



# ENGENDERING EXTREMISM: Gender Equality and Radicalisation in the West Asia - North Africa Region



West Asia-North Africa Institute, December 2017



All content of this publication was produced by Alethea Osborne. This publication is generously supported with funds from NWO. This publication reflects the views of the author only, and not necessarily that of NWO.

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Published by the WANA Institute, Royal Scientific Society in Amman, Jordan

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*Cover image:* Héctor de Pereda (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Printed in Amman, Jordan

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Manufactured in Jordan

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# 1. Introduction

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It has been suggested that 3,000 of the 20,000 foreign fighters who have travelled to join Daesh have been women, and while focus has primarily been upon those who came from the West, women from the WANA region were also drawn to the cause.<sup>1</sup> A discussion about the relationship between gender and violent extremism is therefore imperative, not only because women are affected by violent extremist groups (VEOs) in multiple ways, but because they play a vital role in P/CVE. This chapter explores these links by considering the ongoing impact of gender inequality in the WANA region, and Jordan in particular, not just on women but on society as a whole, and how this links to P/CVE.<sup>2</sup>

Gender gaps have been narrowing for decades, but men continue to outscore women globally on a range of development indicators, from educational enrolment and achievement to labour force participation, earning power, and infant mortality.<sup>3</sup> The WANA region scores particularly poorly in many of these rankings. While the principle of gender equality has become entrenched in international human rights law, national action plans, global development objectives, and humanitarian best practice, there is often still resistance to change among traditional power-holders. All social structures and their practices and symbols are gendered; thus, consideration of gender is crucial for effective P/CVE programming.<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate the inherent barrier that gender inequality presents to development, and the knock-on effect this has on violent behaviour and social cohesion, this chapter will first discuss what is meant by gender equality, in theory and in action. Second, it will consider how VEOs appeal to women, and their roles within them. Many people, including Jordanian officials, refuse to acknowledge that women can become radicalised and involved in VEOs; this is a potentially very dangerous oversight.<sup>5</sup> Third, it will highlight some of the many ongoing manifestations of gender inequality in the WANA region, and Jordan in particular. While significant steps have been taken in Jordan, there are still extensive legal, social, and systemic barriers in place against women. Throughout, the argument will be made that gender equality should be a fundamental tenet of all development work, including P/CVE.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Sjoberg, "People Not Pawns: Women's Participation in Violent Extremism across MENA," USAID Research Brief, September 2015, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByclINu-Y8d-TXFsNWdq1pXWU/view>.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Dr Erica Harper for her research support, particularly for the section "Women as Agents of Violent Extremism and P/CVE," and Nadine Sayegh for her research and drafting support on the section "Women's Disempowerment in Jordan."

<sup>3</sup> Esther Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development," *Journal of Economic Literature* 50, no. 4 (2012): 1051–79.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Mackay, "Women, Human Security, and Peace-Building: A Feminist Analysis," in *Conflict and Human Security: A Search for New Approaches of Peace-Building*, IPSHU English Research Report Series no. 19, ed. Hideaki Shinoda and Ho-Won Jeong (Hiroshima: Institute for Peace Science, Hiroshima University, 2004), 152–75, [http://pdf2.hegoa.efaber.net/entry/content/511/women\\_human\\_security\\_peacebuilding\\_feminist\\_analysis.pdf](http://pdf2.hegoa.efaber.net/entry/content/511/women_human_security_peacebuilding_feminist_analysis.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan* (Amman: RASED and Search for Common Ground, March 2016), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByclINu-Y8d-YzhEUC1leEJiaUk/view>.

## 2. Gender Equality in Theory and Action

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It has repeatedly been shown that addressing gender inequality benefits broader society as much as the individual. Women's empowerment is both a way of thinking about gender equality and a means of achieving it. It understands gender inequality as rooted in power imbalances between men and women. Women engaging in the public sphere, accessing its opportunities and resources, and using their agency in meaningful, constructive ways are positive manifestations of women's empowerment through asserting control over their lives.<sup>6</sup>

There have been many attempts to quantify women's empowerment. This is inevitable when a concept becomes associated with donors, limited resources, and cost/benefit calculations.<sup>7</sup> However, the need to measure results is potentially damaging to the authenticity of empowerment. Some argue the usefulness of the term is in its vagueness: as soon as it is associated with external instrumentalist programming the women in question become measurable objects, to be empowered in prescriptive ways.<sup>8</sup> If women's empowerment is linked to making choices, the danger of measurable women's empowerment programmes is that the choices on offer become controlled.

Many international organisations, such as the World Bank, take a pragmatic approach in which women's empowerment consists of acquiring and using agency in strategic fields relevant to development, including the control of economic assets.<sup>9</sup> To realise this, women may be measured on their ability to access employment income, pensions, social security, and alimony, along with the rights to own and inherit land and make decisions over household finances.<sup>10</sup> A second commonly used measure of empowerment is a woman's level of decision-making power in her family and personal life. Relevant indicators include the gender roles assigned to wives, how citizenship is determined and passed on, whether there are protections against violence and child marriage, women's rights within marriage, freedom of movement, and the ability to work and access identity documents.<sup>11</sup> Finally, empowerment can be seen as having a voice in society and policy, through political participation and representation or engagement in collective action.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Important Concepts Underlying Gender Mainstreaming," Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, United Nations, 2001, [www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> "Important Concepts Underlying Gender Mainstreaming," 18.

<sup>8</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Empowerment of Women in South Asia: Concepts and Practices* (New Delhi: Columbo, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," UNWOMEN, [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures).

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, *Gender Equality and Development: World Development Report 2012* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner, *Women's Rights are Human Rights* (New York: United Nations, 2014), [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Pilar Domingo et al., "Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making: Assessing the Evidence," Overseas Development Institute, April 2015, [www.researchgate.net/profile/Pilar\\_Domingo/publication/282133333\\_Women%27s\\_Voice\\_and\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Decision-Making\\_Assessing\\_the\\_Evidence/links/57ed005c08ae92eb4d27d443/Womens-Voice-and-Leadership-in-Decision-Making-Assessing-the-Evidence.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pilar_Domingo/publication/282133333_Women%27s_Voice_and_Leadership_in_Decision-Making_Assessing_the_Evidence/links/57ed005c08ae92eb4d27d443/Womens-Voice-and-Leadership-in-Decision-Making-Assessing-the-Evidence.pdf).

As with any donor-driven development goal there are often difficulties in ascertaining what is truly best for the individual, as opposed to what fits into a broader agenda. However, it is clear that empowering women, financially, socially, or politically, is beneficial both for women and for the broader community.

If women's empowerment can help to improve the situation for the broader community and is linked to the encouragement of peace, it should have a central role within P/CVE recommendations and programming. It has also been found repeatedly that women can be an invaluable source of community information, and mothers are usually in one of the best positions to notice early stages of radicalisation.<sup>13</sup> However, partly as a result of strict gender roles which map onto divisions between the private (female) and public (male) realms, women often feel disempowered, uninformed, or scared to come forward with such information, and thus early prevention opportunities are missed. In empowering women to speak more freely and providing civic space for such discussions, P/CVE could improve communities' ability to track radicalisation early on and respond appropriately.

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<sup>13</sup> UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan*.

### 3. Women as Agents of Violent Extremism and CVE

Much early scholarship on women's relationship to violent extremism exhibits gender-laden assumptions about their vulnerability to radicalisation and recruitment into VEOs. It highlights the supposed ease with which women can be coerced and their desire to marry as principal push and pull factors. There is certainly evidence that in highly gendered contexts, dependent on men for their protection and livelihoods, women may have no choice but to acquiesce when their male relatives join a radical group, and are more vulnerable to physically coercive methods such as rape.<sup>14</sup> Even in less virulent contexts such as Jordan, experts believe that pressures on women to conform and respect male family leaders can lead them to follow general social trends, including towards radicalisation.<sup>15</sup> There is also evidence that women are targeted for strategic purposes: assumptions about women's lack of agency and reliability often rules them "out of suspicion," and so less likely to be apprehended by authorities.<sup>16</sup> However, it would be misguided to imagine women incapable of using violence to express their beliefs, or that their participation in VEOs is always involuntary.<sup>17</sup> Evidence suggests that while some are pressured or forced, many—perhaps a majority—join VEOs by choice.<sup>18</sup> Whether they are pushed or pulled, it is clear that women, and in some cases girls, are being radicalised and actively recruited into such groups.<sup>19</sup>

More recent scholarship finds few or no gender variations in the dominant radicalisation drivers, and that the process of radicalisation is similar for men and women, with studies across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East yielding consistent results.<sup>20</sup> One study concluded that context is more likely than gender to explain an individual's decision to join an extremist group—the implication being that P/CVE strategies should favour "balanced inclusion of both genders," with careful attention to local conditions.<sup>21</sup> However, while men and women may be driven by similar factors, the drivers may manifest differently and are usually bound up tightly with gender roles.

Extremist groups understand these nuances and tailor their propaganda accordingly. Techniques used to recruit women include both offline and online methods, such as encrypted messaging systems, to promote the concept of a caliphate.<sup>22</sup> Such techniques use specific language such as promises of "sisterhood," and show women fulfilling nurturing roles, caring for soldiers and raising the children of the new caliphate.<sup>23</sup> For

<sup>14</sup> UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan*.

<sup>15</sup> "The Role of Families Is Critical in Preventing Violent Extremism," Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2016, [www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Families-in-PCVE.pdf](http://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Families-in-PCVE.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Naureen Fink, Sara Zeiger, and Rafia Bhulai, *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, (Washington, DC, New York, and London: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016), [www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/AMansWorld\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/AMansWorld_FULL.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Fink, Zeiger, and Bhulai, *A Man's World?*

<sup>18</sup> Jayne Huckerby, "Why Women Join ISIS," *Time*, 7 December 2015, <http://time.com/4138377/women-in-isis/>.

<sup>19</sup> Aryn Baker, "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women from around the World," *Time*, 6 September 2014, <http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>.

<sup>20</sup> Baker, "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Babatunde Taiwo, "Women and Violent Extremism in Somalia and the Horn of Africa: Background Note," UNWOMEN, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Fink, Zeiger, and Bhulai, *A Man's World?*

example, Al-Qaeda propaganda has drawn upon Quranic verses “urging women to support their husbands, educate their children, and encourage them in their mission of jihad.”<sup>24</sup> Taliban messaging has targeted mothers of fallen soldiers, capitalising on their bereavement to reiterate the deficits of the state and garner support for their cause.<sup>25</sup>

Daesh has been particularly effective at attracting women to its cause and its claim to offer a historically unprecedented opportunity to live a traditional Islamic life.<sup>26</sup> The participation of women in radical armed groups, as supporters, planners, and operatives, is by no means new,<sup>27</sup> but the roles of women in such groups have evolved. Initially, Al-Shabaab stated that it was “un-Islamic” to use female fighters in attacks<sup>28</sup> and Daesh used very conservative methods, confining women to roles as wives, mothers, teachers, domestic workers, or sex slaves.<sup>29</sup> In recent years, however, these roles have expanded significantly and, perhaps due to heavy battlefield losses, women are increasingly used in militant roles.<sup>30</sup> Key examples include Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s appointment of a female fighter to lead a new battalion in north-eastern Syria in 2016, and Daesh’s all-female Al-Khansa brigade in Raqqa.<sup>31</sup> It has been suggested that Daesh actively decided to adopt a different attitude towards women to those of previous VEOs, and invested in female agency in both the operational and the theological fields.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the controlled anonymity social media offers women, coupled with their personal relationships with other women and younger adults, has allowed them to become effective recruiters, influencers, and couriers.<sup>33</sup>

Can gender equality, and women’s empowerment, either 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 more effective violence reduction and conflict prevention.<sup>34</sup> Women have been found to have in-depth insights, differing from those available to men, into community dynamics, ideological patterns, and behavioural trends.<sup>35</sup> Women are also trusted confidantes; woman preachers are often the first point of contact for women dealing with radical male relatives—mothers, in particular, seek their help and that of trusted local civil society activists.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fink, Zeiger, and Bhulai, *A Man’s World?*

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat, and Liat Shetret, *The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict and Violent Extremism* (Goschen, IN: Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, April 2013), [http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11\\_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention\\_Final.pdf](http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention_Final.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Taiwo, “Women and Violent Extremism in Somalia.”

<sup>29</sup> Fink, Zeiger, and Bhulai, *A Man’s World?*

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mohamed Abu Ruman and Hasan Abu Hanieh, *Female Lover of Martyrdom: Formations of Feminist Jihadism from Al-Qaeda to ISIS* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017) (in Arabic).

<sup>33</sup> Taiwo, “Women and Violent Extremism in Somalia.”

<sup>34</sup> 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, 30 November 2012, [www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10840.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10840.doc.htm).

<sup>35</sup> See for example, UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan*; Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai, *A Man’s World?*

<sup>36</sup> As clarified in 16 focus group discussions with women, civil society activists, and female preachers in four cities in Jordan for an unpublished study.

Mothers are often able to recognise early signs of radicalisation, including anger, anxiety, and withdrawal,<sup>37</sup> and can use their traditional role to shape norms that promote tolerance, non-violence, and resilience or to assist radicalised youth in navigating challenges.<sup>38</sup> Mothers were the main force behind the return of some Jordanian fighters from Syria.<sup>39</sup> It is clear that women should be carefully targeted by P/CVE policies, and centrally involved in the design and implementation of such policies.

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<sup>37</sup> Anita Orav, Rosamund Shreeves, and Anja Radjenovic, with Sofía López, “Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation: A Gender Perspective,” European Parliament Briefing, April 2016, [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).

<sup>38</sup> Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, “Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?” Women Without Borders, 2015, [www.women-without-borders.org/files/downloads/CAN\\_MOTHERS\\_CHALLENGE\\_EXTREMISM.pdf](http://www.women-without-borders.org/files/downloads/CAN_MOTHERS_CHALLENGE_EXTREMISM.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Neven Bondokji, *Journey Mapping of Jordanian Fighters* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2017).

## 4. Women in the WANA Region

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Historically, women's position in the WANA region has been a political and religious bargaining tool, their status and rights primarily based on the desires of those in control. For there to be effective P/CVE efforts this needs to be addressed. It could also be beneficial to have counter-narratives highlighting VEOs' manipulation and abuse of women for their own political goals.

Women's disadvantage in the region is exemplified in the global gender gap index; in 2016, the region had the world's widest gap, 40 per cent; at current rates, this would take 356 years to close.<sup>40</sup> While education is positively encouraged and supported, there are powerful barriers curtailing women's roles within the public spheres of politics and employment. The 2005 UN Arab Human Development Report noted that "the most important barrier to the future of a more prosperous and peaceful region was the lack of full participation of women in every sphere of society, but importantly in the economy."<sup>41</sup> Over a decade later, the region still has some of the lowest global rates for women's economic involvement, and faces vast security concerns.

Social expectations of women are limiting. A recent study found that "two-thirds to more than three-quarters of men support the notion that a women's most important role is to care for the household" and that "Women often internalise these same inequitable views,"<sup>42</sup> potentially limiting women's willingness to engage in gender equality schemes. However, while the study found that men's views concerning gender roles do not differ significantly between generations, "younger women ... held more equitable views than their older counterparts ... [and] are yearning for more equality."<sup>43</sup> While both men and women have reportedly claimed that gender equality is "not part of our traditions or culture," there appears to be an increasing desire among young women for fairer opportunities, whether named as gender equality or not.<sup>44</sup>

Women's empowerment is also limited by systemic and economic conditions. Gender inequality, poverty, and dysfunctional institutional structures are mutually reinforcing. For women in poverty or without local influence there are few of the genuine choices and alternatives necessary for empowerment.<sup>45</sup> Even without social judgements, a woman's choice to work, continue education, or exercise healthcare decisions is often contingent on a level of economic independence. Likewise, the opportunity for women to engage in public

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<sup>40</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), [www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF\\_Global\\_Gender\\_Gap\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Dina H. Powell and Jane Kinninmont, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa* (London: Chatham House, 6 July 2015), [www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field\\_document/20150706Women%27sEconomicEmpowerment.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150706Women%27sEconomicEmpowerment.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> S. El Feki, B. Heilman, and G. Barker, *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)—Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine: Executive Summary* (Cairo and Washington, DC: UN Women and Promundo-US, 2017), 8, <https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/05/IMAGES-MENA-Executive-Summary-EN-16May2017-web.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> El Feki, Heilman, and Barker. *Understanding Masculinities*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Nabila Kabeer, "Discussing Women's Empowerment—Theory and Practice," *Sida Studies*, no.3 (2000), 19, [www.sida.se/contentassets/51142018c739462db123fc0ad6383c4d/discussing-womens-empowerment---theory-and-practice\\_1626.pdf](http://www.sida.se/contentassets/51142018c739462db123fc0ad6383c4d/discussing-womens-empowerment---theory-and-practice_1626.pdf).

life may be overshadowed by the absence of a participatory system free of corruption and nepotism. VEOs can hold significant appeal by appearing to offer a genuine alternative.

The influence of Islam in many women's lives in the region has to be taken into consideration. However, religion is always interpreted through a certain cultural, social, or political lens; there is a need for a context-specific and gendered tailoring of P/CVE responses, taking account of how traditional gender norms, and religious and social expectations, influence men and women's lives.

Violence against women has traditionally been linked to poverty, with women in lower wealth brackets reportedly more likely to face physical, sexual, and emotional abuse,<sup>46</sup> and children who grow up around violence are more likely to be violent later in life.<sup>47</sup> However, recent findings suggest that men with more education are more likely to carry out domestic abuse, and women with more education more likely to be victim to it.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is impossible to make a clean link between poverty and domestic violence, something which has also been repeatedly found when trying to link poverty and support for VEOs. Instead, it is important to focus on how violence can manifest as a result of relative deprivation, identity loss, and social injustice, and the frustrations they cause. Such issues are established drivers of violent extremism; thus, it is clear that the personal frustrations which can fuel desperation and violence are closely related to gender inequality concerns. Women who are victims of domestic violence may also be more susceptible to recruitment by VEOs, which may appear to offer an exit from their current home lives when legal and social structures provide few other options.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, women's disempowerment in the region is driven by complex, overlapping structural, legal, and socio-cultural factors. Deficiencies in legal protection are reinforced by traditional attitudes and norms supporting subservience and patriarchy.<sup>50</sup> This creates opportunities for, and normalises, rights violations. Likewise, women's economic rights are broadly incompatible with traditional conceptualisations of women's role. This sets up mutually reinforcing conditions that restrict women's participation in the labour market, disadvantaging society overall but women in particular. Without significant workforce representation, particularly at senior levels, women cannot fight against the structural constraints maintaining the status quo, for example for culturally acceptable and affordable transport and childcare, maternity rights, and protection against workplace harassment. Moreover, poor workforce participation prevents the accumulation of assets, with knock-on effects for agency within the home and in public life. This combination can make women feel desperate, just as large-scale unemployment and rampant corruption reportedly affect young men. In both cases, individuals can become increasingly susceptible to propaganda from groups appearing to offer an alternative life and purpose.

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Prettitore, "Poverty and Legal Problems in Jordan: Defining the Relationship," World Bank MENA Knowledge and Learning Quick Notes Series, no. 150 (September 2015), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/QN150.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> El Feki, Heilman, and Barker, *Understanding Masculinities*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan*.

<sup>50</sup> Annalisa Bezzi, *Women and The Law in Jordan: Islam as a Path to Reform* (Amman: WANA Institute and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, October 2016), <http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/WLE%20-%20OCT%2031%20-%20FULL%20PDF%20.pdf>.

## 5. Women's Disempowerment in Jordan

Jordan has long been associated with tribal rule, with certain areas of the country dominated by large families. Unofficially, the rules of the tribe are implemented socially within set areas of control. Women are often viewed as untouchable objects representing honour, much like land. Traditional male and female roles are thus ingrained in the fabric of society through tribal rule as well as religious cultures. The position of women is plagued by different forms of oppression. There are multiple visible and hidden ways in which the socioeconomic and political participation of women is strongly discouraged, if not outwardly prevented. Even where women are portrayed as being in charge, it is often ultimately men that have control, both socially and legally. For example, women have a dominant role in child-rearing, but in most cases the male has the “final say” in household matters. Gender-based violence is a longstanding issue in Jordan. Notwithstanding the daily harassment all women face in the streets, other crimes include indecent exposure, rape, physical (domestic) violence,<sup>51</sup> honour killings, and child molestation.<sup>52</sup>

The Jordanian legal framework is generally unsupportive of women's rights; this extends to inheritance, marriages, and domestic violence.<sup>53</sup> There has been some headway in creating a safer society for women. For example, protests in front of the Jordanian Parliament building on 1 August 2017 may have influenced the final decision to abolish Article 308 of the Penal Code. The controversial article allowed a rapist to marry his victim, with her permission, in order to avoid charges.<sup>54</sup> This abolishment is a much-needed change, but only time will tell what difference it makes to attitudes on the ground, and it is likely only certain socioeconomic strata will benefit. As male dominance is engrained in the judiciary, the abolishment will mean little to those in impoverished rural areas where the rule of law is not fully implemented.

While there are developments in the legal sphere, there are painful reminders of ongoing failures. During the first four months of 2017, seven women were recorded as having been murdered in cases of gender-based violence.<sup>55</sup> The true number is probably higher. Lenience is often shown over such matters: honour killing often attracts a lighter sentence than other murders, for example. According to Yara al-Wazir, “Article 340 of Jordan's Penal Code reduces the penalty if a man kills or attacks a female relative if she commits adultery. This is a further extended under article 98 of the penal code, which reduces the penalty for murder

<sup>51</sup> Nadine Sayegh, *Challenges to an Integrated CVE and Human Security Approach in Jordan* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2017), 14–15.

<sup>52</sup> For detail on crimes against children, see Jordan River Foundation, <http://jordanriver.jo/?q=content/jrcsp/overview>. For details on male and female dynamics and intimate partner violence, see Diab M. Al-Badayneh, “Violence Against Women In Jordan,” *Journal Of Family Violence* 27 no. 5 (2012): 369–79; Rana Hussein, “Only 3% Of Gender-Based Violence Victims Would Seek Police Help—Study,” *Jordan Times*, 28 February 2016, [www.jordantimes.com/news/local/only-3-gender-based-violence-victims-would-seek-police-help-%E2%80%94-study](http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/only-3-gender-based-violence-victims-would-seek-police-help-%E2%80%94-study).

<sup>53</sup> Khetam Malkawi, “Personal Status Law among World's ‘Highly Discriminatory’ Laws against Women,” *Jordan Times*, 5 May 2015, [www.jordantimes.com/news/local/personal-status-law-among-world%E2%80%99s-highly-discriminatory%E2%80%99-laws-against-women%E2%80%99](http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/personal-status-law-among-world%E2%80%99s-highly-discriminatory%E2%80%99-laws-against-women%E2%80%99).

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that new research is revealing that many of the rape-marriage laws were created and passed on by colonial powers, namely France. For more see, “Rape Laws Aren't Part of Islam, but Colonialism: Study,” *Telesur*, 3 August 2017, [www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Rape-Laws-Arent-Part-of-Islam-but-Colonialism-Study-20170803-0024.html](http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Rape-Laws-Arent-Part-of-Islam-but-Colonialism-Study-20170803-0024.html).

<sup>55</sup> “Seven Murdered in Gender-Based Violence in 2017,” *Jordan Times*, 11 April 2017, <http://jordantimes.com/news/local/seven-murdered-gender-based-violence-2017%E2%80%99>.

if the killer is in a ‘state of great fury.’”<sup>56</sup> Such laws are an important reminder of women’s social status as objects of ownership. It is of little surprise, then, that some women are susceptible to promises of a more empowered or independent life presented by VEOs or others.

A separate indication of the lesser status of women in Jordan is the inability of mothers to pass on citizenship to their children. While this law may be in place for political reasons,<sup>57</sup> the fact remains that a mother is not permitted to share her national identity because she is female. This may fuel feelings of disenfranchisement among women and contribute to the appeal of invitations to women, such as those of Daesh, to help build and parent a new idealised Muslim caliphate.

Three main push factors have been highlighted as influencing women’s radicalisation: “religious duties, the search for alternatives to the repressive environments they live in, and revenge.”<sup>58</sup> Some women express a religious duty to follow their husband’s instructions, including following him to Syria for jihad if asked to.<sup>59</sup> And for some women with a very limited life, in which the only other option for escape might be suicide, jihad can appear an acceptable route to self-destruction.<sup>60</sup> It is therefore clear that female desperation and frustrations over limited socioeconomic opportunities are parallel to those of men in Jordan, perhaps even heightened by increased social limitations. Furthermore, women, particularly Syrian refugees who have lost family members, cite revenge as a reason for joining jihad more than men do.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Yara al-Wazir, “Jordan Abolishes Rape Law, It Must Follow Suit with Honor Killing Law,” *Al Arabiya English*, 30 April 2017, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2017/04/30/Jordan-abolishes-rape-law-it-must-follow-suit-with-honor-killing-law.html>.

<sup>57</sup> There is a similarity between Jordan and Lebanon in this respect. Multiple sources cite authorities’ concerns about passing on nationality to children and husbands for fear of disturbing power shares and demographic balance. For more, see Elisa Oddone, “Jordanian Progeny Gain Ground in Nationality Fight,” *Al Jazeera*, 5 May 2015, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/jordanian-progeny-gain-ground-nationality-fight-150504100629097.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/jordanian-progeny-gain-ground-nationality-fight-150504100629097.html).

<sup>58</sup> Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson, and Leen Aghabi, *Trapped between Destructive Choices: Radicalisation Drivers Affecting Youth in Jordan* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2017), 8, <http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/trapped-between-destructive-choices-radicalisation-drivers-affecting-youth-jordan>.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

## 6. Conclusion

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Human development literature highlights that women's empowerment increases economic prosperity; empowering women is thus beneficial for the community and the country, as well as for individuals. What constitutes women's empowerment has been standardised by various implementing and funding bodies, and typically consists of a woman's ability to be economically, socially, politically, and judicially independent, without undue pressure and influence from those around her. However, despite the logic of encouraging this, barriers are reinforced when those in control have little interest in changing the status quo or see such a change as a threat to their power. Such barriers are particularly strong in the WANA region, where tribal values of honour and shame, reinforced by religious traditions, are perceived as the central strand of society's moral fibre.

While the example of Jordan shows an encouraging shift taking place in certain areas of gender equality, such as access to education or healthcare, along with a growing trend for abolishing "marry-your-rapist" laws, there are still worryingly high rates of gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and political marginalisation, and a lack of legal rights for women. There is a dearth of appropriate human security programming to address such issues, and support for victims of gender injustice usually falls to informal groups or NGOs.

Women face many of the same socioeconomic frustrations as men, and sometimes even more so, so it is unsurprising that they are also susceptible to the drivers of radicalisation. While women are undoubtedly vulnerable to physical, economic, or sexual pressures from men, it is also evident that they can be attracted to VEOs of their own free will and not only through coercion or trickery. Such groups capitalise on traditional tropes, offering a pious and meaningful life to male and female recruits along with a purpose and freedom which may be lacking at home. The propaganda of VEOs suggests a nuanced awareness of how women are influenced by push and pull factors and the ongoing difficulties, limitations, and pressures which they may face in their home communities. It is therefore imperative that P/CVE programming follows suit: it would be mistaken and damaging to continue shaping policy without considering the needs of the whole population, and not simply men alone.



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