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# Alleged Convergent Transnational Crimes in Somali-American Communities: A Qualitative Study of Risks and Practices

## OVERVIEW

This study aimed to build scientific knowledge on the emergence and trajectories of alleged violent extremism and trafficking in persons in Somali-American communities in the U.S. It aimed to generate better understanding of possible convergence issues involved so as to inform policy and practice.

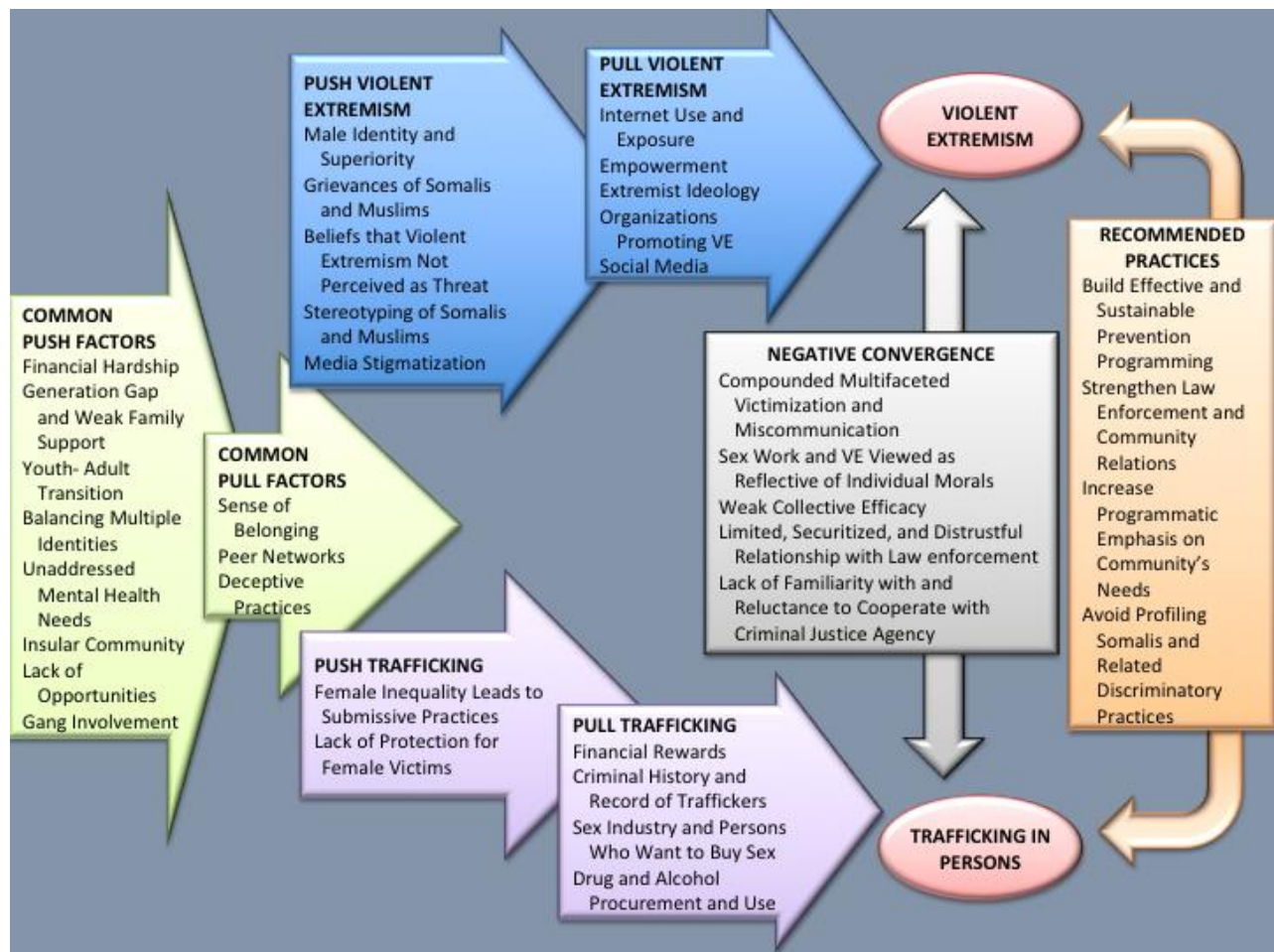
## METHOD

This was a three-year, multi-site, mixed methods study informed by push and pull theory. Data collection involved review of public sources on the possible involvement of Somali-Americans in these crimes, and ethnographic interviews of young adults (n=39), parents (n=21), community leaders and service providers (n=30), and criminal justice practitioners (n=26) in three American cities with Somali communities: 40 in Minneapolis-St. Paul; 40 in Columbus; 36 in Nashville. The investigators used the data gathered to conduct qualitative analyses using Atlas/ti software and a grounded theory approach.

## FINDINGS

Qualitative data suggest that transnational crimes such as violent extremism and trafficking in persons both appear to involve common and selective risks and practices, which can be explained via a convergent risks and practices model that is informed by push and pull theory.

### Convergent Risks and Practices Model



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## Risks

The model described push and pull factors that were common and unique to both violent extremism and trafficking in persons. Common push factors include financial hardship; generation gap and weak family support; youth-adult transition; balancing multiple identities; unaddressed mental health needs; insular community; lack of opportunities; and gang involvement. Common pull factors include sense of belonging; peer networks; and deceptive practices.

Regarding violent extremism, the model described selective push factors that include male identity and superiority; grievances against Somalis and Muslims; beliefs that the threat of VE is negligible; stereotyping of Somalis and Muslims; and media stigmatization. Selective pull factors include internet use and exposure; empowerment; extremist ideology; organizations promoting violent extremism; and social media.

Regarding alleged trafficking in persons, the model described selective push factors that include female inequality; and lack of protection for female victims. Selective pull factors include financial rewards; criminal history and records; sex industry and persons who want to buy sex; drug and alcohol procurement and use.

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## Practices

The negative convergence of risks and practices occurs when the risks and community and/or law enforcement practices combine in ways that contribute to negative outcomes. The model identified three overall negative convergent practices (compounded multifaceted victimization and miscommunication; weak collective efficacy; limited and securitized relationship with law enforcement).

Recommended convergent practices should help to ameliorate risks, and lead to positive outcomes. The model identified several recommended convergent practices (build effective and sustainable generalized prevention programming; strengthen law enforcement and community relations; increase programmatic emphasis on community's needs; stop discriminatory practices) which were incorporated into our final recommendations.

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## IMPLICATIONS

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### Research Implication

This empirical model, and the push and pull factors it identified, are based upon qualitative data. Future research should examine and validate this model using survey methods and quantitative analysis.

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### Practice and Policy Implications

We identified several convergent practices which offer evidence-based suggestions for designing helpful programs and policies to replace the negative convergent practices identified in this study, practices which do not solve and can potentially worsen the problems at hand.

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