Particular attention is directed toward how the principles of peaceful Islam inform the perspectives, practices, and resilience of Indonesian female migrant workers. By examining the intersection of religious values and migrant experiences, the study highlights how wasatiyyah not only provides a moral compass but also serves as a potential counterbalance to the ideological appeals of violent extremism (Aenul & Nandang, 2024; Hale et al., 2024).

Survey Results

The initial stage of the analysis examines the demographic characteristics of the participants, their degree of exposure to extremist narratives, and the extent to which they have internalized the principles of Islamic moderation. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents strongly identified with peaceful Islamic values and demonstrated consistent rejection of radical or violent extremist ideologies.

A total of 100 former Indonesian female migrant workers voluntarily participated in the study. Their demographic profiles are summarized as follows: most were married (79%), with the remaining unmarried (21%); the average age of overseas employment ranged from 22 to 23 years, although a number had departed prior to turning 18; the most common destination countries included Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, followed by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia. In terms of education, the majority of married respondents had completed elementary to senior high school, while most unmarried participants had attained education up to the senior high school level. This demographic variation offers a valuable lens for understanding how life trajectories shape participants' religious perspectives, their exposure to ideological risks, and their resilience to extremist appeals.

The attitudinal data revealed several noteworthy insights. First, respondents overwhelmingly rejected violent extremism. They expressed strong disagreement with statements endorsing insults toward other religions or religious figures, desecration of sacred texts or symbols, destruction of places of worship, or engagement in violence in the name of religion. This consistent rejection underscores a clear alignment with the peaceful principles of Islam, which emphasize human dignity, respect, and coexistence.

Second, the responses reflected a deep internalization of moderate Islamic teachings. Compassion, tolerance, and ethical conduct emerged as central values guiding their understanding of faith. Importantly, respondents distinguished between spiritual devotion and violent defense of religion. For example, although many strongly affirmed their willingness to "sacrifice everything to defend their religion," such commitment was interpreted as a form of spiritual integrity, devotion to *da'wah* (peaceful propagation), and adherence to justice through legal and ethical means rather than violence. This distinction points to a mature and nuanced understanding of religious commitment.

Third, the analysis highlighted regional variations. Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan tended to express stronger sentiments about defending their religion, likely reflecting contextual factors such as the degree of religious freedom, experiences of discrimination,

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or challenges to social integration in host countries. Nevertheless, across all contexts, the shared theme remained that Islam should be defended through dignity and peace rather than violence.

These findings illustrate the transformative role of peaceful Islam in shaping the worldview of Indonesian female migrant workers. Despite enduring social isolation, discrimination, and exposure to radical content online, the majority demonstrated a strong orientation toward moderation, respect for others, and nonviolence. This suggests that strengthening the dissemination of peaceful Islamic teachings-particularly through community networks and accessible religious education—constitutes an effective strategy for preventing radicalization.

Moreover, by amplifying narratives centered on peace, empathy, and interfaith harmony, former migrant workers can serve as ambassadors of peaceful Islam in both domestic and JID | 285 transnational spaces. Their lived experiences and moral authority provide a powerful counternarrative to extremism and reaffirm Islam's identity as a religion of mercy, justice, and peace.

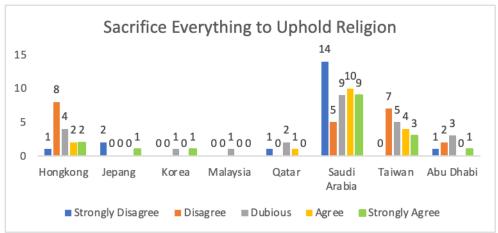


Figure 2. Defending Religion

The findings further reveal that, although the respondents demonstrate a profound commitment to their Islamic faith, they simultaneously exhibit a clear and consistent rejection of violence and extremist ideologies. Their religious identity is deeply rooted in the principles of wasatiyyah (Islamic moderation), which emphasizes peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and respect for interfaith relations. Importantly, the women's expressions of religiosity are not manifested through antagonism or exclusivist practices; rather, they are embodied in spiritual devotion, ethical behavior, and the pursuit of social harmony. This pattern suggests that their faith serves as a constructive resource, fostering resilience, moral integrity, and an inclusive orientation within both domestic and transnational contexts.

Understanding radicalism through the lens of moderation reveals that a significant number of participants (n = 55) reported familiarity with the concept of radicalism or having heard of radical groups in Figure 2. A smaller group (n = 3) encountered such information after returning home, suggesting that exposure to extremist ideas is not limited to the host country. A few participants (n = 6) acknowledged having been approached or invited by individuals associated with radical ideologies. Most of these cases were linked to domestic workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where weekend social gatherings and digital connectivity are more accessible. However, even in such environments, most women actively resisted extremist narratives. Their social interactions served not as gateways to radicalism but as opportunities for learning, reflection, and connection with

fellow Muslims. This demonstrates the potential of spiritual communities and religious engagement abroad to reinforce peaceful Islamic values when supported with proper guidance.

Faith-Based Communities Abroad as Platforms for Peace

JID | 286 In response to questions about organizational involvement while working overseas, 21 women reported having joined local groups. These organizations were most commonly found in Taiwan (n = 9) and Hong Kong (n = 8), with a smaller presence in Saudi Arabia (n = 2). Importantly, these groups often became spaces for spiritual growth, where members could recite the Qur'an, strengthen their understanding of Islam, and form bonds grounded in shared faith and cultural identity.

Faith-based communities played a pivotal role in mitigating feelings of loneliness and social isolation, enabling migrant women to remain anchored in the authentic and peaceful teachings of Islam. One respondent in Taiwan, for example, recalled being invited to a mosque gathering with promises of a better life. However, she exercised discernment and spiritual clarity in evaluating the authenticity of such invitations. Similar concerns were echoed by other participants, who highlighted the pervasive influence of social media and charismatic religious figures in disseminating religious messages. While acknowledging the potential value of these platforms, participants stressed the importance of critically engaging with such content through the lens of moderation and truth.

Moreover, respondents underscored the necessity of vigilance toward digital discourses and self-proclaimed ustadz whose interpretations may diverge from the Prophet's foundational teachings of mercy, justice, and peace. Their testimonies reflect a heightened awareness of the risks of misinterpretation, particularly when religious messages are consumed without the guidance of trusted authorities or the support of a cohesive community. This awareness illustrates not only their capacity for critical religious engagement but also the protective function of Islamic moderation as a framework for resilience against ideological distortions in transnational contexts.

Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword

Social media has emerged as a significant arena for religious engagement, functioning simultaneously as a medium for positive learning and as a potential gateway to radical influences. Many participants, particularly in Hong Kong and Taiwan, reported utilizing platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to maintain familial connections, disseminate Islamic knowledge, and cultivate supportive peer networks. At the same time, several respondents acknowledged encountering content in which radical ideologies were subtly framed as part of religious discourse, often accompanied by misleading promises of spiritual salvation or material benefits.

These dynamics underscore the critical importance of integrating digital literacy with robust religious guidance. By equipping migrant workers with the skills to discern credible sources and fostering access to authentic Islamic teachings, communities can empower them to navigate online environments more safely. In doing so, migrant women are better positioned to resist manipulative narratives that distort religious values and to uphold Islam's core principles of peace, mercy, and justice.

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Isolation and Power Dynamics in the Middle East

Respondents employed in Saudi Arabia reported comparatively limited exposure to both organized religious groups and radical content. This condition was primarily shaped by the restrictive nature of the Kafala (sponsorship) system, which imposes significant constraints on social mobility and personal autonomy. Under such circumstances, migrant women had minimal opportunities for engagement beyond the employer's household, thereby reducing their chances of encountering both supportive faith-based communities and potentially harmful ideological influences.

Although this restricted interaction appeared to lower the immediate risk of exposure to radical networks, it simultaneously curtailed access to essential sources of spiritual support and religious education. Such limitations may inadvertently heighten vulnerability by creating a vacuum in which personal struggles are faced in isolation. These findings highlight the critical need for accessible and credible Islamic education that can be delivered through safe, culturally sensitive, and contextually relevant channels—both in host countries and upon reintegration in Indonesia.

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Social Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding

Despite the risks it poses, social media also functions as an important lifeline for Indonesian female migrant workers, facilitating spiritual engagement and sustaining connections with communities that embody the values of peaceful Islam. Many respondents reported using digital platforms to access religious lectures, participate in Qur'an reading circles, and exchange uplifting messages with fellow Indonesians. These practices enabled them to maintain a sense of belonging and spiritual grounding despite geographical distance and social isolation (Boynton & Mellan, 2021; Buckingham et al., 2023; Førsund et al., 2024).

Testimonies from participants further demonstrate that when appropriately managed, digital platforms can serve as effective vehicles for promoting narratives of moderation, compassion, and religious clarity. Rather than being passive recipients of online content, many women actively engaged in curating and sharing messages that reinforced their resilience against extremist ideologies and strengthened their moral agency.

Overall, the participants expressed a consistent preference for peaceful interpretations of Islam, firmly rejecting violence while embracing community building through compassion, shared learning, and faith-based solidarity. Such patterns were especially evident among migrant workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where access to peer networks, religious gatherings, and digital resources provided meaningful support for their spiritual journeys. This analysis underscores that the primary challenge extends beyond preventing radicalization. More critically, it lies in equipping migrant women with the intellectual and spiritual tools necessary to embody, practice, and disseminate peaceful Islam across transnational contexts.

Solutions Proposed by the Participants

The participants articulated a set of constructive recommendations aimed at mitigating the risks of radicalization while simultaneously reinforcing the principles of peaceful Islam (Meinema, 2021; Pamungkas, 2024): 1) accessible religious education having programs to deepen the understanding of peaceful Islam - focused on compassion, tolerance, and respect - should be made available before

departure and after returning from overseas work; 2) Digital literacy and online safety that provide an opportunity for FMWs to take trainings aimed to discern between authentic and misleading religious content on social media platforms; 3) Faith-based community support such as Indonesian mosques and community centers abroad that can serve as safe spaces to nurture Islamic values aligned with peace and moderation, offering protection against loneliness and ideological exploitation; 4) Spiritual counseling and reintegration that allowing returned FMWs access to faith-based reintegration programs that help them reconnect with mainstream Islamic values, address any spiritual confusion, and reestablish community ties.

Figure 3 show a notable proportion of participants (n=55) are familiar with radicalism or extremist groups. They have identified several key solutions that warrant attention from women, families, organizations, agencies, and governments, as outlined in the figure below.

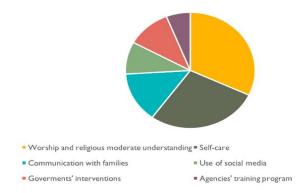


Figure 3. Solutions for Radicalism and VE

Promoting Peaceful Islam as a Strategy Against Radicalism

The study revealed that individuals, families, and community groups play vital roles in promoting peaceful Islamic values and preventing radicalization and violent extremism, especially at the micro level. As shown in Figure 4, over thirty participants (n = 32) emphasized that regular worship, sincere devotion, and a moderate understanding of Islam serve as powerful protective measures against radical ideologies. These women stressed the importance of deepening religious knowledge through trustworthy scholars, maintaining a strong spiritual connection, and avoiding reliance on unverified online sources—such as websites or Google searches that may lead to radical teachings. This emphasis is consistent across key migrant destinations such as Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia, where FMWs reported that structured access to mosques, religious study groups, and Indonesian Muslim communities significantly strengthened their commitment to peaceful Islamic practice.

Participants also emphasized the importance of self-awareness and vigilance in their daily lives. Twenty-eight respondents (n = 28) highlighted the value of self-protection strategies grounded in Islamic ethics, such as being cautious with unfamiliar individuals, choosing friendships wisely, recognizing early signs of radical influence, and staying focused on their original intention of working abroad to support their families in a lawful and dignified manner. Respondents working in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia noted that strong Muslim-majority environments helped reinforce these protective behaviors. At the same time, those in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea—

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where Muslims are a small minority-relied more heavily on personal discipline and online religious communities to maintain their spiritual grounding.

Open communication within the family unit emerged as a central protective factor against radicalization. Fourteen participants (n = 14) emphasized that maintaining regular contact with family members, consulting trusted elders, and engaging in open discussions on religious matters significantly contributed to their emotional resilience and spiritual clarity when confronted with ambiguous or extremist narratives. In relation to digital influence, nine women (n = 9) emphasized the importance of media literacy, specifically the ability to critically evaluate online content and identify manipulative strategies employed by radical groups. They cautioned against deceptive narratives that exploit Islamic terminology under the guise of offering salvation or material gain, JID | 289 and instead encouraged reliance on mainstream Islamic teachings grounded in peace, compassion, and moderation. Participants in locations with strong migrant networks—such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia-reported higher access to peer support groups that facilitated these discussions. In contrast, workers in Japan, South Korea, and Qatar described digital literacy as their primary defense against misleading online religious content.

At the structural level, participants advanced macro-level recommendations to enhance protection mechanisms for migrant workers. Eleven respondents (n=11) urged both the Indonesian government and authorities in host countries to take a more proactive role in mitigating extremist threats, including the establishment of clear regulations to monitor suspicious organizations, curb radical influences, and ensure the safety, well-being, and religious freedom of migrant workers. Additionally, six participants (n = 6) recommended that labor agencies in both sending and receiving countries provide preventive education and training programs. Such initiatives, they argued, should focus on recognizing radical narratives while simultaneously fostering a balanced and compassionate understanding of Islam. Some participants in the Gulf countries—particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—suggested the need for tighter oversight of religious gatherings to prevent infiltration by radical preachers. At the same time, those in East Asian destinations such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong emphasized the importance of governmentsupported cultural orientation programs that include modules on peaceful Islam and interfaith coexistence.

Taken together, these insights illustrate the participants' strong commitment to safeguarding peaceful religious practices and advancing the principles of Islamic moderation, which emphasize tolerance, diversity, and social harmony. The findings also highlight the dual nature of digital platforms, which, while enabling positive engagement, can also serve as tools for radical groups targeting vulnerable migrant women. In response, participants emphasized the importance of cultivating faith-based resilience, fostering family dialogue, and exercising caution when interacting with unfamiliar individuals or online religious authorities. Across all eight major destination countries-Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia—the women consistently identified peaceful Islam as both a moral anchor and a practical safeguard against extremist influence, although the specific challenges and support systems varied by regional context.

The Need for Enhancing P/CVE Through the Lens of Peaceful Islam

Drawing on social work theories and gender-sensitive analytical frameworks, effective Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) initiatives must be designed to operate simultaneously at the individual, familial, community, and governmental levels, with the principles JID | 290 of peaceful Islam serving as a central normative foundation. At its core, Islam emphasizes peace (salaam), justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and mutual respect across religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. These principles are not only intrinsic to Islamic teachings but also embedded within Indonesia's indigenous Islamic tradition, Islam Nusantara, which embodies a culturally rooted and moderate form of Islam that promotes coexistence, tolerance, and communal harmony. The experiences of Indonesian Female Migrant Workers (FMWs) across major destination countries—such as Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia—further demonstrate that the accessibility of moderate Islamic teachings varies considerably by national context, shaping the urgency and design of P/CVE interventions.

Prioritizing these values within religious discourse and policy frameworks can significantly enhance the resilience of both individuals and societies against the proliferation of violent ideologies. Violent extremism does not emerge in isolation; rather, it is nurtured within contexts of exclusion, inequality, disinformation, and spiritual disorientation. By consistently advancing Islamic teachings that privilege dialogue over dogmatism, unity over fragmentation, and peace over violence, communities are better positioned to cultivate what may be termed "spiritual immunity," a capacity to critically resist and reject radical interpretations that distort the essence of religious doctrine. This need for "spiritual immunity" is particularly evident among FMWs in non-Muslimmajority destinations such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea, where limited access to formal Islamic institutions compels migrant women to rely on online platforms—spaces that are simultaneously rich in moderate content yet vulnerable to extremist messaging. In contrast, FMWs in Muslim-majority countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Malaysia often reported stronger institutional support, such as structured religious gatherings and access to Indonesian Muslim communities, which help anchor them in peaceful Islamic values.

Furthermore, a critical dimension in advancing Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) initiatives involves integrating intersectional gender perspectives that acknowledge both the vulnerabilities and the transformative potential of women in peacebuilding. While certain women may be drawn into radical networks due to experiences of marginalization, trauma, or the allure of purpose and belonging, it is essential to recognize that these dynamics coexist with women's broader capacity to act as central agents of peace. As mothers, educators, caregivers, and community leaders, women play strategic roles in fostering resilience, transmitting the values of moderation, and countering extremist narratives through their daily practices of care and moral guidance. Patterns observed across the eight destination countries reinforce this: for example, women working in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Qatar often engage in structured religious study circles that reinforce peaceful Islamic messages, whereas those in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea rely more heavily on informal peer-based learning due to fewer institutional resources, necessitating more tailored, context-sensitive P/CVE approaches.

This dual potential has been formally acknowledged at the international level, most notably through United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), which emphasizes the inclusion of women in peace processes and highlights their agency not only as potential victims or perpetrators of violence but also as key contributors to sustainable peace. For P/CVE frameworks to be effective, they must therefore invest in women's leadership within religious, educational, and social institutions. A notable example in the Indonesian context is the Ulama Perempuan movement, which empowers female Islamic scholars to engage in authoritative interpretations of sacred texts. By advancing perspectives grounded in gender justice, empathy, and peaceful coexistence, this movement reinforces the essence of Islam's normative message-mercy, justice, and peace-while simultaneously positioning women as indispensable actors in safeguarding communities from extremist ideologies. Such gender-inclusive religious leadership becomes even more critical in countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, where migrant women often lack direct access to credible religious authorities; conversely, in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Malaysia, female-led religious initiatives can be integrated more seamlessly into existing community structures, offering stronger institutional pathways for peaceful Islamic outreach. These comparative insights underscore the importance of tailoring P/CVE strategies to the unique religious governance systems and sociocultural landscapes of each host country, thereby ensuring that peaceful Islam remains both accessible and contextually relevant to migrant women across diverse global settings.

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Creating Opportunities for Women as Peacebuilders

The empowerment of women as religious leaders, educators, and peace advocates should not be regarded merely as an aspirational discourse but rather as a moral imperative and strategic necessity within contemporary Islamic thought. Women's active involvement in religious interpretation and community decision-making provides critical avenues to challenge patriarchal readings that have historically marginalized female voices, while simultaneously amplifying perspectives that advance justice, peace, and social cohesion.

In this regard, fostering women's agency requires multidimensional strategies, including sustained investment in women-led educational initiatives, the establishment of peer-support networks among Indonesian migrant women abroad, and the cultivation of alliances between female religious scholars and civil society actors. Global institutions, such as UN Women (2020), have emphasized that women's participation in peacebuilding processes enhances the durability and inclusivity of peace agreements, underscoring the intersection between gender justice and conflict resolution (Carter, Hallward, et al., 2025). By advancing these initiatives, the dissemination of inclusive and peaceful interpretations of Islam can be expanded to wider audiences (Karim et al, 2025). At the same time, extremist narratives that instrumentalize religion for violence can be neutralized at their source. Ultimately, empowering women in these capacities strengthens not only the moral fabric of religious communities but also contributes to social resilience, intercommunal harmony, and the global pursuit of sustainable peace.

Moreover, a gender-sensitive approach to P/CVE necessitates the integration of deradicalization and reintegration initiatives tailored to the specific needs of women. These programs should not only confront radical ideologies intellectually but also restore dignity, agency, and purpose through psychosocial counseling, social reintegration, and the reaffirmation of peaceful Islamic values. Emphasizing forgiveness, compassion, and moral reflection within these interventions ensures that prevention is complemented by empowerment, thereby transforming migrant women into agents of resilience and advocates of peace.

Strengthening Systems of Prevention and Empowerment

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The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of structured pre-departure training for prospective migrant workers. Such training must extend beyond legal awareness and labor protections to incorporate religious education grounded in moderation (*wasatiyyah*). By providing women with theological literacy and critical interpretive skills, these programs can enable them to recognize and resist extremist propaganda - particularly in digital spaces where radical narratives are frequently disguised through the misuse of religious terminology.

To achieve this, coordinated action between governments and labor agencies, both in Indonesia and in destination countries, is imperative. Policy frameworks should ensure the establishment of safe spaces for religious learning, emotional support, and community engagement, while simultaneously upholding freedom of belief, curbing hate speech, and regulating organizations that exploit religion for political or violent agendas. Such initiatives are vital for creating an enabling environment where migrant women can strengthen their resilience against ideological manipulation.

An effective national strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) cannot be sustained without the active engagement of civil society. Faith-based organizations, community associations, women's groups, and youth networks must be systematically empowered to advance peaceful Islamic teachings through diverse platforms, including religious study circles, community-based initiatives, media outreach, and cultural or artistic programs. Comparative experiences, such as those observed in Singapore, illustrate how strong civil society engagement plays a pivotal role in preventive education, early identification of risks, and the cultivation of communal trust - all of which are indispensable for long-term resilience against extremist ideologies.

At the grassroots level, P/CVE initiatives should prioritize family- and community-based empowerment as the foundation of sustainable prevention. Families constitute the primary sphere of spiritual and moral education, instilling values such as compassion, honesty, critical reasoning, and peaceful dialogue, as articulated in the Qur'an and Hadith. Complementing this, local mosques and religious educators hold a critical responsibility in providing inclusive, non-politicized religious instruction. Such spaces should not only reinforce moderate theological perspectives but also serve as safe environments for learning, spiritual growth, and community building, particularly for migrant women who often face isolation and vulnerability abroad.

Conclusion

The promotion of Islamic moderation should be understood not merely as a theological obligation but also as a pragmatic strategy within the broader framework of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). This is particularly salient in the context of Indonesian female migrant workers, who often occupy a position of structural vulnerability due to their transnational mobility, socio-economic dependence, and exposure to social isolation in host countries. As research has indicated, these conditions may render them susceptible to ideological

manipulation by extremist networks. Nevertheless, the findings of this study highlight that the vast majority of Indonesian migrant women demonstrate strong resilience against radical ideologies, affirming their commitment to embodying Islam as a faith of peace, tolerance, and dignity.

The findings underscore the crucial role of empowering Indonesian female migrant workers (FMWs) as proactive agents of peace, who possess the capacity to cultivate and disseminate the values of religious moderation within both domestic and transnational contexts. In doing so, the study demonstrates how strengthening peaceful Islamic narratives not only enhances individual resilience but also contributes to the broader effort of safeguarding migrant communities from the influence of extremist ideologies. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the sample of Indonesian FMWs cannot be fully generalized to all Indonesian women. FMWs occupy a distinct JID | 293 socio-cultural position shaped by transnational mobility, exposure to intercultural environments, and specific economic pressures. These experiences uniquely influence their perspectives on religious moderation, resilience, and peacebuilding. Therefore, while the findings provide critical insights into women's potential roles in preventing extremism, they should be interpreted as reflective of the particular lived realities of migrant women rather than as a universal representation of Indonesian women as a whole. Even so, the patterns identified in this study offer an informed basis for understanding broader opportunities for Indonesian women's engagement in P/CVE initiatives.

The advancement of Islamic moderation among women migrants necessitates a multidimensional approach that integrates sustained dialogue, community-based support systems, and gender-responsive policy interventions. Such measures should not be perceived as external impositions but rather as initiatives rooted in the normative foundations of Islam, which emphasize compassion (rahmah), justice ('adl), and the sanctity of human life. By aligning gender-sensitive frameworks with authentic Islamic values, governments, civil society organizations, and transnational religious authorities can cultivate inclusive environments that both affirm women's dignity and strengthen communal resilience against the spread of violent extremism.

The paper concludes by offering policy-relevant recommendations designed to reinforce these narratives and institutionalize frameworks that support long-term resistance to radicalization among vulnerable populations. Additionally, in shaping the future of P/CVE strategies, stakeholders-governments, civil society, religious leaders, and families-must come together to promote the values of peaceful Islam as a shield against extremism and as a foundation for global peacebuilding. When women are empowered with knowledge, support, and leadership opportunities, they can become the vanguard of a peaceful Islamic revival that uplifts not only Muslim communities but all of humanity.

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