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KAZAKHSTAN'S APPROACH AND EXPERIENCE IN REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF REPATRIATES

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The author of this publication is Dr. Yulia Shapoval - Professor of the Department of Religious Studies at the Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan. The publication contains an analysis of the approach and experience of Kazakhstan in the rehabilitation and reintegration of citizens repatriated from the zones of terrorist activity in Syria and Iraq, identifies successful practices and shortcomings, and provides recommendations for improving programs for the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates.

The publication is intended for decision-makers, experts and consultants, representatives of civil society, as well as a wide range of readers interested in Kazakhstan's policy regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates from the zones of terrorist activity in Syria and Iraq.

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ABBREVIATIONS

RK	– The Republic of Kazakhstan
IS/ISIS	– The Islamic State/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; an extremist organization
KNB	– National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan
PF	– Public Fund
NGO	– Non-governmental Organization
PSC	– Population Service Center
CRS Nur-Sultan	– Center for Religious Studies in Nur-Sultan
ORA	– Office of Religious Affairs
RAGS	– Civil Registration
DUMK	– Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan
CCRP	– Committee on children's rights protection under Kazakhstan's Education and Science Ministry

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I. Executive Summary

In the “Zhusan” humanitarian operation, Kazakhstan had returned its citizens, mostly women and children, from the zones of terrorist activity of the so-called “Islamic State”. Ensuing rehabilitation and reintegration efforts have emerged as a major challenge for the country.

Kazakhstan had some rehabilitation experience prior to the “Zhusan” operation; it had been rehabilitating individuals, mostly men, with radical religious leanings and those sentenced for religious extremism by reiterating the idea of de-radicalization, i.e., religious re-education. Rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children necessitated a revision of existing methods and the development of a new approach tailored to the target group’s needs. This study aims to examine Kazakhstan’s approach to the rehabilitation and reintegration of those repatriated from zones of terrorist activity in Syria and Iraq. The study employs a qualitative approach, basing on interviews with rehabilitation center directors, lawyers, counselors, community workers, theologians, and female repatriates. The study also involves desk-based research and a review of relevant documents.

As opposed to the earlier practices of rehabilitation of men in the penal system, Kazakhstan took a more comprehensive and holistic approach this time in rehabilitating and reintegrating women and children repatriated from Syria and Iraq. This approach acknowledges and embraces varying rehabilitation dimensions, including social, legal, medical, social security, socio-psychological, social education (for children), educational (for women), and theological dimensions. The purposes of rehabilitation and reintegration programs are to restore the civil and legal status of returnees; to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing; provide returnees with individual and social opportunities to reintegrate into Kazakh society; and because returnees had been exposed to the ISIS ideology, to contribute to their religious rehabilitation. Kazakhstan’s rehabilitation approach is premised on the state-funded collaboration between NGOs and public authorities. Kazakhstan’s approach is therefore multi-actor as it engages various institutions and professionals to help the repatriates return to their normal civilian lives.


Rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees in Kazakhstan embody three phases. The first phase provides for the social adaptation; it had been deployed in a rehabilitation camp immediately upon repatriates’ arrival to Kazakhstan. The second phase provides for rehabilitation and primary socialization; it had taken place in the provinces through “Shans” Socio-Psychological and Legal Assistance Centers established by the “Pravo” PF with a consolidated work system and directly under Fund’s management headed by Olga Ryl. This phase accommodated documenting of women and children, psychological diagnosing and correction, medical and social assistance, retraining courses for women, and religious rehabilitation. Much emphasis was given to the social-pedagogical and psychological service to children and preparing them for school. Rehabilitation’s third phase assembles continued socialization and smooth social reintegration; the final phase continues to this day. The

main actors involved are the “Akniyet” Fund, Centers for Religious Affairs under the city and provincial administration (akimats), the Offices of Religious Affairs under the akimats. The rehabilitation and reintegration efforts at this stage are focused on religious rehabilitation and psychological counseling for women. Rehabilitation measures do not target children as the aforesaid actors suggest that children had not been indoctrinated by ISIS.

Rehabilitation and reintegration activities had engaged numerous experts, including lawyers, counselors, community workers, theologians, and teachers. Working with these groups of people was a new experience to many of them; they, henceforth, were able to test their methods and professional inputs to working with women and children from terrorist activity zones, and thus identify the most effective ones. This will permit the elaboration of a single integrated approach to rehabilitation and reintegration specific to the Kazakh context and individual characteristics of the repatriates. Women now have completed primary rehabilitation and socialization phases and are attempting to decide their own life strategies. Having attained professional knowledge and skills, some of them are employed or seek to work and make a living, while others married pursuing familiar gender-related behavior. Employment as an imperative tool for the reintegration of repatriates remains a pertinent issue deserving special attention from the state. In social terms, a sewing workshop recruiting repatriates for sewing medical masks could be cited as a good effective example since women made small but sustainable livelihoods amidst the pandemic. They were also able to network in the work environment and decide their life strategies. “Ulagat” Muslim Women Club in Zhezqazghan also merits attention; female repatriates are employed (sewing workshops and pastry rooms) in that club; engage in personal development (English and Arabic language courses); see a therapist and consult theologians. The club also provides supplementary education for children of repatriates. Hence, conditions conducive to rehabilitation, reintegration, and employment of repatriates are set in one room.

As the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates have been a new experience, the participants in the rehabilitation have encountered difficulties at different rehabilitation phases. In particular, while documenting repatriates, participants have determined areas in legislation for improvement, precisely those concerning the provision of birth certificates to children born in Syria and to presuming killed or missing husbands in Syria as dead or lost. In many cases, legal complexities had prompted a rather lengthy documents restoration.

In the rehabilitation process, there was a shortage of qualified religious scholars and counselors who (a) had adequate expertise and skills necessary for working with this group of women and children; (b) spoke Russian as the majority of women did not have advanced Kazakh language skills and preferred to communicate in Russian. We also should cite a lack of teaching materials in psychology and theology that guide the rehabilitation processes and are tailored to target women and children as specific rehabilitation groups. Religious rehabilitation program stressed re-education, i.e., persuading repatriates to abjure religiously motivated ISIS ideology and accept the Hanafi School of Sunni Islam. Scant attention had been paid to the secular alternative lifestyles in multi-ethnic and multi-religious society in a secular state and encouraging critical thinking essential for life in a digital society. The present stage



leaves unsettled the question of further measures for reaching repatriates' children; the full impact of their stays in terrorist activity zones has a delayed effect.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a grievous challenge for all rehabilitation and reintegration programs at the current stage. Most of the work with returnees went online, whilst also calling for a reassessment of the working methods. On the one hand, remote work methods are relevant for Kazakhstan's digitalization program. On the other hand, the online format necessitates corresponding material and technical support, mastering new approaches and methods of conveying the material, and a well-designed step-by-step meeting arrangement. The effectiveness of "online" for such a peculiar process as rehabilitation requires expert analysis. At the same time, the pandemic clearly demonstrated the need to use digital technologies and media space in rehabilitation processes, and generally in building resilience to radical religious ideologies through generating digital educational resources, online counter - narratives¹, alternative narratives², online forums and online communities. Especially since different websites and social media platforms actively used by extremist organizations for indoctrination and recruitment were a major factor influencing Kazakh citizens' decision to move to the "Islamic State."

¹In countering radical religious ideologies and religiously motivated extremism, counter-narrative is a message intended to deconstruct or delegitimize extremist narratives.

²An alternative narrative is a constructive message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda.

2. Introduction

2.1. Background

At the Government's initiative, in several stages of the humanitarian operation "Zhusan", Kazakhstan had returned 156 women and 406 children from the zones of terrorist activity of the so-called Islamic State (hereinafter IS), the National Security Committee reports³. The majority of women left for ISIS between 2013 and 2016. Nearly every female repatriate had several (an average of 3-5) children, some of whom had been born within the territories of ISIS.

The next major step proceeding repatriation was rehabilitation and reintegration of these citizens into Kazakh society and civilian life.

Kazakhstan has been fulfilling its rehabilitation and reintegration programs from January 2019 to date. The international community presents several different approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals perceived to adhere to violent, religiously motivated extremism.⁴ The first approach is presented by the Middle Eastern countries that exercise Yemen's theological dialogue model. This model involves religious reeducation programs via theological dialogue with leading experts in Islamic theology to undermine radical Islamist ideology, encourage moderation, and promote the region-specific and state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. The main shortcoming of this approach is that it is difficult to assess whether a person has truly changed his or her beliefs.

European states have taken a different approach as they see radicalization not merely in the wrong interpretation of Islam but in the context of broader social problems, notably the growing alienation and isolation of Muslim communities in Europe and their inadequate social integration.⁵ The European rehabilitation programs, as demonstrated by researcher Floris Vermeulen in his 2014 article, are aimed largely at enhancing social cohesion and integration; ideological element is also there but is rather neglected.⁶ European experts also doubt that deradicalization is attainable as an ultimate result of rehabilitation, i.e., change in beliefs and values. For instance, Horgan (2008) maintains that disengagement is a far more realistic goal that entails a change in behavior (i.e., refraining from violence and withdrawing from a radical organization) but not necessarily a change in beliefs.⁷ The United Kingdom had been implementing the prominent counterterrorism strategy CONTEST, then CONTEST-

³KNB: Vse etapy operatsii "Zhusan" zaversheny [All "Zhusan" Operation phases had been completed, National Security Committee] <http://knb.gov.kz/ru/article/knb-vse-etapy-operatsii-zhusan-zaversheny>, Accessed on 11.12.2020.

⁴Rabasa A., Pettyjohn S.L., Ghes J.J., Boucek Ch. (2010) *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*. Pittsburgh. 244 pp.

⁵Bartlett J., Miller C. (2012) "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:1 - 21

⁶Vermeulen, F. (2014) "Suspect Communities – Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26: 286-306.

⁷Horgan, J. (2008) "Individual disengagement: a psychological analysis", in Bjorgo, T. , Horgan, J (ed.) *Leaving terrorism behind. Individual and collective disengagement*, pp.17-30. London: Routledge.

2, whereby the government opted to cooperate with moderate Muslim organizations and Muslim communities in the country and implemented educational and social programs for young Muslims to increase the immunity and resilience to violent extremism.⁸ The Netherlands' preventive measures and rehabilitation programs are socially-oriented and aimed at reducing the feelings of frustration and alienation and promoting democratic values, social integration, and social harmony.⁹ In Denmark's deradicalization programs called "Deradicalization - Targeted Intervention" (2009-2011) and "Deradicalization - Back on the Road" (2014), of great interest are mentoring programs for young people who expressed extremist views in persuading them to leave the radical environment and guide them back into the fold of mainstream society. Deradicalization program has also involved the radical's family members and friends.

Another counter-radicalization approach has been developed in Singapore and Indonesia. Experts claim Singapore's program to have been successful and best-designed as it consists of several interlocking components: a well-established psychological rehabilitation with permitted family visits; religious rehabilitation via theological dialogue; social rehabilitation to refine educational and employment opportunities by providing the radicalized with training to develop vocational skills; support to extremist's family through "adopt a family and youth" approach; and community work to build resilience to radical ideology.¹⁰

Kazakhstan had certain experiences deradicalizing individuals who have been involved in and sentenced for religiously motivated violent extremism. However, it mostly targeted men. Policy tools of Kazakhstani authors on deradicalization and rehabilitation do not provide for gender sensitivity and peculiarities of deradicalizing children.¹¹ Besides, there had been a major emphasis on the religious reeducation to "traditional Islam". Working with women and children as a primary target in rehabilitation programs has been new to Kazakhstan. The Central Asian state has been convinced to design its own approach to rehabilitation.

Designing rehabilitation programs for women and children was widely discussed in recent years among international experts and practitioners within The European Commission's work on Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism, particularly the RAN (The Radicalization Awareness Network).¹² The study of Kazakhstan's approach and

⁸Rabasa A., Pettyjohn S.L., Ghes J.J., Boucek Ch. (2010) *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*. Pittsburgh. 244 pp.

⁹Butt R., Tuck H. (2016) *European Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Comparative Evaluation of Approaches in the Netherland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. 42 pp.

¹⁰Rabasa A., Pettyjohn S.L., Ghes J.J., Boucek Ch. *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*. Pittsburgh.; Hussin, S.M. (2017) *Strategic counterterrorism, terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement: the Singapore experience*. 167th International training course Visiting experts' papers. pp. 27-35.

¹¹Sabdin, A. Metodi eskoe posobie dlja specialistov po pereubezdeniju i adaptacii priverzencev destruktivnyh i radikal'nyh idej islamskogo tolka. [A training manual for experts on reeducating and rehabilitating adherents of destructive and radical Islamic ideas]. Aktobe, 2014. Adresnaya deradikalizacija. [Targeted deradicalization]. Manual, "Akniyet" Advocacy and Rehabilitation Center. Astana, 2017.

¹²The European Commission Website https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network/about-ran_en

experience rehabilitating women and children repatriated from zones of terrorist activity is valuable, relevant and will provide inputs to the overall efforts to boost the efficiency of the rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

2.2. Research framework

This study of Kazakhstan's experience proceeds on an understanding of rehabilitation and reintegration as a multifaceted and multidimensional process, during which a repatriate (women and children in this case) regains individual and social opportunities to live in society, accepts social norms and positive behavioral models. This understanding of rehabilitation and reintegration is reflected in a manual by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.¹³ Rehabilitation is an incremental multi-stage practice comprising stages of groundwork and organization, direct rehabilitation measures, monitoring and effectiveness assessment. It engages a variety of institutions and agents; financial and human resources. Understanding these processes is essential for examining Kazakhstan's approach and experience. Rehabilitation of repatriates takes place in certain legal, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political contexts that influence policies and practices of rehabilitation presenting another immersing research question. As the rehabilitation of women and children has emerged as a new dimension, it is therefore pertinent: (a) to examine the positive aspects and effective methods in Kazakhstan's approach, and b) to identify challenges and difficulties associated with the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees; which ones appear to have been overcome and which remain unresolved.

2.3. The goals and objectives of the study

The goals of this study are to holistically examine the Kazakh approach and experience in the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates; to identify accomplishments of the Kazakhstan-selected approach; to identify setbacks and areas for concern in the implementation that would yield recommendations for its further improvement.

The study of the Kazakh approach and rehabilitation experience addresses the following **research agenda**:

- Explore the legal framework of rehabilitation; identify opportunities and challenges associated with restoration of repatriates' civil status and their access to education, healthcare, social benefits, employment opportunities.
- Through an integrated approach merging desk and field research, highlight the role of stakeholders, institutions (government, NGOs, religious organizations); the degree of coordination among them required to succeed in rehabilitation efforts.
- Identify the varying types of resources involved in the rehabilitation programs (financial, logistical, political, human and others).
- Examine methods, techniques, practices held at different rehabilitation stages: provisional work, implementation, process management, performance monitoring.

¹³Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Organizations: The Role of the Justice System. – Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019.

- Demonstrate the rehabilitation perspective of experts involved in those programs; identify the criteria they used to assess the effectiveness of rehabilitation at every stage; evaluate their validity.
- Identify the challenges and difficulties associated with the rehabilitation.
- Determine how female repatriates themselves evaluate the rehabilitation programs.
- Elaborate recommendations to enhance rehabilitation efforts.

Recommendations are addressed to state bodies participating in decision-making on further rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees; civil society institutions providing a social environment for returnees; educational institutions that impact socialization of the repatriated children, international organizations streaming experience of different countries on the international arena and initiating dialogue platforms and expert discussions to share experiences.

2.4. Research methodology and methods

This research employs methodology and combines two types of research strategies: desk study and field research.

The desk study embodies the analysis of documents and procedures relevant to deradicalization and rehabilitation efforts. This was executed in September-October 2020 in “Shans” regional offices in Nur Sultan, Karaganda, and Almaty, where primary rehabilitation has taken place. Access to rehabilitation documents is provided by Olga Ryl, Director of the Pravo Fund.

The desk study targeted ascertaining the following dimensions of rehabilitation and reintegration:

1. The legal dimension of reintegration and rehabilitation provides for analysis of Kazakhstan’s regulatory legal documents and documents enabling reintegration and rehabilitation of those repatriated from zones of terrorist activity, including the restoration of repatriates’ civil status and their access to healthcare, education, social benefits, employment opportunities, housing. The purpose of this review is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the legal provision and recommend areas to improve the legal framework, facilitating the smooth process of rehabilitation and reintegration.
2. The institutional dimension of rehabilitation.
 - Identify institutions and actors involved in rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including state agencies, non-governmental sector, religious organizations, educational institutions, law enforcement, and other stakeholders; articulate their roles and responsibilities in rehabilitation.
 - Determine challenges encountered by those stakeholders; identify areas such as the legal framework, policy support, social environment, financial and human resources, administrative capacity, technical resources/capabilities, access to returnees, and any other support needed to advance their efforts.

- Assess knowledge and the capacity of professionals and experts involved and determine whether they had had any training that helped build their capacity in rehabilitation.
- Through the analysis of relevant documents, explore the strategy, direction, and milestones of rehabilitation and reintegration designed by experts involved in these programs (community workers, counselors, theologians, etc.); identify peculiarities of Kazakhstan's approach to rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children.
- Analyze the rehabilitation process control and monitoring; identify what performance criteria had been used in monitoring and evaluation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs; identify how these criteria are tested.
- Identify setbacks and areas for concern in rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates.

We conducted interviews with stakeholders during the field study. We employed a semi-structured interview guide to interviewing various experts involved in rehabilitation programs. We interviewed three heads of “Shans” rehabilitation Centers in Nur-Sultana, Karaganda, and Almaty, to establish the legal, organizational, and institutional facets of rehabilitation. We then interviewed “Akniyet” Fund director Alim Shaumetov to analyze the Fund's rehabilitation and reintegration approach and to refine the target dimensions of work with female repatriates.

We also interviewed theologians involved in deradicalization programs, including scholars at “Shans” and “Akniyet” rehabilitation Centers, to reveal the ideological component of rehabilitation. Finally, we interviewed three community workers at “Shans” rehabilitation center to understand their vision of deradicalization.

We drafted guides to interview the following experts: rehabilitation center directors, psychologists, community workers, theologians. Interview questions address seven aforesaid areas of rehabilitation. Interviews lasted 40-60 minutes on average. The interview location was agreed with the respondents. The interviews had been tape-recorded, transcribed, and interpreted to produce output by interview consent forms. With the consent of the respondents, we provide the full names of interviewees in the text; or else, we use the first letter of a fake name.

We also interviewed six female repatriates. Returnees interview guides aimed to elicit their views on rehabilitation programs, complacency, suggestions and proposals, their vision, and future plans. Women gave their voluntary consent to be interviewed. The interview location was agreed with them. The interview lasted 30-60 minutes while safeguarding confidentiality and anonymity. No audio or video recordings were made, as the tape discourages trust during interviews. We made field recordings with the assurance that we will not mention their names whatsoever. The records will be destroyed several months after the completion of the study. The interviews with female repatriates feature the first letter of a fake name.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Repatriates from Terrorist Activity Zones: Legal Dimension

One major legal implication of stay of women and children in terrorist activity zones is lost credentials, including identity documents; birth certificates of children taken from Kazakhstan to terrorist activity zones; birth certificates of children born on the territory of the so-called Islamic State; death certificates of children who had been taken to IS and had died there.

“Shans” Socio-Psychological and Legal Assistance Centers in Kazakhstan’s regions helped to restore the legal status of women and children and had provided full documentary support of the rehabilitation programs. Restoring documents of women and children born in the Republic of Kazakhstan has begun upon their arrival to a rehabilitation camp in Aktau, documented by the country’s Migration Service. There have been no constraints in documentation as they all were registered in the civil registration database (RAGS).

The main documentation difficulties attended obtaining birth certificates for children born in Syria. A birth certificate is a key provision to register a child at polyclinic domiciliary; for a mother to receive targeted social benefits; and for a child to receive educational services in kindergartens and schools.

Under the Kazakhstani legislation, verifying family relationships and issuing birth certificates for foreign-born residents of the RK may be restricted only by a court order. “Shans” Centers could appeal to the court only after conducting forensic genetic analyses to prove the family relationship between mother and a child; requesting from RAGS a document attesting absence of the child’s birth record; providing documents issued by either Kuwaiti or Jordanian Embassy on repatriation of children if returning either from Syria or Iraq, respectively. Only then the “Shans” attorneys could apply to confirm the birth of a child or the kinship if the child were repatriated without a mother and there were indications of her death. Local RAGS had issued birth certificates by a court order. “Shans” Centers store relevant statements and court orders in women’s personal records.

“Shans” center attorneys also had to confirm the death of a child taken to Syria as women did not have a relevant death certificate. Women had been given certificates attesting a child’s death by a court decision. Personal records of women at “Shans” Centers also accommodate relevant court decisions.

One acute problem in documentation raised by attorneys, “Shans” center directors, and women themselves is the birthplace item. The vast majority of women wished to register Kazakhstan as a place of birth for their children. Nevertheless, changes to Kazakhstan’s Marriage and Family Code dated November 25, 2019, per Art. 188, item 3 requires indicating a child’s actual birthplace in the certificate.¹⁴ For the majority of children Kazakhstan is indicated as the birthplace because the judge reciprocated and was able to track a legal basis to do so. Nine children have Syria in the birthplace item of their certificates. One

¹⁴О brake (supruzestve) i sem’e. Kodeks Respubliki Kazahstan [Marriage and Family Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 26 December 2011 No. 518-IV] <https://zakon.uchet.kz/rus/docs/K1100000518>, Accessed on December 20, 2020

of the interviewed female repatriates expressed frustration over it as she fears this might impinge on the future of the children, causing doubts and suspicion from others. The birth certificate in Kazakhstan is the primary document certifying a person's identity and must be submitted to polyclinics, educational institutions, and social services departments. ID cards and passports are also issued based on the birth certificate.

There had been instances of changing the child's name from Arabic to Kazakh at the request of the mother, but they were few. As every child born in Syria had an Arabic name often unusual for Kazakh society, there had been instances of misspelling names in birth certificates, as reported by one of the interviewees.

Another legal norm that the interviewed "Shans" Centers attorneys challenge is clause 11 of the Supreme Court's regulatory decision No. 2 of May 30, 2019, On the court practice in cases of declaring someone missing or dead.¹⁵ Many women have husbands who left with them to Syria and got killed there. It is, however, unfeasible to declare them missing or dead as paragraph 11 outlaws declaring persons wanted for committing criminal offense missing or dead. In this regard, women who cannot attest to the death of their husbands could not apply for survivor's benefit because their husbands are on the wanted list, according to the KNB.

Moreover, the "Shans" center attorneys, at women's request, helped them to file a lawsuit to divorce husbands, Kazakh citizens, who had stayed in zones of terrorist activity or died. The claims were granted, and the women were divorced. This has opened a way to officially re-marry in compliance with the Kazakhstani legislation.

In the case of female repatriates, however, it is also critical to consider the religiosity of these Muslim women who live not only in concord with the secular laws of Kazakhstan but by Sharia, too. Many of these women who had nikah (Muslim ritual of marriage) in Syria consider themselves married if there is no record of their husband's death in zones of terrorist activity. In this case, women under Sharia law can file for divorce – khula on their own initiative.¹⁶ One of the interviewed women, who had nikah in Syria, filed for divorce-khula by appealing to the DUMK that shall consider the matter. At the same time, another repatriate woman doubted the possibility of a divorce-khula in a situation where she cannot fulfill divorce terms (returning mahr or other property to her husband).¹⁷ This is a complex and sensitive issue that requires a competent explanation from fiqh (Muslim law) experts to women. The matter is exacerbated by the fact that women in Syria followed a different aqidah, but not Maturidiyya aqidah of the Hanafi school within which DUMK operates.¹⁸
¹⁹"Theologians keep telling me to get married. But I am married," says one woman.²⁰

¹⁵Normativnoe Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Suda [Regulatory Decision No. 2 of 30 May 2019 of the Supreme Court] https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=39268371#pos=4;-1086. Accessed on December 20, 2020

¹⁶As per Shariah, khula is the situation in which the wife initiates divorce proceedings and compensates for divorce financially.

¹⁷The Mahr (dower) is the gift given by the husband to his bride at the time of marriage.

¹⁸Aqidah is a creed.

¹⁹The Hanafi madhab is a major school of thought and Islamic jurisprudence in Sunni Islam founded by Abu Hanifa. The Hanafi school is characterized by moderatism and tolerance. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Kazakhstan espouses the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam.

²⁰An interview with a repatriated woman M. on October 27, 2020, at the "Shans" Office in Nur-Sultan.

The importance of fiqh for these women is also evidenced by the fact that female repatriates are currently remarrying with nikah only, undermining registration of marriage in RAGS, even if they are the first and only wives. They prioritize Muslim marriage arrangements.

The legal dimension, therefore, became the principal rehabilitation framework, hindering the access of women and children to the rights of a Kazakh citizen, including social benefits, access to education and health care, employment possibilities, and housing. The legal rehabilitation was executed based on Kazakhstan's Code of Civil Procedure of 26 December 2011 No. 518-IV "On Marriage (Matrimony) and Family" with the 2019 changes. The migration service helped to restore the lost documents of women and children who left for the so-called "Islamic State". To document the children born in Syria, the "Shans" Center hired lawyers who helped women conduct trial proceedings to confirm the family relationship between a mother and a child, to appeal for divorce and issuance of a birth certificate. All the women and children had received their documents by early 2020, except for an orphan due to complex forensic investigation, termination of funding from the CCRP, and a duplicate birth certificate issued by RAGS in Azerbaijan. As of October-November 2020, all children have received their birth certificates.

Study respondents identified the following difficulties of legal rehabilitation:

First, Kazakhstani legal acts, particularly the Code of RK of 26 December 2011 No. 518-IV "On Marriage (Matrimony) and Family" establishes a norm (article 188, para. 3) requiring indication of the actual birthplace, thereby indicating Syria as the place of birth for some children that might impinge on their future. For other children, the current residence place in Kazakhstan is indicated as the birthplace for the judge was able to track a legal basis to do so. That item on the birth certificate, in many ways, depended on the will of the judge to reciprocate and find appropriate legal norms.

Second, DNA testing and judicial proceedings had lasted for over 3 months delaying children's registration at polyclinics, their access to pre-school educational institutions, and social benefits.

Third, Item 11 of the Supreme Court's regulatory decision No. 2 of May 30, 2019, On the court practice in cases of declaring someone missing or dead had seriously hindered the declaration of husbands left missing and killed in the IS dead or missing thereby delaying survivor's benefits for female repatriates.

Fourth, we have discovered inconsistencies between secular law and the Islamic law of fiqh regarding the marital status of women. Immigrant women with the dominant religious paradigms of gender relations favor Muslim marriage, believing they are married; no talaq (divorce) if there is no evidence of the husband's death.²¹

²¹Talaq is the situation in which the husband initiates divorce proceedings.

3.2. Rehabilitation: institutional dimension

Repatriation of these women was decided at the highest State level by Kazakhstan's first President Nursultan Nazarbayev and the current President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev; rehabilitation and reintegration programs, therefore, were state-funded. As regards to institutional dimension, the country's rehabilitation approach is premised on collaboration between NGOs and public authorities. This section explores organizations and institutions that have been active and integral participants of rehabilitation and reintegration, their roles in those processes, and their vision of deradicalization and reintegration efforts.

The rehabilitation commenced with the arrival of women with children in a rehabilitation camp near Aktau and continues today in places where women reside. The rehabilitation and reintegration program can roughly be divided into three phases. **First**, adaptation related to the stay of repatriates in the camp near Aktau. This phase that lasted nearly a month focused on relocating repatriates from survival and warfare regimes, in which they lived the past few months in Syria and Iraq, to a peaceful life. At this stage experts had provided diagnosing of returnees, assessed the full impact of their stay in zones of terrorist activity, and hence determined their basic medical needs, needs for psychological assistance and treatment, for welfare assistance with clothes and food, needs for restoration of the documents. To that end, community workers and therapists had worked with repatriates. As the latter had arrived from the territory of the "Islamic State", representatives of power structures and religious scholars spoke with them to evaluate the severity of their radical religious views and their danger to the society into which they must integrate.

The experts had also worked with children to diagnose the impact of their stay in zones of terrorist activity and adapt them to a peaceful life. Children completed classes with counselors and educators. Children above 10 years old had talked to theologians and religious scholars.

The second phase of the rehabilitation and reintegration program is primary rehabilitation and socialization that took place already in places where repatriates reside and largely under the "Shans" Centers. This phase covered the afore-described registration of women and children, as well as empowering women with skills necessary to live in a society. The timeline for this phase is from January 2019 (the arrival of the first women with children under the "Zhusan-1" operation) until March 2020.

"Pravo" PF, "Shans" Centers that by then had branches in all regional Centers and major cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan have served as the central framework for rehabilitation's second phase, for provision of legal, social, and psychological rehabilitation. Among the repatriates, there were 156 women, 406 children under "Zhusan" operation, and 14 children under "Rusafa" operation²². It was, therefore, decided to hold rehabilitation activities at "Shans" Socio-psychological and Legal Assistance Centers for Minors which by the time of

²²As per the "Pravo" and "Shans" Centers, 156 women and 407 children were repatriated with the "Zhusan" operation. In his book, a Kazakh radicalization and extremism expert and "Zhusan" Operation participant, Erlan Karin argues it has been 160 women and 420 children (including 32 orphans). See Karin, E (2020). "Zhusan" Operation: Who returned from Syria and why? Monograph: Almaty, pp. 145.

the “Zhusan” operation have gained extensive experience working with children in difficulty in contact with the law. “Shans” Centers in the regions have the requisite specialized personnel, including lawyers, community workers, psychologists, educators. “Pravo” PF and “Shans” Center had also the experience of working with the Interior Ministry, juvenile justice, CCRP, educational and medical institutions, juvenile affairs commissions. The “Shans” center buildings are modified to accommodate women with children for a certain time; for personnel to hold classes with children and women. Interviews with the “Pravo” Director and two “Shans” Center Directors, together with the analysis of the documents provided by them, demonstrate that the work they do is overtly socially-oriented. Thus, the Center’s background experience had conformed with the objectives set by rehabilitation programs. “Shans” Centers worked in cooperation with the Committee for Children’s Rights Protection under Kazakhstan’s Education and Science Ministry.

The rehabilitation activities of the “Shans” Centers riveted to provide legal, social, and psychological rehabilitation, and other community services to repatriates. Whilst implementing rehabilitation programs, the “Shans” Centers paid heed to work with children repatriates. Interviews with counselors and community workers of the “Shans” Centers suggest that experts undertook a comprehensive effort not only to adapt, but to socialize children, and prepare school-age children for an academic year. The “Shans” Center Director in Nur-Sultan, Gulmarzhan Shunaeva said the following: “Kids had no idea what a school is, so it was right to hold a summer school. Not only they had classes, but they also had been taken for a school tour. It was the first time they visited the city and the cinemas. We took them to an aquarium. Kids were really impressed, in shock even. We always took them on the outdoor activities, to the playground. Children stayed with us from 9 am to 5 pm before the school year started.”²³ When school started, children were brought on weekends and holidays or to optional classes.

Director Shunaeva summarized the following on the work with women: “Our job is to give them a fishing rod, they had to fish on their own”.²⁴ Apart from social and legal rehabilitation, medical and socio-psychological assistance, “Shans” Centers in the regions have also paid for the retraining courses by women’s choice. These were sewing, cosmetology, and baking classes, driving instruction course. Women who left the country without graduating were able to complete their studies free of charge if in college or with big discount if in university. All in all, the rehabilitation program had been up to the Standard for providing social services and covered a range of activities, including restoration of the legal status (registration); social, socio-medical, psychological, educational (training, retraining) services with employment prospects, socio-economic and socio-cultural services.

For an ideological component of rehabilitation, “Shans” Centers recruited female theologians to conduct classes for women and children. Female theologians are a fairly new phenomenon in Kazakhstan; rehabilitation of female repatriates and their children had

²³ An interview with Gulmarzhan Shunaeva, the “Shans” Center Director in Nur-Sultan, on October 27, 2020, at the “Shans” Central Office.

²⁴ An interview with Gulmarzhan Shunaeva, the “Shans” Center Director in Nur-Sultan, on October 27, 2020, at the “Shans” Central Office.

further facilitated its upgrowth. Female theologians were in high demand while implementing religious reeducation of women and children. We should mention here the religious reeducation strategy developed by Leila Rysakova, one of the female scholars who worked with repatriates, and list her approach as highly effective and most pertinent. Rysakova had designed her own methodology for regular classes with women; it embodies both the religious aspects of the Hanafi School of Islam and spiritual aspects of Kazakh traditional culture with an appeal to the works of authors like Abay and Chingiz Aitmatov. The purpose of her methodology was not only to change religious views of women but to shape their mindset in a way it would allow them to successfully integrate into the poly-confessional Kazakhstani society. Leyla Rysakova had developed her ideological program for children embracing three components: promote humanist ideas through religion, develop spiritual intelligence and respect for other religions; introduce the education cycle aimed at civic education, critical thinking, and positive role models; instill the “My Motherland” cycle, in which children turned to Abay, the traditions of the Kazakh people, and made shejire.²⁵ All religious scholars among respondents, including female theologians, stressed the importance of meticulous work with children. The ideological component in the rehabilitation and primary socialization in “Shans” Centers, in our view, was not overtly emphasized and had been rather a subject to the social component. Owing to the terminated public funding, “Shans” Centers are currently not involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees, neither women nor children. The “Pravo” Fund Director Olga Ryl maintains that some of the “Shans” Centers implement further rehabilitation efforts at the expense of the local budget (Karaganda and Zhezkazgan), some do it at their own expense. The “Pravo” Fund continues to provide complex social assistance to women and children repatriated from zones of terrorist activity. For instance, the “Ulagat” Muslim Women Club was created in Zhezkazgan for female repatriates. Ryl has also asserted that the Pravo Fund had fully funded the registration of children repatriated from Iraq.

Apart from the “Shans” Centers, the rehabilitation programs had also engaged “Akniyet” Advocacy and Rehabilitation Center Headed Alim Shaumetov. From 2014 Center works with prisoners with radical and extremist religious leanings in their deradicalization and efforts to prevent the proliferation of religiously motivated extremism in prisons. Based on an interview with Alim Shaumetov, the Center collaborates robustly with Kazakhstan’s National Security Committee, the General Prosecutor’s Office, and Committee on the Penal Correction System. Over the years of work in correctional facilities, the “Akniyet”’s staff have gained extensive experience in working with people adhering to radical Islamic views. Shaumetov believes that a person turns to religiously motivated extremism when s/he is “tortured by the ideology”. Therefore, the major rehabilitation component, in his view, is a religious reeducation, i.e., overpersuading extremists to abjure takfiri or jihadist ideology and to adopt Islam of the Hanafi School espoused by the vast majority of Muslims in the country. Shaumetov says the Center experts had to “re-run” their methods of deradicalizing

²⁵Shejire is a family tree of Kazakhs.

the so-called “pseudo – Salafis”.²⁶²⁷ The deradicalization approach that synthesized the prior experience of working with convicts was introduced in the policy tool “Targeted deradicalization” (2017); the latter focuses on ideological reeducation. In their deradicalization and resocialization programs before the “Zhusan” operation, the “Akniet” Fund targeted adults, mostly men. Citing prior experience, the Center stresses the importance of religious reeducation in efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate female repatriates. There is an element of psychological therapy, but it serves to support ideological rehabilitation. Religious reeducation implies the theological converting to Islam of the Hanafi School, which Kazakhs have adhered to since ancient times. The “Akniet”’s theologians, most of which are men, worked with women as early as in the rehabilitation camp near Aktau. Working with women from “Zhusan” and generally with female jamaats helped to attract female theologians. Sheiks like Mohammed Abdusama Ibrahim in Almaty, who currently works for the Center, had conducted and continue to hold collective lectures for female repatriates. Women are also invited to the “Akniet” office for a one-on-one conversation with a theologian. To date, in the tender of Center for Supporting Civil Initiatives, the “Akniet” Fund is implementing a three-year project “Providing uniform rehabilitation approach to adherents of destructive and radical religious ideology in the regions”. One of the target groups for the project is female repatriates. Children repatriates are excluded from the project.

Interview with the “Akniet” Center Director provides insights into the current rehabilitation and reintegration approach. First, there is a religious reeducation. Second, the program demands psychological counseling of women. Shaumetov said that “Akniet” had launched Psychological Assistance Center, headed by female counselor Shynar Nauryzbaeva, to consult the returnees. Third, Shaumetov believes there is no need to continue rehabilitation and resocialization of children as they were not indoctrinated, and such assiduity will only yield stigmatization. Therefore, letting children see therapists within the reintegration framework is unnecessary at this stage as these children should be like everyone else. Working with theologians and psychologists will only remind them of Syria and traumatize them. Also, Shaumetov argues that there is no need to recruit experts in child theology because children will, either way, follow their parents if the latter are deradicalized.

Pavlodar Center for the Study and Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue (CSPID) has facilitated rehabilitation and reintegration efforts since Aktau. The CSPID Director Gulnaz Razdykova enunciates social and psychological rehabilitation efforts. In the rehabilitation camp near Aktau, she held individual talks and self-help seminars in groups with female repatriates, various contests and trivia nights like a beauty contest and trivia on Kazakhstan’s history. Together with the “Akniet” Center, Razdykova now holds online classes for women every Saturday and Sunday, while bolstering therapeutical talks on topics relevant for women and religious conversations with the help of invited theologians. Female repatriates commended the guest lecturer, a theologian who previously adhered to radical religious views, renounced them,

²⁶An interview with Alim Shaumetov, the “Akniet” Center Director, on November 7, 2020, at the “Akniet” Central Office.

²⁷State agencies of Kazakhstan that regulate the religion-state relations refer to pseudo-Salafis as destructive Islamic movements.

and is now working in religious reeducation. Engaging ex-radicals to work with a radicalized audience is a powerful tool in rehabilitation practice today. Razdykova collaborates with the Association of Psychological Assistance to Muslims (APAM) in Russia because she believes it is crucial to bring the psychological potential of Islam to psychological rehabilitation women who are immersed in religion. Center for the Study and Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue and the “Akniyet” Fund now have joined their forces in religious and psychological rehabilitation.

The third phase of rehabilitation and reintegration is currently under implementation and it is, to a greater extent, fraught with social reintegration. Operations at this phase are field-oriented and entrain the Office of Religious Affairs under the city and provincial administration (akimats) or organizations in the akimat. For instance, the Center for Religious Studies (CRS) Nur-Sultan under the city administration executes projects for the reintegration of female repatriates. The rehabilitation department consists of theologians (men and women) and a counselor. CRS in Nur-Sultan is currently implementing rehabilitation and reintegration strategy with inherent theological, psychological, and social components. The social rehabilitation program had been completed with the support of the City Employment Center whereby the two launched a workshop for sewing masks employing and mightily helping two female repatriates. As revealed in one of the interviews, “Sayon” Fund under Almaty city administration is engaged in a rehabilitation program under special arrangement with the State. Moreover, the “Akniyet” Fund and Pavlodar Center for the Study and Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue are embroiled in rehabilitation and reintegration activities at the third phase.

On the part of religious institutions, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK) participated in the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates at all stages. DUMK’s religious scholars notably took part in the religious reeducation of female repatriates. The Spiritual Administration also donates food and clothes.

Over 10 state agencies took part in rehabilitation and reintegration at different stages:

- **National Security Committee** (Department for Combating Terrorism, territorial divisions, Anti-Terrorist Center Headquarters, “Arystan” Special Forces, KNB Academy)
- **Ministry of Health**
- **Ministry of Education and Science**
- **Ministry of the Interior** (Migration Service Committee, military personnel of the National Guard, Department of Internal Affairs and Department of Emergency Situations in Mangystau region)
- **Ministry of Information and Social Development**
- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
- **Ministry of Defense**
- **Akimat of Mangystau Province**

- **General Prosecutor's Office**
- **Security Council**
- **Akimats in the provinces (Department of Education, Department of Religious Affairs, Employment Centers, and other agencies)**

3.3. Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees: Challenges

As the rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriates have been a new experience both for NGOs and public authorities, organizations have encountered difficulties at different rehabilitation phases. The study has revealed the following challenges:

- Certain legal acts had stalled the documentation process. These were discussed in the previous section.
- Delays in the documentation, particularly of children born in Syria, reflect the novelty of the case with the returnees for RAGS and civil courts. Similar difficulties arose with declaring women's husbands dead or missing. The women could not apply for survivor's benefits without a relevant court ruling.
- In some cases, there was a misunderstanding of the peculiar situation of individuals arriving from terrorist activity zones that had greatly delayed local access to healthcare and education.
- A major obstacle for the "Shans" had been the lack of housing for many women. Some of them lived in the cottages of "Shans" Centers for some time; one family still lives in one of the regional centers. Most repatriates live with close relatives. The housing issue is outside the remit of NGOs and therefore needs to be addressed by the state.
- The data above alluded to the lack of concerted steps among stakeholders of rehabilitation and varying vision of rehabilitation and reintegration. Working with children at rehabilitation's stage is an unsettled matter. At the same time, women during the interviews pointed out the difficulties in school, mainly with the English language, necessitating extra classes. The theologians also stressed the need to continue working with children as there is a potential risk of the heroization of their martyr fathers and the memories of their time in a radical environment, including traces of radical ideology.
- There were heavy instances of discontinuity, lack of common direction, consistency, and regularity in the rehabilitation process. Reallocation of the work with female repatriates from one organization to another led to staff rotation, and each expert working with women had to start "from the scratch". In the interview, one female returnee proposed to have the same experts throughout the entire course of rehabilitation.
- There was a shortage of (a) trained personnel, mainly theologians, inter alia female

theologians, who would have expertise in female and child psychology; (b) Russian-speaking theologians as women's Kazakh language skills were not advanced for theological reflections.

- Rotating experts and organizations working with women and children affects not only rehabilitation but also performance monitoring. Longitudinal observation is essential in rehabilitation process control and evaluation.
- The social environment was unready to welcome women into the fold of mainstream society. There was a difficulty on the side of women's relatives. There were reported instances of school staff's ill-preparedness at the initial stage to work with these individuals.
- Coronavirus pandemic had interrupted real-life communication with women impeding the process of reintegration. Socio-psychological and religious rehabilitation for most of it went online, with online group meetings and discussions in classes of 20-30 people.

3.4. Experts Involved in Rehabilitation: Competencies and Capacity-Building

Various stages of rehabilitation and reintegration had engaged different experts like lawyers, community workers, counselors, theologians, and religious scholars.

The study suggests that counselors that worked with repatriates, having considerable expertise in counseling, were inexperienced in working with individuals repatriated from terrorist activity zones. "Shans" Center counselors with whom we managed to talk had an experience of counseling individuals with behavioral problems. The Center hired a male psychologist from the children's psychoneurological clinic in Karaganda. Gulnaz Razdykova, who deals with psychological rehabilitation, had an experience of working with female jamaats and the penitentiary system even before "Zhusan".

Training courses for counselors to build their capacity in working with these individuals had been held already during rehabilitation. Counselors had attended a seminar on working with children under the UN auspices in October in Almaty, and an international multi-sector seminar, also under the UN auspices, that brought together experts from various departments of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Counselors among respondents spoke highly of these seminars and stressed their importance.

The recruited counselors are proficient in psychological diagnosis methods, both tests and projective techniques. They also know how to conduct individual consultations and group sessions. Counselors had worked with women and children at the first and second phases. At the moment, counselors of the "Akniyet" Fund, CRS, and CSPID Pavlodar work only with women; their projects do not reach children.

Interviews with community workers had evidenced the novelty of the experience. There were no prior training or seminars held for the practitioners. Among the community

workers, there were individuals with medical degrees and pedagogical education. As social work with repatriates had been held in the “Shans” Centers, the program involved their personnel. While working with repatriates, community workers attended seminars and had been trained to work with these groups of people. Community workers among respondents demonstrated excellent communication skills, which facilitated the work with women and especially children. They had helped women to apply to monthly social-assistance payments, including the family food basket (21,000 tenges). They also assisted in registering children at local polyclinics, in documentation processes at PSCs, and providing social welfare services where possible.

The “Shans” Center community workers had devoted much attention to working with children. They conducted primary socialization activities: games, enrichment courses in drawing, sculpting, poetry. They took children to cinemas, theaters, museums, entertainment venues to show them the alternative to the life they had in Syria and adapt them to a new civilian life. All community workers, counselors, and directors of the Centers commented on children’s curiosity and willingness to learn new things.

Theologians were responsible for religious reeducation at all rehabilitation stages and continue to work to this day. The programs mainly engaged theologians of “Akniyet” Fund, imams, and women ustads of mosques under DUMK. Theologians worked to overpersuade women to convert to Islam of the Hanafi School. Most of the scholars graduated from the “Nur-Mubarak” Islamic University and Akhmet Yassawi Kazakh-Turkish University. Both men and women theologians were involved in the process, whereas “Akniyet” Fund theologians had a vast experience working with men convicted of religious extremism but had never worked with women and children.

“Zhusan” operation has raised several issues regarding the competencies of theologians. First, it is critical to train female theologians to work with this group of women and female jamaats in general as there are certain limits for Muslim women to talk with the opposite sex who is not a relative. There are also sensitive questions that are better to raise with a female theologian. At the same time, the latter are primarily young women who lack considerable life and professional experience, which reduces their capacity to interact with female repatriates and have an impact on them. This was observed by the women repatriates themselves. In this respect, the only exception was adult women theologians with life experience and theological expertise.

At the same time, the female repatriates alluded to the fact that, as of their interpretation of Islam, a man inherently is better suited for aqidah. It is therefore pivotal to recruit both female and male theologians to work with these women.

Second, interviews with female repatriates suggest that theologians need to enhance their psychological competencies as most of them failed to earn trust. Women have described conversations with theologians as the “imposition” of the Hanafi madhab that caused inner psychological aversion. Psychological ways of influence and persuasion, competencies in both personality and social psychology are prerequisites of effective deradicalization efforts.

Female repatriates have highlighted the lecture of ex-radical recruited by “Akniyet” Fund to the rehabilitation program. Not only he knows the Hanafi madhab but also understands psychological ways of persuasion, which he might have used in propaganda and recruitment while belonging to extremist groups. Cialdini in his “The Psychology of Influence” says that people tend to trust those who are like them.²⁸

One of the female theologians stressed that a scholar has to know biology and physiology. The findings suggest that the best-performing professional would be a woman with secular and theological training, psychological expertise, and extensive life experience.

Third, theologians must know child psychology basics and have the skills to work with children. Several theologians from different organizations stated the importance of working with children repatriates. First, there is a potential risk of the heroization of the martyred father, one of the scholars called it the “call of the blood”.²⁹ Secondly, children remember narratives and constructs they heard in the extremist environment of Syria. Even a 5-year-old uses the term “kafir”. Third, the deradicalization of women can last much longer, and all this time the children will be under the influence of their mothers.

Fourth, several women said they did not understand theologians in the Kazakh language. It is therefore crucial to train Russian-speaking scholars.

At the rehabilitation’s first phase, religious scholars, men and women, were recruited to work in a rehabilitation camp near Aktau. These are secular university professors who are experts not only in Islam but other religions too. They also can explain what secularism is from academic and practical perspectives; religious scholars have a broader perspective on religion as opposed to theologians. They were rarely engaged to work with the returnees after that. Because Kazakhstan, as per the Constitution of 1995, is a secular multinational and multi-confessional state, we believe that working with immigrants should go beyond the Hanafi Madhab and Kazakh traditional culture and feature the secular alternative, a variety of worldviews that can be offered by religious scholars.

²⁸Cialdini, R. (2019). Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion. How to persuade and get your way. Revised Edition.

²⁹An interview with a theologian named S., on September 30, 2020, in Almaty.

3.5. Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Approaches and Phases. Peculiarities of Kazakhstan's Approach to Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children

We present Kazakhstan's approach to rehabilitation based on the document review and in-depth interviews with various experts and female repatriates.

A personal record of each repatriate at the "Shans" Center included the following rehabilitation elements:

- social and legal support; full documentation, support in claims to issue birth certificates for children born in Syria, concerning divorce, and other documents.
- social and medical rehabilitation; medical examinations and treatment of female repatriates and children, provision of medicines.
- socio-psychological rehabilitation had been held at all rehabilitation phases and continues to this day.

While working with repatriates in "Shans" Centers, counselors personalized work plan for each woman. They used the following methods to diagnose the condition of women: personality typology test (assessing traits of Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, Agreeableness), Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the FPI test, The Aggression Questionnaire (Ludmila Pochebut Questionnaire), Sobchik Questionnaire, lie detector test, IQ test, Tolerance Index Questionnaire, Parental Attitude Research Instrument (Parental child-rearing attitudes)

We commend the work of "Shans" counselors in conducting tests to evaluate parental attitudes of the women: PARI (parental child-rearing attitudes), profile questionnaire for parental beliefs regarding the emotional skills of children, Parenting Style Quiz.

Apart from tests and questionnaires, counselors also used the following techniques: drawing fictional animals; metaphoric associative cards; the Luscher color test. Sand play therapy was used as a relaxation technique. Aside from individual meetings, counselors also held group sessions.

"Shans" Center counselors had personalized work plan for the children, separately for school-age children and the toddlers. The counselors have used drawing tests to evaluate emotional indicators of the child and family relationships. In particular, they have used The Draw-a-Family-Picture-Test (DAFPT), the City of the Future Test, The House-Person-Tree (HPT) Test, and The Non-Existent Animal Test. The psychological treatment incorporated simulation games, fairy tale therapy, art therapy (drawing, modeling), watching videos aimed at patriotic education and socialization of children in Kazakhstani society.

Attention Concentration Test, Memory Quiz, Thinking and Language Quizzes were to a primarily used to assess intellectual development of school-age children. Many of them were diagnosed with developmental delay, which is associated with their stay in the war zone, lack

of access to formal education, and lack of communication with their peers. Children had gone through social and pedagogical rehabilitation, whereby experts had determined the level of a child's development (whether age-appropriate or not) and held classes for children to prepare them for school. Experts and women themselves gave prominence to the highly efficient Summer School that was organized through "Shans" Centers in August 2019. The Summer School had helped to adapt children to the school environment and academic schedule. Children took school subjects, elaborated their cognitive activity in games, and attended cultural and educational events. This had mightily helped women to attend retraining courses at this time.

Psychologists deem projective techniques the most effective of all. Psychological tests can be applied but in an abridged and simplified form. Women tended to have positive perceptions about projective techniques as opposed to large test questionnaires.

"Akniyet" counselors and Gulnaz Razdykova now took over social and psychological rehabilitation. They hold weekly online group sessions on Saturdays and Sundays on different topics: gender relations, types of men, coronavirus, and other topics of women's interest. Razdykova also invites theologians as guest speakers.

Centers under city administration, too, conduct weekly counseling sessions, in particular, CRS holds events in Nur-Sultan. The CRS counselor employs film therapy, allowing women to express emotions, speak out, and discuss vital issues. Besides, the CRS counselor attached importance to occupational therapy in the current reintegration stage, i.e., encouraging female repatriates to seek employment. The CRS in collaboration with the Employment Center had launched a workshop for sewing medical masks employing two female repatriates and mightily helping them make small but sustainable livelihoods amidst the pandemic. Female repatriates cited this as an example of tangible support.

The social dimension is another imperative rehabilitation and reintegration component. This section had offered women various vocational courses to advance employment possibilities. Women could choose from the following courses: sewing, cosmetology, baking classes; driving instruction, courses in web design, and office skills. Some of the women went back to school.

Interviews with female repatriates suggest that they value being employed and getting paid. Of the six women interviewed in Nur Sultan and Almaty, the two worked in the mask-sewing workshop; the other two were planning to go back to work in a supermarket; one worked in the HR-department; one woman was pregnant by her new husband and was home taking care of the kids. A major challenge when seeking employment was that women had toddlers who had not been assigned to a kindergarten. Assigning kids to a kindergarten is now facilitated by local authorities or the women's relatives who help pay for a private kindergarten. All the women interviewed said they are willing to get employed.

Ideological reeducation is an integral part of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. As already discussed, the "Akniyet" Fund and the CRS theologians hold sessions with female repatriates at the third phase which we can call reintegration.

In December 2019, the “Akniyet” Fund prepared a technical paper “Theological and psychological aspects of deradicalization and rehabilitation of individuals repatriated from the zones of terrorist activity: ‘Zhusan’ humanitarian operation”, where it presented employed approach and methods by analyzing the experience of working with repatriates. The paper identifies the challenges practitioners had encountered during rehabilitation. Those are “the scarcity of specialized counselors and experienced theologians, blatant academism in the training of these professionals; the lack of comprehensive training manuals to take awareness-raising and preventive measures”.³⁰ Thus, the rehabilitation experience had shown a shortage of qualified theologians and counselors and deficient methodological groundwork. The paper aims to fill this gap. The manual sought to enhance the psychological competencies of theologians who, aside from theological competencies, should be able to establish an emotional contact, inspire confidence, sow doubt on returnees’ religious views and persuade them to convert to the moderate Islam of the Hanafi madhhab.

The manual states that de-radicalization and rehabilitation is a comprehensive, complex, and enduring process that involves systematic education and prevention activities for repatriate women. The goal of rehabilitation is to persuade participants to abjure destructive views and accept the Hanafi School of Islam. The rehabilitation should be driven by principles of care, humanity, privacy, and comprehensive assistance to returnees.

The manual recommends recording the results of individual theological work with repatriates in a special register to study patterns and efficacy of the ongoing activities. The manual incorporates a guided instruction for individual interviews and clarification of certain essential concepts. The following topics are recommended for discussion with repatriates: Advancement of Islam in Kazakhstan; the Status of Islam and Muslims in Modern Kazakhstan; A Secular State: Myths and Reality; Public Policy on Religion in Kazakhstan.

In his interview, the “Akniyet” Center Director Alim Shaumetov outlined the currently-used four-term model of rehabilitation: deradicalization, psychological rehabilitation, social adaptation, and instilling patriotism. Children remain outside the rehabilitation process, although the manual refers to a “risk potential to children getting recruited by foreign fathers and communicating with international terrorist organizations as they come of age”.³¹

³⁰Teologicheskie i psichologicheskie aspekty deradikalizatsii i rehabilitatsii lits, vozvrativshihsya iz zon terroristicheskoy aktivnosti (gumanitarnaya operatsia “Zhusan”) [Theological and psychological facets of deradicalization and rehabilitation of persons returned from terrorist activity zones – Humanitarian Operation Zhusan], A manual, “Akniyet” Advocacy and Rehabilitation Center. Nursultan, 2019, pp. 10.

³¹Ibid, pp.13

3.6. Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Management and Monitoring

As already discussed, counselors, community workers, educators, and theologians had documented all rehabilitation activities in the women's personal records. They had documented social and legal rehabilitation, social and medical services (doctor visits, medicines, doctor's advice), social welfare services and financial assistance, social and psychological rehabilitation (the personalized work plan with a counselor, counseling sessions, tests, psychological report), social education (work plan with a child psychologist, determining the child's developmental level, recommendations), a theologian's report. Attendance at psychological counseling and religious reeducation classes was mandatory for women.

Analysis of rehabilitation points to the following areas of monitoring rehabilitation, each having its own indicators:

1. Individual and social opportunities for social reintegration.

(Indicators: meeting basic needs; documentation; access to health care; psychological support; vocational skills; employment; social environment; placement of children in kindergartens and schools)

The experts of "Shans" regional centers monitored housing conditions of women and children, their mental well-being, employment/education status; law-obedience and non-existence of a crime; positive parenting, social environment. They also monitored children's performance in school.

Interviews with the "Shans" regional center directors, community workers, counselors had demonstrated that the primary socialization and rehabilitation objectives have been met. Women and children had received legal status, financial assistance to meet basic needs for food and clothing, monthly food baskets for 21 thousand tenges per child. Women and children had also been provided with the necessary medical advice and treatment and psychological counseling. Besides, women have graduated from various courses and have acquired vocations skills to seek employment, wherein some of them found jobs already. The children had filled their knowledge gap in Summer Schools and had been enrolled in public schools.

Women returnees believe primary rehabilitation has helped them mightily. Then again, women stressed their financial problems; some women face housing difficulties. The majority of women got employed and went back to school. The pandemic-induced lockdown had affected the employment of some, whereas others, on the contrary, found a job sewing medical masks. Employment remains a pressing issue to date.

2. Internalization of social norms and positive behaviors. Post-traumatic growth/positive attitudes

(Indicators: Change in attitude towards other people; greater openness to others; empathy; willingness to cooperate; new life opportunities (new interests, new hobbies, new life journey); personality strength; spiritual transformation (life purpose, life perspective); respect for life (value life)). The final important indicator in this area is a woman's ability to

decide her own life journey with positive attitudes. These indicators were monitored and evaluated by a counselor.

Psychologists have stressed that many women exhibit consumer attitude and reject the social model of Kazakhstani society, including the need to make a living, self-dependence, and taking care of children. One counselor depicted this condition with the following: “There she was with a man. Men provided in those places, but here she must take the responsibility herself”.³² Some women chose to marry, at times as a second or third wife, pursuing a familiar model implicated in Syria. Others got married, but found a job at the same time, adapting social model specific to Kazakhstani reality. The remaining did not marry but are employed and trying to build a life for themselves.

3. Deradicalization.

(Indicators: cognitive inclusion; abjuring narrow-minded interpretation of doctrine; rejecting hate speech and image of the enemy; refusing to justify the violence). One key deradicalization indicator for Kazakhstani theologians is the adoption of the Hanafi madhab. Interviews have revealed that theologians not only explained the aqidah of the Hanafi madhab, but also taught how to pray. The theologian had provided an expert opinion based on individual sessions.

The scholars denoted several positive developments. Women had become more open and responded better to workers, but quarantine interrupted work, and much was lost during the primary rehabilitation.

The “Akniyet” Fund Director Alim Shaumetov suggest that 5-6% of female repatriates continue adhering to aqidah that was instilled in them in IS. Most women, however, are beginning to modify their views by adopting Hanafi madhab. A few more women took off their hijab. Shaumetov stressed that the change in ideological rigidities is an enduring process, and results will not come quickly.

Women argued that the theological classes implicated the imposition of the Hanafi Madhab, wherein stating that arguments on the superiority of Hanafi Madhab are weak and unconvincing. Under the pressure in theological dialogue, the woman pretended to agree with everything said, while retaining her religious views. Some women claimed that theologians are at times unable to answer their questions. The female repatriates had remarked that they would like to see reputable, highly professional adult theologians, and notably men.

4. Pending radicalization risk assessment.

(Indicators: social alienation; socio-economic deprivation; a sense of victimization (victim of injustice); hostility to national and collective identity; lack of empathy and understanding of those outside their group; involvement in jamaats with fundamentalist views; the aspiration to die a martyr; susceptibility to influence; visiting extremist websites; fanaticism and radical beliefs; obsession with moral superiority imperative; thirst for adventure).

³²An interview with a counselor named A. on September 30, 2020, at the “Shans” Office.

The psychologists and theologians in their reports had to indicate the risk a female repatriate poses to society. Counselors, theologians, heads of rehabilitation centers all suggest that the risk of radicalization of these women remains, given that several of them had to return to their former social environment due to financial and housing issues. Female repatriates are getting married; the risk of radicalization also increases if the husband turns out to be a Muslim with radical leanings. Among the repatriates are women convinced of the absolute truth of their views and those who believe their life in Kazakhstan is temporary.

3.7. Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Accomplishments and Setbacks

We must highlight the following accomplishments of the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts in Kazakhstan:

- The government had provided extensive support for rehabilitation and reintegration, including financial, political, social, legal, institutional, administrative, and educational assistance.
- State bodies had collaborated profoundly with the NGOs in rehabilitation and reintegration;
- The rehabilitation program had attracted socially-oriented NGOs like “Shans” regional centers that have vast experience working with people in difficulty, allowing effectively to hold the primary rehabilitation and socialization. Also involved were the NGOs like the “Akniyet” Fund with extensive experience working with people of radical religious views, including those serving prison sentences for religious extremism.
- Rehabilitation had appeared to include a wide range of measures aimed at legal, socio-psychological, religious rehabilitation, re-socialization, and social reintegration. Experts at the first and second rehabilitation phases paid heed to socio-psychological and socio-pedagogical assistance to children.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration programs are state-designed in the long run, wherein the current activities are implemented by the “Akniyet” Fund under the special state arrangement on a 3-year-project “Providing uniform rehabilitation approach to adherents of destructive and radical religious ideology in the regions”;
- Rehabilitation and reintegration efforts had been regionally extensive as rehabilitation centers operate in all regional cities, alongside Nur-Sultan and Almaty.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration had engaged various experts, including lawyers, counselors, community workers, healthcare workers, educators, theologians.
- Experts could test their methods and professional inputs and thus identify the best-performing ones. This will permit the elaboration of a single integrated approach to rehabilitation and reintegration specific to the Kazakh context and individual characteristics of the repatriates.

- A sewing workshop, launched with the CRS assistance, that recruits repatriates for sewing medical masks, and fairs at malls that let women sell garments and toys they made, could be cited as a good effective approach in social terms. Another promising approach is the “Ulagat” Muslim Women Club in Zhezqazghan, where one room creates conditions conducive to rehabilitation and reintegration, including sewing workshops, pastry rooms, English and Arabic language courses, counselor’s and theologian’s offices, Muslim prayer rooms.
- Primary rehabilitation and reintegration efforts had successful outcomes. The women we met had graduated from varying courses and are now attempting to build a life for themselves. Five out of six women aspire to work; three of them are already employed; two are seeking employment. One woman said she likes working with people, communicating, and being on the move. Another woman claims they should have been given a chance to work and make a living earlier.

We highlight the following setbacks and disadvantages of the rehabilitation and reintegration programs:

- Certain legal acts had interfered (a) obtaining birth certificates for children born in Syria; and (b) presuming killed or missing husbands in Syria dead or missing, thus deterring survivor’s benefits. Legal barriers delayed the documentation process for up to six months. Also, because of changes in legal regulations, Syria had been indicated as the birthplace for some children; this frustrates women and might impinge on the children’s future.
- In organizational and institutional terms, we must observe that the work with female repatriates had been reallocated from one organization to another, thereby rotating personnel, interrupting the rehabilitation process, and hampering the rehabilitation monitoring. Each new expert must start anew communicating and gaining trust. Some women argued it is more convenient to have the same experts throughout the course of rehabilitation.
- Scarcity of qualified and trained theologians and counselors with adequate expertise and skills to be able to work with these groups of people. Theologians and counselors have had to learn during the rehabilitation as many of them were not trained earlier.
- Lack of comprehensive training manuals that provide for gender sensitivity in rehabilitation and the peculiarities of working with children repatriates. The manual produced by the “Akniat” Fund, aimed to enhance the competencies of theologians, is considered to be a pioneering paper that needs a follow-up. The latter should deploy, aside from theological and psychological dimensions, psychological components, including developmental psychology, social psychology, the psychology of religion. It should also infer peculiarities of working and legally assisting these individuals.

- Although many counselors and theologians testify the need for further work, the rehabilitation activities at the current phase do not reach repatriated children.
- The religious reeducation encourages returnees to adopt the Hanafi madhhab often neglecting the secular alternatives. This neglect constricts both the rehabilitation horizons and life choices for repatriates in Kazakhstani society.
- The rehabilitation approach overlooks working with the family and the social environment of the returnees, yet they are instrumental in the resocialization and social reintegration of women and children.
- At the present reintegration stage, there is practically no commitment to build new social ties for repatriates and promote social cohesion through different social clubs in order to fulfill the needs of belongingness, communication, mutual understanding, and mutual assistance. These clubs and associations may emerge as alternatives to the radical jamaats, which played a prominent part in the radicalization and ensuing decision on “hijra” to the “Islamic State”.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a grievous challenge redeploying most of the work online and calling for the reassessment of the working methods.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kazakhstan adopted a comprehensive multilateral approach to rehabilitation, seeking to address all aspects of repatriates' life from social integration to religious awareness. Kazakhstan's approach is therefore not limited to socio-psychological rehabilitation or the theological dialogue model, but it is rather holistic.

The rehabilitation efforts are premised on the state-controlled collaboration between NGOs and public authorities, including the National Security Committee, the Ministry of Information and Social Development, and the Ministry of Education and Science (Committee on the Children's Rights Protection). The State envisages rehabilitation and reintegration efforts as a long-term endeavor, which is why it has extended rehabilitation activities for another three years.


The rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees embody three phases. The first phase provides for the social adaptation; it had been deployed at the Flamingo rehabilitation camp near Aktau. The one-month-long phase had engaged varying stakeholders, including law enforcement, "Shans" NGO, "Akniyet" Fund, and the state agencies. The second phase is extremely socially-oriented and provides for rehabilitation and primary socialization; it had taken place in the provinces through "Shans" Socio-Psychological and Legal Assistance Centers headed by Olga Ryl. The timeline for this phase is from when the repatriates began settling in the regions until March 2020. The third phase is reintegration. The principal actors are akimats' units and offices and the "Akniyet" Fund together with the Center for the Study and Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue (headed by Gulmarzhan Razdykova). Substantially, this phase pays heed to theological and psychological rehabilitation. It began in May 2020 and continues to this day. The rehabilitation program had recruited a multidisciplinary expert team with lawyers, psychologists, educators, theologians, community workers in its ranks. The program revealed the best-performing approach and techniques and areas for improvement.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend endorsing a single integrated rehabilitation and reintegration approach specific to the Kazakh context and individual characteristics of the repatriates. The approach should address psychological tools, theological facets of rehabilitation, and social work approaches with thorough attention to age differences.
2. We recommend broadening and refining the upscale curricular practices in rehabilitation that would reflect the amassed experience, the proven techniques, and best-performing approaches in teaching resources. The latter should bear in view the gender-related aspects of rehabilitation and the peculiarities of working with the repatriated children.
3. We recommend addressing the concern of psychologists and theologians on a possible radicalization of children as they come of age. We recommend that rehabilitation activities continue for children through psychological counseling, extended learning aimed at developing critical thinking skills, patriotic sentiments, and open-mindedness that acknowledges the spiritual diversity of today's world.

4. We recommend holding training enhancing the competencies and skills of counselors and theologians working with these individuals. These are the training for theologians for them to master psychological ways of persuasion; religious education training for counselors; joint training for counselors and theologians on the psychology of religion; joint training for participating counselors and theologians to promote peer learning.
5. As per social work, we recommend replicating and scaling up the success of the mask-sewing workshop launched by the CRS Nur-Sultan and the City Employment Center that recruited repatriated women; and the success of the “Ulagat” Muslim Women Club in Zhezqazghan launched by “Shans” Center, where one room creates conditions conducive to rehabilitation and reintegration. We also recommend building new social ties for repatriates and promote social cohesion through different social clubs in order to fulfill the needs of belongingness and mutual assistance.
6. In rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, we recommend working both with the repatriates and their families/social environment by engaging the latter in social and psychological assistance provided to the returnees and increasing the immunity and resilience to radical religious ideologies.
7. In efforts to foster quality theologians, we recommend reviewing the curriculum of “Religion and theology” by including the psychology courses, inter alia personality and social psychology, developmental psychology.
8. We recommend reaching out to both theologians and secular experts in religious studies, which would, apart from the Hanafi School of Islam, examine the humanistic potential of religion and its compatibility with secularism in Kazakhstan’s post-secular society.
9. We recommend evolving a framework, forms, and means of women’s religious education and guidance at mosques as religious women have a strong inclination to religious knowledge, religious reflection, consultations on everyday Islamic practices, communication, and emotional support from other religious women. Religious illiteracy and resorting to online websites for the pursuit of knowledge have been driving factors in women’s radicalization and their decision to leave for IS.
10. In the post-secular reality of Kazakhstani society, we recommend taking heed of the women’s inclusion in social processes so that they find their place in society and see a life perspective in a secular state. For instance, there are public associations in Kyrgyzstan where religious women meet per their interests, debate personal and social issues, and engage in religious education.³³
11. We recommend conducting annual longitudinal studies on rehabilitation and reintegration efforts and their effectiveness once a year in order to gain a holistic view of the rehabilitation developments.

³³Noor O’Neill Borbieva (2012) “Empowering Muslim Women: Independent Religious Fellowships in Kyrgyz Republic”, *Slavic Review*. 71(2): 288-307

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12. We recommend contributing to the rehabilitation and reintegration debates on international forums for practicing peer learning with other countries and boosting Kazakhstan's approach.
 13. The coronavirus pandemic, having redeployed most of the rehabilitation projects online and having accelerated the digitalization of society and religion, has demonstrated the need to use digital technologies and media space in rehabilitation processes, and generally in building resilience to radical religious ideologies through generating digital educational resources, online counter-narratives, alternative narratives, online forums, and online communities.
 14. We would also like to call attention to improving the state gender policy to create an environment in which women could fulfill their personal and career potential in Kazakhstani society; in which they could pursue positive behavioral models in the home and social environments; in which women could design positive life strategies associated with a responsible attitude towards themselves, their family and children; in which they could make career choices and be included in social processes.

5. APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Group A: **Rehabilitation Center Directors**

1. Pre-rehabilitation

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Were you involved in laying the groundwork for rehabilitation programs? What was it about? What institutions took part in it?

2. Rehabilitation and reintegration:

3. How would you evaluate the impact of the repatriates' stay in zones of terrorist activity? How did it affect their legal status (loss of documents, ability to work), physical and mental wellbeing, their relations with their family, employment, and their financial situation?
4. What was your responsibility in rehabilitation? What do you think is the purpose of rehabilitation?
5. How did your organization help to restore documents of women and children? What people and organizations provided legal support? What difficulties have you encountered during the process?
6. What other rehabilitation activities did you hold for women and children (medical and educational services, retraining, social warfare services, work with the families of returnees)?
7. Was there a difference in rehabilitation programs for women and children, or are these interrelated processes?
8. What organizations helped you implement the primary rehabilitation? Whom would you like to acknowledge? Conversely, who failed to provide adequate assistance?
9. Which experts and practitioners were involved in the process? And how would you rate their performance? Did they have enough knowledge and skills to work with these individuals? What areas need improvement?
10. What was the role of the State in rehabilitation processes? Should the Government extend its assistance? What the state support should look like?
11. What was the role of other organizations in rehabilitation processes? How did they contribute to rehabilitation efforts?
12. Did participants in rehabilitation coordinate and harmonize their work with one another?

3. Post-rehabilitation: performance assessment

13. What difficulties have you encountered while counseling these women and children?
14. What performance criteria have you used to evaluate rehabilitation results?
15. Does the program stipulate social and psychological assistance to these individuals after rehabilitation is over?
16. Who is currently working with the women and children?
17. Could repatriates be at risk of social stigma while attempting to reintegrate into Kazakhstani society?

Group B: **Counselors**

1. Pre-rehabilitation:

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Did you have any prior experience of working with people returning from areas of terrorist activity?
3. Were there any prior training or seminars held to help you build the capacity to work with these individuals?

2. Rehabilitation (psychological component):

4. At what rehabilitation stages you commenced your work with repatriates?
5. What organization did you work for?
6. As a counselor, how would you evaluate the impact of their stay in zones of terrorist activity? Do these people need serious psychological rehabilitation? Or it is merely a treatment they need?
7. What was your responsibility in rehabilitation? What do you think is the purpose of rehabilitation?
8. Where did you meet with the repatriates? How often did you meet?
9. What psychological tools did you use while working with these people? Which tools had proven effective? Which were found to be unsuitable?
10. What difficulties have you encountered while counseling these women?
11. How did the psychological rehabilitation of children go? What are the peculiarities compared to the women's rehabilitation program? What were the difficulties of working with children?

12. Did you provide counseling services to the family of these women?
13. How long does it take to complete psychological rehabilitation? Are there any stages to it?
14. Would it possible to create a simplified and standardized approach to the rehabilitation of people repatriated from zones of terrorist activity? Or does it take an individual approach for successful rehabilitation?

III. Psychological rehabilitation assessment:

15. What performance criteria for psychological rehabilitation you can think of?
16. What difficulties have you encountered in the psychological rehabilitation of returnees (lack of financial resources, structural shortcomings, the lack of qualified and trained personnel, others)?
17. What do you recommend improving in rehabilitation programs for people repatriated from zones of terrorist activity?

Group C: Theologians

I. Pre-rehabilitation:

1. Did you have any prior experience of working with people returning from terrorist activity zones?
2. Were you trained to work with these women? Did these courses help you?

II. Rehabilitation (theological component)

3. Do you think there was a need for religious rehabilitation or religious reeducation of the repatriates?
4. What was the purpose of your work with female repatriates?
5. At what rehabilitation stages you commenced your work with repatriates?
6. What organization did you work for?
7. Where did you meet with repatriates?
8. What tools did you use? Which ones proved effective?
9. What difficulties have you encountered while working with women repatriates?
10. What skills and competencies were useful to you, and what were you lacking? Would you like to gain those skills or enhance them?
11. Did you work with children? What are the peculiarities of working with them?
12. Is there a need to recruit experts in child theology or your knowledge and skills were ample to succeed in the process?

13. Was there someone supervising your work? What documents had concluded your work?
14. What performance criteria for religious reeducation and deradicalization you can think of?

III. Accomplishments and setbacks to rehabilitation:

15. What are the accomplishments of religious rehabilitation?
16. What are the setbacks in religious rehabilitation?
17. Do religious rehabilitation practices continue today?
18. What are your suggestions for improving theological rehabilitation?
19. Following the “ Zhusan” experience, should anything be done in educational institutions as of training theologians? Do you need refresher courses to be able to work with these individuals?

Group D: Community workers

1. Pre-rehabilitation:

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Did you have any prior experience of working with people returning from zones of terrorist activity?
3. Were there any prior training or seminars held to help you build the capacity to work with these individuals? Did these courses help you?

2. Rehabilitation (social component):

4. At what rehabilitation stages you commenced your work with repatriates?
5. What organization did you work for?
6. Did you work with women, children, or both?
7. What was your responsibility during rehabilitation?
8. What kind of activities you held for women?
9. What techniques did you use to work with children?
10. What institutions and organizations were involved in the social rehabilitation? Would you like to acknowledge anyone?

3. Social rehabilitation assessment:

11. What difficulties have you encountered while working with these individuals?
12. What performance criteria did you use to assess rehabilitation outcomes?
13. What are your suggestions for improving the rehabilitation and reintegration programs?
14. Who is currently working with these women and children?
15. What are the setbacks to the social reintegration of returnees?
16. Could repatriates be at risk of social stigma while attempting to reintegrate into Kazakhstani society?
17. Is there a need to continue offering social support to repatriates? What rehabilitation projects need to be fostered?

Group E: Female Repatriates

The impact of their stay in IS:

1. What made you leave for the “Islamic State”?
2. What was your life like in IS?
3. How did you make a living? Were you employed?
4. Have you lost loved ones (husbands, children, others)?
5. What are some challenging moments you can think of? (shooting, explosions)
6. How and with whom did you return to Kazakhstan?

Joining rehabilitation programs:

7. Was your return to Kazakhstan informed and voluntary?
8. Which experts have worked with you?
9. What kind of medical care has been provided to you?
10. Have therapists been working with you?
11. Have religious scholars from DUMK been working with you?
12. What assistance and when was it provided to you? Did the program accommodate all your needs?
13. Was there any assistance provided to your children? If yes, then what kind? Are you satisfied with the way experts worked with your children?

14. Did the experts help you to recover physically and mentally, and prepare for life in society? Would you like to acknowledge and commend the work of any particular expert?
15. Have you been offered retraining courses?
16. How did your family or your relatives react to your return? What is your relationship like with them these days?
17. What difficulties and challenges have you encountered during rehabilitation?
18. What positive aspects of rehabilitation would you like to highlight? Any proposal or recommendations?

The life strategy and social integration of female repatriates; progress they made and challenges they encounter:

19. Your current marital status.
20. Who are you living with at the moment?
21. Are you working or studying?
22. Where are your children and what do they do now?
23. How do they feel in a social environment (kindergarten, school, with peers)? Were there any difficulties in adapting to a new life?
24. Do experts still work with you and your children?
25. How does the state help you at the moment? Any welfare assistance?
26. How do you make a living now? Do your relatives and friends help you?
27. Are there any organizations, apart from the state, that offer help to you?
28. Do you continue to abide by Islamic norms, pray, etc.?
29. Do you continue to accumulate religious knowledge? If yes, then from what sources?
30. How other people feel about you? Do you face communication difficulties?
31. How did the coronavirus pandemic affect your life?

Future plans

32. Has rehabilitation helped you go back to normal life?
33. Do you think you need financial, psychological support, religious consultations, or any other help?
34. Has your life changed over the past year?
35. What are your plans for the future?

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