



A MAN'S WORLD?

Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering
Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism
and Violent Extremism

edited by

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The views expressed in the chapters of this publication are the opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security.

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ABOUT THE CENTERS

Hedayah is the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, an international, independent think-and-do tank based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. A product of the GCTF, Hedayah's mission is to be the global hub of experts and expertise and platform for good practice sharing for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policy, programs and practice.

The Global Center on Cooperative Security works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. The Global Center's work focuses on enhancing community resilience to violent extremism and on supporting national and non-governmental institutions in responding to multidimensional security challenges. In collaboration with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional, and global levels. The Global Center has played a key role in raising awareness among the international community about the multiple roles of women in terrorism, violent extremism, and countering violent extremism and worked with international and local partners to inform and shape related policy and programs.

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Foreword

Over the past year, the international community commemorated the fifteenth anniversary of the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security. This resolution recognized the disproportionate and unique impact of violent conflict on women and girls, and affirmed the participation and representation of women in building peace. UNSCR 1325 for the first time codified the role of women in building and sustaining peace in the international legal framework.

In preparation for the 2015 High-Level Review on UNSCR 1325 (2000), the Security Council invited the Secretary-General to commission a Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Global Study), highlighting best practices, implementation gaps and challenges, emerging trends, and priorities for action.

Recognizing this unique opportunity, the Permanent Mission of the UAE to the United Nations and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security worked in partnership to contribute to the Global Study. Leveraging our respective expertise, the Mission and the Institute initiated the “UAE Panel Series on Women, Peace and Security,” which brought together key stakeholders from a variety of disciplines and sectors to focus on some of the most critical peace and security issues. Our goal was to shape public discourse, raise awareness, and mobilize United Nations Member States to implement solutions to prevent and resolve conflict, as well as to advance stability and prosperity by better understanding the role of women in peace and security. The Panel Series served to inform the Global Study in the lead up to the 2015 High-Level Review on Women, Peace and Security, which brought Member States of the United Nations together at the Security Council to assess fifteen years of progress at global, regional, and national levels.

At the High-Level Review, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2242 (2015) on Women, Peace and Security to address implementation gaps through practical action in several areas: countering violent extremism and terrorism, improving the Security Council’s own working methods, and implementing gender recommendations made by the High-Level Independ-

ent Panel on Peace Operations and the Global Study. This resolution was co-sponsored by 72 Member States, including the UAE, and an unprecedented 113 speakers addressed the Council, underscoring the broad support for this resolution.

Given the complex global security context today, Resolution 2242 (2015) highlights the role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism, urging Member States and United Nations entities to integrate a gender analysis on the drivers of radicalization for women, to consider the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations, and to ensure greater consultations with women and women's organizations when developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

To underscore the importance of this issue, the first discussion in the UAE Panel Series on Women, Peace and Security centered on the role of women in countering violent extremism. As extremist groups have increased in influence, their territorial advance has been coupled with targeted, strategic attacks on women's rights and freedoms, including the ability to move freely, engage in public life, access education and employment, enjoy health services, express themselves without the fear of repercussion, and live as equal citizens. Yet, it is also important to recognize that women play different roles when it comes to violent extremism: they can be enablers and actors, or they can play a key role in countering fundamentalism and extremism.

The role of women in promulgating and countering violent extremism (CVE) is an understudied but critical contemporary security issue. Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security have developed this publication to further explore women and CVE-related issues through a range of perspectives, reflecting on women's roles as propagators of terrorism, as well as agents in countering violent extremism.

In this publication, contributors from across the world reflect on the lessons learned from diverse fields of practice, including development, human rights, media, advocacy, academia, and conflict prevention and mitigation, and consider their application to CVE efforts. This volume seeks to secure a deeper insight into women's roles in this field, and offers a nuanced understanding of the grievances that move women toward violent extremism, as well as the enormous potential role that women can play as agents in preventing the spread of violent extremism.

We believe that efforts to counter violent extremism must engage women at all levels. Women are positioned to be effective partners in CVE efforts against intolerance and extremism, and as positive change agents in their families, communities, and public spaces in order to prevent radicalization that leads to violent extremism and acts of terrorism. Only when women are meaningful participants in shaping comprehensive CVE strategies – through the security sector, criminal justice system, in social programs, counter-ideology initiatives, and within civil society – will societies be able to address the conditions conducive to terrorism.

Recalling the real spirit of Resolution 1325 (2000), which reminded the global community that women's leadership is an untapped resource for peace, and that injustices and inequalities embedded in gender relations are a long-term threat to development and stability, strategies to counter violent extremism must promote women's participation, leadership, and empowerment.

This volume, compiled by Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security, offers the reader a unique vantage point into this emerging topic. We believe this is an important contribution to a nascent, but growing, area of study and hope it will mobilize both men and women to work for peace and equality, and continue to assist in the fight against extremism.

Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh
New York, March 2016

Ambassador Melanne Vermeer
Washington D.C., March 2016

Introduction

Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger and Rafia Bhulai

Responses to security issues, predominantly in the form of military or law enforcement measures, have long been considered a male-dominated endeavor, with women relatively absent from the peacemaking tables and policy development.¹ This trend has been no less apparent within responses to terrorism. However, terrorist groups are exacting a heavy price from women and girls, from inflicting sexual violence, challenging basic human rights and impeding socioeconomic development by, for example, attacking girls' schools and educators.² As the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, Zainab Bangura, and Melanne Verweij, former US Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues, recently noted:

Extremist groups such as [the Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham] ISIS and Boko Haram use sexual violence because it disrupts and further destabilises families and communities, and stigmatises women... This form of violence has distinct and devastating consequences that remain with individuals, communities and countries across generations.³

Despite these grim dynamics, women can be powerful agents of change and can play a crucial role both in detecting early signs of radicalization, intervening before individuals become violent, and delegitimizing violent extremist narratives. The unique role of women in conflict prevention was recognized at the international level over fifteen years ago through Resolution 1325 (and subsequent resolutions). UNSCR 1325 (2000) emphasizes the "role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in peace-building... and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."⁴ Subsequently, UNSCR 2122 (2013) re-emphasized the need to better implement 1325, including regular consultations with civil society and women's organization to better develop conflict prevention and peacebuilding/keeping strategies.

In recent years, the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has also gained some momentum in the international counterterrorism (CT) policy discourse. The development of the field of policy and practice for P/CVE has meant that governments are emphasizing prevention efforts in CT strategies. This includes elements that address and counter the push and pull factors that lead to radicalization and recruitment as part of a more comprehensive approach, as opposed to military and intelligence strategies alone. The launch of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), and its CVE working group have helped to push this agenda forward internationally since 2011. Moreover, the White House hosted a CVE Summit in February 2015, and subsequent regional CVE Summits were hosted in Algiers, Astana, Istanbul, Nairobi, Nouakchott, Oslo, Sydney and Tirana to emphasize on a senior policymaker level the need for preventive approaches to countering terrorism. From these platforms and forums, a number of initiatives emerged, including joint work between the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the GCTF to develop a framework document *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*,⁵ as well as a dedicated Action Agenda item resulting from the CVE Summits on the role of civil society, women and youth in CVE. Both the Global Center on Cooperative Security and Hedayah have actively participated in these forums, and have led initiatives and projects on the margins to enhance understanding of P/CVE as well as the role that women play in these efforts.

In October 2015, the Security Council focused more directly on the intersectionality between the women, peace and security agenda and counterterrorism and CVE, noting “changing global context of peace and security... relating to rising violent extremism” and reiterated the “intention to increase attention to women, peace and security” as it relates to terrorism.⁶ The resultant resolution, UNSCR 2242, called for closer integration of efforts to implement Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and CT resolutions—specifically encouraging the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) to collaborate with UN Women to gather data on the drivers of radicalization for women, and the impacts of CT strategies on women. However, it is also noteworthy that it did not presuppose the nature of the relationship between the WPS and CT/CVE agendas, instead it

Urges Member States and requests relevant United Nations entities, including CTED within its existing mandate and in collaboration with UN-Women, to conduct and gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women’s human rights and women’s

organizations, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses, and to ensure United Nations monitoring and assessment mechanisms and processes mandated to prevent and respond to violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, have the necessary gender expertise to fulfil their mandates, including relevant sanctions experts groups and bodies established to conduct fact finding and criminal investigations...⁷

This resolution also comes at a time when a third role of women is increasingly garnering the attention of international policymakers: that of perpetrator or mobilizer. The controlled visibility accorded women by social media platforms has created a space for many women to play a role in soliciting and mobilizing recruits for ISIS. However, women as members and even leaders of terrorist groups is not a novelty. For example, right-wing organization in the United States and Canada such as Stormfront and the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) have dedicated web pages for women on the Internet to generate support and recruitment.⁸ Experts such as Mia Bloom and Anne Speckhard have presented a number of case studies from Chechnya, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Iraq of women actively participating in terrorist activities.⁹

For example, according to a number of studies in the Sri Lankan case, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) aggressively recruited women to its cadres of fighters starting in the mid-1980s, although their participation in the broader movement began in the 1970s.¹⁰ In the LTTE, women’s roles were at first limited to propaganda work, medical care, information collection, fundraising and recruitment—but a number of them began receiving military training. In the context of Northern Ireland, women were more active in republican paramilitaries than loyalist paramilitaries, and were even militarily active in IRA and Provisional IRA.¹¹ On the loyalist side, however, women participated in paramilitaries mainly through propaganda and logistical support.¹² These examples illustrate the varied roles that women can play in violent extremism and terrorism. However, in comparison to their public roles vis a vis groups like Al-Qaida or Al-Shabab, the public voices of women in support of ISIS represents a novel development. Indeed, in Afghanistan, the Taliban has pointedly not included women as either mobilizers, public supporters or advocates. A number of strategic and cultural factors play into this: a highly-mobile environment where the strategic value added of female suicide bombers is not needed, a conservative culture that restricts female freedom of movement, and an absence of a female culture of martyrdom.¹³

It is in this context that several questions emerge when discussing the particulars of why and how women partake in both violent extremism and efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. For example, what are the different roles that women can undertake in terrorist organization? Are females recruited differently than their male counterparts? What roles do they play in inciting or persuading others to join violent extremist groups? Is there a particular role for women in countering terrorism and P/CVE? Are specific policies aimed at women a necessity moving forward? How can a gender analysis be effectively integrated into CVE policy and programming?

As governments, academics and practitioners seek to answer these questions, this edited volume provides an innovative set of national, regional, and international perspectives reflecting on the roles of women in terrorism and CVE. Contributors reflect on the lessons learned from diverse fields of practice, including development, human rights, media and advocacy, academia, and conflict prevention and mitigation, and consider their application to CVE efforts. The essays are analyzed in the conclusion, which also includes a set of recommendations for national, regional, and international actors to integrate a gender perspective into CVE policy and programming. The analysis also draws on a series of workshops and discussions convened by the Global Center on Cooperative Security and Hedayah, relevant UN resolutions, and framework documents of the GCTF, as well as in-depth interviews by the editors with policymakers, practitioners, and experts in the field of CVE and related areas of work.

PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In much of the literature to date that discusses how women participate in violent extremism, women are viewed as passive or coerced actors or supporters rather than active participants or perpetrators of terrorism and violent extremism. As Fionnuala Ní Aoláin argues, “when women come into view they typically do so as the wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of terrorist actors, or as the archetypal victims of senseless terrorist acts whose effects on the most vulnerable (women themselves) underscores the unacceptability of terrorist targeting.”¹⁴ While this characterization has some merit, painting all female supporters and perpetrators with a broad brush can be counterproductive, especially when developing CVE policies and programming, and perpetuate stereotypes inherent in broader discussions of the roles of women.

In some cases, the Western media’s characterization of young, Western “jihadi brides” traveling to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra illustrates this point. For example, a Guardian article describes a would-be “jihadi bride” named Karen as “naïve” and implies Karen was almost tricked into traveling to Syria by a fighter there.¹⁵ Anne Speckhard’s semi-fictional account of Shannon Conley, a 17-year-old American teenager, and her attempted journey to travel to join ISIS characterizes her as the “girl next door” who was “seduced” by ISIS.¹⁶ An article from the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) news describes female Australians as “sexual slaves” and “suicide bombers”—thus implying these women are recruited for utilitarian purposes by groups in Syria and Iraq.¹⁷ In these instances, the characterization of females traveling to Iraq and Syria emphasize the idea that these individuals have limited agency in their choice to travel, and they are coerced by men to join ISIS/Jabhat al-Nusra, or do so for reasons other than adolescent passions, though this may also play a role in individual motivations.¹⁸

This phenomenon is not limited to the context of terrorism; parallels can be drawn in the perceptions of female perpetrators to the Rwandan genocide. When discussing female agency in the Rwandan genocide, Sara Brown noted, “female perpetrators...especially high-profile perpetrators, are often depicted as deviant anomalies and stripped of their gender and humanity.”¹⁹ In the case of Rwanda, several female perpetrators participated in violence to reject and overcome the patriarchal context in which they were residing. Women in Rwanda often were not allowed to make decisions outside of their fathers or husbands, and committing acts of violence was one way they could seek to regain control of their behavior and actions.

The perception that women can only be victims of terrorism or violence is indeed problematic. For policies and programs targeted at preventing violent extremism and terrorism in particular, the contradiction between assumptions of agency when women partake in prevention roles versus a rejection of agency when women are perpetrators poses a number of conceptual and practical challenges. For example, ignoring women’s active participation and agency in terrorism could result in unintended consequences in CT or CVE programs underestimating women’s passion or level of activity in a terrorist organization. It could also result in missing key intervention opportunities (particularly those aimed at women) that could have ripple effects into the women’s social circles. Ignoring women’s agency in participating in terrorism could also result in poor research or data assessing the grievances and push/pull factors leading to radicalization and recruitment. There are also implications here for criminal justice strategies used to prosecute individuals participating in terrorism;

if women are not seen as having agency in perpetrating violence, their crimes may not be prosecuted in the same way as men.

While Aoláin's argument is still valid in terms of mainstreaming a more robust discussion of the roles of women in violent extremism and terrorism, the literature investigating the role and involvement of women in violent extremism and terrorism has grown in the past decade. In other words, there is a small but burgeoning body of literature that investigates a number of different roles that women play in violent extremism and terrorism.²⁰ These roles vary from active participation in violence to facilitating transactions in support of terrorist organizations to passive compliance with terrorist activities going on around them. As with men, the reasons for women's participation in violent extremism vary widely.

WOMEN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

The existing literature investigating the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism is limited, and reflects the relatively recent emergence of P/CVE as a policy focus. Consequently, there is mixed evidence to suggest that women have a unique role to play in P/CVE efforts as different than men. However, a study by the Institute for Inclusive Security argues that based on interviews with women in 30 countries in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, women are often the first to stand up to terrorism “since they are among the first targets of fundamentalism, which restricts their rights and frequently leads to increases in domestic violence before it translates into open armed conflict.”²¹ In other words, women more than men may be affected by violent extremism—and may be more willing activists in preventing it.

Several anecdotal examples illustrate how women can contribute to CVE efforts. For example, PAIMAN Trust in Pakistan has strongly embraced reintegration efforts that include vocational and psychological training programs led by women and mothers.²² A focus group study conducted in Yemen suggested that given the right legal, psychological and emotional support, women could have a significant role to play in creating dialogue about violent extremism and terrorism prior to their children joining a terrorist organization.²³ Dialogues with women's groups and experts from South Asia, for example, have highlighted the important roles they play in government, in civil society and in communities, in challenging extremism and advocating for improved governance, rights and development.²⁴ However, a 2012 report by OSCE also notes that women's participation in preventing violent extremism should not be limited to traditional or “private” roles—but that women's participation

in the community, politics, law enforcement and other state agencies are also crucial to P/CVE agendas.²⁵ For example, female law enforcement officers are often better at building trust with the community and community-oriented policing, which are crucial elements of P/CVE strategies.²⁶ Studies have also shown that female UN peacekeepers help to improve situational awareness of the mission by enhancing the understanding of, for example, female victims or young boys and girls.²⁷

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE-BASE

The collection of essays contained in this edited volume seek to build the body of literature on women and CVE by drawing on examples from a number of countries and regions. The essays contain both policy-level recommendations as well as program-level recommendations and seek to answer some of the outstanding questions regarding the types of roles women might play in CVE efforts. These chapters represent the opinions and experiences of individual authors, and their voices are preserved despite undertaking a light consultative editing process.

A number of essays highlight the powerful role of women as preventers. Focusing on the recent adoption of UNSCR 2242 and the high-level attention on CVE, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat raises a number of overall concerns regarding the conflation of the WPS and CVE agendas in her essay “Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations.” First she warns that the current debates on women and CVE are not contextualized in the broader analysis of gender and security. Second, de Jonge Oudraat argues that women's voices on the ground are often ignored in policy debates and decisions. Third, she warns against subordinating the WPS agenda to CT and CVE agendas and asserts that equal participation of women in peace and security efforts should be a goal in its own right. Finally, de Jonge Oudraat recommends increased funding opportunities to the WPS agenda as compared to the vast amount of funding directed at CT and CVE efforts.

Sahana Dharmapuri goes further in arguing that that utilizing the framework of UNSCR 1325 can be an effective tool for CVE efforts in her chapter titled “UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Countering Violent Extremism: Using a Gender Perspective to Enhance Operational Effectiveness.” She recommends adopting a more robust gender perspective in CVE efforts to overcome some of the negative consequences of “gender blindness.” Moreover, Dharmapuri argues that the overall effectiveness of CVE programs and policy implementation would be enhanced by increasing the participation of women in the security sector.

In “A New Security Architecture: Mothers Included!” Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg present an innovative study examining the critical roles mothers can play in CVE efforts, informed by a unique field study and dataset. Drawing on their pioneering work with “Mothers’ Schools” Schlaffer and Kropiunigg combine qualitative and quantitative data to highlight lessons from a myriad of contexts, including Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Pakistan, supplemented by anecdotal evidence from returning foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and Syria. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg conclude that women as mothers can play an important role in P/CVE efforts, but they also could benefit from further capacity building and support to enhance their abilities to, for example, detect early warning signs of radicalization or have discussions with their children about the dangers of terrorism.

A number of national experiences are also highlighted in this volume. In her chapter “Women, Gender and the U.K. Government’s Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Efforts: Looking Back and Forward,” Jayne Huckerby reviews the U.K.’s *Prevent* strategy with a focus on three key components: gender dynamics within the strategy itself, the main issues at stake in women’s roles in CVE programs, and the ways in which violent extremism and CVE impact women and girls differently than men and boys. In her analysis, Huckerby reviews these aspects through the pre-June 2011 counter-terrorism policy, post-June 2011 counter-terrorism policy (after modification and review), and post-April 2014 strategy to prevent women from traveling to join the fight in Iraq and Syria. Huckerby identifies a number of significant lessons learned from the U.K.’s *Prevent* strategy with regards to the effects on women and girls. For example, she argues that it is important to understand the barriers of women’s engagement in CVE space, including safety, legal and resource barriers. Moreover, she also argues that labeling activities as “CVE” can be counter-productive to the aims of these programs and put women and women’s organizations especially at risk. Finally she argues for more gender-sensitive approaches by the law enforcement community to facilitate better community trust.

The chapter on “The Role of Women in Preventing, Mitigating and Responding to Violence and Violent Extremism in Nigeria” by Kemi Okenyodo analyzes the Nigerian context, reflecting on the wider gender roles in Nigeria and how these roles might translate to better gendered approaches to violent extremism. She utilizes examples from women’s participation in law enforcement and military agencies to support her argument that women are effective at CVE efforts in circumstances where men may not be able to intervene due to gender differences and cultural expectations.

Mariam Safi’s chapter, “Afghan Women Roles in Countering Violent Extremism,” underscores the critical importance of women’s inclusion in efforts to build peace and resilient communities, and as part of that, to prevent and counter violent extremism. She makes several recommendations, especially in the context of the Afghan government developing their own CVE policy, of how CVE efforts could be effectively aimed at women, including counter-narrative campaigns and encouraging political activism.

The roles of women as perpetrators and supporters of violent extremism were also examined in this volume. Erin Saltman and Ross Frenett explore the roles women play as being radicalized to join ISIS, as well as implications of these roles in CVE efforts in their chapter “Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE.” Drawing on a database of social media profiles of Western female ISIS members, Saltman and Frenett highlight several push and pull factors involved in the radicalization and recruitment process, and conclude with a number of recommendations of how to prevent Western females from joining ISIS.

In their chapter titled “The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism: Motivations, Experiences and Engagement,” Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc and Stephane Lacombe investigate the varied roles women play in both participating in and countering violent extremism. Drawing on their experiences with programs involving victims of terrorism, they argue that women should not be singled out for specific roles in CVE, but rather should be engaged equally with men in coordinated and combined initiatives.

These essays together offer insights into a range of experiences and reflections on the roles of women in preventing and perpetrating violence, and consider the application of these to the challenge of preventing and countering terrorism. As governments, international organizations and civil society actors consider the urgent need to develop contextually tailored responses and policies, these contributions highlight the need to understand pre-existing dynamics while forging innovative responses. They emphasize the importance of perspectives from the field as well as academia in informing critical policy decisions and program design and implementation efforts, while also underscoring the need for far greater investment in research and analysis that goes beyond traditional notions of women’s roles. Most of all, they reiterate that responding to terrorism and security threats is not just a man’s role, but that without integrating a gender perspective and including women in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation stages, critical opportunities to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability and relevance of P/CVE measures could be lost.

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CHAPTER 1

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Women and Women’s Organizations

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The role of women and violent extremism is receiving increased attention by international actors.¹ For example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) organized a series of workshops examining the roles of women with regard to violent extremism in 2014 and 2015.² The European Union and the European Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) have considered the role of women—particularly women as mothers—in efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism.³ The role of women has been recognized in the February 2015 White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism and in follow up activities by the US government.⁴ The UN Security Council has also acknowledged the role of women and the importance of their engagement in preventative strategies.⁵

However, while the attention to the role of women is to be applauded, the parameters of the current discussions on the roles of women relating to violent extremism raise four main concerns. First, the debates about the roles of women and violent extremism are not connected to broader analyses about the relationship between gender and security. How, and to what extent, are gender roles and gender inequality driving violent extremism? We have an increasing body of knowledge that shows strong correlation between gender inequality and the status of women and violent conflict. Most violent extremist groups—particularly right wing and religious fundamentalists groups—have extreme views with respect to the roles of men and women. More often than not, they favor extreme notions of patriarchy and the subservience—if not, subjugation—of women. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a prime example—tales of rape and torture of women have emerged, particularly from foreign terrorist fighters who defect from ISIS and return to their home countries.⁶ By failing to incorporate a gender perspective in the analysis of violent extremism, the policy discussions have a tendency to reinforce regressive and stereotypical notions of women and men, whereby men fight and make

decisions, and women do neither. This hinders our understanding of violent extremism and thus limits the effectiveness of our responses.

Second, many policy discussions and programs on the role of women and their roles in countering violent extremism do not listen to the voices of women on the ground and are based on misguided notions of the power of women in many societies. The idea that in many cultures women may not be very visible in the public sphere, but wield significant power and influence in the private sphere and hence can counter violent extremism early on—is widespread. Yet, my interviews with women in Africa and Asia reveal that most women are invisible and have no voice. The majority is powerless and their strategy for survival is not to speak up, but to be in denial. For women to become effective agents in preventing or countering violent extremism they need to be given voice. Here, the empowerment of women is key.

Third, the larger Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda—that is the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment as embodied in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and its follow-on resolutions⁷—must not become subordinate to the counter-terrorism agenda. In other words, gender equality and women's empowerment should not be reduced to a counter-terrorism policy, but should be pursued in its own right and according to national and international commitments. There is a real concern shared by many women and women's organizations, including the lead author of the Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, that women and the WPS agenda will be “used” by governments to get intelligence on movements of extremists, that is, the “bad guys.” This instrumentalization of the WPS agenda risks to further sideline an already weakened women, peace and security community and undo much of the progress women activists have worked for the past twenty years.⁸ In addition, it makes a farce of the commitment to promote and support the role of women in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts.

Fourth, international actors are not putting money where their mouth is. The amount of money spent on programming furthering the WPS agenda is very limited and far outshines the amount of money spent on counter terrorism efforts. It also does not reach the 15% minimum set by the UN Secretary General's Seven Point Action Plan on Responsive Peace.⁹

In order to make P/CVE policies more effective, it is essential that policy-makers, practitioners and analysts connect their policies and analyses to the broader WPS agenda, without hijacking that agenda. Neglecting the gendered

nature of violent extremist movements hinders effective policy responses and has a tendency of casting women in stereotypical roles and restricting their action to the domestic level. An effective and progressive P/CVE policy needs to engage women (and men) at all levels of society—at the personal and family level; at the community level; at the national level; and at the international level. Only then will we be able to craft credible alternative narratives in which relationships between communities and people—men and women—are based on dignity and mutual respect, instead of intolerance and violence. Only then will preventative policies become a reality.

In this chapter I do five things. First, I examine the relationships between gender inequality and violent extremism. Second, I consider what women on the frontlines have to say. Third, I outline how to link issues of violent extremism and the WPS agenda. Fourth, I briefly examine the funding environment. Lastly, I outline ideas on how to move forward.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The study of the linkages between gender inequality, violent conflict and violent extremism is in its infancy. Valerie Hudson and Mary Caprioli have pioneered studies in this area and found strong correlations between gender inequality and conflict. Mary Caprioli examined the relationship between gender equality and the behavior of states when involved in inter-state disputes. She also studied the relationship between gender equality and conflicts within states. In both cases she observed positive statistical significant relationships—that is, the higher the score on gender equality the less likely a state will resort to the use of force in inter-state disputes and the less likely it experiences intra-state conflicts.¹⁰

In *Sex and World Peace* Valerie Hudson and her co-authors provide empirical data for understanding the linkages between the situation and the security of women and states in which they live. They demonstrate how the insecurity of women creates insecurity for society at large. They also show that the best predictor of a nation's peacefulness is not its level of democracy or wealth, but rather the level of physical security enjoyed by its women.¹¹

These studies provide strong hypotheses and innovative ways of looking at security issues. That said, they do not (as of yet) provide a clear picture as to the causal factors between gender inequality and conflict. Also, little research has been undertaken on the relationship between gender norms and conflict. For example, to what extent do extreme (violent) norms of masculinity fore-

bode conflict or vice versa?⁹ Many gender analyses fail to recognize that men are also gendered beings. Are the socially constructed ideas of what it means to be “manly” part of the problem in achieving lasting peace and security and gender equality? It is important when looking at gender norms that we look at norms for both men and women. According to Kuehnast and Sudhakar, “focusing on only one side of the gender equation overlooks the relational quality (that is, the power dynamics between and among men and women) and provides incomplete understanding of gender issues in the context of conflict and peacebuilding efforts.”¹²

Women practitioners active in preventing and countering violent extremism programs often underscore the role of gender inequality and the lack of women’s socio-economic and political empowerment as a major enabler for violent extremism and a major obstacle to preventative efforts.¹³ That said, very little research has thus far been carried out on the relationship between gender inequality and violent extremism and terrorism. S.V. Raghavan and V. Balasubramanian are one of the few who have examined the relationship between gender inequalities and terrorist groups. Their study demonstrates how gender inequality provides fertile ground for terrorist groups.¹⁴ They call attention to the fact that terrorist groups readily exploit to their advantage the victimization of women in patriarchal societies. They also point out that the increase of female suicide bombers is most pronounced in groups operating in societies that relegate women to a lower social status than that of men. Indeed, their lower status “leads them to being oblivious in the eyes of society, thereby, ruling them out of suspicion” and hence less likely to get caught.¹⁵

For example, Chechen separatists started using female suicide bombers in the late 1990s. Islamic groups in Palestine started using female suicide bombers in 2002 (15 months after the second Intifada). While the role of women in ISIS is largely restricted to the private sphere, ISIS in Iraq has in certain instances also resorted to the use of female suicide bombers. According to some reports heavy losses in Iraq and Syria have encouraged the ISIS leadership to promote the role of female jihadists.¹⁶ Boko Haram, the extremist group operating in Nigeria, started using female suicide bombers in 2014, and stepped up this effort in 2015. It has also started to use young girls (as young as 7-10 years old) as suicide bombers.¹⁷

Lindsey A. O’Rourke also points to the fact that many female suicide bombers may turn to terrorism to re-embrace societal norms about the behavior of women from which they believe (or are perceived) to have deviated. She points to women with declining marriage prospects, those who have been raped,

those who suffer from infertility, or women who are divorced as examples. In the societies from which these women come, these perceived indignities are serious transgressions that can be overcome by becoming a suicide bomber. Overcoming the feeling of being victimized hence becomes a prime motivator for these women to join violent extremist groups.¹⁸

Practitioners in the (European) RAN have likewise pointed to the importance of gender identity issues for those working on (de)radicalization efforts with those susceptible to violent extremism. Indeed, most right wing and religious extremists advocate highly restrictive gender roles. They generally “support a resentful and/or violently hostile attitude towards the other sex, people that are homosexual, or persons that, by their appearance or behavior challenge their rigid gender role order.”¹⁹ De-radicalization or preventative efforts hence should aim to “de-rigidify” gender roles and make “male and female identity concepts and behavior patterns more flexible and less compulsive.”²⁰

Though these ideas are convincing, we do not know how gender inequality and gender norms contribute to further violent extremism on a structural level and how these gender rigidities lead a person to become a violent extremist on an individual level.

It is, therefore, critical that more research is undertaken. On the one hand such research needs to examine the relationships between structural gender inequalities and violent extremism and terrorism. On the other hand such research needs to uncover gender specific motivations for joining violent extremist groups. Finally, a third strand of research should look at the organization and behavior of violent extremist groups with respect to women.

It may also be worthwhile to examine to what extent sexual violence is part of the modus operandi of such groups. The use of sexual violence by violent extremist groups such as ISIS very much resembles the use of sexual violence by state military forces and other armed groups, who have used such tactics as a weapon of war. In this respect, much can be learned from recent research on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Those studies have uncovered “complex patterns involving power, peer driven affiliation, and gender inequalities.”²¹ Similar patterns can be seen in the ISIS controlled areas in Iraq and Syria where sex slavery has become institutionalized and an important recruitment tool.²² The slave markets of ISIS where they sell women into sexual slavery for as little as a pack of cigarettes, also draw attention to the economic dimensions of sexual violence.²³ The violent commodification of women and girls is an essential element of the “business model” of extremist groups both in the Middle East and Africa.²⁴

Overall, women, like men, will join extremist groups for a variety of reasons, including ideological reasons, desire for national independence or emancipation, and pressure by peers and family. Women, like men, may also be forcefully recruited.²⁵ That said, each of these motivations play out differently for men and women at an individual level. Unless we understand those differential dynamics, we will not be able to prevent or counter them.

ENGAGING AND LISTENING TO WOMEN ON THE FRONT-LINES

When designing programs or projects that focus on the role of women and women's organizations in preventing and countering violent extremism, it is extremely important to adopt a gendered approach and to listen to the voices of men and women on the ground. What do existing gender norms say about the roles of women and men in a particular society and how do these gender norms encourage or impede certain actions?

Two recent pilot projects—one conducted by Women without Borders/Sisters Against Violent Extremism, the other conducted by the US Institute of Peace's Center for Gender and Peacebuilding—examined the role of women and women's organizations in preventing violent extremism.²⁶ A select number of the women leaders from Africa and Asia who participated in the projects came together in March 2015 in Washington, DC. All of them, without exception, had one clear message “our voices are not heard.”²⁷

The idea that women could become powerful allies in the fight against violent extremism is based on the belief—popular amongst Western policymakers—that in many cultures—particularly, Islamic cultures—women may not be very visible in the public sphere, but are very powerful forces in the domestic sphere—as such they are an untapped potential in the fight against terrorism.

However, this belief is based on a fallacy. Indeed, the women leaders we talked to emphasized that in their countries and communities children and husbands often show real disrespect for their mothers and wives—women are invisible. This is not to say that they are ignorant, rather that they are powerless. As one woman community leader observed “women know what goes on in their communities, but they never said anything about it, because they felt they were not listened to.”²⁸ Under those circumstances the survival strategy of many women—particularly mothers—is denial.

Interviews with over a dozen African and Asian women leaders engaged in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism further underscored that a major obstacle for them is the fact that, they—women and mothers—have no voice. One of the women leaders recounted how in the majority of cases “the mother is considered as the maid” —“a machine”—to do domestic work. All the women leaders stressed that in their respective countries and cultures, the majority of “women are not asked for their opinions” or as one woman leader put it “we live in a society where women are not supposed to be heard, just seen.”

Indeed, gender inequality is the greatest obstacle to women playing a role in preventing or countering violent extremism. Programs that engage women to counter terrorist or violent extremist agendas need to make sure that women have a voice. In so doing, national and international actors need to be careful that they do not instrumentalize or essentialize the role of women. In other words, countering violent extremism programs need to make sure that they do not exploit women in order to get to the “bad” guys or reinforce stereotypical notions of women as mothers and those who do not fight.²⁹ It follows that programs targeting women should focus not only on their roles as mothers, but also underscore the roles of women as political actors. As such it is essential to embed such programs within the context of the broader gender equality and the WPS agendas.³⁰

THE WPS AGENDA AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The passage of UNSCR 1325, in October 2000, was a victory for women and women's organizations. Their advocacy for a role of women in international actions dealing with peace and security challenges had finally been recognized. For many, UNSCR 1325 held the promise of a new way of looking at conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution.

Unfortunately, attention to the WPS agenda as embodied in UNSCR 1325, was quickly eclipsed by the military responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The ensuing changed security environment, including the rise and transformations of terrorist and violent extremist threats since then, the renewed concerns about nuclear proliferation, and the resurgence of balance of power politics at both regional and global levels have further sidelined the WPS agenda.

Current debates on international peace and security remain largely devoid of gender perspectives—despite increased recognition that gender imbalances have a profound effect on economic development and international peace

and security issues. Indeed, most security experts and policymakers continue to ignore gender imbalances as a source for insecurity and more generally have difficulty conceptualizing what a gender perspective has to do with the analysis of geopolitical security challenges such as the rise of China or the war in Ukraine. As a result, much of the WPS agenda has been reduced to a numbers game and confined to humanitarian concerns about sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, in which women are seen as victims, with little or no agency.³¹

At the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325, many observers agreed that countries around the world had made little progress in advancing the WPS agenda. They recognized that the political empowerment of women had been lagging, in particular.³² While many countries and international organizations, including military organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), adopted UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans, the scope and actual implementation of these plans is uneven.³³ Finally, the WPS agenda had little to say about one of the most critical international peace and security challenges in the 21st century—that is the rise of violent extremists groups.

In October 2015, during the High Level Review of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 the UN Security Council recognized the need to regain the political momentum of the WPS agenda and deepen understanding about gender equality as a prerequisite for peaceful, inclusive and just societies.³⁴ In UNSCR 2242, celebrating the 15th anniversary of 1325, Council members reiterated that women must have the power to participate equally in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, not only because it is their right but also because it is the only way to provide sustainable and lasting peace. In addition, UNSCR 2242 explicitly highlighted the role of women in countering violent extremism and called on states to integrate their WPS agendas with counter terrorism and countering violent extremist policies.³⁵ The UN Secretary General in his plan to further international efforts to counter violent extremism also put considerable emphasis on finding synergies between the counter-terrorism and the WPS agenda.³⁶ While this new emphasis on synergies is to be applauded it becomes even more important that the search for such synergies comes with serious gender sensitive analyses of the problems at hand. It is not enough to bemoan women as victims of terrorist groups.

The Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, released in October 2015 at the occasion of the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, recognized that the empowerment of women “as a bulwark against extremism is an important idea,” however, it cautioned that such empowerment should not

become part of a military counter-terrorism strategy, but instead remain “part of the civilian assistance to the development and human rights programs in the country. To enmesh such programs in counterterrorism strategies, sanctioned by the Security Council, is to deeply compromise the role of women’s organizations and women leaders associated with the programs.”³⁷

The issue of terrorism and counterterrorism has been a fringe concern for the WPS community. Members of the women, peace and security community have actively opposed counterterrorist policies.³⁸ Indeed, the association between counterterrorism and military approaches has led members of the WPS community to be wary of close engagement on these issues. They fear the potential for greater insecurity for personnel in the field, greater scrutiny by extremists groups, and more generally the instrumentalization (exploitation) of the WPS agenda for security objectives without sustained support for women’s rights.

There is a real divide between the WPS community (the majority of whom are women activists) and the intelligence and security community (the majority of whom are men). These two communities do not mix and often show disdain and distrust toward each other. For many academics and policymakers, security issues, including terrorism and violent extremism, continue to be defined primarily in military terms and connected to the notion of the state. Recent international developments — such as the interference by Russia in Ukraine, negotiations with Iran over nuclear capabilities, or geopolitical posturing by China — reinforce those conventional state-centric ways of looking at international relations. The majority of states have also adopted a “hard” security approach to terrorism and violent extremism that minimizes a focus on women and other minority or underserved communities. While violent extremism and terrorism are main areas of research in the security studies community, gender is only now gaining some traction in that community. Inversely, gender is a main staple of the women, peace and security community, but the issue of terrorism and counterterrorism has been a fringe concern—if not actively opposed.

The move towards more preventive engagements as reflected in the emergence of the P/CVE agenda, has created a more constructive platform for interaction between the two communities. A gender analysis has much to contribute to the design of preventative policies and may increase our understanding of the motivations for young men and women to join violent extremist groups. Since many women organizations are also active on the ground, they may have unique alternative entry-points to engage with populations who are most at risk of radicalization. But their engagement should not come at the expense of the push for greater gender equality.

FUNDING

The new focus on the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism has raised expectations that funding for new programs would become available. Unfortunately, as of yet, that has not happened. While the overall budgets for counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are difficult to estimate in detail, there is general consensus amongst experts that total expenditures have gone up. For example, in 2011 the European Parliament estimated that EU spending on Counter terrorism had increased from 5.7 million Euros in 2002 to 93.5 million Euros in 2009.³⁹ The Pew Research Center estimated that the US spends over 16 billion US dollars a year on counter-terrorism.⁴⁰ That said, relatively small amounts are dedicated to programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and even smaller amounts are set aside for programs directly targeted at women.

The Global Review on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 noted that the lack of funding is “the most serious and persistent obstacle to the implementation of the WPS agenda” and that the scarcity of funds for the WPS agenda is in line with the global funding gap for gender equality.⁴¹ Indeed, “in 2012-2013, just 6 percent of all aid to fragile states (...) targeted gender equality as the principal objective. In the case of peace and security specific aid, this figure was only 2 percent.”⁴² In addition, OECD-DAC data shows that in 2012-2013, of the 31.8 billion US dollars of aid to fragile countries, only 130 million US dollar went to women's equality organizations.⁴³

As donor countries set up new structures and public-private partnerships to deal with the violent extremist threat it is key that funding for such structures is put on sound footing and that gender is mainstreamed in all programming.⁴⁴ In this regard, it would be useful to set a target of allocating a certain percentage of such funds to gender and WPS related projects.

In addition, it is critical to make such funding accessible to the many grassroots non-governmental organizations working in the field. It will also require a certain amount of flexibility on the part of funders. Indeed, many grassroots organizations are small and do not have the capacity to write funding proposals or have financial auditing systems in place. Indeed, many of the women's organizations have average budgets of no more than 20,000 US dollars.⁴⁵

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A MULTILAYERED APPROACH

The prevention of violent extremism will require a multi-layered and long-term approach engaging families, local communities, states and international actors. It requires that connections and bridges be built between each of these levels. Programs also need to connect with men at all levels of engagement. Finally, programs need to be sensitive to local contexts.

At the family level, it will be important to provide mothers and fathers not only with parenting skills, knowledge about child development and skills to recognize early warning signs of radicalization, but also with greater understanding of the gender norms within their societies and how these norms define relations at a family level (including relations with their spouses, kids and in-laws), as well as at a community, socio-economic and political level.

At the community level it will be important to provide women with greater understanding of the local, national and international security institutions, including law enforcement. Indeed, in many places relations between the community and law enforcement and the security sector are tense—grievances with respect to the behavior of certain law enforcement agents have been cited as one of the underlying factors for radicalization. Families may be wary to cooperate with law enforcement agencies if such cooperation leads to the incarceration of their children. Women and women's organizations will want to learn how best to engage with local government and other actors active at the community level—the private sector, educators and religious leaders.

At the national level women and women's organizations should be encouraged to engage with members of parliament and national government officials. This is also the place where women and women's organizations can engage on the women, peace and security agenda and devise ways and means on how to establish feedback mechanisms at the local level.

Finally, at the international level women and women's organizations should be encouraged to engage with the UN, regional organizations and individual international actors. They can help international actors understand national and local security challenges while learning how to engage with similar efforts abroad.

CONCLUSION

The increased attention of the international community to the role of women in P/CVE efforts is to be applauded. Unfortunately, many international efforts to engage women fail to incorporate a gender perspective and hence perpetuate stereotypical and regressive notions of what it means to be a woman.

Effective preventative efforts to deal with violent extremism require that we pay greater attention to gender relations and gender inequalities within societies. Indeed, in gender unequal societies it is mostly women that lack voice and agency. Gender inequality, including women's financial dependencies, means that women are not willing or able to speak up when members of their family were radicalized. Mothers, in particular, may be tempted by their children's pledges to improve the condition of the family, resulting in the mothers "protecting" their children from community and law enforcement interventions. In such cases, women easily become passive, if not active, enablers of violent extremist and violent extremist ideologies. The empowerment of women is hence a precondition for women having a role in P/CVE efforts.

Many of the reflections on women and violent extremism are reductionist and perpetuates stereotypical notions of women and men. For this to change, the security community needs to start taking gender analyses seriously. Such analyses illuminate power dynamics in our societies and hence should be of key interest to those in the security community.

In this Chapter I have argued that women and women's organizations can be key allies in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism. However, international actors need to pay keen attention to what women and women's organizations on the frontlines are saying.

One key message is that women want respect, dignity and voice. It follows that engagement with women and women's organizations will have to put the issue of gender equality front and center in all programming. It is an essential condition for any engagement. Finally, declaratory policies by states and international organizations should be matched with serious long-term financial commitments.

ENDNOTES

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1. In this chapter I will use the terms violent extremism and terrorism interchangeably. There is no agreed upon definition of either term. That said all definitions recognize that terrorist and violent extremist acts are acts that involve the unlawful use of violence against civilians with the intent of causing death or serious bodily injury.
2. See GCTF-OSCE International Workshops on "Advancing Women's Roles in Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, Istanbul 13-14 May 2014 and Vienna, 21-22 October 2014. The workshops produced a "Draft Good Practices document on Women and Countering Violent Extremism. See also the OSCE website.
3. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response*, January 15, 2014. See also the RAN Best Practices Data-Base -http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/index_en.htm. It highlights the projects of the Austrian Based NGO - Mothers without Borders. See RAN Collection Preventing Radicalisation to terrorism and Violent Extremism (first edition) Chapter 7 – Supporting and empowering families.
4. See for example, US State and USAID supported initiatives to Counter Violent Extremism <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/02/237647.htm>; and Catherine Powell, "White House Summit Embraces Women's Rights to Counter Violent Extremism," *CFR Blog Development Channel*, February 25, 2015.
5. See, for example, UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2178 of September 2014 and 2195 of December 2014. See also UNSCR 2122 (2013) and 2129 (2013) by which the Council reaffirmed its intention to increase attention to women, peace and security issues in all thematic areas of work on its agenda, including in threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. See also UNSCR 2242 (2015) the 15th anniversary resolution of UNSCR 1325 (2000) adopted in October 2015.
6. See Charlie Winter, *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the al Khansaa Brigade*, (London: The Quilliam Foundation: February 2015).

7. Follow-on resolutions include: UNSCR 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); and 2242 (2015).
8. See, Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), pp.220-233.
9. See the Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding, A/65/354-S/2010/466. In the Plan the UN Secretary-General pledged that 15% of all peacebuilding related funds would be targeted at women's needs, including women's advancement and empowerment.
10. Mary Caprioli, "Gendered Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, 37 (2000): 51-68; Mary Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict," *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (2005): 161-178.
11. Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli and Chad Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia Press, 2012). Part of their research is focused on household formation and stability. They also examined the relationship between polygyny and recruitment in terrorist groups.
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13. These insights are based on workshops organized by the author on the auspices of the US Institute of Peace (USIP) in 2014-2015 in Africa and the work of Women Without Borders. See <http://www.women-without-borders.org/aboutus/>.
14. They warn "violence against women in conflict zones leads to violent social movements driven by women." They observe that such is the case not only for left wing nationalists and secular groups—but also for religious groups. S. V. Raghavan and V. Balasubramanian, "Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or Regression?," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15 (July 2014): 197-211.
15. Raghavan and Balasubramanian, "Evolving Role of Women," 202.
16. Rudaw, "ISIS doc says women can become suicide bombers without husbands permission," May 17, 2015. The attack on a Turkish/Syrian border town July 20 allegedly involved an 18-year-old female suicide bomber. See also Kareen Shaheen and Constanze Letsch, "ISIS Suicide Bomber Strikes Turkish border town as Syrian war Spills over," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2015. That said the Turkish government later identified a male suspect disguised as a woman. It has also been reported that the all female Al-Khansaa Brigade is training female suicide bombers. The number of female suicide bombers in Iraq exponentially increased in 2015. See the interview with US Major Gen. Mark Hertling who explains what the U.S. military is doing to prevent the proliferation of female attackers at <http://www.nbcnews.com/video/nightly-news/26226666>.
17. See interview with Elizabeth Pearson, "How Boko Haram Uses Female Suicide Bombers to Terrorize Nigeria," *Huffington Post*, February 28, 2015.
18. Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "What's Special About Female Suicide Terrorism?," *Security Studies*, 18 (2009): 681-718.
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25. Edwin Bakker and Seran de Leede, "European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic," ICCT Background Note, April 2015, 13.; and Alessandra L. Gonzalez, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven Chermak, "How Women Engage Homegrown Terrorism," *Feminist Criminology*, 4 (2014): 344-366.

26. Both projects were funded by the US State Department and (RAN) from 2012-2015.
27. The symposium was organized by the US Institute of Peace Center for Gender and Peacebuilding and brought together participants of its project on women preventing extremist violence from Nigeria and Kenya and participants of the Sisters Against Violent Extremism run by the Austrian NGO Mothers without Borders. Participants of the latter project hailed from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Pakistan. The symposium took place at USIP in Washington DC in March 2015. See also *Charting A New Course: Thought for Action Kit: Women Preventing Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2015), 36.
28. Interviews were conducted in March 2015 by an independent filmmaker during an international symposium in Washington, DC on Women Preventing Violent Extremism. The symposium was organized by the USIP Center for Gender and Peacebuilding.
29. On this issue see also Katherine E. Brown, "Gender and Counterradicalization: Women and Emerging Counter-Terror Measures," in: Margaret L. Satterthwaite and Jayne C. Huckerby, eds., *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism-Human Rights Perspectives*, (London and New York: Francis and Taylor-Routledge: 2013), 36-59.
30. Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and the role of Women: Programmatic Lessons," *USIP Peace Brief*, (forthcoming).
31. See the report of the UN Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security, S/2014/693. Similarly, within the realm of the violent extremist and terrorism agenda women are seen mostly as victims of abhorrent crimes.
32. "Sluggish Progress on Women In Politics will Hamper Development," *IPU Press Release* March 10, 2015, Geneva. For example, while the global number of women Members of Parliament has reached 22%--that number has grown by only 0.3% in 2014, and only 16% of Speakers of Parliament are women. A mere 14% of Heads of State and Heads of Government are women. Finally, from 1992-2011 only 9% of negotiators at peace tables were women. Women and women's organizations have been absent or relegated to secondary peace negotiating tables in both Afghanistan and Syria.
33. Thus far 46 UN member States out of a total of 193 have established National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325. Only 33% have earmarked funds for the implementation of these plans.
34. See UN Security Council Resolution 2242 adopted on October 13, 2015.
35. In 2013, the UN Security Council recognized the need to increase attention to women, peace and security issues when dealing with terrorism. See UNSCR 2122 and 2129. In UNSCR 2178, adopted in September 2014, the UN Security Council focused on the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and for the first time recognized the need to empower women as a mitigating factor to the spread of violent extremism and radicalization. See also UNSCR 2195 of December 2014; and Presidential Statement S/PRST/2014/21. Within the Security Council the linkage between the WPS and CVE agendas is resisted by Russia and China. Both states have expressed their reservations about the WPS agenda from the beginning. On the one hand this is related to a steady regression of gender norms in both countries. Indeed, we have seen in both countries a steady deterioration of the status of women and neither country has adopted a National Action Plan to implement UNSCR 1325 at home. On the other hand, the reservations of China and Russia have to do with their views regarding the scope of work of the UN Security Council. They have steadfastly advocated a restricted mandate for the Council and opposed most Council interventions related to human rights and humanitarian interventions. See for example, Soumita Basu, "Permanent Security Council Members and Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security," *E-International Relations*, October 31, 2012.
36. See the UN Secretary General's report on Women, Peace and Security, S/2015/716, paras 86-95.
37. Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), 229.
38. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat and Liat Shetret, "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict and Violent Extremism: lessons for the United Nations and International Actors," Policy Brief, April 2013, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (now: Global Center on Cooperative Security) They emphasize "practitioners engaged in gender issues related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding are also reluctant to engage in activities labeled as counterterrorism."
39. European Parliament, "Counter Terrorism funding in the EU Budget," Briefing, June 2015.
40. Drew Desilver, "U.S. Spends over \$16 billion annually on Counter-Terrorism," September 11, 2013, Pew Research FacTank. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/11/u-s-spends-over-16-billion-annually-on-counter-terrorism/>.
41. Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice Securing Peace*, 372.
42. Ibid, 373.

43. Ibid, 382.
44. For example, the US Counter Terrorism Partnership Fund, the Global Counter Terrorism Forum, the Global Community, Engagement and resilience Fund in Geneva, Hedayah in Abu Dhabi, or the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN).
45. Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice Securing Peace*, 382.

CHAPTER 2

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Countering Violent Extremism: Using a Gender Perspective to Enhance Operational Effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, one of the most visible and dominant narratives of violent extremist groups is the perpetuation of inequality between men and women. Violent extremists often target women as victims and recruit them as perpetrators of violence as part of a larger political project. Increased violent activity by women and girls has focused international attention on the role of women in political violence and how women can help counter violent extremism (CVE).

Today, the international community has at its disposal an overlooked and underutilized tool to the multidimensional problem of violent extremism: UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325). UNSCR 1325 sets out a mandate to require both the participation of women and a gender perspective in policies and programs related to international security and peace.

The past decade has shown that peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and international development policies and programs that employed a gender perspective and increased the participation of women in decision-making have a track record of increased effectiveness. For example, studies show that local women's participation in peace negotiations increases the probability of conflict violence ending by 24%.¹ Similarly, evidence from peacekeeping and peace support operations shows that the integration of a gender perspective and the inclusion of women has a significant, positive impact on increasing the effectiveness of the operation. This is because, first, a gender perspective enhances situational analysis and second, a gender perspective provides a better understanding of key actors, impacts and opportunities for appropriate action. Understanding how to a gender perspective in countering violent extremism, per UNSCR 1325, can be a very effective tool for the CVE policy-maker.

WHAT IS A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND WHY IS A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IMPORTANT TO COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

The term gender refers to the differential needs, experiences, and status of women and men, and boys and girls based on socio-cultural context.² Consideration of these differences and their impact on women, men, boys, and girls is what is known as a gender perspective. A gender perspective improves situational awareness because it provides a socio-cultural lens on power relationships, including race, class, poverty level, ethnicity and age. Using a gender perspective in the process of assessing the implications for both men and women of any planned CVE action, program, policy, or legislation illuminates the differential threats and opportunities for men and women's security.³

Lessons learned from NATO, the UN, and Member States show that information gathering and analysis improves when a gender perspective is employed and the differential impact of armed conflict on women and men is taken into account.⁴ This is because attention to men and women's different experiences in conflicts reveals comprehensive information on the areas of operation including the identities of local power brokers, division of labor, access to resources, kinship and patronage networks, community security threats, risks, interests, and needs.

Understanding the needs of different demographic groups helps frame a more accurate analysis of the threat and response opportunities, and allows for an assessment of priorities and appropriate sequencing. Using a gender perspective can help reveal context-specific, socially and culturally relevant responses and solutions to violent extremism because it focuses on understanding the different experiences, needs, and priorities of women, men, boys, and girls regarding their security and their life during and after conflict. A gender perspective requires asking more detailed questions about both men and women's access to and control of resources, men and women's legal rights, and socio-cultural beliefs and practices about the way women and men are expected to behave—and examining how all of these dynamics may change over time.

A gender perspective often reveals the persistent and chronic marginalization of women and can help identify sex-specific strategies to level the playing field for them. These are often women-focused programs that focus on equity strategies, which seek to rectify the status of women in comparison to other women. Women-focused strategies include the use of female police to engage with the local female population to do security checks, for example. Unfortu-

nately, women-focused strategies are often stand-alone activities unconnected to a larger strategic framework such as UNSCR 1325, and are not usually informed by a gender perspective. An example of a stand-alone, women-focused strategy is the use of U.S. Female Engagement Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. These all-women teams were not created under the umbrella of UNSCR 1325 because the US had not yet adopted a national action plan or strategy on implementing UNSCR 1325 and the women peace and security agenda. Instead, the Female Engagement Teams evolved out of necessity for the US Marine Corps, first in Iraq then in Afghanistan, to search local women for hidden explosives and weapons. The teams were not trained in using a gender perspective.

It is worth reiterating that using a gender perspective includes consideration of men and boys as well, utilizing a lens that includes perspectives relating to the needs, priorities and experiences of men and women. This is critical because terrorism and extremist violence are highly gendered activities that usually exploit rigid stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. A general example of this is found in conflict situations where men and boys are routinely targeted to be killed or for recruitment into fighting forces. And in the spectrum of extremist violence to armed conflict to terrorism, women and girls have more often been recruited as operational support behind the scenes, or they have been targets of acts of sexual violence. It is especially crucial to remember when analysing these differences that gender roles and status change over time and across cultures. Because of these changes in roles and status, power relations and the position of power can also shift over time and across cultures. This means that shifts can happen toward or away from equality between men and women, and toward or away from the use of violence as a defining trait of masculinity, or femininity.

WHAT IS UNSCR 1325 AND WHY IS UNSCR 1325 IMPORTANT FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

A comprehensive examination of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is beyond the scope of this paper, however, it is important to briefly review its genesis and explore why this resolution provides an innovative policy framework that can help effectively counter the threat of violent extremism. One of the greatest contributions of the Women, Peace and Security agenda is that it mandates the inclusion of women and women's groups at the outset of security and peace decision-making, in both the analysis and conceptualization stage in order to improve the effectiveness of policy and programs.

The Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325 unanimously in October 2000, following decades of advocacy by women's civil society groups. UNSCR 1325 was ground-breaking because it provided an internationally recognized legal framework for promoting gender equality and addressing issues affecting women's peace and security at the local, regional, and international levels.⁵

Through the adoption of UNSCR 1325, women were recognized as significant political actors in international security decision-making for the first time in history. This means that UNSCR 1325 helped the international community recognize non-violent women—as non-state actors of political significance. Consequently, UNSCR 1325 provides a new set of strategic policy options to peace and security problems not premised on the use of force.

The resolution also recognizes and underscores the mandate of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law in the protection of women and girls. This is significant to the CVE practitioner because the body of IHL includes both international armed conflict as defined by state-to-state aggression and non-international armed conflict, as defined by aggression between the state and belligerent non-state actors. In short, this means that while the Security Council recognized that the legal definitions of international armed conflict and terrorism are different, the Security Council emphasized, with UNSCR 1325, that it favors and supports protection from and prevention of all conflict-related violence across the spectrum from state-sponsored violence to acts of terrorism by belligerent non-state actors.

Most significantly for the CVE policymaker, the resolution specifically affirms the role of women in the prevention of conflict-related violence:

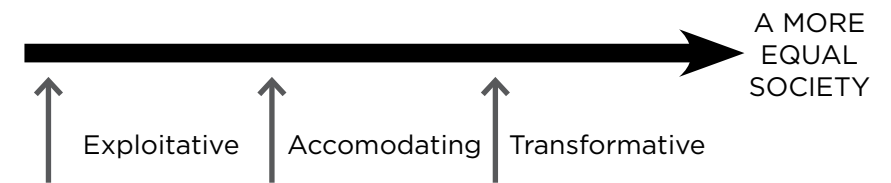
... the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution...⁶

Though international in scope, UNSCR 1325 calls upon Member States to implement National Action Plans that provide concrete actions on the four pillars of participation, protection, gender mainstreaming, and prevention. In addition, the UN Security Council continues to recognize the role of women in subsequent prevention and response frameworks. UNSCR 2122 (2013), for the first time in a WPS resolution, refers to the Security Council's intention to

increase its attention to women, peace and security issues, including in relation to peace and security threats caused by terrorist acts. And more recently, UNSCR 2242 (2015) reaffirms a connection between engaging women in the resolution of political violence and violent extremism.

These facts illuminate that UNSCR 1325 and countering violent extremism are not the distant relatives they may appear to be at first. Promoting gender equality, and the full participation of women in countering violent extremism is part of a larger conversation on women, peace, and security that can help CVE policymakers and practitioners avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping or securitizing women's roles.

A gender perspective offers a framework of different strategies for practical application in analysing, designing and assessing CVE efforts. This framework can be thought of as a spectrum of approaches as illustrated by the graphic below.⁷ This spectrum of exploitative, accommodating and transformative approaches can be thought of points on a line continually progressing toward a more equal society between men and women.



The discussion below will place examples of CVE activities and policies on this spectrum to help understand the multiplicity of roles for women in countering violent extremism.⁸

THE EXPLOITATIVE APPROACH: WHAT NOT TO DO

Gender exploitative approaches take advantage of rigid gender norms and imbalances in power between men and women. Exploitative approaches emphasize both hyper-masculine identities and hyper-feminine identities to motivate and direct people's behaviours. In the short run, this might seem useful. But, in the long run, perpetuating power imbalances between men and women has negative consequences. Two consequences of an exploitative approach include the dangers of stereotyping and securitizing women's roles.

An example of exploiting gender norms is when the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) depicts women's primary role as the future mothers of jihadi

children or when men are targeted with the message that foreign male fighters can be rewarded with as many wives as they desire. Reducing women's roles to their reproductive capabilities for both men and women reinforces the rigid gender norm of women as only child bearers, with no other identity or agency. From the male perspective, hyper-masculinities are emphasized when men's position of power over women is considered a natural right and the use of violence by men is reinforced as a defining trait of what it means to be a man, for example. Though masculine identity is gaining attention in the West, Muslim masculinity is an under-examined category.⁹ The connection between exploiting masculine identity and violent extremist recruiting tactics is a gender-blind spot for CVE that requires further examination.

Another example of an exploitative approach is when women are not considered equally capable of political thought and action. In this case, women become a strategic blind-spot for those wishing to effectively counter violent extremist activities because they are not viewed as taking actions that have consequences outside the sphere of private life. For instance, studies on counter-radicalization efforts in Saudi Arabia show that although women were arrested for terrorism-related offenses, including involvement in bomb preparation, they were not prosecuted. Instead, their families were asked to supervise and assist with the rehabilitation process. In this case, women's radicalization is viewed as a personal or family matter, not a criminal justice matter.¹⁰ From a policy perspective, if women are considered incapable of being radicalized because they are thought to be naturally submissive and incapable of taking political action, this leads to missed opportunities to address how women are being radicalized and to possibly halt violent extremist activity.

ACCOMMODATING APPROACHES TO INCREASING OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Accommodating approaches acknowledge the role of gender norms and inequities between men and women, and seek to adjust or compensate for these imbalances. They do not try to change the norms or inequities, but they attempt to limit any harmful impacts on women and men, and the existing relations between men and women. In situations where gender inequities are pervasive, an accommodating approach offers a sensible entry point to work toward equality between men and women.

Some ways of promoting women's equality in countering violent extremism programming include empowering women in their homes and communities to de-radicalize youth and amplifying women's voices in the public sphere to

provide effective counter-messages about political violence. One example of what this can look like comes from a report produced by the Swedish National Defence College, which concluded that women's civil society activities in Somalia and Pakistan are crucial in preventing radicalization.¹¹ While neither the women nor the program providers actively sought to change or address imbalances between men and women in Somalia or Pakistan, the women used their influence within their communities to work directly with local communities and track signs of growing militancy. In Somalia, for example, women's groups were noted for their public condemnation of al-Zawahiri's wife's call to mothers to bring up their children to support violence and terrorism in 2012.¹² According to the same study, women in Pakistan have played a significant role in civil society to deradicalize youth and engage with religious leaders on preventing extremist ideology from spreading. An example of this is PAIMAN Trust, which works with youth and mothers to offer counter-narratives against extremist recruiters.¹³

Accommodating approaches further include efforts to increase women's presence and voice in community matters. This approach allows women to contribute their experiences of radicalization and de-radicalization to the larger conversation of CVE in order to deter young people from joining extremist groups. This type of action does not require that social and cultural norms between men and women are actively transformed. Instead, an accommodating approach requires that women are presented with the opportunity to be visible and heard in public within the constraints of their culturally and socially specific gendered identities.

For example, an EU workshop on Effective Programming for Countering Violent Extremism found that without taking on new public positions or official mandates, women can de-mystify and de-glamorize the life of a terrorist by speaking about the challenges of separation from family, increased insecurity, the loss of income, and the anxiety of leading a duplicitous life. In addition, women who are victims or survivors of terrorism have the ability to garner public sympathy and media attention when they share their personal experiences with others in public and private settings.¹⁴ These types of initiatives do not seek to change women's economic or legal status, but aim to leverage and contribute the resources and influence already available to women: namely their perspective on and experience of extremist violence.

Interestingly, using an accommodating approach can also have a transformative effect that positively alters women's status beyond what might have been intended by the original accommodating program. One such accommodating ap-

proach that can lead to longer-term transformation is the education of women. A 2013 Brookings study on countering violent extremism in Bangladesh and Morocco found that when women are empowered economically, legally, and through education, violent extremism is less likely to spread.¹⁵ The study shows that an increase in women's empowerment and gender equality has a positive effect on countering violent extremism, as it does in peace building. For example, the Brookings report notes that in addition to reaching parity within the classroom among boys and girls, the Bangladeshi government has also mandated that 60% of primary school teachers in remote areas be women.

But without looking at what kind of education different women (such as mothers, young women, professionals) in a society need, CVE efforts might fall short. The education of mothers offers interesting lessons policy-maker in this regard. For example, participants in a 2010 workshop held by Sisters Against Violent Extremism in Yemen, pointed out that the capacity of women to spot and react to extremism in their families ranged greatly based on their education, their geographic remoteness and awareness of what was transpiring in the local community. These women also pointed out that mothers with less education may not be able to perceive early warning signs or detect unusual or concerning behaviors.¹⁶ They observed that, "Female illiteracy and radical thinking often go hand in hand."¹⁷

Although these examples are *ad hoc*, meaning that they were not specifically created to implement UNSCR 1325, they nevertheless underscore the importance of both promoting women's equality, and women-focused CVE activities in countering violent extremism. Further attention to the range of women's roles in both their public and private lives is necessary to identify viable entry points for women to fully and equally participate in CVE efforts.

TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO INCREASE OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Gender transformative approaches actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and inequalities between men and women, as a means of accomplishing policy objectives more effectively. Those policy objectives can be wide-ranging from better nutritional outcomes for families in development programming, to the increased effectiveness of peace and security operations.

Gender transformative approaches encourage several things in policy and programs: increased critical awareness among men and women of gender roles,

the promotion of the position of women, reconsideration of the distribution, allocation and access to resources for men and women, and the examination of power relationships between women and others in the community, such as service providers and traditional leaders.

Transformative policies and programs may not fall into a neat category of just one type of approach; both accommodating and transformative elements may be present in the same program or policy. An accommodating approach may contribute to a transformative outcome, even if that was not the original intent. Conversely, a transformative approach can also produce a negative effect that exacerbates gender inequalities. This can be seen in a backlash against women's rights programs that do not adequately consider the possible negative impacts on men and boys as well as the potential positive impacts on women and girls.

Some examples of transformative approaches to countering violent extremism can be found in security sector reform initiatives in the police and in peace operations. In the realm of security sector reform, initiatives that employ a gender perspective to the area of operation have increased the effectiveness of the peacekeeping and policing on tactical and strategic levels. Examples of the inclusion of female police and female soldiers are especially instructive for the CVE policy-maker.

Over the past decade of implementing UNSCR 1325 in UN peacekeeping and in other multilateral peace support operations, studies of peace support operations show that female police and soldiers can often access and interview more of a local population--the women, boys and girls--especially in cultural contexts that are conservative and do not allow men outside the local community to interact with the local women of the community.¹⁸ This increased access to the population by female officers expands the ability of peacekeepers to gather more comprehensive information that can enhance mission success.¹⁹

According to studies by NATO, negotiations conducted by female soldiers are more successful than those handled by male soldiers, that informants in some locations divulge more information to Western women than to Western men, and that it is more appropriate for female soldiers to address issues related to women with local tribal leadership than it is for Western men to do so.²⁰ Interviewees in these studies shared examples of men revealing information about specific security threats only to female NATO personnel and even refusing to share details with other men.²¹

On a tactical level, an important way to increase the capacity of the security sector to meet the needs of civilian population and identify potential threats to security is to include more women in police forces. Research shows that police operations are more effective at countering violent extremism than military force.²² This is because police are trained to protect civilian life, and maintain law and order when fighting militant groups. Police forces are also present in communities and are aware of the threats that may or may not exist in the communities in which they do their daily work. Studies have shown that female police in particular can improve the operational effectiveness of police forces overall because they are able to build trust with local communities, can more effectively de-escalate violence, and are able to collect information that male police officers could not.²³ Women are also more likely to report cases of gender-based violence to female police than their male counterparts.²⁴

The inclusion of women in police forces increases the effectiveness of tactical level work such as patrols and searches because female officers can interact with both men and women, whereas in conservative communities male officers can only interact with men in the local population. An example from Iraq shows how increasing the number of women in the security sector can improve efforts to stop female suicide bombers. According to one study, in 2007, women accounted for almost a third of suicide bombings in Iraq.²⁵ At that time, American forces in Iraq recognized the need for female personnel to combat female suicide bombers in a way that would avoid crossing the strict taboo of women interacting with men who are not family members—in this case, when being searched for explosives. The Daughters of Iraq, a group of Iraqi female volunteers trained to investigate and inspect women for IEDs, was created by American and Iraqi officials as part of a new security plan to curb female suicide bombers and prevent the radicalization of women and children in and around Diyala province.²⁶ This is a tactical adaptation in environments where men are routinely searched for IEDs, not women.²⁷

Secondly, when security sector actors consult with women's organizations that work with local communities on issues such as protection of human rights, access to education and healthcare, these organizations can provide more nuanced and comprehensive information about what is happening in the community.²⁸ This information can enhance the security sector's early warning capabilities. Studies by NATO and the UN also show that strong partnerships and enduring trusted relationships between the security sector and local communities are integral to the prevention of violence.²⁹ Women can play a strategic role in building trust and partnerships between communities and the security sector. Women and women's organizations can provide the security

sector with guidance about current and past grievances within the community. This can help to more effectively address community grievances that may relate to bad relationships between the two when the security sector is aware of the grievances. Women may also be able to identify signs of radicalization within their homes and communities, raise awareness and build the capacity of other women in their community to deter radicalization.³⁰

These examples from peace operations in conflict zones show that including women in the security sector, particularly as police, provides a competitive advantage to the mission to help reduce violence in communities.

GENDER BLINDNESS: AVOIDING ADVERSE IMPACTS OF CVE POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The failure to ask about the differences in men and women's experiences, needs, priorities and perspectives in security programs and policies can make counter-terror programs ineffective. This is called "gender-blindness." Gender blindness is a failure to take into account the impact of the power relations between the sexes and their impact on the effectiveness of policies and programs. Gender-blind programs and policies can have harmful unintended consequences, and can weaken the policy or program being implemented. Gender blindness literally leaves the CVE policy-maker and practitioner with a blind-spot about the different roles, status, needs, and priorities of men and women and ultimately weakens measures to counter violent extremism.

Margaret Satherwaite observes just how big an oversight gender-blindness is in CVE programs in *Missing Indicators, Disappearing Gender*. She writes, "In their exhaustive report, Huckerby and Fakhri found that even agencies that routinely use gender-sensitive indicators do not require their use in counter-terrorism or CVE context because of an assumption that such interventions are focused on men. . . . However, as the same study demonstrates, even programs targeted at men have impacts—whether direct or indirect—on women and LGBT communities, as well as men who are the intended targets, and those impacts must be monitored."³¹ This is important because evidence-based policymaking depends on comprehensive data-collection.

As Lama Fakhri notes, an example of how gender blindness in CVE policies might impact women and men negatively comes from documented findings of adverse funding impacts on women and women's rights caused by anti-terrorism financing laws. For example, the squeeze on funding for women's rights cuts across subjects as disparate as counter-radicalization programs in

the UK, the US government's anti-trafficking policies, and international funding for humanitarian assistance in Somalia. Ignoring this money trap has serious consequences for women's rights. In the case of Somalia, one study found that, "as the United States, other governments and Western foundations curtail funding to Somalia, terrorist organizations and religious foundations are stepping in to fill the humanitarian aid gap with . . . detrimental impacts on women's ability to access assistance and increasing a trend toward greater restrictions on women's rights."³²

According to a 2015 policy brief by the Women Peacemakers Program, an emerging trend impacting women's organizations worldwide is the impact of counterterror finance measures such as the Financial Action Task Force on the funding of women's peace and justice work.³³ Isabelle Geuskens from WPP notes, "Counterterror measures have increased the already vulnerable position of women's peace organizations, for example via . . . bills that undermine women's civil society and banks that delay, limit or block the transfer of funds to women's peace organizations."³⁴ Others have also noted that counterterror measures are creating obstacles to supporting women's organizations with the potential to destabilize them and make them disappear all together. In a panel commemorating the 50th Commission on the Status of Women Carolyn Tomasovic Boyd of the Ecumenical Women's Initiative remarked "The issue of identifying resources for women is high on all of our agendas, but one issue not being talked about underlies them all . . . how counterterror measures are impacting women's rights to access those resources already dedicated to her."³⁵

The fact is that gender blindness misinforms policy-making and planning. It is a factor that undermines our understanding of security problems and adversely affects our ability to find the best solutions to these problems. In the example discussed above, the lack of a gender perspective on how anti-terror financing laws are impacting men and women differently is a serious strategic blind-spot with long-term consequences of weakening civil society and the ability of civil society to fully participate in contributing to the maintenance of peace and security.

CONCLUSION

Gender matters to countering violent extremism because violent extremism—its ideology and the people who perpetuate it—is highly gendered. A first step in taking the highly gendered nature of extremist violence into consideration is to develop critical awareness of women's roles in both promoting countering violent extremism. But the identification of women's roles is not enough to help the CVE policy-maker and practitioner develop effective measures to reduce violence and curtail extremism. A focus on women's roles can lead to stereotyping women, and securitizing their roles—both of which have negative consequences.

However, the full participation of women in CVE means including both their presence, and attention to gender equality through the employment of a gender perspective in the analysis, design and implementation of policies and programs. It also means increasing women's presence in leadership positions, particularly as religious authorities within their communities, consulting with both local women and men on how anti-terror programs and policies are impacting them differently, using gender-sensitive indicators to monitor CVE programs, or reporting incidents of sexual violence as a political and military tactic, not a cultural practice. The good news is that this is not a new practice. The inclusion of women and a gender perspective has precedent in UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. As such UNSCR 1325 is an innovative tool that CVE actors can take advantage of to improve their chances of reducing violence, increasing protection and using a human rights based approach to countering violent extremism, instead of strictly military strategies.

Women's participation in CVE is crucial to shaping effective policies and practices to prevent extremist violence. Women need the barriers to their full participation in CVE removed. It is true that some women are wary to engage in CVE, for good reason. They may be putting themselves at great risk by engaging with the security sector. Therefore, it is crucial that a gender perspective is used by security actors to identify what these barriers and rigid norms are, and to help identify what opportunities and constraints exist for changing them. And, security actors and policy-makers need as much support and insight as they can get from both men and women regarding the highly local, context and culturally specific rise of extremist violence. UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security provides an innovative tool for security actors and policy-makers to work together to address these complex and multidimensional concerns to more effectively counter violent extremism over the long-term for the benefit of all.

ENDNOTES

- * Sahana Dharmapuri is an independent gender advisor.
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A New Security Architecture: Mothers Included!

Edit Schlaffer & Ulrich Kropiunigg*

What causes violent extremism to emerge? This question has risen to the forefront of many governments' political agendas as the sense of urgency surrounding terrorism continues to increase. The approach of "Countering Violent Extremism" (CVE) has gained greater attention in the academic and political spheres as more focus is placed on preventative strategies alongside direct responses to imminent threats and acts of terrorism. This has evolved out of widening recognition that knowledge of what breeds radicalization to violence is essential to containing it. Experts have sought the underlying social and psychological factors that motivate individuals to adopt violent extremist ideologies, yet comprehensive conclusions translatable to policies are still lacking. As counterterrorism expert Dan Byman explains, the reason for this deficit is that research to date has found a wide spectrum of social ills, varying by geographical, historical, and socio-political context. Efforts to understand radicalization to violence at this level, without moving deeper, will not lead to specific, tailored, and effective solutions.¹ Instead in order to expediently and effectively address the growth of violent extremism, we must return to the common starting point of most individuals: the family.

Although CVE research is growing rapidly, studies to date have largely failed to consider a key actor in their pursuit of potential solutions: *mothers*. Mothers are often well-placed both in their emotional relationship to their children, as well as in their strategic location within the home, to be key sources of information about the social and psychological landscape of the current generation of adolescents and young adults.² As a group – regardless of their social background – mothers contain valuable data on what renders individuals vulnerable to radical influences, holding economic, political, and socio-ecological factors constant. In particular, mothers of radicalized youth can make sense of their children's journeys of coming-of-age, navigating the uncertainties of the inevitable "identity crises" that occur throughout adolescence and young adulthood.³ As a result, they can shed light on the behavior and decisions that are incomprehensible to those on the outside.

Furthermore, not only are mothers a point of unique access and deep knowledge of already radicalized youth, but they are also strategically placed to serve as a buffer between radical influences and those who are next to be targeted. They are the starting point of building resiliency within their children's early years of development and often the first to recognize and address signs of distress including anger, anxiety, and withdrawal. This dual capacity to both pre-empt and respond to radical influences makes mothers essential participants in an effective security paradigm.

There is no doubt that the role we ascribe to mothers in raising their children is not easy. For many external and sometimes even close observers, children's behaviors can seem enigmatic. During the international conference "The Lure of Syria" hosted in Vienna, Austria in December 2014 by Women without Borders/SAVE, mothers came forward with many disparaging stories of "lost children." In an interview, one Canadian mother spoke of her helplessness in the face of her son's conversion to Islam: "He wouldn't talk with me as much as he used to. He stopped seeing his friends, and spent more and more time in his room."⁴ Her son then left for Syria, and later died there.

Moreover, mothers are in direct competition with recruiters whose offers might be more attractive to desperate adolescents struggling to define who they are and the role they play in society. "The recruiters gave him a sense of personal value that he didn't have in his life. This is what brought him to Syria."⁵

In the study we conducted that was titled *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?*, one notable finding was the mothers' willingness to prevent their children from becoming involved in violent extremism.⁶ Yet this was coupled with another notable finding: mothers lack the confidence and skills to be effective in this role. The question is then: how to equip mothers with the tools to successfully guide their children through adolescence to well-adjusted adulthood? Adolescence is a complex developmental stage influenced by a variety of psychological and social phenomena.⁷

Despite its importance, it would be unfair to blame scholars of violent extremism for failing to include the psychodynamics between mothers and their children during adolescence and young adulthood. This is largely because their concepts and methods mostly rely on empirical research methods and qualitative interviews. To our knowledge, psychoanalysis is almost entirely absent from the field of violent extremism research. Even in overall adolescence research the psychodynamic forces during adolescence are widely neglected. This assertion is also shared by Seth Schwartz, an expert on adolescence, who

criticizes his own field for the paucity and calls for an analysis of the root causes of terror from a psychodynamic perspective.⁸

What is more noteworthy about the current state of affairs in CVE research is its tendency to produce general and sweeping recommendations on bettering society writ large. Though necessary, this logic ignores the real need for a direct and personalized intervention for adolescents at risk of radicalization to violence. In the context of violent extremism, we need to place more emphasis on an individualized, youth-directed approach in addition to long-term and general solutions such as access to education or poverty eradication.

THE CURRENT CVE APPROACH

Actuated by events such as the terror attack on the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, 9/11, and the emergence of Al-Qaeda, the recent counterterrorism approach still largely consists of reactive strategies, relying heavily on military and security forces to carry out actions meant to both punish and deter. While this strategy has continuously been scaled-up in the last forty years, the incidence of terrorism is growing more critical. Despite the expanding global efforts to understand and curb violent extremism, the US State Department reported a 35 percent increase in terrorist attacks and an 81 percent increase in total fatalities from terrorism since 2013.⁹ Furthermore, an increasing number of adolescents are becoming radicalized and leaving their home countries in order to fight with violent extremist groups in Syria, Iraq, and Somalia. According to a 2014 estimate by the US Department of State, over 12,000 foreigners have traveled to Syria from over 50 countries to join ISIS,¹⁰ while a more recent estimate by Peter Neumann from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) gives an estimate of more than 20,000.¹¹ These statistics make it clear that a top-down, reactive approach is insufficient. We can no longer wait for extremists to emerge and then launch offensives via the military and law enforcement. Instead, violent extremist ideologies need to be exposed to provoke challenges, questions, and alternative narratives. Therefore an effective approach must address both the problem of existing violent extremists, *and* the problem of recruitment. Preventative strategies embedded in civil society are key to the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of countering violent extremism.

Existing CVE methods include two categories of strategies and actors: "hard" strategies that include military operations, law enforcement, and diplomacy, and "soft" strategies that include research and rehabilitation programs.¹² While focus on "soft" or preventative strategies has recently increased, there is

still a lack of systematic programs which directly translate into timely efforts. Programs implemented in various countries such as strengthened support for social workers, counselors and community organizations, fail to have an early impact in the most personal spaces where interventions may be the most effective. Namely, they neglect that recruitment often does not initially target the ideological level, but the individual himself. Many of these individuals have little idea what they are buying into – as we hear from the growing numbers of former fighters, including those returning from Syria.¹³ Adolescents and young adults, grappling with questions about who they are, what they want,¹⁴ and where they belong,¹⁵ often find answers for the first time within the framework of violent extremist groups who offer unambiguous worldviews as well as notions of acceptance and belonging. While it is known that this existential questioning pervades adolescence regardless of social or historical context, few scholars have considered these uncertainties in characterizing the pre-radicalization phase.¹⁶ It is evident that youth and young adults, still undergoing development¹⁷ and living at home, are most vulnerable to violent extremist ideas that promise compensation for material and emotional deficits. The current security approach simply does not capitalize on this fact.

Mothers, in many cases, are well-positioned where the first signs of radicalization emerge and have the potential to serve as a barrier and first responder. As key witnesses to the small changes in behavior, preferences, and habits, mothers can be instrumental in preventing the next wave of radicalized youth.

CAN MOTHERS CHALLENGE VIOLENT EXTREMISM? A STUDY EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MOTHERS

It is widely recognized that individuals are influenced by their social contexts: their hopes, aspirations, struggles, and reactions are largely shaped by the environment in which they emotionally and psychologically develop.¹⁸ In examining these social and emotional variables, we can gain a clearer picture of the common factors that lead individuals to adopt violent extremist ideologies, and develop targeted prevention strategies. However, to understand the dynamics that undermine resistance to radicalization among adolescents we need to look at it from a different angle. As Weine et al. reminds us: “If we really want to identify and support resilience in communities under threat, we cannot do so from a distance. We need to listen to and observe its residents and learn about its history, culture, social structure, values, needs, resources, and daily experiences, in order to determine precisely what resilience means for them.”¹⁹ Mothers, as close witnesses to the process of radicalization, often have significant insights into how and why youth join extremist groups, and

what can be done to prevent it. While a disruption in the parent-child bond can also be a driving force in radicalization,²⁰ this relationship is also a key resource for exploring the intimate landscape of an individual's emotional and psychological state, especially in the pre-violence phase. Yet, these approaches have generally been kept on the periphery in CVE initiatives.

Based on this understanding of the deficits in current CVE approaches and of the unique position of mothers, Women without Borders developed an applied-research project to collect evidence about the potential of mothers to protect at-risk youth. The *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?* study examined mothers' perceptions of the threat of violent extremism and their understanding of their role in the processes of both radicalization and de-radicalization. It draws on the subjective understanding of mothers on the causes, factors, and realities of violent extremism as they experience them in their families, communities, and most importantly, in the lives of their children. The study focused on sons because while girls are increasingly joining violent extremist groups, boys still remain the majority of those who become involved. The global rate of radicalized women is estimated at 18 percent, and the rate of radicalized women from Europe is in between 10-15 percent.²¹

THE STUDY

A two-stage study that combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies was designed to collect, analyze, and apply data from mothers living in Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Pakistan: regions all affected by violent extremism. The foundational research question was: Do mothers think they have a role in the prevention of violent extremism on the home front?

Entry points into each community had to be carefully identified and orchestrated in order to successfully carry out the interviews. Potential participants were approached by individuals within trusted local partner NGOs as well as by community leaders and teachers. Interested women were mobilized in small groups and meetings were held to explain the nature and purpose of the study. Once these relationships had been established, the research team and translators began conducting one-on-one interviews with each willing mother. In hindsight, this first contact was the beginning of an essential consciousness-raising, trust-building process: many of the women said it was the first time they talked about security issues. In order for the women to feel safe in speaking openly, it was crucial for the research team to establish this initial trust. In many communities, violent extremism and violence are taboo, and therefore gathering data requires breaking through embedded social barriers. In our

study, it was particularly difficult for mothers whose children were already involved in violent extremist activities: guilt, shame and fear initially inhibited them. But they were ultimately encouraged when they were made to feel not as informants but rather as valuable contributors and allies; many of the subjects also expressed that speaking out became a relief and an advantage.

THE STUDY'S FIRST STEP

In the first research phase we performed 200 in-depth interviews (40 in each country) to gain an overall picture of the social and emotional environments of mothers with adolescent and young adult sons between the age of 12 and 25. Taped interviews were transcribed and evaluated using qualitative data analysis.²² The questions were grouped into seven areas: family background, children's life, a mother's role in their children's upbringing, personal proximity to violent extremism, societal factors especially in contexts affected by violence, existing coping mechanisms for violent extremism: individually and collectively, and future strategies. Occasionally, a smaller sample with slightly different questions was reserved for people familiar with the situation in the respective regions, including journalists, social workers, and community leaders.

THE STUDY'S SECOND STEP

From the qualitative interviews, a number of common themes emerged and were used to develop an extensive questionnaire. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert scales to assess the mothers' levels of agreement with 43 statements that were drawn from the in-depth interviews. The three main areas explored in this survey were: 1) how mothers assess the threat of violent extremism, their own role in reducing the attraction of violent extremist ideologies, and the psychological and social foundations of violent extremism; 2) who mothers would turn to in a situation characterized by an imminent threat of radicalization, and 3) what do mothers need to be effective in recognizing and responding to warning signs of radicalization. Additional core topics addressed in the questionnaire included: 1) What are the sources of violent extremist influences? 2) Whom do mothers trust? and 3) What do mothers need?

Using a combined quota and snowball sampling method the interviewer team targeted over 1,000 respondents in Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, and Nigeria (approximately 200 in each country). Due to the insecure situation during the "Arab Spring," Egypt was replaced by Nigeria.

THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

Our final results were based on 1,023 interviews. Overall there was a general consensus among mothers across all five countries regarding the perceptions of a mother's position and role in countering violent extremist influences. Differences between countries were rare and highly specific.²³ The data from both the interviews and the surveys strongly conveyed the mothers' concerns about the risk of their children becoming radicalized and a majority of mothers expressed confidence in their own abilities to 1) prevent their children from becoming involved with violent extremism in the first place and 2) to recognize early warning signs if they did, in fact, arise. Moreover, in many of the interviews the mothers expressed a sense of urgency and eagerness to organize with similarly concerned mothers to collaborate in combating this growing problem of violent extremist recruitment.

Three common conclusions emerged from the data:

- a) Mothers cite the immediate environment and the emotional and interpersonal exposure of their children as the most important risk factors or roots for violent extremism. Specifically, mothers think their children's grievances (73 percent of mothers), their children's friends (66 percent of mothers), and their children's religious and political ideologies (51 percent of mothers) are potentially driving them into violent extremism.
- b) 94 percent of mothers place themselves and other mothers in a position of high responsibility to deal with the challenges of radicalization in the life of their sons.
- c) Mothers expressed that commonly cited causes of radicalization, namely poverty, absent fathers, and religious obligations were insufficient to explain radicalization (only 34 percent of mothers agreed).

In addition to the three common conclusions, the findings can be grouped under three key questions that helped to shed light on the threat of radicalization: What do mothers fear? Whom do they trust? What do mothers need?

WHAT DO MOTHERS FEAR?

The mothers in the study believe that violent extremist agendas are disseminated primarily through the Internet (78 percent), radical religious leaders (78 percent), political organizations (78 percent), and television (76 percent).

These sources are not surprising, but are notable because of the overall picture that emerges. These four diverse sources are given almost equal significance, indicating that on an average day youth are confronted by radical messages from many different angles: from the media, on the Internet, and within their social networks. The breadth of these sources indicates that in some families and communities there is very little trusted and protected space, leaving youth highly vulnerable to sources uncontrolled by parents. Therefore, this pervasiveness of violent extremist messages, feared by the mothers in the study, provides strong support for a complementary security approach that focuses on building resiliency within and around the home.

Moreover, this data is particularly important because this information—collected from the private realm of the home—is largely inaccessible to local authorities, intelligence, and other actors involved in radicalization prevention. Due to their unique position, these mothers' perspectives on the initial source of violent extremist influence are likely to be more nuanced than those on the outside. As researchers and policymakers have widely acknowledged, gaining a clear picture of the initial entrée into violent extremism has very important implications for effectively addressing radicalization at the origin. Mothers' insights help to elucidate the most intricate details of this picture.

WHOM DO MOTHERS TRUST?

There is no question that preventative measures are very difficult to implement. With concerns on the rise, the need for professional advice and support has therefore become a prevailing issue. But where do mothers turn when they have concerns about their children's safety and wellbeing? What people or institutions do they trust to provide help and support?

The mothers' primary answer was other mothers (94 percent). Fathers were listed next (91 percent) followed by other relatives (81 percent). In a crisis situation the family circle is clearly the primary source of support. Teachers, listed fourth with trust scores of 79 percent, and community organizations (61 percent) are the first perceived trustworthy institutions that lie outside immediate social networks. Religious leaders earned a 58 percent trust score, already suggesting a level of ambivalence. State organizations earned among the weakest trust scores with police at 39 percent, the army with 35 percent, and local councils with 34 percent. International organizations earn similarly weak trust scores of 36 percent. However, the government earned the lowest trust score overall of 29 percent.

The most important finding is that mothers trust themselves along with other mothers first in protecting their children. This is notable because the existing security approach currently focuses implementation within national and local authorities: two groups that seem to evoke significant distrust. Moreover, the lack of trust in the state is a critical finding given that the intended role of the government is to provide citizens with protection and maintenance of productive lives; it reveals a trust gap between the private and the public spheres as they relate to security. This is a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed in order to enable productive information flow and collaboration among two kinds of actors, both of whom play a vital role in combating radicalization. Therefore, a somewhat counterintuitive but key step in countering terrorism seems to be finding ways to enable cohesion and trust between national and local authorities, communities, and families. This is a finding that is likely only to come from mothers themselves, when they are taken seriously as security allies.

WHAT DO MOTHERS NEED?

In both violent extremism research and security policy mothers are not the primary players. We, therefore, know little about their opinions, capacities and, above all, their needs. Hence, how do the mothers assess their own needs? What kind of support do they need to protect their children from violent extremist influences?

First, the data indicates a strong sense of concern among mothers regarding radicalization. Of all possible needs provided in the survey, 86 percent of mothers considered increasing their knowledge about the warning signs of radicalization to be of highest importance. This was followed by training in self-confidence, listed by 84 percent, training in parenting skills listed by 80 percent, and improved knowledge of computers listed by 69 percent. Moreover, a majority of mothers expressed that connecting with similarly-concerned mothers would help them gain the needs they listed as most important; these included learning about early warning signs, parenting skills, and boosting self-confidence to speak up to their families and enable them to take action.

There are two important implications here. The first is that mothers are confident in their own security potential if equipped with the right tools and knowledge, and the second is that their awareness of their needs indicates that they are already confronting radical influences, and feel unable to effectively respond.

Overall, these findings suggest that there is an immediate need for a more diversified approach to counter terrorism, namely one that includes the expertise and strategic position of mothers. In a preventative paradigm we need their voices and capacities to be brought to the table to develop new strategies and partnerships. But, this requires mothers to be recognized as key allies; as long as they are excluded, so is the most valuable point of intervention. The gap in the existing security paradigm, seeking to address recruitment at the root, requires the involvement and active engagement of mothers.

APPLYING THE STUDY FINDINGS

In the wake of these significant conclusions, the final stage of the *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?*² study was to apply the most important needs expressed by the mothers to readjust and further develop our comprehensive Mothers Schools model, developed in 2008. Specifically, the findings indicated that mothers hold significant, under-recognized potential in countering violent extremism, yet need specific supports in order to optimize their capacities. Most importantly, facilitating dialogue as well as formal exchanges of information and personal experience emerged as critical in building confidence and in gaining knowledge and targeted skills. With this data, *Women without Borders* advanced the Mothers School model to address these needs and strengthen community resilience, is starting in the home.

THE MOTHERS SCHOOL MODEL

The Mothers School model promotes the role of mothers as partners in the delivery of security and arms them with the skills to be effective as the foundation of community resilience. This model, targeting and optimizing a pre-existing, underutilized resource is inherently a grassroots approach. Drawing upon the findings from the *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?*² study it strengthens individual capability, awareness of violent extremism, and emotional literacy to both empower and enable mothers to effectively prevent and confront this growing threat. The curriculum, implemented through trusted community partners, includes specific exercises that facilitate dialogue, information exchange, and critical reflection using context-based techniques that apply to participants' daily lives. The modules are continually monitored and evaluated through weekly Skype sessions with the Women without Borders team, trainer protocol summaries documenting the evolving dynamics of the group, and the note takers' notes documenting key anonymous testimonials, challenges and successes that emerge within the discussions.

This model creates a safe space where mothers improve their knowledge of early-warning signs and strategize how to be effective barriers to radical influences. Willingly coming together allows them to deconstruct social barriers and to have open dialogue regarding their children's as well as their own struggles that inhibit their ability to be an impactful countering force.

Mothers Schools (MS) have been piloted in Tajikistan, Kashmir, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria and Zanzibar, and the regular feedback sessions via Skype have confirmed that the model is readily embraced by mothers. Participants expressed that involvement in the Mothers Schools with like-minded women builds their self-confidence, improves their parenting skills, and gains them more credibility in their homes and communities. As one MS participant from Kashmir valley stated of MS, "We always think that such discussions can only be among the educated and elite people from high profile societies. But now we believe after exploring our skills were with us always but unfortunately on sleeping mode, that we can also become friends with our children and help them to deal with any kind of support so that they don't feel the need to look for any violent alternatives." The pilot findings also indicate that the MS curriculum provided the mothers with substantive information and targeted skills, making them better prepared to identify and respond to radical influences.

THE MOTHERS SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The central components of the MS curriculum are building confidence and self-esteem, increasing knowledge and reflection of parent-child dynamics, and delivering specific training in countering radicalization. The model provides mothers with the appropriate tools to respond to their children's needs and guide them through a healthy, well-adjusted adolescence, as well as strategies for how to respond to signs of inner turmoil, confusion, or anger.

The curriculum includes ten modules spanning across three stages, guiding participants through a process of gradual awareness building. These stages move successively from the self, to the family, to the community, and then to one's role in security.

MOTHERS SCHOOLS MODULES 1-4: SELF ACTUALIZATION AND REFLECTION IN A SAFE SPACE

The first four workshops aim to collectively create a safe and comfortable environment in which barriers can be deconstructed and productive dialogue can take place. This includes exercises in which mothers are guided through critical

reflection of themselves, including identifying their strengths and weaknesses, along with analyses of their communities and their role within them. Individual and community identity, self-esteem, self-doubt, and emotional competence are discussed in-depth with a particular focus on individual narratives to contextualize and personalize these key subjects. The first modules strengthen confidence and self-awareness, a foundation for the subsequent skills-training and targeted knowledge. The first four modules of the MS Curriculum are:

Module 1: This is me, who are you?

Module 2: Me in my community

Module 3: Self-doubt and self-esteem

Module 4: Rethinking my role in security

This initial stage directly responds to two significant requests expressed by mothers in the *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?* study: 1) meeting and sharing with other mothers and 2) self-confidence building, both which lay the foundation for learning and enacting targeted skills.

Weekly feedback from the MS participants suggests that the workshops are meeting these needs. As one mother from Dal Lake, Kashmir, stated, “Once you encourage someone here who shares her sad story or about the problems in their lives, just a word of encouragement makes them feel strong. They think they are not alone. They get the feeling of acceptance.” Another mother from Ledokombo, Indonesia stated, “We feel more powerful and strong in this group,” while another from Mewat, India explained this in relation to her children, “The better confident we would be, the better our children would seek advice and emotional support from their mothers.” This confidence, self-awareness, and recognition are important preconditions for subsequent, concrete skill building.

MOTHERS SCHOOL MODULES 5-7: CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT

The next stage progresses from addressing barriers to emphasizing targeted skills-training. Primarily, this stage focuses on parenting skills, grounded both in theory and on the social political realities of the community. Initially, a presentation of psychosocial child development theory initiates the discussion of how to improve parenting skills. Mothers are encouraged to analyze their own relationships and interactions with their children in the context of the needs explained by Erikson's child development theory.²⁴ The aim is to organically make conclusions about how they can better meet their children's needs. For

example, one Kashmiri mother from Batamaloo explains how she applied this knowledge in her home, “It is a common belief that you don't give much importance to the children and listen to them every time and instead you should be strict so that a fear is maintained and they have respect. But, in this class, I came to know that the fact is something else... It is just a notion and it is very important to acknowledge the problems of our children.” While another mother from Rawalpindi, Pakistan asserted, “Instead of making the problems an excuse, we should also develop positive thinking so that our children don't feel burdened and depression due to us.” The second three modules of the MS Curriculum are:

Module 5: Child psycho-social development

Module 6: Understanding political violence and radicalization

Module 7: Talking and listening. Improving my communication with teenagers

The workshops in this phase incorporate dialogue surrounding context-specific political violence, which engages mothers to share information about how and in what ways youth become involved. This is further enhanced by a discussion of how to engage with teenagers, specifically surrounding difficult topics. For example, the Mothers School in Kashmir took place in the months leading up to the election. The participants shared their children's varying levels of involvement and the ensuing problems they were confronting as mothers. One woman from Srinigar shared how her son's friend had been killed for allegedly throwing stones in an act of political protest. Her son was deeply depressed and angry about the injustice, and she shared how she comforted him and encouraged him to talk about it, which eventually led to a discussion about productive ways to channel his anger and grief. Another mother from Kupwara shared how after a series of suicides in her community, she vowed to, “listen to my children. When I heard about [these suicides] I imagined that [those children] must have been going through some problem which they couldn't share with their families or loved ones so they took the extreme step... These incidents scared me so much and have given me reason to listen to my children. Earlier I had no idea where being away from my children's mind could lead.” This intermediary stage facilitates reflection on parent-child dynamics, and discussions of ways to enhance support overall, especially related to security issues. Individual narratives play an important role in this part of the curriculum, not only because it fosters a useful exchange of case studies, but it also strengthens the group dynamic.

MOTHERS SCHOOL MODULES 8-10: INCLUDING FATHERS

The last stage focuses on how to establish and continually reinforce resilience in the home; mothers are provided with specific instruction on recognizing and reacting to the early warning signs of radicalization, including instruction on the role of the Internet in spreading violent extremist messages, as well as how to engage fathers in looking out for and addressing concerning behavior. At the conclusion of this stage, the goal is that the mothers have an increased awareness about the threat of radicalization on their children, and a deepened understanding of their own role, as well as a broad toolkit of strategies. This part of the curriculum directly addresses the remaining needs expressed in the *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?* study: namely strengthened knowledge and training about the early warning signs of radicalization, augmented by targeted training in computer skills and parenting skills. The last three modules are:

Module 8: Early warning signs of radicalization. Recognizing and reacting

Module 9: Involving Fathers

Module 10: Peace starts at home

The overall goal of the Mothers Schools is to graduate mothers more aware of the signs of radicalization in their children and potential dangers in their immediate environment. They feel more confident and competent to respond to their children's needs and provide proper support. These Mothers School graduates are the starting point for building resilience in their families and communities.

The crucial adolescent phase is a small window of opportunity for two key actors. Radical recruiters appeal to disaffected youth at this time of heightened vulnerability, with promises of brotherhood/sisterhood, belonging and honor. But it is also a pivotal point for mothers and families to understand their role in creating a positive alternative to the lures of radicalization. Although adolescence is a stage for self-exploration and greater independence, the uncertainty also requires guidance and attentiveness. This difficult task calls for mothers' courage as well as confidence and credibility in both their communities and in their role as a mother—skills that are seldom taught in society. The Mothers School model aims to achieve this in communities threatened by violent extremism.

MOVING FORWARD: A EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF AFFECTED MOTHERS

As the *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?* study findings convey, mothers are instrumental in implementing targeted intervention at the pre-violence phase. And they are also a valuable source of information, not only about the intricacies of youth's social and emotional environment overall, but also as a retrospective lens. Their vigilance has nothing to do with surveillance that would be rejected by the young; instead they are naturally positioned to intervene in the flow of information from recruiters and other sources of violent extremist messages. Through their active involvement, mothers of radicalized youth, in particular, can provide a perspective most salient to developing a new security approach. Mothers are the common thread to youth who vary in background, religion, and political involvement. As the emotional link to their children they, uniquely, have the ability to piece together the common denominators. This perspective we can then offer to other mothers struggling to guide their children through stages of heightened uncertainty.

In order to give prominence to this key data and the individuals with the ability to interpret it, Women without Borders brought together a group of mothers from across Europe and Canada, whose children had departed to fight in Syria, in December 2014 in Vienna to share their experiences. In sharing their insights with security stakeholders in a strategizing meeting, they painted a picture of their children's personalities, their struggles, and the changes they observed in the early stages of the radicalization process. This was heard by representatives of institutions invested and equipped to translate the new insights into preventative actions. As one mother from Belgium whose son died in Syria in 2012 explained, “[ISIS] misleads children because it tells them they are selected, that they are chosen. These ideas tell them that Allah will take care of them.” Another Belgian mother shared, “My son was very immature. He had no real information about religion and no real intellectual perspective about religious questions. This is why he was radicalized so quickly.” These mothers were able to present to government officials, policymakers, counselors, educators, and journalists why their children were lured by extremist recruiters and what, in hindsight, were the warning signs. “Having a bottle of wine at dinner suddenly became problem. Then we couldn't have friends over because he was afraid of how they would dress.” Another mother from Sweden said of her daughter, “She hid the voting card when it came in the mail. She started denouncing democracy.”

These signs, in retrospect, are clear indicators of their children's new influences, but the mothers explained how fear, confusion, and even false hope prevented them at the time from understanding their gravity. Most importantly, the mothers articulated the lacking supports that could have helped save their children—at least in theory. “I hid my concerns from everyone... I was too afraid to talk..If I had known where to turn, maybe I could have stopped him.” While this mother's notion of support includes potential intervention by the authorities, we have found in our work that this too can be highly problematic. Another mother from France shared how authorities failed to take her concerns seriously when she tried to warn them that her daughter was trying to leave for Syria: “In France, the authorities don't have connection with the parents. They don't have the will; so we all work for the same goals in different spheres and don't make any progress.” By delegating the problems to institutions, which also lack the proper training to be effective, mothers lose time and also undermine their own genuine capacities. Authorities can be a resource for intervention, but have real limitations. Mothers Schools focus on self-empowerment and conscious-raising to enable mothers to take action, drawing on their inner resources, to help their children effectively.

Indeed, clearly defined solutions involving law enforcement evolved out of this conference including: improved communication and collaboration between local authorities and families as well as scaling-up of counseling services and counseling referral mechanisms. However, it is important that these liaisons are first built on trust and cooperation. Strengthening these community networks will be a focus of the upcoming European Mothers Schools to reduce mistrust and foster productive collaboration.

The positive feedback from this conference, from both the mothers and the government and community representatives, supports the need to explore ways to formally include mothers' insights into security dialogues. Security stakeholders not only found this conference uniquely informative, but the mothers returned to their homes inspired and equipped to help other families at-risk.

These mothers have an important role as counterfactuals: living evidence of the existing deficits in the current CVE approach. The outcomes of this conference support the use of retrospection as a powerful tool in informing new approaches; and among the most valuable are the reflections of the key witnesses who have now been left behind: mothers.

MOTHERS SCHOOLS COME TO EUROPE

Following this strategy meeting in Vienna, Women without Borders is now scaling-up the Mothers School model across Europe. Mothers Schools in Belgium and Austria have recently launched and the model will spread to France, Sweden and England in early 2016. Mothers Schools in the Netherlands and Germany are also in the planning phase.

Implementing the model across Europe aims to directly impact current CVE methods and efforts to curb the flow of foreign fighters. It optimizes the prevention potential of mothers to combat the radicalization and recruitment of their children to violent extremist groups.

The Mothers School participants in Belgium provide further compelling evidence of this potential. As became evident during the training, mothers have real concerns, but do not know how to act. For example, Najia (not her real name), joined the Mothers School because her fifteen-year-old son is at the top of his class in one of the best schools in Brussels. Yet as a Muslim in a Flemish school he is the target not only of discrimination by his peers, but also of discouragement from his teachers. She shared during the training, “He wants to change schools. I can see he's very sad and frustrated. Even though he is one of the best students he has to work even harder because the teachers put down the Muslims in the class.” Although Najia's son is not currently involved with radical influences, she views her son's frustration as a risk factor. In Belgium, which has highest rate of youth recruitment to ISIS in Europe, she worries he will give up on school and follow other, more rewarding alternatives, where he feels competent and appreciated. And in her community these alternatives are easily accessible. Najia has joined the Mothers School in the “pre-prevention” phase to gain the knowledge and skills to help her son through this stage of discouragement and marginalization, which has no clear solution or end in sight.

Sunia (not her real name), another Mothers School participant, has a 14-year-old daughter. She joined the Mothers School with her sister-in-law, whose son departed for Syria two years ago and is now living there with his own family. Sunia is highly concerned that her daughter is at-risk of radicalization in the wake of her cousin Ahmed's departure. Sunia expressed her concerns, “The threat is outside. They go out with their friends..It's hard as a parent to recognize the signs immediately because we are not prepared. We don't have the tools to detect what's happening.”

Sunia's sister-in-law is yet another example of a concerned mother looking for strategies. She is coping with the loss of her son while also struggling to emotionally support her five other children who have all been affected by their brother's recruitment. She has one child who is battling severe depression and another who is suicidal. She fears that they are both at-risk of heading down toxic paths in search of an explanation for their brother's decision.

There are many more mothers like these three women who fear they are witnessing the first moments of vulnerability, the planting of seeds, which can grow into an appeal for violent extremist ideologies. Indeed as Saliha, leader of the Brussels Mothers School who lost her son fighting in Syria, shared with the other mothers in the Mothers School training, "It can happen any day. My son was perfect for 18 years. He was on the national basketball team; he had dreams to go to the US and play. And then one day...it all changed."

What is clear from the discussion in the Belgian Mothers School and the messages emerging in the other Mothers Schools is that many mothers are coping with these difficult questions. How do I help support my child who is experiencing discrimination in school? How do I protect my adolescent from radical influences? How do I address my young adult daughter's decision to wear the veil without pushing her away?

These are certainly questions that emerge in every family, across communities regardless of religion, language, culture, or social class. And the answers are essential in helping mothers build resilience in their children, in their communities and in society at-large. But we need to build the social infrastructure and support systems to lay these questions on the table, and collectively find answers. And this need becomes even more urgent, when it pertains to radicalization.

CONCLUSION

We would argue that mothers are further out on the frontlines than many officials and law enforcement actors tasked with addressing threats like violent extremism. While the authorities react in the aftermath —intercepting youth at airports, making arrests, searching homes— mothers are present at every stage. So in the absence of our ability as a global society to eliminate the myriad causes and sources of radical messages, our only option is to build resiliency from within. Addressing the internal, emotional forces that leave one vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies such as anger, resentment, resignation, or lack of purpose and belonging requires individual attention and support from trusted, willing individuals. Violent extremism, understood as a symptom of these emotional deficits, is inherently beyond the scope of the government or local authorities alone. In fact, it demands the involvement of civil society.

Mothers are a critical starting point. In their proximity, they are often the first to recognize changes in their children including anger, anxiety, and isolation. They are well positioned to develop unique connections with their children, which remain consistent throughout their growing interactions with the outside world. Understood in this role, they can be a crucial element to building resilience into the social fabric. Indeed, tapping into mothers' preventative potential, establishing capacity-building mechanisms for mothers, as key security allies, is an essential part of an effective and cost-efficient security architecture. Mothers have a dual role to play: 1) building resilience within their communities from the ground up, starting in the early years of their own children's development; and 2) recognizing and responding to early warning signs of violent extremism. This is a tall order, and as such, one that deserves recognition and support. Overall, it is not only the mothers but global society that stands to gain from this effort.

ENDNOTES

- * Edit Schlaffer is the founder of Women without Borders and Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) in Vienna. Ulrich Kropiunigg is a psychotherapist and Professor of Psychology at the Medical University of Vienna and serves as a Director of Research for Women without Borders and SAVE.
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CHAPTER 4

Women, Gender, and the U.K. Government's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Efforts: Looking Back and Forward

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The role of gender in violent extremism and countering violent extremism (CVE) has long been overlooked, despite being related to many of the efficacy and human rights issues CVE efforts face and pose. As a result, CVE practice as well its critics, largely discount three inter-related phenomena: gender dynamics in violent extremism, issues at stake in women's roles in CVE initiatives, and how both violent extremism and CVE differently impact women and girls versus men and boys. Against this backdrop, this chapter provides a case study on how women and gender have featured in the U.K. government's counter-terrorism policy CONTEST¹—particularly in its preventive arm (*Prevent*)—to reflect on these elements generally and to specifically extrapolate lessons learned concerning the opportunities and challenges of women's engagement in countering (or preventing) violent extremism. The United Kingdom is a particularly instructive case study as it is one of the few government programs that has had an explicit and specific focus on women's roles in CVE, most particularly in its pre-June 2011 counter-terrorism policy and practice. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes the different efforts to engage women in three distinct phases in the U.K.'s counter-terrorism strategy: its preventive arm (*Prevent*) prior to its revision in June 2011; the new four-year *Prevent* strategy released in June 2011; and recent efforts to engage women to prevent their relatives from traveling to Iraq and Syria in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In each phase, the envisaged and actual roles of women in CVE—as well as the government's rationales for their engagement—are detailed and examples of specific activities provided, before turning to an overview of the core human rights and efficacy issues and outcomes at stake in these efforts.

WOMEN, GENDER, AND PREVENT PRE-JUNE 2011

The first phase of the U.K.'s *Prevent* strategy (2007-2011) had a targeted approach to promoting the role of Muslim women in CVE efforts. In large part

this focus derived from the breadth of *Prevent*; one of the core 2007 *Prevent* strategy objectives was to build “community resilience” to violent extremism, which meant that broader community integration and cohesion work was considered a core component of CVE practice.² While the rationale for *Prevent*'s focus on women varied somewhat across government departments, women's inclusion was often conceptualized in relation to this effort to increase resilience. For example, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), women's leadership and participation enhances communities' resistance to violent extremism, such that: “Resilient communities cannot be built and sustained without the active participation of women.”³

Other *Prevent* objectives also created entry points for women's engagement. This included challenging the ideology of violent extremism and supporting mainstream voices and addressing the “grievances exploited in the radicalisation process.”⁴ On the former, for example, DCLG's engagement with Muslim women also drew upon the rationale that supporting mainstream voices to challenge violent extremist ideology requires looking beyond community gatekeepers and realizing that “[w]omen can be a particularly effective voice as they are at the heart not only of their communities but also of their families.”⁵ Accordingly, the U.K.'s Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) also included women in its activities to challenge ideologies; for example, projects such as “Projecting British Muslims” included women delegates.⁶ In relation to addressing grievances, gender issues were also sometimes a part of understanding and mitigating those grievances that drove radicalization; for example, the impact of body scanners at airports on women was considered to be one such grievance.⁷

In addition to realizing these *Prevent* objectives, government departments and partners also often conceptualized the role of women in *Prevent* in terms of women's “unique” capacity to intervene in radicalization processes as mothers, on the basis that they are most likely to spot changes in behavior and be able to influence the behavior of their children.⁸ Additionally, a related, smaller set of projects sought to specifically improve women's response to terrorism, such as Operation Nicole and All Communities Together Now (ACT NOW).⁹

Another area of more limited attention in *Prevent* was addressing female radicalization and recruitment of women by violent extremists. According to a 2011 interview with the Home Office conducted by the author, there was not a “specific focus on women in CONTEST (including in *Prevent*) and...no specific policy position on women in radicalization,” however, it was also noted that this situation could change, if the “Countering Terrorism evidence base

(developed within the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT)) reflected an increased role of women in terrorism, the Home Office would also increase its focus.”¹⁰ An interview by this author with a unit of the Metropolitan Police (MET) accounted for the lack of targeted work with females at risk of radicalization as follows: “in respect of women and radicalization, while there is a need to create safe spaces where conversations (e.g., about *jihad*) can take place naturally, there is also a challenge in getting female Muslim scholars involved in such efforts.”¹¹ The U.K. government did undertake two efforts that focused on the radicalization of women: a “female intervention program” and work with families of those convicted of terrorism-related offences, yet public information about both programs was scarce.¹²

Examples of DCLG, ACPO and FCO *Prevent* Activities Focused on Women¹³

Some of the activities supported by DCLG, ACPO and FCO include:

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

The Department focused on supporting Muslim women, along with Muslim faith leaders and Muslim youth, through both direct grants to community organizations and through a substantial grant to local authorities.¹⁴ In January 2008, the DCLG established the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG) to “act as role models and represent the views and concerns of Muslim women.”¹⁵ DCLG has also supported empowerment programs to prevent violent extremism: e.g., Hounslow Leadership Training, Muslim Women's Community Leadership Training Project run by Sizanani Africa, and The Muslimah-Make a Difference project.¹⁶ The Preventing Violent Extremism Community Leadership Fund has also funded Faith Matters to provide a “UK tour of Muslim women role models from the US”¹⁷ and to “compile a directory of the 100 leading mosques that provide the best access to women...[t]he ultimate aim is to incentivise mosques to improve their engagement and inclusion of women in all aspects of their work.”¹⁸

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)

From 2009 to 2010, the ACPO *Prevent* Delivery Unit developed and implemented programming with Muslim women that included internet safety programs; funding training (that assisted women's groups to apply for funds from trusts and statutory bodies); radicalization awareness training for women's groups (with the Quilliam Foundation); and women's leadership training. ACPO hosted the first Women's *Prevent* Network event on December 18, 2009. As at February 2011, the ACPO *Prevent* Delivery Unit continued to focus on women as one of its four core areas of engagement.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

The FCO has also funded a number of women's projects under *Prevent*. For example, FCO's *Prevent* grants in 2008-09 included funding to Pattan (for "PATTAN Women's Councillors training"); International Research and Exchanges Board (for "[redacted] young women's leadership program"); Action Aid (for "Women Affecting Change Action Aid"); and BBC (for "[redacted] Women's Hour").¹⁹ The second largest FCO *Prevent* grant in 2008-09 was to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for: "Building social cohesion, harmony, moderation and security in the Arab region as an antidote to radicalization and extremism."²⁰

Women, Gender, and Prevent 2011-2015

In contrast, the new *Prevent* strategy released in June 2011 did not have a specific focus on women. This was mainly due to the U.K. government developing a clearer division between *Prevent* and community integration approaches, marking a definite shift away from having resilience strategies more broadly housed under *Prevent*. This change in strategy followed a *Prevent* review process from 2010 to 2011²¹ that was designed to respond to a series of critiques of the policy, including concerns about its stigmatizing and marginalizing impacts on Muslim communities who were the focus of *Prevent*.²² As such, the four-year *Prevent* strategy released in June 2011 still seeks "to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism,"²³ but has more narrowly defined objectives, which are to: "respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it; prevent people from being

drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and work with a wide range of sectors and institutions...where there are risks of radicalisation."²⁴ Priority sectors include the internet and "education, faith, health, criminal justice and charities"²⁵ and the three core areas of *Prevent* expenditure are "local projects, policing and *Prevent* work overseas."²⁶ Recent activities under the new *Prevent* rubric include "prevent[ing] apologists for terrorism and extremism from travelling to this country;" giving "guidance to local authorities and institutions to understand the threat from extremism;" "funding a specialist police unit which works to remove online content that breaches terrorist legislation;" "supporting community based campaigns and activity which can effectively rebut terrorist and extremist propaganda and offer alternative views to our most vulnerable target audiences - in this context we work with a range of civil society organisations;" and "supporting people who are at risk of being drawn into terrorist activity."²⁷

The new version of *Prevent* in 2011 implicates or addresses gender in five key ways. First, as mentioned, the revised *Prevent* strategy of 2011 to 2015 seeks to draw a much clearer or definitive line on defining what constitutes countering violent extremism and the institutions that should be responsible for such efforts. Accordingly, it separates *Prevent* (to be led by the Home Office) from broader community integration and cohesion work (to be led by the DCLG)²⁸ on the basis that the prior form of *Prevent* had "confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism."²⁹ One core gender outcome of this shift away from community integration and resilience strategies was to almost automatically narrow *Prevent* funding for women's groups and empowerment. For example, according to the *Prevent* review, "in the past, the FCO funded activity overseas that aimed to build community resilience and support wider cohesion goals (for example English language training for imams or empowering Muslim women). We do not believe this work is effective in *Prevent* terms and the focus has since moved."³⁰

Secondly, as part of the push to enhance oversight of *Prevent* delivery and expenditure,³¹ the new strategy takes a much more restrictive stance on funding *Prevent* work with so-called formers, by cutting off *Prevent* funding and support to extremist organizations.³² The pre-June 2011 *Prevent* strategy explicitly relied on partnerships with non-violent extremists to combat violent extremism, based on the idea that they represented one of the most credible voices to dissuade others from violent extremism.³³ This focus had raised a series of gender concerns, including the risk that "ethnic minority women may become more vulnerable because *Prevent* and cohesion policy puts more power and authority

into the hands of religious leaders and interfaith networks.”³⁴ A broader, and somewhat related concern, here too was that *Prevent* diverted funding from specialist women’s organizations to mainstream organizations with adverse impacts on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women.³⁵

Third, in the new *Prevent* strategy, gender serves as a litmus test of the kinds of British values understood to be informing the new *Prevent* strategy. Under this conception, gender equality is referenced as symptomatic of British values and conversely, gender inequality is identified as indicative of dangerous ideologies and institutions where there are risks of radicalization. For example, according to the revised *Prevent* strategy:

Challenging ideology is also about being confident in our own values—the values of democracy, rule of law, *equality of opportunity*, freedom of speech and the *rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind*. Challenge must be accompanied by advocacy of the very systems and values which terrorists in this country and elsewhere set out to destroy (emphasis added).³⁶

In its focus on the risk of youth being radicalized, the new *Prevent* strategy similarly refers to “allegations that a minority of independent faith schools have been actively promoting views that are contrary to British values, such as intolerance of other cultures and *gender inequality*” (emphasis added).³⁷

Fourth, gender featured in the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken for the *Prevent* 2011 review, in terms of describing the disproportionately negative impact of *Prevent* on young males and potentially mixed impacts on women. According to the EIA, there is “some qualitative evidence to suggest that age and gender had also been impacted to an extent by the strategy in terms of perceived impact on young males.”³⁸ In terms of anticipated gender impacts of the new *Prevent* strategy, the online consultation revealed mixed results. While the majority of respondents (78%) did not think that the strategy would have a negative impact on gender, the majority (77%) also did not anticipate a positive impact either, with results indicating that it was “overwhelmingly felt that men would be most negatively impacted by the *Prevent* strategy on the basis that they are perceived to be at greatest risk of radicalisation.”³⁹ The EIA itself concludes that: “It is recognised that young people and young men in particular are more vulnerable to the risks associated with terrorism. Given this, there *may continue to be a perception of disproportionate impact on young men under the new strategy*” (emphasis added).⁴⁰

On the question of *Prevent*’s impact on women previously and moving forward, the EIA’s online consultation similarly received varied responses:

A smaller group felt that women have been negatively impacted by virtue of perceptions (underlying in the strategy) of male dominance and more should be done to redress the balance. However, there was also the view that it is difficult to reach into some groups without encountering gender issues. For example, *Prevent* aimed at women could be seen as an attempt to undermine traditional relationships between genders within certain cultures. Conversely, some respondents felt that *Prevent* had had a positive impact on women. Some perceived that women are not treated equally within some groups and *Prevent* had the potential to remove the constraints that block their participation in the agenda, by empowering them to tackle intolerance and play a more active role in society.⁴¹

Finally, gender also features in new tools to monitor and evaluate *Prevent* delivery. Pursuant to the U.K.’s revised *Prevent* strategy, the OSCT in the Home Office was given the task to “put in place a Case Management Information System to monitor data,” including the gender, race, religion/belief, and age, “of all individuals subject to *Prevent* interventions.”⁴² Under the new strategy it is envisaged that such data will be “reviewed regularly and used as a basis for further research and to evaluate delivery of the refreshed strategy.”⁴³

WOMEN, GENDER, AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS

A third key phase of the U.K. government’s CVE engagement with women concerns the phenomena of U.K. residents or citizens traveling to Iraq or Syria to support or join ISIS. On April 24, 2014, the U.K. government launched a new campaign that targeted women—and in practice, particularly mothers—to encourage them to stop their relatives from traveling to Syria.⁴⁴ In launching the initiative, Scotland Yard’s Senior National Co-ordinator Counter-Terrorism Helen Ball said: “We are increasingly concerned about the numbers of young people who have or are intending to travel to Syria to join the conflict. We want to ensure that people, *particularly women, who are concerned about their loved ones* are given enough information about what they can do to prevent this from happening” (emphasis added).⁴⁵ The roll-out of the campaign involved “radio and press adverts in minority ethnic media”⁴⁶ and distributing DVDs to “inspire conversation within women’s groups.”⁴⁷

These government efforts to engage women on Syria have also been reflected within civil society. In 2014, Inspire—a non-governmental organization “working to counter extremism and gender inequality”⁴⁸—launched the NGO #MakingAStand campaign “to stop the damage caused by extremists poisoning young minds in our communities.”⁴⁹ #MakingAStand has a particular focus on mothers as follows:

As mothers we were losing our children as they turned their backs on us, choosing instead to join the murderous so-called Islamic state having been radicalised online by hate preachers pushing their messages of a false Islam. Listening to women as they told us of their suffering and unimaginable grief on discovering that their sons and daughters had turned their backs on the family to join ISIS made us realise that if we came together our voice would be stronger.⁵⁰

In traveling around the United Kingdom—including Birmingham, Luton, Cardiff, Leeds, Burnley, Bristol, West and East London—the campaign has, according to Inspire, “inspired women to take the lead in challenging extremism,” and “set out to equip mothers with theological counter-narratives to extremist ideology so they could feel confident in challenging their children’s views at home,” and “also sought to help women recognise possible early signs of radicalisation using real life case scenarios and signposting them to agencies if they require support.”⁵¹

More recently, the phenomenon of young women and girls traveling to Iraq and Syria has been a particular issue of concern for the U.K. government’s counter-terrorism policy. Precise figures are difficult to obtain but as of February 2015, an estimated 60 females from the United Kingdom had travelled to ISIS⁵² and the group has recently become more explicit about the role of women in the group, including through its manifesto on women and the Islamic State.⁵³ This trend caught policymakers and the media largely unaware: initial responses have trafficked in stereotypes about women and Islam, assuming young women must be tricked or brainwashed, or only join ISIS to become “jihadi brides,” and that they would not join if they knew the full extent of ISIS’ horrific treatment of women. Other accounts have particularly pointed to the young age of girls traveling from the United Kingdom to Syria, referring to the process by which ISIS recruited their travel as a form of “grooming.”⁵⁴

The initiative discussed above that was launched on April 24, 2014 also addresses this particular issue of young women traveling to Syria. One leaflet

distributed to parents opens with the question “Who knows how many young women plan to travel to Syria? You can help stop them.”⁵⁵ The leaflet continues: “It’s not just young men who are travelling to Syria. Several young women are now known to have left home for the conflict, leaving their devastated families in a state of fear.”⁵⁶ The leaflet also demonstrates a number of assumptions about the roles of mothers in particular, stating, for example: “We know that the strong bond between a mother and daughter can have a powerful influence on a young woman. You can talk to your daughter about her feelings. You could see changes in behaviour, or signs she may be about to travel to a conflict that millions are desperate to escape.”⁵⁷ In addition to this campaign, other initiatives have included, for example, a U.K.-wide web-chat as part of International Women’s Day to “discuss and take questions about the worrying trend of young women putting themselves and children in grave danger by travelling to Syria, leaving their families devastated.”⁵⁸ Helen Ball and colleagues, community members and partners from around the world have also made a “resolution” on “The conversation on Syria,” that particularly focuses on the threats of terrorist organizations to women, as well as the idea that women traveling from the United Kingdom to Syria have been sold a false promise.⁵⁹

WOMEN, GENDER, AND THE U.K.’S CVE EFFORTS: LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

The U.K. experience with engaging women in its counter-terrorism and CVE activities contains a number of important lessons moving forward as it—as well as other governments—seek to define the parameters of what constitutes countering violent extremism and to address the opportunities and challenges surrounding women’s participation both in violent extremism and efforts toward its prevention.

As a starting point, one of most significant lessons is the importance of identifying the potential overlaps, but also the dividing line, between CVE and efforts to support women’s activities more broadly. This insight comes from the core outcome of the 2011 *Prevent* review, which found that *Prevent* should be refocused to “make a clearer distinction between our counter-terrorist work and our integration strategy” because “[f]ailure to appreciate the distinction risks securitising integration and reducing the chances of our success.”⁶⁰ From a gender and human rights perspective, this clarity is important. On one level, the old *Prevent*’s blurring of community cohesion and counter-terrorism was a key entry point for women’s groups to receive funding for activities they might already be undertaking and for which they needed more resources (e.g., on forced marriage).⁶¹

It has also been argued that this entry point enabled *Prevent* funding for women's projects that then enhanced the visibility of Muslim women and networks;⁶² created a safe space for women to talk about extremism and empowered Muslim women;⁶³ enabled women's groups to form community networks that will not survive if *Prevent* funding to these groups is cut;⁶⁴ and enabled women's groups to identify community needs.⁶⁵

At the same time, however, this blurring of cohesion and countering violent extremism activities had significant human rights and security trade-offs. According to the U.K. government's own assessment, it risked securitized engagement with Muslim communities, as well as increasing their stigmatization and discrimination. Many outside of the government also rejected it as a government effort to use community outreach as a pretext to surveil Muslim communities.⁶⁶ While the U.K. government noted in May 2015 that the new "strategy covers all forms of terrorism, including far right extremism and some aspects of non-violent extremism," it nonetheless then—as mentioned earlier—also emphasized that it continues to "prioritise our work according to the risks we face,"⁶⁷ which in practice, involves a focus on jihadist threats.

These policy features and impacts also have important gender dimensions. When integration activities are blurred with counter-terrorism and Muslim communities are only engaged on counter-terrorism issues, women's insecurity can increase and their willingness to engage with authorities decrease. These effects, in part, result because women can feel wholly discouraged from accessing all services for fear of exposing themselves and family members to undue scrutiny by security agencies. For example, An Nisa Society, "a women managed organisation working for the welfare of Muslim families"⁶⁸ in the United Kingdom, notes that the receipt of *Prevent* money can taint organizations' relationship with their constituencies, undermining the very trust and expectations of confidence that are key to the engagement efforts promoted by the government,⁶⁹ not to mention to those services (e.g., in domestic violence cases) such organizations provide to those in need. Significantly, women's insecurity and further distrust of law enforcement also results from such policies because it is young Muslim women in the United Kingdom who disproportionately bear the brunt of the increased Islamophobia, harassment and attacks that characterize this environment.⁷⁰

Secondly, alongside these adverse gender aspects of securitization, the U.K. experience also shows the risks of backlash and instrumentalization that arise when women are engaged only on national security issues. For example, a concern in the United Kingdom was that *Prevent's* engagement with Muslim women was instrumentalizing, risking that Muslim women's "activism will become increas-

ingly associated with the government agenda of counter-radicalisation" with the effect of "relegating Muslim women's political activism to a sideshow."⁷¹ According to The Muslim Women's Network UK (MWN-UK): "Muslim women are being used by government" and there is a "concern that the skills of Muslim women are being built up to 'spy' on their families rather than participate fully in society and overcome barriers they face."⁷²

Thirdly, in all iterations of *Prevent* and in the most recent campaign targeting mothers to prevent family members traveling to Iraq and Syria, there have been a number of disincentives and barriers for women's engagement in countering violent extremism of which there is insufficient account and which often remain unaddressed. Understanding these gender-specific challenges for women who operate in increasingly restrictive, polarized, and volatile environments is particularly important as there is an increasing push to engage women in CVE. For example, in implementing its #MakingAStand campaign, Inspire identified three common barriers: "barriers within families, barriers within communities and a lack of engagement with 'outside' agencies that could help," as well as the particular gendered security and safety challenges involved in women's efforts to counter violent extremism.⁷⁴

Indeed, a lack of trust between women and law enforcement is a major stumbling block that can be observed across efforts of the government to engage women in CVE. In relation to the recent campaign on Syria, female community leaders have pointed to the key challenge of trust in law enforcement as providing a barrier to the success of the initiative. For example, Mussurut Zia, from the Muslim Women's Network UK, stated: "There's a real fear of people becoming marked. Also there is mistrust where the police are concerned" and "[t]here isn't enough engagement with the community, with women, to say that 'this is how it's going to be, this is what support you can expect and this is why we would like you to do this.' I think that has got to be made very clear from the outset."⁷⁵ Others skeptical of the appeal noted particularly that "women won't come forward to report relatives they think may travel to Syria to fight for fear that their relatives will be arrested."⁷⁶ U.K. counter-terrorism officials sought to address these concerns but stressing that the campaign "is not about criminalising people it is about preventing tragedies," that "no information would be passed on to Britain's MI5 security service," and that anti-terrorism engagement officers would "offer support."⁷⁷ These concerns of trust are not new and instead can be traced back to pre-June 2011 *Prevent*. For example, in an interview the author conducted with a former ACPO *Prevent* liaison officer, it was noted that women "were either suspicious of the *Prevent* agenda or suffered from community pressure to not partake in overt *Prevent* activity."⁷⁸

Fourth, the U.K. experience demonstrates the shortcomings of engaging with gender gatekeepers and of assuming homogeneity amongst women. For example, in 2007, the DCLG set up NMWAG to assist with *Prevent*, however, much criticism was made of its limited representativeness⁷⁹ and its inability to influence government policy.⁸⁰ In addition, according to Ulfah Arts, engaging women on a faith-related basis caused divisions because “whoever gets funded everybody else is thinking, ‘they have been funded because of this, that or the other’ and there is this conversation around Muslim women who are supported are women who wear hijab, not the women who do not wear hijab.”⁸¹ Instead, *Prevent* programs that were based around direct consultation with grassroots women’s groups were perceived to be more successful.⁸² For example, in an interview conducted by this author, the Metropolitan Police indicated that they had designed a survey for women to identify their preferred needs and services and, based on the results, organized self-defense and first-aid training to engage with the community.⁸³

Fifth, in many instances the U.K. government’s efforts to engage women often reflected a series of gendered and racialized stereotypes about women’s roles in their homes or as victims of terrorism or as inherently “peaceful” actors who will mitigate rather than foster violent extremism and terrorism. The U.K. government’s strategies have stressed for example, Muslim women’s educative role in their families⁸⁴ and emphasized the roles of women as mothers or as moderate voices in ways that can be “patronizing” and undermining of Muslim women in their efforts to combat violent extremism.⁸⁵ Some of the responses amongst female Muslim community leaders to the 2014 Syria campaign have also echoed many of the same underlying gender assumptions in their support of the campaign. For example the director of Inspire, referred to women’s “unique position” of influence over their loved ones, and stressed that women also “need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge including theological counter-narratives to counter the arguments extremists use in order to lure vulnerable individuals to their cause.”⁸⁶

Sajda Mughal, a survivor of the July 7, 2005, bombings in London, noted that “[m]others are key agents of change” and “[t]hey are the ones who can actually nurture, and protect and safeguard their child, and actually prevent them from travelling to Syria and endangering their lives.”⁸⁷ Such rationales overlook and underrate women’s roles as supporters or perpetrators of violent extremism, including the ways in which violent extremists increasingly target and tailor their messaging to appeal to women and girls.⁸⁸ For example, interviews by the author in February 2011 indicated that at that time, the U.K. government’s work on countering ideology had not specifically engaged with Al-Qaeda propaganda on women in these counter-narrative and other efforts, but instead addressed the propaganda as a whole.⁸⁹

As such, and finally, the U.K. experience also demonstrates the necessity of fully acknowledging and addressing women’s involvement in violent extremism. On the latter, prevention of female recruitment—as particularly embodied in the increases in the number of women travelling from the United Kingdom to Iraq and Syria—requires a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond gender stereotypes, as well as assumptions about religion and ethnicity. When faced with the complexities of female membership in violent extremist groups, some U.K. policymakers and the media quickly fall back on tropes about female passivity and domesticity, as well as Islam’s and ISIS’ (the two are often conflated) anti-women stance. While in some cases women may be motivated by romance or be unduly influenced, other women are drawn to groups like ISIS by many of the same forces as men: adventure, inequality, alienation, and the pull of the cause. Indeed, a recent study outlined three self-identified reasons that women travelled to ISIS as “oppression of Muslims throughout the world;” desire to contribute to state-building; and “individual duty and identity.”⁹⁰ U.K. women have also been particularly influential in recruiting their female peers to travel⁹¹ and more generally in promoting ISIS through social media. They also reportedly have taken on particular roles within ISIS, including in leading the all-female Al-Khansa brigade in Raqqa.⁹²

Failing to recognize these complexities means that superficial responses can be generated; an over-dependence on counter-narratives stressing ISIS’ brutality against women to dissuade female recruits is one example. Efforts to prevent women from leaving for Iraq and Syria need to properly address the push and pull factors for women on their full and gender-specific terms and through a human rights lens. For example, the U.K. government’s failure to prevent, investigate, and punish Islamophobic attacks against women and girls as referenced above, is a human rights issue and also increasingly a security one as it can in some cases constitute a push factor that is capitalized upon in terrorist propaganda. Strict government policies—including blanket punitive policies for returnees—make return extremely difficult, if not impossible, for women who manage to leave ISIS. For example, in at least one well-known case in the United Kingdom a young woman who had left the United Kingdom with her son and who then became disillusioned with the reality of life under ISIS escaped only to face automatic arrest at Heathrow Airport.⁹³ Undifferentiated treatment of “foreign terrorist fighters” disincentivizes such return, just as it often prevents families and peers from reporting concerns to law enforcement in the first place—a concern, as mentioned above, that was reflected amongst some community responses to the U.K.’s April 2014 initiative targeting women to prevent their relatives from traveling. Additional efforts to gender CVE architecture are also pressing; for example, a recent study indicates that of

the 65 Home Office-approved intervention providers in the United Kingdom, there are “only 3 or 4 active female-specific de-radicalisation mentors.”⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

As governments continue to design, implement, and evaluate efforts to counter violent extremism, the status quo of excluding women from policy and practices in this area cannot continue. But how women are included matters and ahead lay much more difficult policy questions on which the U.K. experience engaging with women can be particularly instructive. In particular, the U.K. experience demonstrates that community engagement solely through the lens of countering violent extremism and on the basis of faith can increase women's insecurity, as well as indelibly shape the landscape for engaging women in existing CVE and future CVE efforts. It is of critical importance to better understand and to address barriers to women's engagement—safety, legal, resource and other—which in many cases may involve addressing the gender footprint of other elements of existing or previous CVE efforts that may discourage or minimize the scope for women's engagement. This includes understanding if, and when, categorizing or documenting certain activities as CVE will be too unsafe, unprincipled, or counter-productive, as well as how to preserve a well-resourced and non-securitized space for women's civil society. Consultation with local women's groups must guide all aspects of these policy questions but governments' commitments also need to go beyond the local or informal level to change national security architecture, including through ensuring that there is sufficient attention to issues of female radicalization, as well as more gender-sensitive approaches to law enforcement that focus on building genuine trust with communities. Transparency, non-securitization of engagement, and clear delineation of the scope of countering violent extremism activities are hallmarks of any human rights-compliant and effective strategy that seeks to support the work that women already do in combatting violent extremism in ways that avoid risks of instrumentalization, securitization, and backlash.

ENDNOTES

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1. In July 2011, the U.K. government published the third version of its counterterrorism strategy (CONTEST), the aim of which is “to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence” (HMG Government, *Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, Cm. 8123 40 (United Kingdom, 2011), 6, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97995/strategy-contest.pdf). CONTEST consists of four strands: *Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare* (HMG Government, *Contest*, 11).
2. HMG Government, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092, (United Kingdom, 2011), 37, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.
3. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Preventing Violent Extremism: Next Steps for Communities* (United Kingdom, 2008), 30, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/896799.pdf>.
4. Jayne Huckerby, “Women and Preventing Violent Extremism: The U.S. and U.K. Experiences,” New York University School of Law, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), 2012, 4, <http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Women-and-Violent-Extremism-The-US-and-UK-Experiences.pdf>.
5. HM Government, *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England*, Ref: 288324 (United Kingdom, 2008), 17, https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Prevent_Strategy.pdf.
6. “Home,” Projecting British Muslims, <http://www.projectingbritishmuslims.co.uk>.
7. Huckerby, “Women and Preventing Violent Extremism,” 4-5.
8. DCLG, *Empowering Muslim Women: Case Studies*, (United Kingdom, 2008), 2, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/669801.pdf>.

9. "Prevent Operation Nicole," ACPO *Prevent* Delivery Unit, 2010, <http://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/TAM/Op%20Nicole.pdf> ("Operation Nicole is a table top exercise that has been developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) *Prevent* Delivery Unit in conjunction with independent facilitators. It is predominantly aimed at Muslim communities and specifically designed to break down barriers between police and communities by promoting an understanding of how counter-terrorism operations work."); "Prevent ACT NOW for Schools," ACPO, <http://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/TAM/2013/201303-tam-prevent-act-now-ed-factsheet.pdf> (ACT NOW is "an interactive counter terrorism exercise which provides communities with an insight into how police officers make decisions in the event of a terrorist incident.").
10. Huckerby, "Women and Preventing Violent Extremism," 6.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Taken from Ibid., 5 (some footnotes excluded).
14. HM Government, *The Prevent Strategy A Guide for Local Partners in England*, 13-14.
15. DCLG, *Preventing Violent Extremism*, 30-32 (noting that NMWAG's three main programs were: civic skills and participation; providing role models for non-traditional careers; and a theology working group).
16. DCLG, *Empowering Muslim Women*, 39-47.
17. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series (2009), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/lhan68.pdf>.
18. Ibid; "Developing Diversity," Faith Matters, (United Kingdom, 2009), 127-128, http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/publications/Developing_Diversity.pdf.
19. "Research Note 75: Foreign Office Prevent Grants," The TaxPayer's Alliance, 2010, 6-9, <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/taxpayersalliance/pages/333/attachments/original/1427131269/fcopenvent.pdf?1427131269>.
20. Ibid., 7.
21. Lord Alex Carlile, *Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy*, (May 2011), https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97977/lord-carlile-report.pdf.
22. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 1 ("The *Prevent* programme we inherited from the last Government was flawed. It confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism. It failed to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat we face; and in trying to reach those at risk of radicalisation, funding sometimes even reached the very extremist organisations that *Prevent* should have been confronting") and 31 ("But one of the most damaging allegations made about *Prevent* in the last two years has been that it has strayed into the area of Pursue and become a means for spying on Muslim communities."). See House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee, *Preventing Violent Extremism*, H.C. 65 (United Kingdom, 2010), 3, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cm-comloc/65/65.pdf> ("The current breadth of focus of *Prevent*—from community work to crime prevention—sits uncomfortably within a counter-terrorism strategy" and "The single focus on Muslims in *Prevent* has been unhelpful" and "stigmatizing").
23. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 23; Home Affairs Committee, *Roots of Violent Radicalization: The Prevent Strategy*, (United Kingdom, 2012), 40-88, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/1446/144606.htm>.
24. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 40.
25. Ibid., 63.
26. Ibid., 24.
27. Home Office, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice, James Brokenshire MP, and The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, *2010 to 2015 government policy: counter-terrorism*, (United Kingdom, 2015), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism#appendix-2-prevent>.
28. Home Office, *Prevent Strategy 2011*, (United Kingdom, 2011), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011>; HMG Government, *Prevent*, 9.
29. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 1.
30. Ibid., 37.
31. Home Office, *Prevent Strategy 2011*.
32. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 34-36, 39; Carlile, *Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy*, 5-7.
33. Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, "Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria

- for engagement with Muslim groups,” Policy Exchange, http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Choosing_Our_Friends_Wisely.pdf.
34. Communities and Local Government Committee, *Preventing Violent Extremism*, Ev. 105–07 (referencing Memorandum from Oxfam (PVE 12)).
 35. Ibid.
 36. HMG Government, *Prevent*, 44.
 37. Ibid., 68.
 38. HM Government, *Prevent Strategy: Equality Impact Assessment* (United Kingdom, 2011), 5, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/prevent/prevent-strategy/prevent-review-cia?view=Binary>.
 39. Ibid., 8-9.
 40. Ibid., 15.
 41. Ibid., 9.
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CHAPTER 5

The Role of Women in Preventing, Mitigating and Responding to Violence and Violent Extremism in Nigeria

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There is a popular saying among civil society groups in Nigeria that “when you train a woman, you train an entire community.” This reflects the level of influence that women possess in the society from the “cradle to the grave”. Women play a range of roles in relation to violent extremism for different reasons, including those of perpetrators, supporters, and sympathizers of violent extremist groups. The role of women in radical movements is linked to a wider context of gender roles in Nigeria that determine the circumstances in which they live.

Respondents from research carried out by the National Stability and Reconciliation Program (NSRP) aimed at understanding gender norms and female participation in radical movements in northern Nigeria show that the roles women play are determined by the men in their lives. Women in Nigeria are victims of the bigger identity crisis in Nigeria. The diversity of the Islamic groups in northern Nigeria determines the gender roles by each sect and their interpretation of Islamic injunctions. This means that rights and duties of women are linked and it aims at making them better to perform their duties to Allah, the family and to the society. For example, because women are expected to be dependent on men for their livelihoods, male relatives' involvement in radical groups automatically includes their participation as well. They are forced or expected to be part of radical groups like Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (JAS)¹/Boko Haram once their husbands or fathers become active members of JAS or when they die in the course of being active participants of JAS.

According to Maria Lozano, Managing Director of the Association for Aid to Victims of the March 11th attacks in Spain, “There can be no effective prevention against terrorist radicalization without the involvement of women as educators, influencers and positive agents of change in their families, communities and broader society. However to realise this potential, women first

have to be recognised, included and protected as full and equal citizens before the law, especially when they come from a minority background.”² While recognizing the important roles women can play in the family, the importance of engaging women beyond traditional roles and providing leadership opportunities in decision-making capacities, whether in communities, the private sector, or government should also not be overlooked. Engaging Nigerian women in roles that provides them opportunities for providing leadership beyond traditional roles needs to be explored as the country devises its plan for countering violent extremism.

WOMEN AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Nigerian society is patriarchal both in terms of organization and culture. The adage that “women need only to be seen and not heard” cuts across the country from the north to the south. The system of having women as passive participants in the society is entrenched either through cultural or religious norms—whichever is easily acceptable by the community or society where it is being perpetuated. The patriarchal orientation has influenced the initial conception of the role of women in violent extremism in Nigeria. Women as passive participants was entrenched by the “need to have women who can serve the role of traditional companions and the expediency for supportive combatant roles.”³

However, over the past five years, the roles women play in violent extremism have evolved within Nigerian society and the security organizations. Women are becoming more active: taking up responsibilities as couriers who carry money and weapons to various cells; as recruiters who seek out new members and mobilize grassroots volunteers by taking advantage of family ties or other personal relationships; or as suicide bombers, fighters, and operational leaders who carry weapons during combat. Nevertheless, as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 notes, women are also disproportionately affected by violence during conflict, and have in many places played important roles in efforts to prevent and mitigate conflict and violence, and rebuild the resilience of affected communities.⁴

Despite the active roles they have taken in violent extremist groups, perceptions of women as passive victims and meek actors were reflected in the attitudes and practices of the security agencies, including the military and police, and limited their scope for participation within the organizations, despite a request that women be given more responsibilities as police constables. For example, the Nigeria Police Force had no visible presence of women before

the 1940s. Women argued that women constables would be in a better position to prevent prostitution and handle female criminals. Yet, female officers in the Nigeria Police Force were more likely to be given non-essential tasks, such as serving tea at meetings or carrying the handbags for female government officials or political figures.

WOMEN AND RADICALIZATION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the evolution of JAS has highlighted the potential for an increase in women’s involvement in terrorism – both voluntary and involuntary. Women have also played a marginal role in other violent extremist groups like the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and other militant groups. For example, the wife of the founder and leader of NDPVF, Asari Dokubo Hajiya Mujaheedat Dokubo, reportedly stated that the Southern region of the country would make the country ungovernable if former President Jonathan was not allowed to return to power in 2015. This is a worrying trend that has contributed to heightened tensions between the north and south, particularly during the general elections in 2015.⁵

In addition, female relatives of suspected JAS members have been found to play either passive or active roles in violent extremism. For example, in May 2013, the leader of JAS claimed that the kidnappings of 12 women and children from a police barrack in Bama, Borno State was a retaliation for the detention of about 100 JAS members, their wives, and children in 2012.⁶ This tactic on the part of government of targeting immediate members of the family of the JAS members/suspects was said to have a significant impact on the organization’s strategy. To reaffirm this, the detention was cited as a grievance in almost all the video statements in 2012 and 2013 by the group’s leader, Abubakar Shekau. It is important to draw attention to the fact that this scenario has contributed to the use of women as pawns or instrument of negotiation between both parties.

The cycle of violence makes women more vulnerable to economic deprivation as widows, orphans, mothers of victims, internally displaced persons, and refugees. Women and children are kidnapped or taken away from these communities. There is a lack of accurate data of the numbers of persons abducted by the insurgent groups in the northeast. The abduction of 270 girls from their secondary school in Chibok in April 2014 drew national and international attention to the plight of these communities. The campaign aimed at rescuing these girls was tagged #BringBackOurGirls on social media outlets. The

campaign has been coordinated mainly by women organizing public meetings in Lagos and Abuja, with heavy reliance on the power of social media.

Since July 2014, there have been a series of suicide bombing attacks involving young women, raising speculations that some of the female suicide bombers could be from the group of abducted Chibok girls. Accordingly, this prompts the questions - should these girls be referred to as “suicide bombers” or simply as persons bearing improvised explosive devices, since there is no evidence of consent on the part of the young girls?

The evolution of JAS has emphasized the increasing role females play as fighters in Nigeria. However, it is not fully clear why women join violent extremist groups, including JAS, other than the adduced reason that men in their lives influence their association and membership. An Afrobarometer report on Security and Extremism in Nigeria shows that the main reasons people join extremist groups include:

- Poverty
- Unemployment or lack of opportunities
- Religious beliefs
- Lack of education
- Sense of injustice or mistreatment of their community by government
- Ineffectiveness of the government
- Coercion / they were forced to join

According to the Afrobarometer data, there seems to be no significant difference in the survey responses between female and male, implying that there may not be any significant gender difference in the motivating factors for joining violent extremist groups (see the following table).

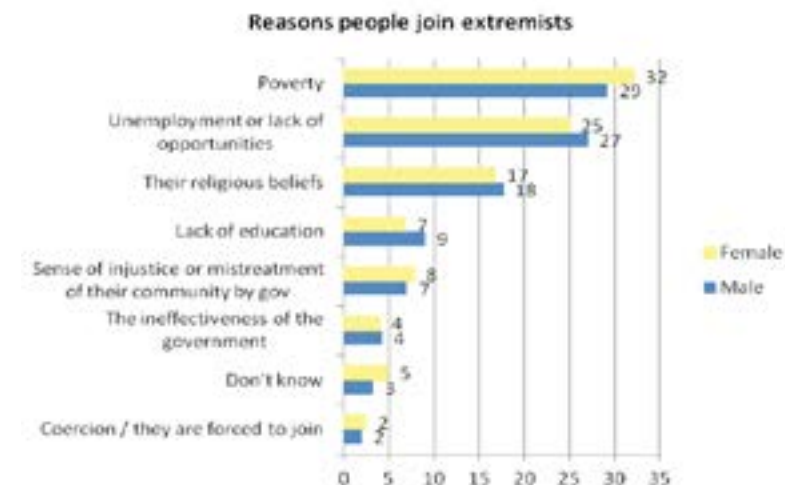


Table 1: Afrobarometer data on reasons people join extremists. The data is disaggregated by gender.

However, a study by CLEEN Foundation on why young people become radicalized in Northern Nigeria identified some of the drivers of violent extremism to include a broad range of factors that can heighten the appeal of such groups and their ideologies and tactics to women. These include “push” factors based on structural conditions (poverty, lack of employment) and “pull” factors that make violent extremist ideas and groups appealing, such as charismatic leaders, attractive ideas and causes, or financial, social, and material incentives. Other factors include: 1) lack of access to justice for women; 2) infringement on the rights of women; 3) no social or security cover for women making it easy for them to be easily abused either by government or the aggressors; 4) ideology or indoctrination; and 5) vulnerability of females due to their low economic power and lack of information, absence of information, ignorance, and distortion of facts.

In addition, the study found that lack of knowledge or education on the teachings of religion, in this case Islam, provide the most important predisposing factor or catalyst through which youths acquire radical or distorted views of religion.⁸ These distorted messages are often propagated by roaming or independent preachers that are not officially accredited by traditional Islamic scholars. Economic (poverty and unemployment) as well as socio-cultural (poor parental upbringing or neglect of children) factors also increase young peoples’ susceptibility to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremist or terrorist groups.

The role of women in addressing some of the causative factors identified in the study is instructive. Education and enlightenment of women would go a

long way in shaping and influencing their children at home. Families where both parents are employed and have a source of income are better placed to face economic challenges and to provide decent living conditions for their children. These points were raised during a dialogue session between community based organizations and police while implementing a program on Women Preventing Extreme Violence (WPEV) in Nigeria.⁹

Furthermore, in December 2013, CLEEN Foundation conducted a mapping of human rights defenders in the northeast which provided valuable insight into the underlying structural conditions that may lead to radicalization and recruitment. The aim of the study was to identify human rights defenders and their scope of activities in order to provide capacity building for the groups. Of the over 500 groups that were identified and documented, less than 25% of them were headed by women. Political rights issues are not areas of interest for the civil society groups in the region. The reason for this could be linked to the cultural and religious framework of the region. For example, a CLEEN Foundation study which aimed to identify the nexus between governance and insecurity in the northeast found that NGOs were more focused on providing services - mainly health services to the community, as evident by the response rates for Adamawa State (22.3%) and Bauchi State was (34.1%). However, NGOs involvement in policy advocacy or engagement was quite low at 15% in Adamawa and 10.6% in Bauchi. The most prominent group that is headed by women and addresses women issues even in the socio-political space is the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN). It is a faith based umbrella organization that links Islamic women's groups in Nigeria and promotes Muslim women's viewpoints on the national stage.

This study found that civil society groups in the region do not engage strongly on socio political issues, further contributing to an environment where issues relating to marginalization, discrimination and other grievances by certain groups are not addressed in a constructive manner. This situation heightens the structural inequalities that lead to violent extremism in society, and could be one of the factors that "push" individuals on the path of radicalization and recruitment.

Another potential structural condition in Nigeria may be related to the pervasive poor governance administration across the country, which has in turn particularly affected women and their families. The attendant effect of climate change on agricultural landscape, decline of industrial activities, limited employment opportunities has made women more vulnerable. With minimal education and limited options for livelihoods, women find themselves dependent on their husbands, fathers, brothers or sons. In a NSRP study on Gender Norms and Female

Participation in Radicalism, one respondent noted the failure of the Nigerian educational system as a contributing factor to violent extremism: "JAS have a point; what is the use of an education that does not help you find a job? But the way they are fighting is not right... How do you right a wrong by perpetuating a wrong?" There are reports from focus group discussions carried out at various times in a bid to understand the evolution of JAS which pointed out that JAS provided micro-finance and other social welfare benefits which includes providing for the widows and families of some of its members.

The feelings of discrimination and marginalization as a result of gender inequality have been exploited by terrorist groups in order to entice them into extremism as a form of empowerment.¹⁰ For example, in the UK context, "interviews with women belonging to Hizb Ut-Tahir, a radical Islamic organization, found that their motives for joining were partly hinged on their desire to resist patriarchal values expressed in their home environment and contributed to their self-esteem and sense of empowerment. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, fosters a "Sisterhood," which is promoted in their English magazine, *Inspire*. In Issue 12, the Sisterhood column employs Quranic verses, urging women to support their husbands, educate their children, and encourage them in their mission of Jihad. The column uses expressions such as "precious sister," "my dearest sister," and "sister in Islam" to create a sense of solidarity and belonging amongst women.¹¹

Although there is little evidence to justify this same assumption in Nigeria, a cursory comparison reveals that women do not play active roles in other extremist groups such as MEND and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and other militant groups in the Niger Delta. Informal interactions with women working in different community based organizations in Borno, Plateau, and Kaduna States revealed that women who support JAS in the northeast do so because their relationship with the group gives them relevance and importance in society. The Afro barometer findings from the Round 6 survey, which focused on Security and Extremism in Nigeria, showed that 44% of the respondents (22% male and 22% female) were of the opinion that people support JAS in order to gain personal power or relevance. Other reasons for people supporting JAS were stated as fight against corruption, personal enrichments, a sense of injustice or government maladministration, coercion by the groups, poor performance by government and religious beliefs.

Although the role of women as terrorist actors remains relatively unexplored, studies suggest¹² that some of the factors that prompt men to become terrorists drive women in the same way:

- grievance about socio-political conditions;
- grief about the death of a loved one;
- real or perceived humiliation on a physical, psychological or political level;
- a fanatical commitment to religious or ideological beliefs;
- an intention to derive economic benefits;
- or a desire to effect radical societal change.

The vulnerability of women in culturally stereotyped environments is stronger based on the lack of alternative mechanisms that make women independent of the male figures in their lives either socially or economically.

Following the proclamation of a State of Emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States in 2013, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)¹³ has partnered with the formal security agencies to tackle JAS in the affected states. They have done this by introducing new tactics, for example, mass arrest of male suspects in the early hours of the morning, and use of young teenage boys that are fluent in the local Kanuri language and culture to man checkpoints.¹⁴ The new tactics initiated by the CJTF members have created a “gender responsive shift”¹⁵ in JAS tactics. Women have begun to feature more in the operations of the group; they have been caught with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), pistols and AK – 47s. There have also been incidents where men were disguised as women in order to evade arrests and to carry out attacks. The Nigeria situation with JAS illustrates an adaptive response, which has been utilized by some other terrorist groups in situations where there are pressures on men. This trend has been explored across the globe including Indonesia, Pakistan, Israel and Palestine. When it is successful it shows to women who are supporters of the cause that they can play more active roles.

WOMEN AND SECURITY FORCES

In Nigeria, it seems that the government's response to the activities of JAS have created more opportunities for women as law enforcement officers, policy shapers and activists. The involvement of women at these levels should bring different perspectives to identifying and addressing specific political, social, economic, cultural or educational concerns that may lead to violent extremism and terrorist radicalization, in general, and among women and youth in particular. For example, mainstreaming gender and the role of women into the fight against violent extremism brought about a fundamental change in the recruitment of volunteers into the CJTF. Women were recruited to join the CJTF to focus on conducting bodily search of other women and young

girls and gather information because of the access they have to areas where men are not allowed in the Muslim society; they also operate with the men at the checkpoints to address issues related to young girls and women. Women's participation in the CJTF became even more critical as JAS groups adapted their strategy to use women in carrying out some of their operations. It also accommodates the religious inclinations in the north, which sets a physical barrier between women and men.

Hitherto, the police have been very conservative about the role of women within their establishment. For example, in the Nigeria Police Force, Section 121 of the Police Act and Regulations states that women police officers shall as a general rule is employed on duties which are concerned with women and children, particularly:

- investigation of sexual offences against women and children;
- recording of statements from female witnesses and female accused persons and from children;
- attendance when women or children are being interviewed by male officers;
- the searching, escorting and guarding of women prisoners in police stations, and the escorting of women prisoners to or from police stations;
- school crossing duties;
- crowd control, where women and children are present in any numbers.

Section 122 further states that women who are recruited to the General Duties branch of the Force may, in order to relieve male police officers from duties, be employed in any of the office duties, namely - clerical duties, telephone duties, office orderly duties. Section 123 states that “women police officers shall not be called upon to drill under arms or take part in any baton or riot exercise.” This means that women are excluded from core police duties and consequently not able to progress beyond a particular level in the Force.¹⁷

Closely linked to the above is the recent trend of recruitment of women into the Nigerian military, particularly the Army, and women playing a bigger role in operations than before. Similarly, the Nigerian Police have included women as part of its counterterrorism team. Until recently, the situation in the Nigeria Army was not too different from the police. However, given the security situation in the Northeast and the fight against violent extremism, over the past 5 years the role of women within the Force and the military has evolved.

Women are now being recruited to handle weapons and be part of tactical operations. In the streets of Abuja, for example, one can come into contact with female military personnel at checkpoints bearing arms. The Nigeria Defense Academy, the nation's premier training institution for military officers, has also graduated its first batch of female officers.

The Nigeria Police and military have evolved over the years since the return to democratic rule by creating more space for women in the police. Women are now part of the riot police and counter terrorism teams. It should be noted however that although the practice is changing, the legal framework still remains the same. There is a need to review the legal framework to accommodate the evolving practice of expanding the role of women. From a positive standpoint, it can be surmised that one of the gains of the fight against violent extremism in Nigeria is the widening of the space for women within the security sector and more organizations in the country have recognized the value and importance of having a gender perspective in their work.

WOMEN FOCUSED PROJECTS AIMED AT ADDRESSING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

Women are largely excluded from formal peace-building and governance processes. As a result, decisions rarely take women's realities into account or address their security concerns. Their expertise and capacity are not fully utilized. However, it should be noted that under the 8th Assembly, one of the female senators from Borno State has recently moved a motion on the protection of women and children who are victims of insurgencies in the North. There has also been support from other women from the southern part of the country in the form of financial assistance to women in different States including Gombe and those living in the camps of internally displaced persons in Abuja and other northeast states.¹⁸ Although the implications of these steps are limited, there is a growing trend to have a greater inclusion of women in certain processes.

Nevertheless, women's active role in conflict prevention is crucial to international peace and security. Understanding CVE and designing intervention programs in Nigeria is a novel area. One of the main challenges is the politicization of the entire insurgency, radicalization process and attendant interventions. There are some interventions that are ongoing that are focused on the role of women in countering or preventing violent extremism. Some of these interventions are designed to manage existing violent extremism while others are specifically developed to prevent and counter violent extremism. These include:

1. The Women Preventing Violent Extremism (WPEV) project, which provided an opportunity to train thirteen (13) women-led civil society organizations in a training of trainers' activity. The training was aimed at understanding radicalization and its prevention; building skills to prevent extremist violence; building relationships of trust with police; and getting the local groups in Nigeria to develop prevention plans that can be driven by women.
2. The Office of the National Security Adviser¹⁹ has taken steps to replicate WPEV flagship project by including women from other States in the north beyond Kaduna and Plateau States. As an outcome of the pilot project, the Women Interfaith Council in Kaduna was the only group that carried out follow up seminar in their community with participants drawn from all sectors, including security agencies. The group also organized visits to their local police stations. Most of the women received mixed reactions, as most found the approach of the officers not cordial. This observation, arguably, may discourage most of the women from any further engagement with the police.

In the course of evaluating the impact of a similar project in Plateau State, the women who participated from Women without Walls International (WOWWI) stated that the project helped them to understand their role as mothers and women in curbing extreme violence and other forms of crime in their communities. As part of their step down programmes, WOWWI made a presentation at a seminar organized in Jos on child abuse to further enlighten residents on violent extremism. On an individual level, advocacy activities were carried out in their communities through monitoring and continuous counselling of youths. As opposed to the participants in Kaduna, WOWWI has continued to have a cordial relationship with the police in Plateau state.

3. The Justice for All Program of the UK Department for International Development organised a seminar themed Women, Peace and Security: the Missing Millennium Development Goal. The event on 6 March 2014 in Abuja commemorated the UN International Women's Day. The event aimed to raise awareness about the National Action Plan (The national framework includes provisions on women's participation in peace building, conflict management and tackling violence against women and girls). Discussions focused on finding ways to include women's rights in conflict prevention and peace-building efforts in Nigeria. The event brought together civil society organisations, human rights activists, women, peace and security specialists, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

4. A study on “The Role of Women in Peace initiatives in Nigeria” has been conducted by the National Stability and Reconciliation Program (NSRP). The research findings confirmed that women in Nigeria have a powerful role to play in conflict resolutions, but gender discrimination and violence often hinder their participation. The report was presented by the NSRP at the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). The UNSCW is the principal global policy-making body dedicated to setting standards and policies for gender equality and advancement of women.
5. The CLEEN Foundation, a nongovernmental organization aimed at promoting public safety and security in Nigeria conducted a study on security and governance in north east Nigeria. Findings from the study reveal that education in the north east is low, particularly for the girls. In Adamawa State 50% of the respondents stated that they had not benefitted from primary education in the State. The study also shows that community based organisations (CBOs) are the most effective means of providing social services to the community members in some of the states - Adamawa 22.3%, Bauchi 34.1%. Participation in activities of the local government which is the closest arm of government to the people is low - 45% of the population in Adamawa do not participate in local government activities and 31.8% of the population in Bauchi do not participate. There are concerns that illiteracy and lack of access to education may put women at a disadvantage and increase their vulnerability to radicalism. The north-eastern and northwestern regions of Nigeria have the lowest levels of educational attainment and the highest levels of illiteracy.

Analysis of the study’s findings would assist CLEEN Foundation in designing its local governance and security forums which is an intervention program for the northeast part of Nigeria. The aim is to increase citizens participation in local governance as a means of addressing some of the issues of violent extremism in the region. Findings from the Security Threat Assessments conducted by CLEEN Foundation as part of the Election Security Management reveal that women are “influencers” of the political system. In this regard, there is need to design programs that utilize the strength of women in the Nigerian society.

6. As a result of increased reporting on gender based violence and related issues (including in conflict prone areas like North East region), the Nigeria Police Force now has a gender focal point who works at the Force Headquarters and reports directly to the Inspector General of Police. Her

responsibility includes coordinating police response to gender issues and mainstreaming gender in the activities of the police and the institution by implementing the gender policy of the Nigeria Police Force. However, it is important to note that this development is still in its formative stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN IN CVE EFFORTS IN NIGERIA

Some of the lessons learned from the above discussions and CVE case studies include the following:

1. ***CVE intervention programs should strategically focus on both men and women.*** This is particularly importance in the Nigerian context as women’s participation in violent extremist groups is greatly influenced by the male figure(s) in their lives.
2. ***Identify and empower women within the civil and security sectors.*** This can be done by developing training programs that are multilayered from the grassroots to the state to the national levels. These women should be trained on advocacy skills that are strategic which allows them to take advantage of their positions and localities. This may include strategic ways to disseminate narratives that counter violent extremism.
3. ***Broaden the space for conceptualization and implementation of the CVE programs to ensure that more women are involved.*** Intervention programs should include awareness on the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) 2011 (as amended).
4. ***Assess the impact of counterterrorism policies and programs on women.*** The current National Security Strategy in Nigeria does not take gender dynamics into consideration. For example, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was not involved in the drafting of the Strategy. Having a gender perspective would help to ensure that the Strategy not only looks at women’s roles in violent extremism and CVE, but also that women and women’s groups are not adversely impacted.
5. ***Develop study to understand why women are joining JAS.*** So far, inferences are being drawn from other related studies. This is an area of intervention which should be explored - surely getting access to these women might not be easy, however the efforts would make a great contribution in better understanding the role of women as active participants in

Nigeria. Closely related to this is the need to disaggregate available data according to gender - most times the data are clustered.

6. ***Provide a platform for grassroots women activists to work more closely with national, regional, and international activists.*** This will expand opportunities to share experiences, lessons learned, and good practices.
7. ***Facilitate training and provide capacity building assistance in monitoring and evaluating CVE intervention programs.*** There is a difficulty in identifying programs that are clearly CVE focused or programs that contribute to CVE. This could be as a result of its emerging status, and the difficult terrain associated with CVE. , therefore the technical expertise may also be lacking. There is a need for focused training and capacity building on monitoring and evaluating CVE focused intervention programs.

CONCLUSION

The gender shift in the dynamics of JAS has brought to the forefront the changing roles of women in conflict situations. It is becoming more obvious that women can also be active participants apart from being passive supporters. In this regard, there is a need to incorporate gender into CVE efforts in Nigeria. Issues relating to women were erstwhile treated with minimal seriousness - where they are given attention it is seen as an added on to the portfolio of spouses of politicians or public officers.

Concerted effort is required to mainstream a gender perspective across all sectors of government to address the increasingly complex security threat facing individual states, like Nigeria, the the rippling effects on the region and globally.

ENDNOTES

- * Kemi Okenyodo is working with the Justice For All Program of the UK Department for International Development as the Team Consultant on the Police Accountability Program.
1. This group is more commonly known as “Boko Haram” but for the purposes of this paper, the choice was made to use the name which the group uses to refer to themselves. The name means the “Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad.”
 2. “Women, terrorism and counter-terrorism,” last modified 18 June 2014, www.osce.org/secretariat/120964.
 3. Usman, Zainab et al., “Understanding Gender Norms and Female Participation in Radical Movements in Nigeria” (unpublished). Report of Research commissioned by the NSRP.
 4. “Different Roles of Women in Countering Violent Extremism,” (Hedayah & Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2015), http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/WomenCVE-Project-Desc_Feb2015_FINAL.pdf.
 5. “No regrets about Asari Dokubo’s war threats-Ex-militant’s wife,” *The Sun*, <http://sunnewsonline.com/new/no-regrets-about-asari-dokubos-war-threats-ex-militants-wife/>
 6. Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, “Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram,” *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5 (2014), <http://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.828/>.
 7. Kemi Okenyodo, Nengak Daniel Gondyi and Peter Lewis, “Security and armed extremism in Nigeria: Setting a new agenda,” *Afrobarometer Dispatch* 29 (May 2015), http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno29.pdf.
 8. The research was carried out with support from the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in 2003. It was aimed at identifying the underlying drivers of radicalisation in Northern Nigeria. The States that were studied were Borno, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto and Yobe. The report was released in 2014.
 9. The project is a flagship project of USIP which was jointly implemented in Nigeria with CLEEN Foundation. The objectives of the project was to identify and

support innovative ways in which women in civil society in particular those in selected local conflict affected communities can help prevent extremist violence.

10. “Empowering women in countering radicalisation and violent extremism,” Global Network for Rights and Development, (2014), <http://gnrd.net/seemore.php?id=846>.
11. Ibid.
12. Lillian Ayana Grey, “Female integration on Secular Terrorist Groups,” (2015), Honors thesis.
13. Civilian Joint Task Force is a group of non-state actors mainly young people in the affected states under State of Emergency that have emerged to work with the formal security agencies to tackle the insurgency.
14. “Nigeria: Boko Haram Abducts Women, Recruits Children,” *Human Rights Watch News*, November 29, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/29/nigeria-boko-haram-abducts-women-recruits-children>.
15. Zenn and Pearson.
16. Police Act Chapter 19 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.
17. Etannibi E. Alemika and Austin O. Agugua, *Gender Relations and Discrimination in Nigeria Police Force*, (Centre for Law Enforcement Education, 2001).
18. Information from Key Informant Interview conducted in September 2015 in Abuja.
19. The Office of the National Security Adviser is headed by the National Security Advisor, a senior aide in the cabinet of the President of Nigeria who serves as the chief advisor to the President on national security issues and participates in the meetings of the National Security Council and other deliberations on security matters.
20. The TPA 2011 was enacted to prevent violent extremism and terrorism in Nigeria. Section 4 (2) empowers the National Assembly to make laws to prevent terrorism, and Section 11 allows the National Assembly to make laws to protect the security of Nigeria.

Afghan Women and Countering Violent Extremism: What are their roles, challenges and opportunities in CVE?

Mariam Safi*

The post-2001 period in Afghanistan witnessed considerable progress in women's legal rights and in mainstreaming gender equality across all state institutions. This has ensured that women play an active role in influencing the peacebuilding process that ensued after the fall of the Taliban regime (1996-2001). This was guaranteed through the development of the new Constitution in 2003, which calls upon the state to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other international treaties to which the country has joined such as the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1889. These steps have been further reinforced by national documents such as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and the decree on the Elimination of Violence Against Women law. At the normative level, these documents established women's participation in all peacebuilding processes. As a result women are more, involved in national politics now than ever before in the country's history.

This argument can also be applied, though to a lesser extent, to women's participation in the security sector, such as the in the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army. Most importantly, women have also contributed to the field of peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in ways that can importantly inform efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism as members of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Process (popularly known as the peace process), community development councils, civil society and as mothers and wives of insurgents. However, the importance of these roles in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has not yet been recognized by policymakers in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the impacts from these efforts, as this paper explains, will show how important it will be to include and strengthen women's efforts in CVE initiatives, programming and policy in Afghanistan.

At present, Afghanistan lacks a national policy on CVE but has been involved in various regional and international forums looking to initiate the develop-

ment of such a policy in the near future. Therefore, it becomes extremely timely and pertinent to start a dialogue and raise awareness on the importance of including women in any CVE strategy the country adopts, particularly in view of developments like the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2242. By making “spaces for these women, you make space for the most important voices- new ideas, creative ways, and usually much more efficient ways to bring stability into a situation.”¹ With this in mind, this paper argues that any national CVE policy or program developed by the Afghan government must take into account women’s roles and create a framework that is conducive to women’s active participation in all related initiatives. In order to underline this argument, the paper seeks to examine the various roles Afghan women have played in efforts to build peace and demonstrate how these roles are critical to preventing violent extremism.

THE RANGE OF EXTREMIST GROUPS IN AFGHANISTAN

Religious extremism in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon and has roots in “major strands of Islamist ideas and parties”² dating back to over a century ago. In the Anglo-Afghan wars, Afghan religious leaders used to describe the wars as “holy wars” to legitimize them. In the 1960s, Islamist movements in Afghanistan emerged and were led by professors trained in Al Azhar University in Cairo, where they faced influences of the Muslim Brotherhood. However it was not until the late 1970s after the establishment of the Soviet backed People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), that a more aggressive form of extremism appeared in Afghanistan. As the jihad against communism thickened so did support for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan from countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United States. Funnelled through Pakistan, these funds were used to create “religious seminaries for Afghans in Pakistan’s tribal areas, and many of these seminaries began promoting extremist agendas.”³ It was from within these seminaries that the Taliban regime emerged and gained momentum in the early 1990s.

The Taliban regime governed in Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001 when it was toppled by the US-led intervention. However, while many thought this would mark the end of religious extremism in the country, on the contrary extremist elements and religious extremism grew in the post-2001 period. The combination of ineffective counter-terrorism strategies and the general short sightedness of the international community in the early phase of the intervention has contributed to the persistent challenge posed by the Taliban. The increasing perceptions of bad governance, lack of rule of law, corruption, nepotism, crime, poverty, human rights abuses by foreign troops, and civilian casualties created a major gap between the people and the Afghan government. As early as 2003 hundreds of

disenfranchised Afghan men and youth were attracted to the insurgency for social justice and a sense of belonging. Presently there are numerous violent extremist groups in Afghanistan, some more active than others, and the most active groups include the Taliban, Haqqani Network, and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin. There are also extremist groups who “may espouse similar ideologies and advocate violence against the state but do not have armed cadres and have not been directly linked to violent attacks against the state or its supporters.”⁴ These groups include Jami-at-e Eslah (Society for Reform), Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Islamic Freedom) and even Hizb-e-Islami’s political wing can be considered a moderate Islamist group.⁵ There exist various streams of Wahhabist and Salafist ideologues in Afghanistan as well. Wahabism was introduced to Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet jihad through the influx of Arab volunteers who joined the Afghan mujahiden. The Saudi involvement was twofold, focusing on ideological as well as sectarian challenges. While there is no clear alignment between Wahhabist and Salafist ideologues and violent groups there is nonetheless a concern that the former plays “a key role in radicalization and recruitment processes”⁶ in Afghanistan.

The lack of a CVE policy in Afghanistan has meant that there are no effective interventions available to the government, civil society organizations (CSOs), tribal elders, religious clerics and local communities to utilize in dissuading individuals from joining violent extremist groups or encouraging their exit. It also means there is a lack of understanding on how to engage with key stakeholders such as nonviolent groups to establish engagement and dialogue to “counterweight”⁷ the influence of violent extremist groups. Thus in order to develop a comprehensive CVE strategy, that includes effective interventions and creates the necessary space to include various stakeholders, it needs to be “contextually tailored.”⁸ It also needs an “understanding of local, national and regional drivers of violent extremism.”⁹ Additionally, while also identifying new opportunities for CVE implementation, a CVE strategy for Afghanistan should build upon existing efforts that either directly or indirectly fall within the realm of CVE-specific or CVE-related activities.

In Afghanistan, there is a dearth of research on CVE and what does exist only retains a shallow examination of possible roles state actors, CSOs and, to a lesser extent, tribal and religious actors can play. Moreover, within the current literature related to the topic in Afghanistan, there is no analysis of the role women and women’s group can play, though this gap in CVE literature reflects a common challenge in CVE programming internationally and regionally. However, in the context of Afghanistan, this challenge goes deeper since the concept of CVE is a new area for most and focusing on understanding women’s roles in CVE is a lesser priority.

This paper aims to illustrate the importance of including women in CVE by examining how radicalization has impacted Afghan women, analyzing the direct and indirect ways through which women's work can contribute to countering violent extremism, and finally drawing lessons that can be learned from those experiences to help identify new roles that women can adopt in countering violent extremism in Afghanistan.

LOCAL EXPERIENCES OF RADICALIZATION

There are few studies that have focused on radicalization trends in Afghanistan and even less on the role of youth. However, the group most vulnerable to radicalization is the Afghan youth, who make up almost 47 percent of the country's 27.1 million people.¹⁰ The studies that do exist reveal that drivers of radicalization can vary between push and pull factors. Push factors are described as "those characteristics of the societal environment that are alleged to push vulnerable individuals on the path of violence"¹¹ and pull factors which are "the emotional or spiritual benefits which affiliation with a group may confer."¹² It appears that in Afghanistan, push factors are more dominant than pull factors in shaping recruitment and radicalization. Push factors such as "religious ideologies, socioeconomic and political grievances, poor governance, and personal hardships"¹³ are all key. But it is important to note that in the Afghan context, recruitment and radicalism are "not synonymous or necessarily linear."¹⁴ Radicalization often takes place after recruitment and sometimes it may never occur after recruitment.¹⁵ Additionally, there is no evidence to suggest that individuals who may be radicalized have an automatic predilection to commit acts of violence.¹⁶ However, whether or not groups are focusing on the perpetration of violence, they appear to focus on the same pool of recruits from "less educated and often rural male youth."¹⁷

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF RADICALIZATION

The drivers of violent extremism do not apply equally to men and women in Afghanistan. Afghan women had a differential experience of conflict compared to men; the same applies with relation to their experiences with extremist groups. A policy brief prepared by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on *Afghan Youth and Extremists*¹⁸ argues that in contrast to the successful "psychological assault"¹⁹ extremist groups can yield on young boys and men it has had "relatively limited success...luring young women and girls."²⁰ It was suggested that the reason why men and youth have become the main targets for radicalization is because men have far more unsupervised time, while women and girls are limited and confined to the parameters of the house-

hold.²¹ In Afghanistan, strict and narrow interpretations of gender roles and gender equality continue to obstruct women from participating outside of the household.²² As such, it is more "culturally acceptable for men to mingle with strangers, to explore ways to earn an income, and to be adventurous"²³ than women and girls. Additionally, men are able to stay away from their families for long periods of time due to work or in search of employment opportunities outside their communities. Women have stricter schedules, especially female youth in both urban and rural settings, and tend to be supervised by their mothers or other female and male relatives.²⁴ As a result, young men are easy targets for recruitment, but this does not mean women are immune to the overall impact of recruitment and radicalization.

TARGETING MOTHERS

Violent extremist groups, such as the Taliban, often use narratives that target both mothers of insurgents and mothers of Afghan National Security Forces. Their messages are intended to appeal to the emotions of mothers common across the country. Using both traditional and new media tools, the Taliban narratives are "powerful, emotional, patriotic and ideologically appealing."²⁵ They use these messages to target mothers, convincing them to encourage their sons to join the insurgency and calling on mothers of insurgents to be proud of their son's sacrifices. Messages that express sympathy for mothers of fallen soldiers are particularly powerful because they not only touch on the raw emotions of a mother who recently lost a son, but that loss is represented as meaningless in face of a corrupt government increasingly incapable of meeting the needs of its citizens. In messages targeting mothers of security forces, the Taliban ask mothers what they would tell their sons on the Day of Judgment when they ask, "Why didn't you guide me to the path of righteousness? Did you want to destroy my chance of going to paradise?"²⁶

TARGETING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Extremist groups in Afghanistan have sought to consolidate their authority by attacking women's rights and freedoms, portrayed as the antithetical to the ideal society. To that end, the Taliban have attacked girls' schools, thrown acid on female students, and also impose harsh *hudud* punishments like stoning. In September of 2015, more than 300 girls were poisoned by toxic fumes in two schools in the western province of Herat.²⁷ Six years ago a similar attack was carried out in northeastern Afghanistan where 100 schoolgirls were poisoned. Taliban militants have also carried out acid attacks on female students and have also burnt down many schools. Moreover, by 2010 Afghans started wit-

nessing the return of old Taliban rules in many areas across Afghanistan similar to the way they practiced their version of strict Shariah law during their regime (1996-2001). Public stoning of women accused of adultery has since become common practice in various parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban are in control and government presence is limited or completely absent. According to Nader Nadery, former commissioner of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, there has been “a big increase in intimidation of women and more strict rules on women”²⁸ in the recent years. Nadery is not only pointing to an increase in the prevalence of Taliban rules and system of justice but also to an increase in support for these actions by both mainstream religious authorities and extremist groups in the country.²⁹

Efforts by national, regional and international actors to support women in reaffirming their rights in the aftermath of the US-led intervention that toppled the Taliban in 2001 are now in serious jeopardy. There are growing fears that if the Taliban and other extremists groups join mainstream politics through the peace process, they will make the reversal of gender-based laws and policies as a condition for their return; with no female representation at the negotiation table, this has become a likely possibility. Currently, women have been put into formal roles such as within the High Peace Council (HPC) and Provincial Peace Committees (PPC). However, this is largely as a consequence of international advocacy and have not yet received the political support needed to carry out those roles. Such rhetoric of inclusivity and empowerment may have helped ensure women's presence in these national processes but they have not helped women execute their roles and responsibilities as members of these processes.

The lack of clarity surrounding the peace process has also made it challenging for women to identify what the formal process could mean for them. Fatima Gailani, President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, questions the peace process asking, “What will we have to sacrifice with reconciliation? Is it women's affairs, is it democracy, is it human rights, [or] is it a free press? For me, that is not peace. For me, that is a huge prison.”³⁰ The exclusion of women from the negotiation processes have prompted doubts that there will be any change in the status quo for women's rights and freedoms in the years to come. It was not too long ago that these very same women were forced to adapt to the strict interpretation of Sharia laws under the Taliban regime. Women's groups have expressed that if the Taliban were to be brought back into Afghan politics, as a political party or even worse in a power-sharing arrangement, there would be a very real danger of gender mainstreaming and equal rights falling by the wayside.

TARGETING THE FUTURE PROGRESS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

In a radio address on November 17, 2001, former First Lady Laura Bush declared the war against terrorism to also be a fight for the rights and dignity of women. “Afghan women know, through hard experience, what the rest of the world is discovering: the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists.”³¹ The aim of liberating Afghan women became a *cause célèbre* for Western feminists and something of a policy-oriented goal of the intervention. From 2001 onward, the Afghan government introduced several laws, policies, and initiatives designed to facilitate gender mainstreaming in all sectors of Afghan society and there was great optimism.

Signed on December 5, 2001, the Bonn Agreement laid the foundation for the establishment of a sustainable democratic government in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement ensured that the country's newly ratified Constitution, on January 26, 2004, articulated the importance of protecting peoples' rights and freedoms. Thus, both in its preamble and, more specifically, Article 22 of the Constitution states that “[a]ny kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law.”³² The Bonn Agreement guaranteed women's involvement in the government and took steps to advance the role of women in all sectors.

The Afghan government also became a signatory to several other important documents such as the Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Berlin Conference, the Afghanistan Compact, and lastly, the creation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognizes and reaffirms “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding,”³³ is a key foundation of NAPWA. As a result, NAPWA was created to weave together all of the government's gender commitments, mentioned above, into one single-policy platform. However, views expressed by prominent Afghan women at a roundtable event on “The Role of Women Post-2014 Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities” held in Kabul, on January 21, 2014, showed that despite these achievements, women still struggle to avail themselves of their rights, and to consolidate and advance the scope of their roles.³⁴

While on paper efforts have been taken to prioritize gender-equality as a running theme across all policies, practically there have been no effective actions taken to implement them. Thus, while women may be now included in decision-making circles, there is little consideration for their views and perspectives because these roles are merely symbolic. This has resulted from a lack of political will, influenced by a male dominated society infused in religious conservatism and restrictive social and cultural barriers.

Nowhere has this been more visible than in the framework of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), popularly referred to as the peace process, targeting the Taliban and all other local insurgent groups. Article 5 of the preamble of the Consultative Peace Jirga, which paved the way for establishment of the APRP, calls “on all the parties involved to avoid setting such conditions that can make it impossible for the understanding and negotiations to start, but rather express their goodwill by taking constructive and flexible approaches for the dialogue to begin.”³⁵ Though this denotes that the Taliban cannot make any conditions with women’s rights, it also means the Afghan government cannot make the protection of women’s constitutional rights a condition either. It is important to note that Article 5 was included in the preamble despite the fact that 25 percent of Jirga members were women; this reflects the symbolic nature of women’s participation in decision-making forums. Consequently, women’s fears have not only been exacerbated by the lack of concrete assurances but also because women do not have a substantial role or seat at the negotiation table. If women’s constitutional rights are not identified in initial talks with violent extremist groups then there are no guarantees they will be upheld later.

TARGETING WOMEN'S ECONOMY

Indirectly, women have also borne the negative economic impact that recruitment and radicalization have on families who lose male relatives to extremism. In Afghanistan men are still the main breadwinners in a family, therefore the loss of a male relative brings with it imminent socio-economic hardship on the household, particularly in those led by a single male breadwinner. This is not to suggest that women have not made significant strides in gaining an education, in working outside of the home, and in increasing their political participation, but the reality is that this progress continues to be disproportionate. For instance, presently there are 8.4 million students enrolled in primary and secondary schools of which 39 percent are girls.³⁶ While this marks an impressive increase from the 1 million students that were enrolled in 2001, there are still 3.3 million children who are not in school. Moreover, only 3 percent of women have finished any level of formal education from the share of the

population that is over 25. Additionally, female literacy levels are on average around 17 percent, with high variation depending on geographical and gender divide.³⁷ From this 17 percent, the number of literate women in rural areas is three times lower than those in urban areas.³⁸ Similarly, while more women are now working outside the household than in the pre-2001 period and views on this appearing to be steadily evolving,³⁹ working women still face barriers to economic empowerment. Education, literacy, and economic disparities have made women the most economically vulnerable demographic in the country and it is in this context that the impact of radicalization on them is prominently different than on men.

WOMEN'S ROLES IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM EFFORTS

Women in Afghanistan have various roles to play in countering violent extremism. Women can provide critical support to any type of CVE programing in their capacities as formal members of the peace process, as leaders of CSOs, and as mothers and wives. Women have played an instrumental role so far in outreach and awareness raising, training and capacity building, and facilitating engagement between women and other important actors at the community level. But these efforts by women and women’s groups have remained either limited or under-utilized. Furthermore, since CVE itself is a new concept in Afghanistan, there is no conceptualization of a role for women in CVE efforts. It therefore becomes pertinent to evaluate women’s existing efforts and ways in which those efforts could be strengthened to have a larger impact on countering violent and non-violent extremism.

WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS (APRP)

The APRP is a top-down and bottom-up initiative that the Afghan government, with the support of the international community, launched in 2010 to commence a genuine political methodology for reconciliation and reintegration with the insurgency. Reconciliation was envisioned as more of a political endeavour entailing negotiations with the “top-tier” insurgency regime, with the aim of reaching a peace agreement. Reintegration focused on alleviating the grievances of foot soldiers through a three-phased approach which incorporated social outreach, demobilization and community recovery, and consolidation of peace efforts. In order to carry out both pillars, the Peace Jirga created the High Peace Council (HPC); comprised of 70 members, of which only nine were women. At the sub-national level similar smaller councils were created, referred to as Provincial Peace Committees (PPCs). Each PPC con-

sists of 25-30 people tasked with implementing the reintegration process at the community level and every PPC is required to have (at least) two or three female members, including the Head of the Department of Women's Affairs. The participation of women in the peace process meant that women were now included in an area from which they have been traditionally excluded.

Both the NAPWA and the APRP's Gender Policy have included UN Resolution 1325 to ensure that women were represented in all aspects of the peace efforts. However, women in the HPC and PCC have not been given the space to play a role in grievance resolution and direct negotiations; they have only participated in outreach and public awareness. Similarly, though women have not been equally involved in the former components of APRP, they have nevertheless been able to carry out relatively successful programs in outreach and public awareness. They created a Joint HPC-APRP Women group which meets regularly to review progress on program delivery and make necessary recommendations. This group has organized forums and meetings with CSOs, women networks, and other national and international agencies. They have also participated in outreach visits to provinces. In 2011, the group developed a three month plan that promoted peace and targeted women and youth through political and social engagement.⁴⁰ These efforts are said to have increased community mobilization and generated momentum at the community level, establishing trust between the government and local populations.

The most visible activity so far led by the female HPC members has been a country-wide campaign for peace that they organized in 2014. The HPC, in coordination with Afghan women, civil society, women and youth networks, and NGOs, began a nationwide campaign to call for peace and an end to the conflict.⁴¹ As part of this "call for peace" female HPC members collected 250,000 signatures from women across the country and used this petition to appeal to the government, armed opposition groups, and the international community to seek common grounds for a peaceful settlement.⁴² In addition to collecting the necessary signatures, the HPC also organized events across provinces to promote women's participation in the peace process. The impact of the petition was reflected in the Afghan government's stance on encouraging women to participate in the peace process and continuing to demand an end to the conflict. The initiative was also recognized by the UN Secretary-General, who received the petition in March 2014 and welcomed the peace campaign as representing the spirit of UN's work and Resolution 1325.⁴³

Having women involved formally in the peace process has allowed them to play a role in reintegration matters to some extent but women are still missing

from important discussions surrounding the terms and direction of the peace process. Ground realities show that there is great variation on how APRP's Gender Policy is being implemented. This has meant that women are still not considered equal stakeholders in bringing peace. HPC member Gulali Noor Safi states, "We are trying to be involved in the peace [building] process, but in my opinion, most of the time, we are not included in major discussions."⁴⁴ Travel restrictions, capacity issues, even lack of awareness of the APRP, combined with social barriers have prevented HPC and PPC women from reaching out to insurgents and effecting grievance resolution, assisting in the reintegration process, or in negotiations. A yearlong research project on the role of Afghan women in the APRP by a local NGO in Kabul, the Peace and Training and Research Organization (PTRO), found that women's participation in the formal processes of the APRP was at present extremely limited. Interviews conducted with 343 respondents, including 212 female interviewees, revealed that women at the community level wanted HPC and PPC women to go beyond their present activities and engage more closely with women and other key actors at the community level.⁴⁵ This way their efforts could ensure that both reintegration and reconciliation efforts reflect local and community needs and experiences.

THE ROLE OF MOTHERS

Afghan women are "widely aware of the role they have to play in ensuring a peaceful future for their communities."⁴⁶ Respondents interviewed by PTRO explained that as women are the primary caregivers for their children they are responsible for "providing them with the right *tarbia* and *akhlaq*."⁴⁷ As such, with youth representing the most vulnerable group for recruitment and radicalization, mothers' roles become essential in identifying early warnings and preventing the youth from joining extremists groups. This notion has been further reinforced by other studies⁴⁸ that show that all kinds of extremist groups often plea to the family when recruiting youth. This highlights the agency of mothers and its importance to CVE efforts in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas.

Mothers can have a profound influence within the household. Though this may vary in different parts of the country, there is a consensus that mothers can play a critical role in both their child's upbringing and as identifiers of risk and vulnerability in their households. For example, in eastern Afghanistan, a farmer and his wife learned that their son had been approached for recruitment by an extremist, so they decided to move to another city to prevent their son from engaging with these elements. This action prevented the son from

being recruited into the Taliban; his other male relatives who remained in the village did end up joining the Taliban as suicide bombers.⁴⁹

Another area in which women can play an important role is the rehabilitation or reintegration of former members of extremist groups. PTRO's report argues that "The principle roles of women in reintegration activities at present, as with other social functions in Afghan society, are also mainly within the family and household."⁵⁰ Therefore, while most focus on strengthening the roles of those women formally involved in the peace process, these findings suggest that more attention needs to be placed on how to strengthen women's roles within the household and empowering them to respond to challenges. PTRO's report highlights an instance where an insurgent joined the peace process after his wife threatened to separate from him. She said to her husband, "if you don't join the peace process then I will never talk to you again, but if you want to join then I will support you."⁵¹ These examples illustrate the various ways women can influence their households and can contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism.

WOMEN'S ROLES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Women are also now, more than ever before, involved in decision-making within their villages and districts. Women are members of social development councils, community and provincial councils and ad-hoc women's groups at the village and district level. Though women participation in these forums is not visible in all parts of the country, it is slowly becoming more prevalent. Female respondents told PTRO that, "compared to previous years, women have gotten the courage to participate in society and in meetings."⁵² In regions, where women are members of these various community-level decision-making forum, they are able to openly discuss issues, including matters related to the peace process, with male tribal elders. Female led community councils, like the Community Development Councils (CDCs), created under the National Solidarity Program (NSP), exist in almost all villages. They were developed to increase the ability of local communities in identifying, planning, managing and monitoring their own development projects.

CDCs represent a mechanism for conflict resolution and mediation for women living in rural areas. These councils help resolve conflicts around family issues and are illustrative of women's active role in conflict mediation. Resolution of family conflicts in rural Afghanistan are extremely important because if issues are left unaddressed in such close knit communities, they often can lead to greater conflicts and become push factors towards violent extremism.

Consequently, as PTRO notes, effective resolution of grievances is essential in the prevention of community level conflicts which can spill over into family rivalries that present a viable breeding ground for exploitation by extremists.⁵³

As witnessed, women are already directly or indirectly involved in countering violent extremism at the national, household and community levels. Strengthening them becomes essential in any holistic approach towards CVE. By building women's capacity, confidence and critical thinking skills to ask questions and carve new roles for women's participation, we can ensure women are equipped with the necessary tools to increase their influence in all these spheres.

WOMEN'S ROLES IN CIVIL SOCIETY

"The greatest predictor of security and stability in a country is actually not wealth and it is not the level of democracy. It is how well the women are treated," stated The Honorable Swanee Hunt while introducing a panel on the role of Pakistani women in CVE.⁵⁴ This statement highlights the need to develop women's socio-economic conditions and political empowerment to create resilience against violent extremism. It also underscores the important contributions that women-led CSOs and female activists can make to improve local socio-economic and security conditions.

In Afghanistan, women-led CSOs have become an integral part of the young civil society community that emerged post-2001. These organizations have been crucial in promoting, advancing and protecting women's right in both national policies, agreements and declarations signed between Afghanistan and the international community. They have helped improve women's access to health facilities, female education, livelihoods, and political and security participation. Additionally, they have ensured that gender-equity remains a priority for both the Afghan government and international community by holding seminars and conferences where women's challenges are highlighted and their voices secured in national debates like the peace process. Women's organizations have also provided training for security sector personnel in "international human rights, rights of women and children and how to address sexual and gender-based violence."⁵⁵ These efforts have helped strengthen the rule of law and encourage security actors to develop the necessary tools to address underlying conditions conducive to terrorism.

At the second Bonn Conference (2011) on Afghanistan which marked the 10 year anniversary of the first Bonn Agreement (2001) which paved the way for

the political and economic development of Afghanistan, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), an umbrella organization representing various women-led NGOs, called on the international community to ensure that women's rights were protected under any political agreement signed with the Taliban as part of the peace process. As a result of ANW's advocacy, the final outcome document of the Bonn conference specifically underscored the expectations of the international community in ensuring that the peace and reconciliation process respect the Afghan constitution and its provisions for the rights of women. Though such documents tend to treat women's rights in broad strokes and remains largely rhetorical rather than a guideline for actual practice, it is still useful in raising awareness and highlighting the concerns of women on a national and international platform.

However, CSOs in Afghanistan are hindered by numerous challenges that tend to be more pronounced for women-led or based organizations. These challenges including "fragile security, distrust or misconceptions of civil society objectives by the Afghan public, insufficient funding, donor dependency, poor institutional capacity, weak communications systems, few networking opportunities, limited engagement by the international community, and restrictions imposed by the government."⁵⁶ Also, traditional and faith-based civil society actors have often been underestimated or understudied in comparison to their more modern or mainstream counterparts, and may in many instances play important roles in CVE efforts.⁵⁷

While CSOs are engaged in activities that help support CVE initiatives at one level or another, few if any focus specifically on CVE programing. For instance, CSOs to date do not focus on engaging with mothers and families of insurgents, working with women's groups at the subnational level to counter extremist narratives, or developing programs that identify at-risk youth. Women's organizations at large require further training and skills-building themselves to enhance their capacity in more CVE-specific activities addressing the push and pull factors in identifying and preventing recruitment and radicalization and then training others on the same.

LESSONS LEARNED: WOMEN ROLES IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CONFLICT MITIGATION

Several lessons could be drawn from existing women's efforts that can inform CVE engagement. Some of these lessons point to existing efforts by Afghan women which, if strengthened, can have a deeper impact. Other lessons indicate new opportunities to engage women in addressing extremism. These lessons also il-

lustrate the various risks and challenges associated with women's engagement in CVE. For instance, women in the HPC are not invited to discussions and negotiations conducted with the insurgency, they are prevented by either their families or socio-cultural constraints to travel to insecure areas for outreach purposes as part of APRP, or to accompany their male counterparts in tribal meetings at the community level. Similarly, female CDC members often find it difficult to resolve conflicts brought to them by other women in the community because the men in the community do not recognize their decisions or advice. Moreover, women CSO's are often threatened by insurgents and some, particularly those operating in the provinces, are targeted by the insurgency.

With women as HPC and PPCs members, the peace process benefits immensely from the "inclusion of women as participants and leaders, and of women's voices and priorities."⁵⁸ Women experience war differently compared to men and this differentiation in perspectives is critical in building a consensus around a lasting peace. As articulated by Simar Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, "It is simply not possible to have peace without the support of 50% of the population."⁵⁹ Protecting women's voices and ensuring their perspectives are considered in any potential settlement is essential; women have been fighting for this since the peace process started in 2010. However, new spaces exist through which female HPC and PPC members could increase their impact on reintegration and by extension reconciliation efforts with the insurgency. According to PTRO's study, women involved in the formal peace process could play a more effective role if they reached out to, and offered support, to the families of insurgents.⁶⁰ By offering support and establishing contacts with these families, these women can build much needed trust among them and the government. This will enable HPC and PPC women to identify, highlight, and address the grievances of the parents of insurgents at the highest governmental levels. Engagement with households will also allow them to raise awareness of reintegration and reconciliation processes with various stakeholders at the community level.⁶¹

Women's community councils play an important role in resolving family grievances, though they are not always heard or supported by their male counterparts or tribal elders. This, however, presents an opportunity for women in the peace process to ensure that CDC women's voices are heard by coordinating efforts with female CDCs. This coordination can take the form of a CDC-APRP partnership to raise awareness, create advocacy and combine efforts to redress local grievances, and identify families of insurgents and households with at-risk youth. Since there are only nine female HPC members and three or four female PPC members, CDC members can also help maintain and extend reach in villages across the country.

Women-led CSOs can also help build capacity and skills of women to help them become more effective in the APRP. Such training might include identifying causes and drivers of radicalization, raising awareness of human rights-based responses, promoting tolerance and inclusion, conflict resolution and dialogue and engagement. These skills can also help contribute to critical CVE efforts.

Women-led CSOs can also act as a bridge between traditional networks such as mosques, religious schools, and other spiritual and cultural centers. This can have two positive impacts. First, these networks, which many regard as promoting “peace and social cohesion” can “play a critical role in peacebuilding, disseminating counter-extremists messages, mediating conflict, and promoting inter-ethnic social harmony.”⁶² Second, by engaging with them, the women CSOs, women in the APRP, and women community councils can gain legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of locals. However, unlike CSOs in neighboring countries like Pakistan, who have established a number of peacebuilding and CVE programs,⁶³ in Afghanistan, there are no CVE focused CSO programs and even peacebuilding efforts still remain underdeveloped and piecemeal. Thus, CSO's in Afghanistan require further training and skills-building to enhance their own capacities. This means that foreign aid to Afghanistan needs to prioritize CVE training for women-based organizations and should be made available for grassroots and community-based organizations.

CONCLUSION: ROLE(S) FOR WOMEN IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Though women have not historically been combatants in Afghanistan, they have been negatively impacted by violent conflicts socially, emotionally and economically for many years. This has influenced their productive, reproductive and cross-community roles. Consequently, engagement and empowerment in CVE could be of great importance to women across Afghanistan. Having said this, the roles women can play in CVE would be qualitatively different from those played by men. This has been best captured by Fauzai Kofi, Member of Afghan Parliament, who explained that “[a]t times there are women who think that the peace process is a job for men and not women hence questioning the possible role they could play in the process.”⁶⁴ Such a sentiment, she claims, “comes from the perspective that, [since] women have not engaged in war[,] they should not be responsible for bringing peace.”⁶⁵ Kofi asserts responsively that perhaps it is exactly that — the active engagement and involvement of women — that could help bring peace, precisely *because* they (the women) were not directly involved in the conflict.

Women do not have one particular agency in CVE, but numerous ones. As described in this paper, women's contribution to CVE can take the agency of a mother, a wife, political leader or peacebuilder, a female community council member, or a women-based organization. Given the focus by extremist groups on targeting youth, mother's roles have become extremely important in mobilizing and preventing young men from joining extremist groups. Alternatively, in reintegration efforts as well, mothers have become important as they can help in reintegrating their sons back into society. Wives also have unique opportunities to prevent but also to reintegrate their husbands who have joined extremist groups, where they are empowered to do so within the home. Women can influence domestic and community decisions often even from within the private sphere. This was revealed by a female focus group who told PTRO that “inside the family women have direct roles, while outside of the family they spread their views through their men.”⁶⁶ As members of HPC and PPC, women in the peace process have countered extremism through their awareness and social outreach programs. Women CDCs have been vital to addressing family issues at the community level preventing their further escalation and exploitation by extremist groups. Lastly, women-led CSOs have persisted in their efforts to help build the capacity of women as agents of peacebuilding, help in messaging and civil education that is grounded in Islam, Afghan law and the Afghan Constitution.⁶⁷

Creating a single CVE program that considers the diversity in ethnic, political, economic, social and security conditions across the country but also encapsulates the various roles that men and women can play in CVE is not feasible. However, creating a national CVE policy, that incorporates best practices highlighted by institutions such as the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), and other international forums, could provide a comprehensive foundation upon which context-specific CVE programs can be designed. Within such a national policy for CVE, a gender lens must be mainstreamed. This can complement the existing National Action Policy for the Women of Afghanistan, which already affirms UN Resolution 1325. However, within NAPWA, a detailed framework for women and CVE should be included. This will help ensure that women can participate at the policy and program levels ensuring that their perspectives are represented in the development and implementation of CVE programs.

Currently, Afghan women have been included in various political and security processes as a consequence of international advocacy but these roles continue to remain largely symbolic. The rhetoric of inclusivity and empowerment has had consequences that have on some level hindered, and not helped, efforts to

ensure that women become equal stakeholders in processes such as the peace initiative with the insurgency. Ensuring that a national CVE policy generates an environment conducive to women's active participation requires strong cooperation between the Afghan government, international community and Afghan CSOs, or else it risks placing women in yet another symbolic role.

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* Mariam Safi is the founding director of DROPS in Afghanistan.

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Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE

Erin Marie Saltman and Ross Frenett*

Women have played significant roles in a number of contemporary terrorist organizations. A range of far-right, far-left and Islamist extremist organizations have utilized female forces for a variety of activities including logistics, recruitment, political safeguarding, operational leadership, suicide bombing and combat.¹ The recent surge in female recruitment to groups such as the terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has brought this long lasting phenomenon into sharp focus. This trend is unfortunately often paired with misperceptions around the role of women within these violent networks and engendered responses to the radicalization of women.² A more nuanced understanding of the roles women play in preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE and CVE) is therefore critical. This chapter explores the crucial roles that women play in countering the violent extremist narrative, by reaching a wider audience of those “at risk” of radicalization and bringing much-needed innovation into the CVE sector. Addressing gender dynamics in CVE work is significant as we see an increasing number of women being radicalized and recruited into terrorist networks like ISIS from all over the world.

CVE and the notion of countering “extremism,” as opposed to “terrorism,” is a novel concept that has only occurred in the past ten years or so.³ Hate crimes and terrorism are more easily defined in clear terms because they both involve the intention to cause harm to another and have clarified legal repercussions by nation-states. While terrorist legislation in most Western democracies defines terrorism by membership in a terrorist organization, plots or actions to carry out terrorist attacks, and the glorification of terrorism, definitions of a grey area such as violent extremism are more difficult. The UK government has defined extremism as “the vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.” Here “British values” is synonymous with democratic values, although even with this distinction, extremism remains an ideological gray area in the pre-criminal space.

CVE has acted as the *soft side* of counter terrorism and has evolved greatly in recent years. International governments and practitioners are crucially recognizing that a preventive approach is critical to addressing the roots of radicalization and to more effectively counter recruitment into violent extremist networks. Despite women being active members in a range of terrorist organizations for many years, it is only more recently that CVE has begun to include a more comprehensive recognition of the gender dynamics at play within the processes of radicalization.⁵ Propaganda, information streams, and communication channels recruiting individuals into violent extremist groups like ISIS have cultivated gender-specific material.

However, women joining terrorist and violent extremist groups is nothing new. Since the beginning of what we consider modern terrorism, from the late 1960s onwards, women have taken small, yet expanding, roles within terrorist groups.⁶ In this sense, it is not that practitioners, governments or the public should have sympathy for those involving themselves in violent extremist pathways, but empathy and understanding about why individuals are choosing this pathway is crucial to developing effective responses.

As part of its Women and Extremism (WaE) Initiative,⁷ the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) currently maintains and monitors the largest database of Western females that have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS.⁸ By “Western” the database includes individuals thought to have been born or raised within Western countries, using English as their primary means of communication. For this reason Australia is included within the dataset. Current profiles include individuals primarily from Britain, Holland, Sweden, France and Germany. However, there are also small numbers being tracked from Finland, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Austria, Norway, Bosnia and the United States. The database collects and archives information on over 130 women through their social media and other online profiles in conjunction with data pulling from media and government reports.

The women analysed in this dataset and researched in this wider phenomenon are referred to here as “migrants” rather than the often-used terms “foreign terrorist fighter,” “female foreign fighter” or “jihadi bride.” This is because these women, once in ISIS territory, are not being used in combat and are, in fact, currently prohibited from military activities by the strict interpretations of Shariah law.⁹ Additionally, they share a range of reasons for travel that go far beyond the reductionist role of “bride.” These women also self-identify as *migrants*, often referring to themselves online as *muhajirat* (female migrants) on their social media accounts.

After a brief background, this chapter aims to provide a lens into the motivations behind Western women joining ISIS, exploring both push and pull factors. This chapter also examines the roles women are playing within ISIS, restricted from combat but critically used to disseminate propaganda, engage in recruitment and involve themselves in state-building efforts. Lastly, a set of recommended measures for countering these trends are given, arguing that credible female messengers and community enforcement officers are key in prevention work and counter-narrative initiatives. It should be noted that while the dataset and research that informs this chapter is based on Western women, the trends of violent radicalization, as well as push and pull factors, are not specific only to Westerners. Unfortunately, statistics and more in-depth research into females joining ISIS from other regions is currently lacking, although we do know from online propaganda and ISIS documents in Arabic that women are targeted actively in recruitment and are joining from a range of other regions, particularly in neighbouring countries. The conclusions of this chapter should therefore not be limited only to a Western context.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The flow of both men and women recruited to ISIS is a growing concern for Western governments who are fearful of the continued exodus of nationals to a foreign conflict, and also fearful of the threat potentially posed by returnees. Following this, a large amount of research attention and media in the last three years has focused on the male foreign terrorist fighter phenomena. These fighters are prolific on social media, sharing details of their day-to-day experiences with supporters as well as the public at large. Less, however, is known about the women who travel to join ISIS and support its state-building efforts. Despite media flocking to divulge details about each new case of a Western female departing for Syria, many still appear bewildered that women could be drawn to this violent terrorist organization. Yet, while recruitment of men has stagnated in many countries over the course of 2015, the number of women joining has steadily increased since the second half of 2014. On 29 June 2014 when ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared that the terrorist organization's territory in Syria and Iraq was the official Caliphate of the Muslim people, the announcement also came with a broad and international call to arms as well as a call to join the state.¹⁰ This call for statehood included a direct request for architects, engineers, doctors and women to join, all seen as fundamental elements for state building.¹¹

As of writing the original report, the last public figures released in January 2015 (out of date by now) discussing the number of Western foreign terror-

ist fighters (FTF) and migrants to ISIS was estimated as upwards of 4,000, with over 550 women within this figure.¹² In a more recent report estimates increased the number of Western FTF to 5,000, however, numbers do not separate out numbers by gender, often not including women in calculations of FTF.¹³ It is rare that governments provide detailed breakdowns of their FTF numbers. Often more have gone than a government has been made aware of or prepared to disclose to the public. Of what has been made public, up to 25% of current Western Europeans joining ISIS are women.¹⁴ This unprecedented number of Western male foreign terrorist fighters is paralleled by an equally unprecedented number of Western women travelling to Syria and Iraq to support ISIS.

Previously, public perceptions of jihadists and members of terrorist organizations have always been veiled in an air of mystery and fear. Messaging within Al-Qaeda and other groups has traditionally been highly centralized and secretive. The life of a jihadist was perceived as rugged, violent and detached from civil society. We are now witnessing a fundamental shift. If we can consider the Vietnam War as the first televised war, and the Gulf War the first 24-hour news war, then we can consider the current crisis in Syria and Iraq the first “social media war.”¹⁵ While this digital frontline has caused a new level of fear of online propaganda and terrorist networking to security forces and the public at large, it has also provided researchers and analysts with an incredible lens into the lives of foreign terrorist fighters, their organizational support networks and their female counterparts. Furthermore it has created an invaluable insight into local experiences of terrorism and conflict and created platforms to see what is happening in Iraq and Syria in an unprecedented way.

The research and data used for this analysis comes largely from ISD's report, *Becoming Mulan?: Female Western Migrants to ISIS* (2015)¹⁶ as well as *Till Martyrdom do us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*,¹⁷ in combination with updated research data and interviews with former Islamist extremists now working as mentors to women convicted of extremist and/or terrorist related offences.¹⁸ To inform ISD's database, social media material on a range of female profiles is tracked and archived ranging across online platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Ask.fm, Kik and blog accounts. These profiles are all of female migrants disseminating messages, giving a unique lens into the daily lives of foreign women living in the so-called Islamic State. Crucially, this data allows for a perspective on why these women make the decision to leave the West and the role these women play to further ISIS goals.

In order to develop and maintain this sample of women, researchers used a snowball technique, where females were identified among the networks of other known ISIS members. The women have been designated as ISIS migrants if they self-identify as such and reside in ISIS-controlled territory. This database has also grown using evidence from photographs, online interactions with other ISIS accounts and media reports, to help determine the probability that the person is geographically in Syria or Iraq and to confirm their gender. Women within this database are identified as coming from fifteen different countries, operating online primarily in English to disseminate propaganda.¹⁹

MOTIVATIONS

Recognizing that there are pathways, influences and processes that socialize an individual into terrorist networks is fundamental to developing adequate and meaningful mechanisms for both front-end prevention of radicalization as well as processes for de-radicalization once a person has subscribed to a violent extremist ideology. It is for this reason that this section analyzes the major push factors and pull factors indoctrinating these women into ISIS' ideology. Push factors are circumstances or experiences that prime individuals to be “at risk” of radicalization, while pull factors are propaganda, relations or experiences that actively lead individuals to join a particular ideology, movement or group. These push and pull factors are discussed in terms of how these female migrants *self-identified* reasons for their journey.²⁰ Data also comes from interviews with mentors within UK de-radicalization programs who work with females that have been brought in by authorities charged with violent extremist and/or terrorist-related offences, in addition to those flagged by local authorities for violent extremist beliefs.

There are a handful of cases where western foreign terrorist fighters have brought entire families with them to ISIS-controlled territory, including young children and wives.²¹ While some women have travelled with male companions, husbands, or families, the majority of our research focuses on women that have travelled alone or within small groups of friends.

The major **push factors** we have tracked that prime Western females to migrate to ISIS-controlled territory are often similar, if not the same, as their male counterparts. These include:

- The feeling of social or cultural isolation and/or alienation, including confusion over one's identity and uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture

- A feeling that the international Muslim community is being violently persecuted²²
- An anger, sadness and/or frustration over a perceived lack of international action in response to this persecution

Especially for second or third generation Muslims living within Western society, there is an inherent questioning of identity, particularly during one's teens and early twenties. Unfortunately, it remains the case that most individuals identifying with an ethnic minority group within Western societies will have experienced some form of verbal, if not physical, abuse on the basis of their ethnic identity.²³ This is often the case for Muslim females living in Western societies, and particularly the case for females who choose to wear the *hijab* or *niqab*, who experience a larger portion of discriminatory comments in public due to the more visible marker of their Muslim identity.²⁴ While the experience of persecution alone does not turn someone into a jihadist or supporter of violent extremism, it can serve to fuel feelings of isolation within a larger community. This is, in essence, a form of societal priming, leaving an individual more vulnerable to extremist narratives, which cultivate a sense of belonging. This is discussed further under pull factors looking at the propaganda around "sisterhood."

Like the male foreign fighters leaving for Syria, the female migrants to ISIS territory talk at length about the oppression of Muslims throughout the world. They point to a range of international conflicts that are perceived as deliberate attempts to degrade or destroy the *Ummah*; from Bosnia to Syria, from Myanmar to Mali.²⁵ Violent imagery serves to reinforce these perceptions, which are then shared and re-shared on social media, often showing violence towards women and children with captions identifying the enemy; whether it is the Assad government, Israel, international coalition forces or "The West" more generally. A large body of disturbing images show children who have been injured or killed in violent conflict, creating strong emotionally charged narratives. Consequently, a variety of complex international conflicts across the world are presented as part of a larger theorized war against Islam by "non-believers."²⁶

Replicating a pattern often critical to developing inter-community hatred and inciting violence, extremist propaganda narrating that a global community of Muslims are under attack becomes reductionist in nature and posits the existence of two fundamentally opposed groups — the good believers versus the evil disbelievers (*kuffar*). The dehumanization of the other is an integral first step achieved through the messaging campaigns described above. For those undergoing the process of radicalization there is a building of anger and frustration that international entities are not defending the Muslim community. Within the Syr-

ian case it is clear that the initial and largely accepted label of "enemy" has been the Assad government. The lack of international intervention against the Assad government is highlighted by extremist propaganda again and again. Women undergoing a process of radicalization often empathize with Muslim victims of violence, and this combined with the perceived complicity of Western powers in perpetuating these conflicts, are influential factors in their decision to leave the West and seek an alternative society. The binary way in which the world is presented further reinforces this decision. One female migrant explains: "How can you live amongst people who desire to get rid of Islam... Wallahi [I swear to God] these Kuffar and Munafiqeen [hypocrites] will do anything to cause the Muslimeen [Muslims] harm."²⁷

The major **pull factors** we have identified that are driving Western females to migrate to ISIS-controlled territory have some overlap with their male counterparts. However, the narratives around these pull factors tend to differ greatly due to the drastic differences in roles men and women play once inside ISIS-controlled territory. These pull-factors embrace positive incentives for membership and include:

- Utopian ideals of building the Caliphate state
- Individual duty and identity building
- Romanticization of the experience; both in travel and in forming a union with a jihadist husband

Female migrants are not only rejecting the culture and foreign policy of the West they leave; they are also embracing a new vision for a utopian society. They hope to contribute to ISIS society, governed by a strict interpretation of Shariah law. The declaration and maintenance of a territory that ISIS has declared a caliphate is crucial in attracting these women, who are called for openly within ISIS propaganda and are told they have an instrumental role to play in this new society.²⁸ Women within ISIS territory perpetuate this message through their social media accounts, defending the decision they have made and calling for other "sisters" to join. For these women, the region controlled by ISIS is seen as a "safe-haven" for those who wish to follow Islam in its entirety. The female migrants see hope in the mission of ISIS, that this region will develop into the Islamic utopia they have been promised. They celebrate every territorial victory of ISIS and will for its expansion across the Middle East and beyond.²⁹ On a more practical level, the women are aware that they are the key to ensuring there is a next generation to this caliphate, contributing to ISIS's state-building, as mothers, nurses or teachers. This goes some way to explaining why women are so prominent in this unprecedented trend when compared to previous foreign

fighter migration patterns during conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Somalia and Iraq.

Beyond the desire to be a part of this idealized state-building effort, female migrants to ISIS territory have also become convinced that it is their mandatory religious duty (*fard al-ayn*) to make this voyage and join the so-called caliphate. ISIS propaganda and fellow female migrants reiterate this point at length, calling upon others to join and declaring the migration a women's duty as much as a man's.³⁰ One female migrant expresses a sentiment, which has been repeated in various ways by male counterparts: "[W]e love death as you love life."³¹ Within the radicalization process, these women, as much as the men have a strong belief in the afterlife and fulfilling this perceived religious duty is key in securing their place in heaven. In addition to the heavenly rewards promised, women also discuss rewards within life.³² One of these rewards is the sense of belonging and sisterhood. Women within our dataset consistently speak of the camaraderie and sisterhood within ISIS-controlled territory. This is often contrasted with the fake and surface-level relationships they now perceive they held in the West. This search for meaning, sisterhood, and identity is a primary driving factor for many women to travel.

The final pull-factor ISIS propaganda provides for both male and female recruits from the West plays heavily on romantic notions. While the sense of adventure in leaving home to travel to new places plays a factor for young women, the promise of meaningful romance as a prize for making the journey is also exposed. It is worth remembering that a majority of Western women joining ISIS are often very young, ranging primarily from late teens to early twenties, with the youngest known female migrant being only 13 years old.³³ Analyzing the types of imagery shared on social media around the union between female migrant and jihadist, the imagery of a lion and a lioness is often used. This is symbolic of finding a brave and strong husband, but also plays upon the strong role the female has to support her husband and fulfil her duty. There is an inherent prestige in marrying a strong jihadist husband and his possible martyrdom is encouraged to be glorified. The purpose of marriage, and as such transition from childhood into adulthood, is considered a core factor in migration for the younger migrants. Single women that intend to travel to Syria without the purpose of marriage are openly dissuaded and they are encouraged to idealize the husbands they will have and the role they will take on.³⁴ These women believe that this migration will help secure their place in heaven, be a part of building a utopian society for this generation and the next, while giving them a sense of belonging and sisterhood on Earth.

It is largely these three interlocking factors that provide crucial motivation for migration to join ISIS. Adding to these pull factors, while the majority of onlookers find it puzzling that women could be attracted to a violent extremist organization which places such extreme day-to-day restrictions on women, these women view their migration and religious duty as empowering. Women engaging with the ISIS subculture have their own set of symbols and slogans for establishing the benefits (pull-factors) of joining ISIS. One popular meme that trended among ISIS fan girls and migrants plays on the *Cover Girl* slogan.³⁵ An image depicts a fully veiled woman with the girly cursive writing above it stating: "Covered Girl... Because I'm worth it." Memes and propaganda like this connote something far broader than play on words. This sort of campaigning not only takes a stance against the perceived Western sexualisation of women through make-up ads and fashion marketing, but also conveys the idea that by choosing the veil you are refusing to be sexualized and objectified.

These push and pull factors show that the reasons for females travelling to join ISIS are both complex and often multi-causal. When the declaration of the so-called caliphate was given in the summer of 2014, ISIS took on a unique strategy by recognizing the importance of bringing women more actively into propaganda and recruitment efforts. Declaring a caliphate meant that new energies had to be given to state-building efforts, a key aspect ensuring that the territory and its ISIS-devoted constituency continues beyond this generation. ISIS has increased its female-focused efforts, writing manifestos for women, directing sections of its magazine publications to the "sisters of the Islamic State" and allowing women to have a voice – albeit via social media – once they reach ISIS territory.³⁶ Increasing within this propaganda is a strong message that (Sunni) women are valued, not as sexual objects, but as mothers to the next generation and guardians of the ISIS ideology to pass on to their offspring. However, the reality of life within ISIS controlled territory is significantly different from the utopian propaganda being offered to recruits.

FEMALE ROLES WITHIN ISIS

The extensive decentralized use of social media by ISIS supporters, foreign terrorist fighters, and female migrants to ISIS territory has given ISIS an invaluable propaganda apparatus. It has also given researchers and others unprecedented insight into the daily lives of those living within ISIS territory. Despite being subjected to a greatly gendered and strict enforcement of Shariah law, the Western women of ISIS play crucial roles for the terrorist organization they represent. Their roles can be roughly divided into three categories: 1) necessary agents of state-building as wives, mothers, teachers, and

sometimes other necessary roles like nurses; 2) active recruiters; and 3) a new dimension in the threat assessments of ISIS promoting images which allude to the violent nature of these women and potential militant role they couple play in the future.

Those women who successfully reach Syria or Iraq must settle into their daily life within the self-proclaimed “caliphate” quickly. The unmarried women stay in a women’s hostel, called a *maqarr*, until they are married.³⁷ Life within ISIS-controlled territory for women is predominantly domestic. Their domestic role, however, is constantly glorified; it is not seen as limiting but rather as a spiritually righteous role.³⁸ Most women fill their day with domestic tasks: cooking, cleaning and taking care of children if there are offspring. Cooking in particular is highlighted within online posts. Images of prepared meals are sometimes juxtaposed with weaponry placed next to a curated dish, showing either grenades or guns, reminding viewers of the war zone these women live within. Despite the larger pull factors leading women to make the journey to Syria, roles for women within the terrorist occupied territory remain almost entirely domestic. As declared in the *Manifesto on Muslim Women*, written by the female al-Khansaa Brigade, a female morality policing unit in ISIS territory:

[W]oman was created to populate the Earth just as man was. But, as God wanted it to be, she was made from Adam and for Adam. Beyond this, her creator ruled that there was no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband... The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood.³⁹

Beyond the primary domestic role, the women that do decide to engage online are also playing an active role in recruitment and propaganda dissemination. Far from representing a soft and moderate side to ISIS, the women within our database often celebrate the violence imposed by ISIS. Through the voice they are allowed online, these women send out threats to their ‘enemies’ and call for supporters to carry out violent attacks abroad if they are unable to migrate themselves. Throughout the series of beheading videos released in 2014 and 2015, many of these Western women glorified these acts and re-shared violent and explicit video links. These women do not just celebrate the violence; they justify it according to their reading of Islamic Law: “I have muslim asking me, whether dawla [ISIS] do the barbaric methods of cutting hands & stoning adulterers...It’s in the Shariah [sic] why r u disgusted.”⁴⁰ While the women show a strong willingness and desire to fight, they remain limited by the Shariah law they support. Their primary activity is to spread ISIS propaganda and guide new female recruits to Syria, providing information, support and

encouragement to make the journey. The great risk these women pose is their potential to inspire further men and women to join ISIS. Blogs and forums give practical advice on how to overcome the objections and roadblocks posed by family, what clothes to bring, where to attempt a crossing and what to expect on arrival.

The final role these women occupy is the somewhat ambiguous threat they represent within the jihadist structure of asymmetrical warfare. We know that historically jihadist wives and widows have mobilized and taken arms when their male counterparts have diminished in force. The Chechen female suicide bombers, now known colloquially as the “black widows,” developed over time. As evidenced above, the women within our dataset have become desensitized to extreme violence. Like the Chechens, some female migrants have shown to be significantly affected by the loss of their husbands, which has, in some cases, strengthened their commitment to ISIS and hatred of the “enemy.” It is also highly difficult to assess what threat possible returning females pose to Western societies. Despite the fact that it is much more difficult for a female to return, compared to males, authorities are uncertain of how dangerous returning females might be, unimpeded by the Shariah law which prohibited their violent engagement whilst in ISIS-controlled territory.

THE DIFFICULT REALITIES

There is, of course, an obvious disjuncture between the realities of life within a totalitarian, terrorist-run land compared with the idealistic propaganda distributed by ISIS. Even when things seem calm within a city, and a woman is given permission to leave the house (with a male escort) life is conducted under strict interpretation of Shariah law. For example, the *Mujahideen* (fighters) carry guns at all times and many punishments to those disobeying the jihadist rule of law involve public torture or execution.⁴¹ The restricted mobility of women, who need both permission and a companion in order to leave the house, can pose particularly difficult without a husband as well. As written by one Western female who now lives under ISIS rule:

I have stressed this before on twitter but I really need sisters to stop dreaming about coming to Shaam and not getting married. Wallahi [I swear to God] life here is very difficult for the Muhajirat [female migrants] and we depend heavily on the brothers for a lot of support. It is not like the west where you can casually walk out and go to Asda/Walmart and drive back home... even till now we have to stay safe outside and must always be accompanied by a Mahram [chaperone].⁴²

Another reality of life within ISIS controlled territory is that, despite female migrants talking at length about sisterhood and the sense of belonging, they are clearly foreigners in this region. This is revealed in their anecdotes of their difficulty crossing the road, or their struggles to learn the Arabic language. This cultural and linguistic barrier can be felt from the basic needs of day-to-day life as well as in more extreme cases where women have not been able to communicate their medical needs, resulting at times in devastations.⁴³ There are, of course, also native Syrians and Iraqis within ISIS-controlled territory who do not welcome the influx of foreigners to the region. Foreigner communities often stay amongst themselves, un-integrated into larger society.

Despite the propaganda, reality under ISIS rule is mentally and physically difficult. The territory remains a war zone. Female migrants, even within their social media feeds, discuss hearing planes overhead, preparing themselves for the worst. Electricity can be scarce, along with access to hot water. Casualties and deaths of friends and loved ones are inevitable. Martyrdom of husbands leaves many women abruptly alone, expected to re-marry within an allotted time (known as *iddah*). Because martyrdom is meant to be celebrated, the wife is culturally unable to grieve, being told instead to celebrate the afterlife her husband is surely now enjoying. Despite this, many young widows cannot help but show their sadness and isolation within a foreign land. The hashtag #Nobodycaresaboutthewidow is one such example, giving a brief view into the hardship and trauma the territory envelops these women in.

Additionally, even if a woman comes to question and/or regret the decision she has made in travelling so far from home to join ISIS, it is considerably more difficult for a woman to leave, compared to her FTF male counterpart. While a number of men have returned to their homelands, many disillusioned and often times traumatized by what they have witnessed abroad, we have only seen around ten plus cases of Western female returnees, as of January 2016.⁴⁴ Returning is made difficult by three primary factors. Firstly, it is common practice that ISIS confiscates, if not destroys, the passports of foreigners upon arrival so that they renounce their previous nationality and take on the "Islamic State" identity. Secondly, as mentioned, the nature of being a female within ISIS territory means that movement is highly restricted. A single female travelling alone towards a border crossing would be highly suspect and put the female at great physical risk, particularly without a recognized international passport or form of identification.

Lastly, many foreigners are still uncertain of what the legislation will be towards them in the homeland to which they intend to return. Legislation and precedence around the treatment of returnees is evolving constantly and potential returnees

are given the psychological decision of returning home, possibly facing a lifetime in prison, versus staying in a terrorist-run territory and justifying one's original decision. For this reason, we often see further radicalization of recruits upon arrival in ISIS-controlled territory, increasing extremist rhetoric and justifying the decision to join ISIS, not only to the public but for oneself. It is for these reasons that prevention is the key in safeguarding individuals from this violent extremist trend. Especially for females, once a woman has crossed into ISIS territory there is very little outsiders can do without putting the female at great physical risk. Countering the processes of radicalization at critical juncture points is crucial, and the female voice within this spectrum of credible narratives is key.

COUNTERING PROCESSES OF RADICALIZATION

New ISIS recruits in a Western context are breaking our previous stereotypes about who is "at risk" of radicalization. Recruits from the West are increasingly younger, come from socio-economically comfortable backgrounds, and often have adequate, if not notably above-average, educational results and qualifications. As seen in various examples throughout this chapter, we are also facing a new wave of female recruits. Due to the diversity in extremist propaganda tactics, we need an equally diverse range and scope of counter-narratives and counter-extremism tactics in order to challenge the roots of the extremist ideologies. The growing trend of violent extremist propaganda targeting women, and the subsequent increasing number of Western women joining ISIS, highlights the need for better mechanisms and infrastructure for female-specific prevention and de-radicalization programs.

The female voice within this space is crucial. Looking at discourse analysis from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's female database there is a common narrative among many young female migrants expressing the difficulties they faced in making the decision to leave their families. Specifically, leaving the mother, abandoning one's duty as a daughter and feeling that you cause emotional distress to your mother, is discussed within many blogs and social media accounts. One female migrant is documented saying openly: "I yearn to hug my mother again, kiss her cheek or to even hear her voice, May Allah accept my sacrifice & allow me 2 intercede for her."⁴⁵ Another female migrant, after the death of her jihadist husband, refers to the emotional need she has for her mother; "Ya ummi [O Mother] there's nothing more in this world I long for than the day I embrace you if not in this dunya [world] then in jannah [heaven] insha'Allah [God willing]."⁴⁶ The voice of the mother as a counter narrative to the process of radicalization is an important one if adequately informed.

Policy makers should work to provide better information channels and support to families to better help them understand the vulnerabilities around radicalization and help them protect and prevent their children from the lure of violent extremist organization. Lessons can be learned from other “child safety” awareness information networks, such as anti-gang intervention networks.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as has been shown, mothers in particular have a great deal of emotional influence on their children. For this reason, counter messages coming from mothers and family members may have large impact. Some governments have taken first steps to address women and include the voice of mothers in this space, though content and resources remain largely sparse.⁴⁸

Beyond the need for support and information channels for families, as well as the powerful voice of the mother as a counter-narrative, there is also now a need to challenge the newer frontline online. The Internet is a key component in the radicalization process of aspiring female migrants and male FTF and needs to be better utilized in pushing back against this phenomenon. The material for this type of counter-narrative is not necessarily difficult to create or utilize, but demands a certain level of innovation, creativity, and personalization, using credible messengers and emotional responses. Due to the variety of pathways leading individuals into violent extremist networks, there are equally a range of credible messengers that can have a positive impact on creating counter-narratives, either directly or indirectly driving certain cohorts away from violent extremism. Mothers are by no means the only credible voice in this space. As with male counter-parts, there is a large space for female role models to take a stand, whether as public figures or celebrities, but also for the youth to be involved in campaigns that undermine extremist values as peer-to-peer narratives can be developed.

Some powerful counter-narratives can also be drawn directly from the women who have migrated. Muhajirah Amatullah’s harrowing tale of a fellow female migrant “covered in blood” and refused medical treatment during a miscarriage due to her immigrant status in Syria, represents just one example of a story from life under ISIS that could easily be turned into a campaign.⁴⁹ Highlighting the brutality of living in a war zone under ISIS, can have a large effect on younger individuals contemplating traveling to Iraq or Syria. Counter-narratives are needed taking a variety of forms, both in planting the seed of doubt in those going down a pathway of radicalisation, but also, developing strategic counter-narratives for undermining the misinformation that groups like ISIS distribute in their propaganda.

There is currently a lack of innovative and directed counter-narrative material in circulation. Although we see programs in this arena developing, very few campaigns or initiatives address female radicalization issues directly, nor have we seen the development of counter-narratives that specifically target young females. The programs and initiatives that do exist⁵⁰ have shown dedication and invention, however, these programs often struggle with funding, sustainability and the ability to scale up their efforts. ISIS has engaged with women directly in a myriad of ways, providing encouragement, consistent communication streams and narratives of empowerment. In the current climate, we are lacking the same scope for countering this engagement both in terms of prevention and dialogue with those showing initial attraction to extremist propaganda.

One of the main problems within this arena is that women continue to be viewed as victims of terrorism and extremism, limited to stereotypes, as opposed to active participants or perpetrators. Success within the CVE sector will be greatly facilitated by women being empowered as actors in roles they define and by terms they set. This is not simply an issue of gender equality, although that has positive implications as a stand-alone desirable outcome. As shown within this chapter, the roles women are playing within violent extremist groups like ISIS can vary. Although male and female push and pull factors are similar, they manifest in gender-specific forms, catering to the different gender roles members will take within ISIS, but also catering to gender-specific concerns. Women are often the most successful recruiters of other women to join these organizations, creating a cognitive opening and relationship with recruits. Equally, CVE efforts should be taking the gender perspective into consideration, bringing in female voices to counter extremist ideologies.

Women also have a role to play on the harder end of the spectrum as security officials and/or civil society actors. Women taking on these roles in a public space naturally encourage other women towards engagement with the topic.⁵¹ Female mentors will also be more effective working with women that are undergoing de-radicalization programs, again due to the cognitive opening they can put forward.

The dynamic package being offered by ISIS to both male and female recruits has not only gone beyond traditional jihadist recruitment tactics, but has also become more difficult to counter with traditional hard-power and security-based approaches. Since women within violent extremist networks pose a unique and evolving threat to the West, effective responses need to be nuanced and tailored. It is important to understand the variety of factors that lead in-

dividuals down the pathways of radicalization and it is equally important to make full use of the innovation and technology at our disposal to counter these trends. The inclusion and expansion of women within CVE efforts on strategic, grassroots and operational levels is invaluable in ensuring that prevention and de-radicalization efforts are adequately nuanced and targeted to effectively counter the threat of violent extremism and processes of radicalization.

Women have important roles to play both upstream, with regards to education programs reaching the youth as a whole, as well as downstream, intervening directly with females that are assessed to be engaging with violent extremist ideologies. Successful CVE education utilizing both male and female credible voices has already been developed in places like Canada, through using the personal stories and voices of former extremists as well as survivors of extremism, in a program called Extreme Dialogue (see: extremedialogue.org). In this particular series of classroom videos, the personal story of a male former neo-Nazi is shared alongside the personal story of a mother whose son died fighting for ISIS. Projects like this bring personal stories to the classroom, training teachers on how to engage with students on the topic of violent extremism they also teach critical consumption skills and develop natural resiliencies towards extremist messaging.

Meanwhile, other counter-narratives should not simply counter terrorist propaganda directly, but offer insight and alternatives to the extremist messages. Engagement with young individuals that are already showing an appeal towards extremist groups is also needed. Pilot programs such as One2One in the UK has also used former extremists to engage directly with young people online, providing an outlet for alternative discussions from individuals that have an in-depth knowledge of the ideological and emotional draws of extremist groups.⁵² The pilot of this program included certain female engagement cases and is hoping to grow its female engagement as the project develops.

Despite some of the more ambitious and innovative programs in development, directed counter-narrative material which looks to engage women or even take a gender-neutral approach is severely lacking. Ambitious initiatives would benefit from assistance in scaling up outreach and targeted messaging. This is particularly the case when looking at the important gender dynamics at play within recruitment and processes of radicalization leading women to join groups like ISIS. In order to effectively counter extremism it will be crucial that practitioners not only recognise the innovation and tools available through the Internet, but also diversify CVE efforts to include an adequate gender perspective.

ENDNOTES

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2. Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists*, (London, England: Hurst Publishing, 2011).
3. The United Kingdom was one of the first Western governments to put forward a comprehensive PVE and CVE program called 'Prevent'. This was formulated in 2003 and launched to the public in 2006, recognising that if violent radicalization and recruitment into violent extremist networks can be prevented then you decrease the likelihood and allure of joining terrorist organizations. See: *Prevent Strategy*, 2011, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.
4. Dominic Casciani, "Can ministers define extremism?" *BBC News*, 13 May 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32723881>.
5. Organizations like the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Global Center for Cooperative Security and Women Without Borders have all served to increase awareness to governments and other sectors about gender dynamics within the CVE space. ISD reports, such as "Becoming Mulan and Till Martyrdom do us Part" are examples of research that aimed to reach policy makers and increase awareness around female radicalization. For example, Erin Saltman, and Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," (London, England: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf; C. Hoyle, A. Bradford and R. Frenett, "Becoming Mulan?: Female Western Migrants to ISIS," (London, England: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015).
6. Cragin and Daly, *Women as Terrorists*.
7. As ISD's most recent program, Women and Extremism (WAE) has been launched in order to pioneer new research and initiatives for addressing women within violent extremist organizations and developing new ways for women to counter

- extremism.
8. ISD runs this female database in cooperation with the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) who run the broader international database tracking Western Foreign Fighters.
 9. This is the current situation in ISIS territory. There is historical precedence (Chechen black widows for example) to believe that if male jihadist forces are depleted or restricted, females could be used militaristically and strategically to further ISIS goals. However, this is not something we have witnessed thus far.
 10. See "This is the Promise of Allah' [ISIS document declaring the caliphate]," (29 June 2014), http://myreader.toile-libre.org/uploads/My_53b039f00cb03.pdf.
 11. Erin Saltman and Charlie Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism," (London, England: Quilliam Foundation, 2014).
 12. Richard Barrett, "Foreign Fighters in Syria" (New York: The Soufan Group, 2014), 16. For a discussion on numbers, see also Peter Neumann, "Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s," (London, England: ICSR, 2015). See also: "CIA says IS numbers underestimated," *Al Jazeera*, 14 September 2014, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/cia-triples-number-islamic-state-fighters-201491232912623733.html
 13. "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," (London, Soufan Group, 2015), http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf.
 14. Recent German reports have referred to up to 25% of foreign fighters and migrants to ISIS being women. Similar numbers have been discussed in France and speculation remains in the UK and Belgium.
 15. Sam Jones, "Jihad by Social Media," *Financial Times Magazine*, 28 March 2014; Patrick Howell O'Neill, "Why the Syrian uprising is the first social media war," *The Daily Dot*, 18 September 2013.
 16. Hoyle, Bradford, and Frenett, *Becoming Mulan?*.
 17. Saltman and Smith, "'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part.'
 18. While there have only been a small number of Western women returning from ISIS-controlled territories (around ten as of writing this chapter), female extremist convictions or individuals flagged through government programs as having violent extremist ideologies are numerous. The mentors we have interviewed work within the UK Channel program as mentors to females flagged or convicted of extremist or terrorist related offences.
 19. As mentioned in the introduction, women within the ISD database come from: Britain, Holland, Sweden, France, Germany, Finland, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Austria, Norway, Bosnia and the United States.
 20. While for some of the women in our dataset socio-economic status and experiences living in the West are not available to us, others are known individuals where lifestyle and life before ISIS can be properly assessed.
 21. Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Clear Banner: Update On The Finnish Foreign Fighter Contingent," October 18, 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/10/18/the-clear-banner-update-on-the-finnish-foreign-fighter-contingent/>. See also, Daniel H. Heinke and Jan Raudszus, "German Foreign Fighters In Syria And Iraq," *Combating Terrorism Centre*, January 20, 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq>.
 22. For more on this and the concept of the 'ummah' doctrine refer to works by Thomas Hegghammer.
 23. Imran Awan, *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia*, (Birmingham City University, 2013), <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/appg.pdf>.
 24. See <http://tellmamauk.org/resources/>.
 25. For more on this concept see: Hoyle, Bradford, and Frenett, *Becoming Mulan*.
 26. For more on this concept, see: Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of the Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35 (2011): 53–94; Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* 107 (2013).
 27. Archived Example: Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 17 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab__.
 28. Saltman and Smith, "'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part.'
 29. A myriad of ISIS propaganda shows a map of the world with an ISIS flag growing and spreading over the entirety of global territories.
 30. Archived Example: Zawjatu Abou Mujahid @BintMBMA, 24 September, <https://twitter.com/BintMBMA>.
 31. Archived Example: Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahid1, 2 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahid1>.

- twitter.com/MuslimahMujahid. This phrase has subsequently been used within the book title of Raffaello Pantucci, *We Love Death as You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists*, (London, Hurst: 2015).
32. Many blogs and forums operated by female migrants offer encouragement and practical advice to other women considering making the decision to leave home and join ISIS territory.
 33. See "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters," *The Guardian*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>.
 34. Archived Examples: Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 23 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar>. See also from same source: Making hijrah youve left the comfort and protection of your family & being provided for by them..naturally a husband can take over this duty (23 Nov) Sisters ask why its difficult to be single here, in an Islamic society the husband is the provider,whereas before marriage its the family... (23 Nov) Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 21 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar>.
 35. Saltman and Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part."
 36. In more recent publications of ISIS's high-resolution online magazine, *Dabiq*, there have been sections written and dedicated directly to the female ISIS constituents.
 37. "At this Makar you are provided with everything alhumdulilaah, from food, water, heat, visits to doctors and sometimes even to the market accompanied by the ameer etc.," Umm Layth, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>.
 38. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 19 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar>.
 39. *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade*, translated by Charlie Winter, Quilliam Foundation, February 2015.
 40. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 26 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar>.
 41. Media coverage of such events has been given. This is also displayed and discussed openly on social media.
 42. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>. For further analysis see Hoyle, Bradford, and Frenett, "Becoming Mulan."
 43. One female migrant gives a story about how she accompanied her friend to hospital while she was miscarrying, only to be ignored by doctors and left in pain on the hospital hallway floor. Further reference and details see Hoyle, Bradford, and Frenett, "Becoming Mulan."
 44. As of writing this chapter there have been only five known cases of female returnees; two coming from the UK, one from Denmark and one from Belgium as well as another in France.
 45. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 24 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar>.
 46. Al Britaniyya @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_.
 47. W. Schwartz, "An Overview of Strategies to Reduce School Violence," *ERIC/CUE 115* (1996).
 48. See as an example the UK efforts through the Prevent programme and their 'Prevent Tragedies' initiative: <http://www.preventtragedies.co.uk/syrianmothers/>.
 49. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater>.
 50. There are a number of highly innovative and dedicated programmes that have immersed in recent years such as the Active Change Foundation, Jan Trust, Extreme Dialogue and Sisters Against Violent Extremism – to name a few.
 51. J. Cook, "Women's Diverse Roles in Perpetrating and Countering Violent Extremism," *Kolenda Strategic Leadership* (2015), <http://kolendastrategicleadership.com/womens-diverse-roles-in-cve/>.
 52. For more information about One2One program see *ISD Brochure*, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/ISD_Brochure.pdf, 8.

CHAPTER 8

The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism: Motivations, Experiences, and Methods of Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

The question of whether or how to integrate a gender dimension in terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) analysis and programming is a recurring one in both Western and non-Western contexts. This idea requires examining the relationship between women and violence, a subject that entails an entirely separate study, which far exceeds the scope of this work. Instead this chapter simply seeks to explore some thought-provoking ideas regarding women and their different experiences with radicalization, either through the stories of their own radicalization or through that of their loved ones. Furthermore, this chapter will explore the assumption that women have a distinct role to play in CVE efforts, one that differs significantly from the role of men. Though it is true that women can offer unique perspectives, this chapter will argue that distinguishing between the roles of men and women is unnecessary and counterproductive to holistic efforts to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violence.

It is important to note that in the French context, the concept of *laïcité* can be understood as a kind of secularism is part of the national identity and contributes to the goal of an assimilationist and inclusive model of society. In that spirit, this chapter will explore the role of gender in all forms of extremism, beyond that driven by religious ideology, with the aim of ascertaining trends across experiences. Such an exploration first entails delving into the history of female involvement in terrorism, the topic of this next section.

FEMALE TERRORISTS IN 1970S GERMANY

The history of terrorism in the 20th century offers many instances of female involvement. Terrorist organizations such as the Red Brigades (Italy), the Red Army Faction (RAF, Germany), or Action Directe (France) included women

among their ranks. Though the stories span the century, the 1970s in particular spawned interesting case studies that help examine the central question of this chapter.

Before examining the various instances of recruitment and radicalization to violence in that decade, it is necessary to establish context of the environment at that time. In the heart of the feminist movement across Europe in the 1970s, there were voices that called for the use of violence against people and institutions to respond to political and ideological demands. Though not widespread, this ideology helped inspire far-left feminist organizations like the German group *Rote Zora*, active from 1977 to 1995, which committed at least 45 attacks against infrastructure, property, and businesses. As is the case with general militant literature, militant feminists' writings encouraged the view that female terrorists were not in fact terrorists but rather soldiers of freedom or rebellious feminists.¹

It is also worth noting that during the feminist movement in the 1970s, radicalization happened in the physical space (what we would now call the "offline" space), with tangible and immediate consequences. For example, radicalizing literature and sermons were disseminated through magazines, posters, graffiti, artwork and at events like underground meetings, university assemblies, street protests, and spontaneous rallies in public spaces. This very public radicalization led to physical altercations like vandalism and clashes with security forces and opposing political extremists. Individuals thus undertook the practice of revolutionary violence in real time, the rapid timeline of which diluted the perception of a long process of radicalization and placed participating women in immediate situations of potential physical harm.

Furthermore, the terrorist groups of the 1970s cannot be divorced from the environments in which they gained traction. The far-left group RAF drew its supporters from a generation that had emerged from the Second World War, in an occupied Germany during reconstruction but before its division by the Iron Curtain. This generation began to structure itself around a counter-culture of subversion after the "economic miracle" and the increased access to education and higher education. The same phenomenon happened in other countries like France and Italy but with one difference: subversive ideas permeated these countries and brought about a tolerance, perhaps even support, for acts of political violence and terrorism. In Germany, by contrast, the student protests quickly waned and appetite for revolutionary extremist ideas did not gain traction with the wider population. Therefore, despite a favorable cultural and international context, the radical Germans were isolated.

In order to understand the manner in which women internalized their rejection of social norms and in pursuit of answering the central question of this chapter, this next section will examine three cases of female recruits to terrorism in the German context to ascertain motivations. Two of these examples are from the 1970s movements listed above, and the third example from a more recent terrorist cell that reemerged in 2011.

Ilse Schwitter

The first case study of female radicalization is the case of Ilse Schwitter. Schwitter was a militant anarchist with the 2 June Movement, an anarchist-inspired terrorist organization which dissolved in 1980. She was born in 1937 in Wolfsburg, an industrial city built under the Nazis. Her childhood reveals certain factors that may have contributed to her later radicalization. Schwitter was raised primarily by her grandparents. Following primary school, she was denied access to high school, thus ending her formal education. She then got married at a young age and had four children in rapid succession, the oldest of whom died of a rare disease in 1968. Schwitter has acknowledged that the death of her daughter affected her deeply and helped catalyze her rejection of traditional social norms, which opened up a path to radicalization. Two years later, she left her husband and joined the 2 June Movement.² Later interviews revealed that Schwitter's path down recruitment and radicalization to violence began in earnest following the birth of her children and her experiences in educating them and understanding how pedagogy can influence change.

Ulrike Meinhof

Ulrike Meinhof was a journalist and founding member of RAF. Born in 1934, she lost her father at the age of six and her mother at the age of 20. She began her studies in the social sciences and mobilized against nuclear power under the influence of her adopted mother. Her early career as a journalist was built around the turmoil of the 1960s, the rise of the student protest, and the protests against the Vietnam War. Meinhof married the editor of the leftist magazine *Konkret* at a young age and bore twins. She was always politically engaged and expressed her convictions through the press. In 1970, influenced by radical militants which whom she had been engaging, Meinhof joined the underground movement and trained for weeks in a military training camp in Jordan alongside Palestinian militants. Her involvement and training helped build the structure for what became the first generation of the RAF. The RAF was created in 1970 and dissolved in 1998.³ They killed approximately thirty people.

Both born in the 1930s, both Schwipper and Meinhof became mothers while in their early twenties. They raised their children while creating an identity that led them to gradually reject socially accepted norms and then to justify political violence. Though Schwipper self-identified as a “proletarian” while Meinhof identified as an intellectual, they both recognized the role that trauma and personal tragedy played in their radicalization. Schwipper’s defining moment came after the death of her eldest, while Meinhof traced her catalyst to the 1968 assassination attempt against Rudi Dutschke, a leader of the student movement.⁴ Their experiences show that their *roles* in terrorism were not necessarily different than the roles of men; rather, their motivations and ultimate catalysts indicate how their unique experiences as women and mothers influenced their radicalization.

RECENT FEMALE TERRORISTS IN GERMANY

Building on the previous two cases, to further understand the motivations of female terrorists, and consequently, how best to address them through preventive engagement, a more recent example is provided. This particular example highlights the case of Beate Zschäper of the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (National Socialist Underground, or NSU, also known as the “Zwickau Cell”).

The Zwickau Cell (Germany)

On November 4, 2011, a botched robbery and two suicides in a burning apartment helped uncover the existence of a far-right terrorist group that had been active for ten years, the NSU. This particular faction, the “Zwickau Cell,” was made up of two men and one woman, Beate Zschäper. Their terror spree included the murders of immigrant small-business owners, law enforcement officials, and numerous bombings and robberies. Zschäper’s role in the terrorist group focused on management of daily life and the handling of logistical and tangible aspects of attacks.

Profiles of Zschäper revealed a chaotic and broken childhood that gave way to membership in punk and anarchist groups in adulthood. She adopted the values of far-right extremism with her fiancé and went underground in 1998. As was the case with the two previous examples, Zschäper’s case again highlights the role of early adolescent turbulence in causing vulnerabilities that eventually led to her participation in the Zwickau Cell. Here it is important to emphasize that adolescent turbulence as a push factor is not an experience unique to just males, but also females.

WOMEN IN COUNTERTERRORISM AND CVE EFFORTS: AMBIGUOUS ROLES

Having explored some experiences across the spectrum of far left and right violent extremism, the chapter will now turn to the issue of violent extremism driven by religious ideology. Recommendations on integrating a gender lens to current CVE efforts often note the important role women as mothers can play in preventing recruitment and radicalization to violence. However their role in CVE should not be overestimated - there are a number of recent examples in which involving women in their identities as mothers can, and have been, counter-productive to the effort of preventing terrorist acts. This section will explore the role of women in these efforts, noting three specific case studies where their intervention has either helped or hurt counterterrorism engagements.

Neutral and Negative Roles of Women in CT and CVE

In some cases women’s intervention in terrorism, even with the cooperation of relevant authorities, has been insignificant or counter-productive. The first case is an example of the intervention of a mother of a terrorist that was counter-productive to counter-terrorism efforts. On December 24, 1994, when four terrorists from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) hijacked the Air France plane (Flight AF 8969) scheduled to fly from Algiers to Paris, the Algerian authorities tried to buy time to prevent the plane from taking off. They put the group’s leader, Abdul Abdallah Yahia, in contact with his mother in the hopes that she could persuade him to surrender. The authorities’ attempt to appeal to Yahia through his mother only served to infuriate him and he executed a hostage in response, the second one of three who were killed. This is not to imply that his mother’s intervention caused him to execute the hostage; by all accounts, Yahia was enraged at the manner by which the Algerian authorities attempted to appeal to him. However, this incident provides one example of the limitations in assuming mothers will always have a positive influence over their children—and in this case the mother’s direct intervention was counter-productive.

The second case example highlights the intervention of the mother of Mohamed Merah in March 21, 2012. During negotiations between French authorities and Mohamed Merah, who was cornered in his apartment in Toulouse in the south-west of France, the police contacted his mother, Zoulikha Aziri, in the hopes of getting her to intervene. Merah was suspected of having killed seven people, three of which were children, simply because they were Jewish. Aziri refused to get involved, arguing that she would have no influence over her son. Later, during a family vigil on March 25, 2012, she then

proclaimed: “My son brought France to its knees. I am proud of what my son just accomplished!”⁵ Souad Merah, Mohamed’s sister, was also later recorded without her knowledge saying she was “proud” of her brother. On May 9, 2014, Souad Merah took a Turkish Airlines flight to join up with her partner in Syria. In this regard, Mohamed Merah’s female relatives were passively supportive (in the case of Zoulikha) and actively supportive (in the case of Souad Merah) of Mohamed’s role in terrorist activities.

The third example, the story of Zacarias Moussaoui and his mother, further explores the complicated nature of the mother-son dynamic. Moussaoui’s mother, Aïcha el-Wafi, fled from an abusive husband and moved to France while her children were still young. Her children were handed over to social services and found themselves bouncing between orphanages. Radicalized while attending Salafist mosques in London, Zacarias Moussaoui attended al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan in 1998 and 1999. After several attempts at learning to fly airplanes in Malaysia and the United States, he was deemed unreliable and unstable and was removed from the team preparing for the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York. He was eventually arrested on August 1, 2001 for possession of forged papers.⁶ His mother later wrote a book offering insights into his radicalization process and her efforts to reconnect with him.⁷ Despite her many attempts at reestablishing communication, she was not able to get him to renounce violent extremism. It should be noted though that Moussaoui’s strict adherence might have also been affected by issues of mental health; some experts have suggested that he suffered from schizophrenia. In this case, the mother was cooperative with authorities and was genuine in wanting her son to disconnect from Al Qaeda, but her attempts were neither successful, nor counter-productive.

Women’s Positive Role in Countering Violent Extremism

The following section highlights several case studies where women have played a positive role in CT and CVE efforts. The next illustrative example is from Mantes-la-Jolie, a city located 54 kilometers from Paris, France, which contains many disadvantaged neighborhoods populated by families with immigrant roots. A recent gathering of local families witnessed by the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AfVT.org) in the city revealed that many of the mothers were aware of Salafi preachers standing outside their apartment building, preaching to their children a violent ideology. The mothers felt that their children were vulnerable because of the few opportunities available to them - many of them had absent fathers, dropped out of school, were unemployed, faced economic hardship, and were socially marginalized - and

were concerned that they would be enticed by the ideology. Though the mothers knew exactly what the Salafists were doing and had learned their strategy of standing outside buildings at calculated hours of the day, they had difficulty identifying the proper official with whom to lodge a complaint. This example highlights the innate knowledge mothers can glean from watching their children and offers a cautionary tale of the perils of ignoring their voices.

However, the role of women in CVE should not be limited to their identities as mothers. In North Africa, for example, there are a number of innovative ventures undertaken by women the challenge violent extremism. For example, Soad Begdouri Elkhammal created the Moroccan Association of Victims of Terrorism (AMVT) after losing her husband and son in the suicide attacks in Casablanca on May 16, 2003. She launched a remarkable CVE campaign in schools despite numerous obstacles, using her skills as a teacher to reach youth, especially the poor, and to raise awareness of civil society on violent extremism through public events. In Algeria, Cherifa Kheddar is a public figure who challenges the policy of her country by standing up against former Algerian terrorists who are now considered ordinary citizens due to the president Bouteflika’s policy of “national reconciliation.” Cherifa’s NGO, *Djazairouna*, supports dozens of families and youth who lost their loved ones during the “years of lead” in Blida in the hopes to prevent future violence.

In Pakistan, Shazia Khan, a victim of terrorism from the Hazara community, does her best to amplify her community’s concerns and grievances. The Hazara community is an ethnic minority living in two places in Baluchistan in the north of Pakistan. They are continuously attacked by Sunnis extremists through gunfire assaults against civilian vehicles, bomb attacks on public markets and arsons, among other crimes. Despite threats to her life, Shazia began to take pictures of victims’ bodies in order to help families identify their loved ones. She has also worked on many training programs in order to build networks of victims and to work on prevention efforts and speak out against terrorism.

The examples highlighted by the paper suggest that regardless of the role or identity they assume, women can play an active part in countering violent extremism, just as they can play an active part in fomenting violent extremism. These examples caution against the assumption that women’s engagement is always positive and acknowledge the realities of their engagement, either good or bad, in certain environments.

THE VARIED EXPERIENCES OF VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

This essay will now turn to the experience of victims of terrorism to discern similarities and differences in the ways that male and female victims of terrorism respond to trauma and why youth, especially girls, can become vulnerable to recruitment strategies such as those employed by *Daesh* (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham - ISIS). The findings of the next section are premised on a project implemented by the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AfVT.org). This project offers a case study that compares the experiences of both male victims and female victims, and assesses the implications of these experiences on potential CVE efforts.

From August 3-11, 2014, AfVT.org hosted a group of 20 youth victims of terrorism (10 boys and 10 girls) to help them communicate their emotions in a therapeutic environment and aid their process of healing in a program known as Project Butterfly. Some of the youth were survivors of attacks while others had lost one or more loved ones in a terrorist attack. They came from Algeria, Colombia, Russian Federation (Beslan), France, Israel, Romania, Morocco and ranged in age from 14 to 23 years old.

The program was structured around discussion groups facilitated by psychologists, activities for self-expression through body movement, and time for relaxation and leisure. It should be noted that the therapeutic goal of “Project Butterfly” did not consist of adopting a distinct treatment for both boys and girls; all activities and discussion groups were encouraged to be coed in the belief that all victims of terrorism need to communicate, share, and feel heard. However, interesting differences in the sexes emerged from the psychologists’ evaluations, differences that present opportunities for the development of CVE programming involving victims of terrorism.

In general, the psychologists found that many of the boys exhibited shyness and a genuine difficulty in expressing their emotions or verbalizing the trauma. They also expressed difficulty in planning for a professional career following incidents in which their fathers were killed. They attributed this difficulty to the reality that they had to become heads of their family following the death of their fathers, a massive responsibility that left them little room for anticipating careers beyond the confines of their immediate environment. Psychologists found that the girls, in contrast, were generally less introverted than the boys and were able to verbalize their trauma and the emotions they felt. They also bonded with their fellow female participants on the basis of shared trauma quicker than the boys. The girls were further able to articu-

late big visions for their professional development, all expressing a desire for impactful careers ranging from architecture, to international relations, to the judiciary.

The experiences of victims of terrorism, male or female, can help practitioners and policymakers articulate strategies for countering the appeal of violent extremism. It has been articulated both in CVE policy and programming that the narratives and voices of victims of terrorism may be effective in persuading individuals against joining terrorist groups. It is important to reflect on how the experiences of Project Butterfly described above may be applicable in this context.

This is particularly important in the current climate of *Daesh* recruitment and radicalization. According to official statistics released in France by the Minister of the Interior on the 28th of January 2016, 8250 persons have been detected as radicals. Approximately 30% among them are women. However, many acknowledge that these figures were underestimated. The numbers do not take into account instances where individuals who were stopped at the last minute as they attempted to depart for Syria, nor do they take into account the numbers of men that may have joined *Daesh* because of the incitement, recruitment and persuasion undertaken by women.

The *Daesh* strategy of enticing educated and seemingly reasonable youth to their theater of war is concerning. One of their main targets for recruitment are young girls who may be vulnerable because of their adolescence status, their desire for self-worth and belonging, and their keenness to make an impact. In that sense, *Daesh* has fully analyzed and understood the scope of what this chapter proposes to call the “Florence Nightingale syndrome,” named after the 19th century English nurse who devoted her life to caring for others, especially soldiers. Several female *Daesh* recruits have left their homeland to help the civilian population in Syria; others were detained at the last minute and reported to the authorities. Still others have left with the intent to get married to *Daesh* militants and bear them children with the aim of perpetuating their claim to statehood.

In this regard, the psychologists’ findings from Project Butterfly might be of specific importance to developing narratives against *Daesh*. For example, if female victims of terrorism are better equipped to express emotion and verbalize trauma, they may be better able to articulate messages that prevent others from joining. Moreover, the female victims of terrorism in Project Butterfly were better able to devise and articulate visions of the future, which may sug-

gest that female victims of terrorism will be more naturally open to participating in CVE efforts and projecting their stories to a wider audience. While further research in this field is needed to draw more comprehensive conclusions, Project Butterfly can be used as a preliminary study and example of the roles that female victims of terrorism may be able to play in CVE efforts.

CONCLUSION

The globalized nature of today's world appears to have increased the speed at which new radical identities form and therefore complicates efforts to counter violent extremism. In this context, this chapter ultimately finds that concerted efforts to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violence will require coordinated efforts by men and women. Women should not be singled out for specific roles in CVE, but rather should be engaged in concert with men and in recognition of the strength of *combined* initiatives. This chapter concludes with a number of recommendations on promoting equitable approaches to countering violent extremism, approaches that highlight the roles of both men and women.

1. ***Assign equal responsibility to both genders.*** Based on the experience of AfVT.org and its collaborations with associated victims of terrorism organizations, there does not appear to be a distinct difference in the role that women can play in CVE compared to men. Male figures can play just as important a role in preventing recruitment and radicalization to violence. CVE initiatives, like train the trainer programming, should therefore ensure the participation of both male and female leaders to promote gender balance and account for both perspectives.
2. ***Interventions must be locally tailored and personalized.*** To effectively appeal to at-risk youth who have potentially embarked on the path of recruitment and radicalization to violence, it is important that interventions are personalized to their specific contexts and motivations. A story from France helps illustrate the benefits of smaller scale interventions. A 16 year-old female was detained in France just before her planned departure for Turkey, where she intended to continue on to Syria. The French authorities asked a couple, both of whom are social workers, to take in the teenager and assist her on her path of deradicalization. The couple took her in and took attentive care of her, akin to the care they would have provided had they adopted her. After a few months of living with the social workers, assessments showed that the teenager had relinquished her violent extremist ideas. Observers attributed her reversal to the role of the strong paternal and maternal figures in her life at a time when she needed them the most.

3. ***Coordinate responsibility and action between communities and their local authorities.*** There are many times where mothers are well aware of the dangers facing their children but are powerless to intervene without help from local authorities. The afore-mentioned situation in the city of Mantes-la-Jolie is one such example. The awareness of mothers to the dangers of recruitment and radicalization to violence is just the first step of an intervention process that requires support from the authorities. In order to effectively guard the space that violent extremists exploit, there must be coordinated and sustained action between local communities and their local governments, supported by political will.
4. ***Amplify the voices of victims of terrorism.*** Too often following a terrorist attack, the perpetrators of the attack get undue media attention as experts parse their backgrounds, their motivations, and their intentions. Lost in the conversation are the stories of the victims of terrorism, an unfortunate missed opportunity to highlight their voices. In addition to showing the power of their resilience, their stories can also be powerful cautionary tales that relay a narrative directly challenging terrorist propaganda. Where appropriate, victims of terrorism should be offered platforms to relay their experiences, their needs, and their messages.

Furthermore, as one example from Germany shows, victims of terrorism can play a powerful role in demonstrating resilience and reconciliation. In 2011, Corinna Ponto, the daughter of a banker assassinated in 1977 by the RAF, and Julia Albrecht, the sister of the RAF terrorist who committed the crime, released a book together detailing their tumultuous shared history and the grief and trauma they endured, compounded by 30 years of purposeful incommunicado.⁸ The very public reconciliation demonstrated the strength of communication and the value in listening to different points of views. The reconciliation was further meaningful given that radical groups like the RAF and 2 June Movement have never expressed repentance for their crimes or asked for forgiveness from their victims.

5. ***Protect implementers undertaking CVE efforts.*** CVE practitioners in the field often face threats to their safety and that of their families. In certain regions, the threats to women are especially pronounced and more virulent than that to men. Practitioners and policymakers must create procedures that help ensure the protection and safety of individuals exposed to terrorist groups through the course of their prevention efforts.

6. **Engage all age groups in social work.** Social impact groups like humanitarian organizations and non-government organizations tend to focus on recruiting young adults who are completing or have graduated from university. However, the focus on young adults comes at the detriment of many younger adolescents who crave self-worth and the desire to help others in need but are not offered opportunities to do so. Expanding opportunities for volunteerism or involvement in these organizations may help fill the void of adolescent instability and might provide a buffer between them and violent extremists looking to exploit their desire to be helpful. Such opportunities should be tailored specifically to the distinct desires expressed by both male and female adolescents.
7. **Avoid the celebrity status imposed by media.** Though the work of victims of terrorism is important to highlight, it is likewise important to avoid elevating such victims to celebrity status. Popularizing individuals instead of focusing on their work can have the unintended consequence of inducing backlash against the individual and diminishing the importance of their message. One such example is Malala Yousafzai who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 but has lost some credibility in Pakistan because of her perceived status as a privileged victim.

This chapter has explored the participation of women across many contexts of violent extremism and CVE efforts to understand their motivations, their experiences, and their methods of engagement. The various experiences show that women are not impervious to the process of radicalization and the use of violence to express their beliefs. Furthermore, radicalization of women is not a new phenomenon but rather one that increased following improved access to higher education after the end of the Second World War. In addition, much like the way men are radicalized, the examples included in this chapter show that women undergo a process of radicalization that includes compelling push factors as well as jarring catalysts. In this regard, CVE efforts should ensure a balanced inclusion of both genders, tailored to local contexts.

ENDNOTES

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Conclusion: Program and Policy Recommendations

Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger and Rafia Bhulai

The starting point for this collection was to take a step back from common assumptions about women's roles in countering violent extremism (CVE) policy and practice in order to further examine the questions of if and how women play a role that is differentiated from other stakeholders in these efforts. Each of the contributors to this collection has offered a unique perspective determined by varied geographical, cultural, and professional contexts. Each essay has offered insights into the roles, challenges, and opportunities for women in their efforts to enhance the resilience of communities against violence, conflict and insecurity, and has explored the potential for applying these experiences to CVE.

As the debate surrounding the fifteenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has highlighted, there is a great deal of wariness on the part of many women's civil society organizations regarding their engagement in CVE initiatives. They have voiced concerns that their work might be instrumentalized for security objectives and underscored the security of women and women's organizations in inhospitable conflict environments and the danger of women's groups being "squeezed between terrorist groups and anti-terrorism efforts" (Huckerby). The lack of clarity regarding the concept of "CVE" and the kinds of programming associated with it has also led to confusion about whether and how they might be differentiated from more "traditional" counterterrorism associated with militarized responses.¹

At the same time, there is recognition that extremist groups have adopted a strategic approach to sexual violence that aims to cripple communities and assert power and authority by attacking their most vulnerable members and cultural mores.² Beyond the brutality of a campaign of sexual violence by groups like ISIS and Boko Haram, for example, violent extremist groups also threaten the development prospects for women and girls, and even entire communities and regions, for instance, when they burn and destroy schools, bomb

markets, and destroy families and communities.³ Reports that extremist groups have used women and girls as rewards for new recruits or used narratives bemoaning women's rights as part of their recruitment narratives reflect the highly gendered discourse about push and pull factors in some areas. Yet, groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS have made a concerted effort to appeal to women by transforming traditional notions of their role into one that purports to empower them as mothers of a future generation of fighters. For example, reports in early 2016 that ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has appointed a female fighter to lead a new battalion in northeastern Syria underscores their attention to the roles of women and if confirmed, represent an expansion of women's roles in the group.⁴ In fact extremist groups have demonstrated greater attention to the roles of women than have many counterterrorism practitioners and policymakers.

As the chapters in this collection suggest, we must not assume a passive role for women as merely victims. This stereotype is prevalent throughout the discourse on women and CVE, where for example women who have traveled to join ISIS are described as “brainwashed” or “tricked” or traveling simply to further a romantic notion, rather than treating their choice as a deliberate one that reflects women's agency. Indeed, many have proven fiercely supportive of violent extremist groups, as pointed out by a number of authors including Saltman and Frenett and Denoix de Saint Marc and Lacombe. In the case of ISIS, a number of females have made the ultimate commitment of traveling to join the fight in Iraq and Syria, as Saltman and Frenett make clear in their essay. While the number of female foreign fighters or migrants to ISIS controlled territory may still be small compared with the number of males, we do not have enough research to understand the full impact of women's roles in recruitment and advocacy efforts in encouraging family members and others to join ISIS and perpetrate violence. It is possible that women can play an influential role prompting not one by several men and even women to support or join extremist causes.

Indeed, several essays highlight that the grievances that underpin their support or membership of extremist groups appears to be similar to that of men. Okenyodo points to the Afrobarometer results showing little gender difference in the grievances or push factors to violent extremism in the Nigerian context. Both women and men may cite discrimination, racism, or xenophobia among their list of grievances. However, while the sentiments may be similar, it is important to note that the experience of a circumstance may be shaped by gender. For example, Muslim women wearing the hijab are affected disproportionately by Islamophobia because of their visible identity markers and the stereotypes of passivity associated with outward appearances.

At the same time, as indicated by many of the tweets that Saltman and Frenett referenced, women also appear to feel a sense of empowerment in supporting a group they perceive to be on the right side of global justice, as do their male counterparts. Women's membership in or support for extremist groups is not a new phenomenon by any stretch and historically women have planned, supported, and executed terrorist attacks, from Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka. Despite the high media attention on the subject, it is unsurprising that groups like ISIS, whose recruitment narrative is premised on the idea of building a just society and Muslim state, has succeeded in persuading women to come be a part of this historically significant enterprise. It is a similar narrative told to men and boys and appears to be a powerful one particularly to young people confronting identity crises or direct or indirect grievances against their state or community.

The essays in this volume underscore and reinforce two critical points of intersection. First, women have diverse roles in violent extremism and CVE and generalized assumptions about their desire to be preventers or circumscribing their role to that of passive victims alone should not be made. Second, the essays underscore a powerful role in prevention efforts. The contributors reflect the key findings of UNSCR 1325 that women need to be part of the solution to conflicts on both the policy and programmatic level. Safi emphasizes this point in describing the roles of women in Afghanistan and the prevention and mitigation roles they play at a community and domestic level, as does Oudraat in her chapter outlining the roles of women in conflict prevention and resolution. Schlaffer and Kropiunnig's chapter is a powerful reminder that even in societies where women are limited in their public role, mothers can be critical partners in prevention, from identifying early warning signs of violent radicalization to mobilizing a first line of support, whether that is within the family, other social and kinship circles or government. However, it is also worth noting their point that while mothers may have a unique role in the home and may be closely connected to their children, they are not always empowered to act, and children can go to great lengths to hide their activities, as highlighted by the testimony of mothers whose children have joined ISIS.

The roles of women in preventing and responding to conflict has garnered increasing levels of international attention in light of the fifteenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the growing attention of the CVE community on this issue, as demonstrated by the GCTF *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*. However, as several of the chapters point out (Oudraat, Dharmapuri) activities aimed at engaging women in CVE should not be conflated with the idea of “integrating a gender dimension” throughout CVE

efforts. The latter approach necessitates consideration of gender dynamics in conflict analysis, in conceptualizing and developing responsive programs and policies, in rolling out programs and then evaluating impact. This approach should be undertaken whether or not specific programs are directly intended to focus on women and CVE as a means of mitigating the unintended negative consequences of counterterrorism efforts highlighted by Huckerby. This approach can be complemented by specific programs that engage women in CVE efforts but should not be mutually exclusive. Increasing the numbers of women in security efforts can help this effort, but as Dharmapuri notes, this is both a rights issue as well as one of enhanced operational effectiveness.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout these essays, a common theme is the gap between the potential roles of women in prevention efforts, and the current obstacles and limitations they face in realizing this potential. They suggest a set of working principles that should guide work in this field and illuminate a number of recommendations to enhance the resonance, effectiveness, and sustainability of CVE efforts. Some of these working principles and recommendations include:

1. **Tracking and analyzing a gender dimension throughout all existing programming and policy related to CVE.** One of the reasons it is largely unknown how CVE programming affects women is due to a lack of attention to potential gender dynamics and/or indicators in existing programming. Ensuring gender is tracked and measured in existing programming will help to further assess whether or not specific programming should be aimed at women in certain local contexts. Tracking a gender dimension means reflecting on three separate, but related questions: 1) how many women are participating in current CVE efforts? 2) what roles are the women undertaking in these efforts? and 3) how are CVE programs and policies influencing and impacting women as different than men? In addition, donors should pay attention to their requirements for CVE grants, proposals and plans to ensure there are gender markers identified and tracked.
2. **Increase new programming specifically focused on women, adapted to local contexts.** Where gender dynamics play an important role in the push/pull factors that lead to radicalization and recruitment, CVE programs specifically focused on women may be necessary. For example, counter-narratives against ISIS may need to take on a gender dimension to ensure that the needs and wants of young women are taken into account. Counter-narratives about groups like Boko Haram, ISIS or

Al-Shabab could highlight their destruction of traditional cultures and community dynamics.

3. **Strengthen local partnerships of women-led organizations.** In this regard, stakeholders interested in CVE should allow local groups, including women's groups, to determine if and how they participate in CVE efforts. The role and level of involvement of women's organizations may be determined by the levels of funding available (and the sustainability of that funding), the security context in the local community, as well as risks/benefits in terms of local credibility of being associated with CVE efforts.
4. **Enhance capacities of women-led organizations that "opt-in" to CVE efforts and initiatives.** This capacity-building includes training to enhance capacities for mediation, community engagement, communication and protection, administrative and program management skills, monitoring and evaluation strategies and frameworks, and grant-writing skills to ensure funding is sustainable.
5. **Integrate gender dimension in all UN counterterrorism and P/CVE work, especially related to implementation of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and Security Council resolutions.** This could be facilitated by:
 - The UN and member states adopting a cross-sectoral approach that brings together key stakeholders across various entities;
 - Ensuring that a gender dimension is incorporated into country visits and assessments made by UN counterterrorism actors;
 - Considering the impact of P/CVE programming on women and girls, and on local gender dynamics, from the project conceptualization stage to implementation and evaluation;
 - Integrating a gender dimension in legislative support mechanisms to member states on CT and P/CVE;
 - Drawing on lessons learned from developing National Action Plans for the implementation of Resolution 1325 on WPS and applying to P/CVE national frameworks and strategies and vice versa;
 - Integrating a P/CVE dimension into support to states developing 1325 National Action plans where appropriate;
 - Developing and conducting CVE trainings for gender advisors in UN organizations outside of the traditional counter-terrorism sector, including UNESCO and DPKO, as well as field-based UN offices and missions.

- 6. Promote broadly inclusive dialogue that engages men and youth.** Enhancing broad community support, including from men, boys, and girls, for women's roles in CVE will be important to their safety and to ensuring that initiatives contribute shaping broader structural dynamics that support the efficacy and sustainability of such initiatives that can contribute to enhancing women's rights and contributions to development and security.
- 7. Foster and fund innovative research to assess in local contexts how gender dynamics play a role in CVE efforts.** More research is needed at the micro level to determine when and how a gender dimension to CVE programming is both needed and effective.

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Biographies

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EDIT SCHLAFFER

Schlaffer is a social scientist, writer, activist and holds a PhD from the University of Vienna. In 2002, she founded Women without Borders, an international research-based NGO, encouraging women to take the lead in their personal and public lives. Her research and activities focus on women as agents of change and as driving forces to stabilize an insecure world. In 2008 she launched SAVE - Sisters Against Violent Extremism, the world's first female counter-terrorism platform. Schlaffer has received numerous accolades for her work promoting women in the security arena: Hillary Clinton has twice highlighted SAVE's contributions to the field; in 2010 she was named as one of Women's eNews "21 Leaders of the 21st Century" and in 2011 one of Newsweek's "150 Movers and Shakers" and she has received many national prizes including the Käthe Leichter Austrian State Prize for Gender Equity and Research, the Theodor Körner Prize for Outstanding Research and the Donauland Book Prize for Excellency in Non-Fiction Writing. She is a regular speaker in diverse settings: from the TED talks, the Omega Institute, Hedayah, the Global Center on Cooperative Security, the Europe-wide Radicalisation Awareness Network to the OSCE and various United Nations branches.

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Safi is a researcher and advocate who has contributed widely to the field of peace building, rule of law, human security, and countering violent extremism (CVE) within the context of Afghanistan, offering a grassroots and gender perspective. She is founding director of DROPS, which is committed to strengthening democratic ideas and values in Afghanistan by conducting research that provides policymakers with sound alternative solutions to national issues and by raising awareness on women's issues and creating a role for women in policy dialogue. DROPS publishes the *Women and Public Policy Journal* in Afghanistan, the first journal of its kind in the country offering a unique platform to increase and empower women's voices in policy research and discourse. Safi's recent studies on issues such the Reconciliation and Reintegration of the Taliban, Women's Role in the Peace Process, Women's Role in CVE, Transitional Justice in Afghanistan, and Afghan perspectives on Human Security have been valued by organizations like the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, NATO, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, Global Center on Cooperative Security, and the Consortium of South Asian Think-Tanks. She has an MA in International Peace Studies from the United Nations Mandated University for Peace.

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Saltman manages the Women and Extremism Network (WaE); analysing the radicalisation of women into violent extremist networks, as well as the role women play in CVE. Recent publications include ‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon. Saltman also manages ISD’s Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN); bringing together an international group of young activists and organisations aimed at involving the youth in countering violent extremism.

ROSS FRENETT

Frenett is the Founding Director of Moonshot CVE, a specialist CVE focused organisation which aims to develop emerging methodologies to counter violent extremism. Ross previously served as Director of the Against Violent Extremism (AVE) network, a global network of former extremists and survivors of violent extremism seeded by Google Ideas and managed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Throughout his career Ross has interviewed hundreds of former members of extremist groups and is a regular media commentator around extremism. He holds a Masters in Terrorism Security and Society from Kings College London and a BA from University College Cork.

GUILLAUME DENOIX DE SAINT MARC

Denoix de Saint Marc lost his father in the bomb attack against the UTA flight 772 on the 19th of September 1989 over the Sahara Desert. In 2002, he instigated and took part in the negotiations with the Gaddafi Foundation, headed by the son of Colonel Gaddafi, to obtain compensation for the families of the 170 victims. In 2004, an agreement was obtained. Libya denied any link to the bombing but agreed to pay \$1m to the families of each of the victims. In 2007, Denoix de Saint Marc travelled to the remote crash site with relatives and 140 local people in order to build a memorial to the UTA flight 772 bombing. In 2009, he created the « Association française des Victimes du Terrorisme - AfVT.org », to meet support and assist the victims of terrorism and help prevent violent radicalisation. In 2011, he organised and headed the VIIth International Congress of Victims of Terrorism that took place in Paris. Denoix de Saint Marc is also the co-leader of one of the European Commission’s Radicalisation Awareness Network - Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) working Groups named “RAN - Communication & Narratives (RAN C&N).” Today, the AfVT.org is supporting more than 2,000 victims of terrorism, from different terrorist attacks in France or abroad. The association is also very active in countering violent extremism in France.

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Lacombe is the Deputy Director of the “Association française des Victimes du Terrorisme - AfVT.org” after being its main Project & Communication manager between 2012 and 2015. He works with numerous victims on the field and coordinates various actions of prevention with local actors: NGO’s, administration, penitentiaries. In 2014, he coordinated the production of 21 video portraits of victims of terrorism for the EC project “The Voice of the Survivors against Radicalisation” led by AfVT.org. In 2015, he codirected the making of 10 additional video portraits of French victims of terrorism as counter-narrative tools. As a practitioner, he attended RAN-VVT meetings from 2012 to 2015 and contributes to the RAN RVT and RAN C&N working groups for the European Commission.

Responses to security issues, predominantly in the form of military or law enforcement measures, have long been considered a male-dominated endeavor, with women relatively absent from the peacemaking tables and policy development. This trend has been no less apparent with responses to terrorism. However, women and girls have varied roles with regards to their participation in terrorism as well as counter-terrorism measures—roles which until now have been greatly under-researched and under-explored. These roles vary from victims of terrorist activities to perpetrators of violence to passive by-standers to active agents of change to prevent violent extremism and terrorism.

With the 15-year review of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security (WPS) occurring in October 2015, and the increased attention by international organizations such as the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) on the subject of women and countering violent extremism (CVE), this edited volume begins to fill the literature gap by providing a collection of essays reflecting on what roles women can play in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The essays draw on the experiences of practitioners, academics and policy advisors to recommend ways in which policy and programs for P/CVE can be improved by taking into account the varied roles of women in these efforts.



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