
FACT SHEET

Women and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

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An estimated 3,000 of the 20,000 foreign fighters who joined Daesh were women. Whilst focus has primarily been on Western cases, women from the WANA region were also drawn to the cause.¹

Gender Inequality and Radicalisation Drivers

For both genders, the majority of radicalisation drivers are the result of stunted development, economic stagnation, social disunity, and relative deprivation, yet all of these factors are worsened by gender inequality. Improving gender equality should be encouraged as part of CVE.

The extent to which women in the WANA region are particularly disadvantaged, is exemplified in the global gender gap index; in 2016, the region registered the world's widest gap at 40 per cent. Based on current trends, this gap will take 356 years to close.²

Women's Recruitment into VEOs

Much of the early scholarship exhibits gender-laden assumptions about women's recruitment into violent extremist organisations (VEOs). It is misguided to suggest their participation is always involuntary.³ While some are pressured or forced, many women – perhaps a majority – join VEOs by choice.⁴

VEOs have become experts at adapting their propaganda. Initially, Daesh stuck to very conservative methods by confining women to private roles as wives, mothers, teachers, domestic workers, or sex slaves.⁵ In recent years, these roles have expanded significantly and perhaps due to heavy battlefield losses, women are increasingly used in militant roles.⁶

1 Laura Sjoberg, "People not Pawns: Women's Participation in Violent Extremism Across MENA", USAID Research Brief, September 2015, Accessed October 25, 2017, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BycIIINu-Y8d-TXFsNWdq1pXWU/view>

2 "The Global Gender Gap Report 2016," World Economic Forum, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 Jayne Huckerby, "Why Women Join ISIS," Time Magazine, December 7, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, <http://time.com/4138377/women-in-isis/>.

5 Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai, "A Man's World?"

6 Ibid.

Women's Role in P/CVE

The crucial question is whether women's empowerment and gender equality can prevent radicalisation and violent extremist acts, or aid in de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and resilience building. There is strong evidence that women's participation, in the security sector and as pillars of their local community, leads to greater effectiveness in violence reduction and conflict prevention.⁷

Work in the WANA region has shown women to have in-depth insights into community dynamics, ideological patterns, and behavioural trends that differ from those available to men.⁸ Women are also trusted confidantes; field work has clarified that women preachers are often the first point of contact for women dealing with radical male relatives.

Within families, mothers are often able to recognise early signs of radicalisation including anger, anxiety, and withdrawal.⁹ They are also strategically placed, both physically within the home and through their emotional influence, to assist their children in navigating challenges. For instance, mothers were the main force behind the return of some Jordanian fighters from Syria.¹⁰

Importantly, women are keen to exercise their role within CVE; they have a strong and vested interest in preventing their children and communities from becoming radicalised.¹¹ Women should therefore not only be carefully targeted by P/CVE policies but should be centrally involved in the the design and implementation of such policies.

7 Security Council, "Wherever There Is Conflict, Women Must Be Part of the Solution," Security Council Told in Day-Long Debate Urging Their Inclusion in Restoring Fractured Societies," United Nations Media Coverage and Press Releases, November 30, 2012, accessed August 17, 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10840.doc.htm>.

8 See for example, Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan, UN-Women, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/7/women-and-violent-radicalization-in-jordan>; Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai, "A Man's World?"

9 Anita Orav, Anja Radjenovic, and Rosamund Shreeves, "Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation: A Gender Perspective," accessed August 17, 2017, April 21, 2016, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2016\)581955](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2016)581955).

10 Neven Bondokji and Erica Harper, Journey Mapping of Select Jordanian Fighters (Amman: The WANA Institute, 2017).

11 Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, "Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?" Women Without Borders, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.women-without-borders.org/files/downloads/CAN_MOTHERS_CHALLENGE_EXTREMISM.pdf.