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TRAPPED BETWEEN DESTRUCTIVE CHOICES:

Radicalisation Drivers Affecting Youth in Jordan

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Executive Summary

Research on radicalisation drivers points to complex dynamics that include economic, social, psychological, and ideological push and pull factors. This report analyses radicalisation drivers that affect Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth in four radicalisation hotbeds: Ma'an, Salt, Irbid, and Rusayfeh. The data is based on findings from Focused Group Discussions with 52 youth (33 males and 19 females), including 16 Syrian refugees.

The generated data points to the confusion of youth with respect to defining radicalisation. Most offered general definitions pertaining to rigid worldviews, while a few participants referred to radical social behaviour in explaining what makes a radical. Lack of clarity on the definition of the term confuses youth understanding of the threat of radicalisation and how it relates to terrorism, and on the crucial need to counter radical ideology.

Youth also appeared divided on their views on whether recent Christian-Muslim tensions in Jordan — as expressed on social media — is a symptom of radical views already widespread in society, or on whether these views will eventually lead to the spread of radicalisation in Jordan. These concerns point to the need for immediate interventions to counter and deal with these expressions.

Findings from field research clarify that youth feel trapped between destructive choices. Socio-economic pressures, particularly unemployment and poverty, frustrate youth leaving them powerless in introducing change. As they seek alternatives, radical ideology presents them with an answer that meets their socio-economic needs (i.e. money, employment, and/or marriage).

Push factors also demonstrate the continued crisis of governance in Jordan (corruption, unemployment, unequal enforcement of the law, and marginalisation). But this crisis of governance cannot be isolated from individual psychological factors. Unemployment, for example, impacts youth self-esteem. Unemployed youth also face marginalisation and humiliation at home because of this. The heroism offered in Daesh media attracts youth to improve their self-esteem and find purpose and a role in life. Today, Daesh and other armed radical groups are presenting an alternative to youth where their material and psychological needs are met.

Dysfunctional families also contribute to radicalisation. Radical groups provide a support system for youth and an in-group to identify with because families are repressive and fail to offer guidance to their members. Equally crucial is the confusion about religious concepts like '*jihad*', martyrdom, and caliphate. Recruiters, according to youth, manipulate young people's ignorance on religious concepts to indoctrinate them.

Gender variations in radicalisation drivers are noticeable in three areas: women's understanding of their religious role in joining their spouses in '*jihad*,' finding an alternative vis-à-vis family restrictions on their education and career aspirations, and seeking revenge. The latter applies to Syrian refugee women, compared to their Jordanian counterparts and Syrian refugee males.

The policy recommendations in this report are offered by youth to describe the changes they find necessary to counter radicalisation. They include:

- Enacting serious anti-corruption measures, as well as employment-generating and development projects in underprivileged governorates;
- Encouraging the skills of critical thinking in school curricula and empowering teachers to address students' concerns on radicalisation and terrorism;
- Offering institutional support and awareness-raising activities to empower families to deal with the radicalisation of family members and to highlight how families can be a contributing factor in the radicalisation of individuals;
- Activating the role of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry for Youth and Sports in all governorates to offer free activities for youth away from idleness;
- Reconceptualising the role of mosques in offering guidance on radicalisation concerns;
- Operationalising rehabilitation programs to enable to the re-integration of former fighters and to encourage other fighters to return to Jordan.

The report also identifies four areas of future research to better inform and design strategies for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):

- Developing an acceptable and operational definition of radicalisation in Jordan *before* policy makers enact policy changes. Such a definition should reconcile the security-centric definition with a culturally-salient one. This will guide policy makers towards effective and context-specific CVE efforts;
- Further exploring the role of families, particularly fathers, in the radicalisation of individuals, leading to a better understanding of how family dynamics contribute to the problem;
- Exploring the pull factors influencing youth based on research with former fighters. Their first hand experiences offer the most accurate account on how to respond to pull factors in Jordan;
- Investigating the dynamic through which contextual factors (economic and social) turn radical violent behaviour into a moral and/or acceptable alternative. Such an investigation should employ an interdisciplinary approach combining sociology, psychology, and criminology.

1. Introduction

'Trapped youth' is an appropriate phrase to summarise the findings of this report. Field research on radicalisation drivers as perceived by youth in four radicalisation hotbeds in Jordan (Ma'an, Salt, Rusayfeh, and Irbid)[1] portray a grim picture of macro and micro-level frustration and despair. Specifically, youth feel frustrated with corruption and social injustice, tired of political and developmental marginalisation, and disempowered at home.

This report explores how youth in Jordan understand radicalisation, and the emerging indicators of radicalisation. It details the economic, psychological, political, and social 'push' factors[2] affecting the radicalisation of youth, and demonstrates the interconnected nature of contextual and personal drivers, such as between economic and psychological factors. The report then highlights noticeable gender variations in the findings on radicalisation drivers. The important 'pull' factors affecting youth are examined.[3] The report concludes with a set of policy recommendations, as offered by youth.

This report sits within the body of research that has identified push and pull factors contributing to the radicalisation of youth in different contexts.[4] Prior work recognises the complexity of radicalisation drivers, and this report sheds light on this complexity in the Jordan context.

In particular, the findings suggest a radicalisation process similar to that theorised by Wiktorowicz in his research on al-Muhajiroun group in the United Kingdom,[5] and Moghaddam's 'Staircase to Terrorism' model.[6] While the limited sample size used in the current research cautions against asserting the absolute relevance of these models, it is valuable insofar as it highlights the dynamics at work in radicalisation hotbeds in Jordan. Specifically, it highlights the complexity of research on radicalisation, and identifies further areas of investigation for researchers and policy makers.

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from Focused Group Discussions (FGD) with 52 youth (33 males and 19 females) between July and August 2016. This sample included 16 Syrian

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[1] Several reports and experts refer to these four cities as recruitment hotbeds in Jordan, including an expert from the Ministry of Interior in conversation with the research team, Sharif Omari, Director of Counter Extremism and Violence Unit at Ministry of Interior, Jordan in a meeting with the research team on March 22, 2015; Mohammed Abu Rumman, *I am a Salafi; A Study of the actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis* (Amman: Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), 13; Mercy Corps, *From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups* (Oregon, USA: Mercy Corps, 2015), 2,http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/jordan-jihad-lure- syrias-violent-extremist-groups

[2] Push factors refer to negative social, political, economic, or cultural root causes that influence individuals to join armed radical groups. For a more detailed definition see: Muhsin Hassan, "Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of Al-Shabab and Somali Youth," *CTC Sentinel* 5 (2012) https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-shabab-and-somali-youth

[3] Pull factors are defined as "the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organisation that 'pull' vulnerable individuals to join. These include the group's ideology (e.g., emphasis on changing one's condition through violence rather than 'apathetic' and 'passive' democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits." Alex P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation* (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), 26, http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf

[4] For a review of these, see a discussion of different drivers in Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson, and Leen Aghabi, *Understanding Radicalisation: A Literature Review of Models and Drivers* (Amman: The WANA Institute, 2016), 13-25, http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Understanding%20Rad%20Sept%208.pdf

[5] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam" (paper presented at The Roots of Islamic Radicalism Conference, Yale University, May 8-9, 2004), http://insct.syr.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf

[6] Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60 (2005): 161–169.

refugees in Jordan (the remainder comprising Jordanian nationals). Anonymity was afforded to all participants to encourage an open discussion. The FDGs were conducted in Arabic and each lasted for an average of one and half hours. The data from these FGDs were coded in the original Arabic. Direct quotes presented in this report were translated by the research team. The guidance questions for the FDGs can be found in Annex I.

The report is also informed by input from eight *shari'a* experts and *imams*, who were interviewed between June and August 2016. Although the purpose of these interviews was to discuss radicalisation narratives and counter-narratives, the discussions elicited content pertinent to radicalisation drivers. Where helpful, their viewpoints are referred to in this report.

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2. Radicalisation and the Decision to Join Armed Groups

This aspect to the data collection aimed at gauging what youth believe makes a person a radical, and to understand the shift from radical ideology to the decision to join an armed radical group. In summary, youth are confused about defining radicalisation. The differences between a radical, a religious conservative, and a terrorist were not easily distinguished.

Youth generally understand a radical (whether Islamic or not) to be a person with a rigid mind-set who refuses to accept views different from their own. Some participants link radical ideology to behaviour. For example, a young woman connected radicalisation directly to a family's practice of prohibiting female employment. Another opined that a radical seeks to impose his/her views through violence. Such perceptions reinforced their confusion between behaviour and ideas when understanding radicalisation. Scholars Neumann and Sha'ban distinguish between radical ideas and violent behaviour in understanding radicalisation. This distinction is rarely well articulated. This has contributed to the confusion between radicalisation, terrorism, and extremism.[7]

When it comes to defining Islamic radicalism, one participant explained, "A radical is someone who focuses on minor issues in religion and ignores the main underpinnings on which a religion is based."[8] Variations on this definition were offered by youth across different locales; a common theme was rigidity in dress and/or minor rituals vis-à-vis attention to higher Islamic values and morals that a Muslim should adhere to. Generally, in their definitions of radicalisation, participants seemed hesitant to associate the term with Islam, and instead pointed to the misrepresentation of Islam in Western media.

When asked about the relationship between radical ideology and the decision to join radical armed groups, most argued that a degree of prior ideological receptivity to radical ideology was necessary, even if not totally indoctrinated in radical ideology. "An individual has the seed of radical ideology and then it gets nurtured through social media. Eventually s/he becomes a radical."[9] Another asserted that there is a 90 percent connection between the two: one does not join a radical armed group unless one is a radical.

For Jordanian FGD participants, while indoctrination was necessary, it was not sufficient to explain the process by which an individual joins an armed group. One man explained:

> Whoever is a radical and does not join an armed group, becomes a recruiter or an informer and identifies individuals to recruit. This person is simply waiting for the time to be ready to join the armed group. There might be a deterrent against joining the armed group physically; this may be his wife, or family, or a father who monitors his behaviour. These are

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[7] For a review of these definitions, Bondokji, Wilkinson and Aghabi, *Understanding Radicalisation: A Literature Review of Models and Drivers,* 4-6. http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Understanding%20Rad%20Sept%208.pdf
[8] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[9] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

all social deterrents and not religious ones. There can be no religious deterrent [in this case], because he thinks that joining armed groups is a religious cause.[10]

Syrian participants, by contrast, held more to the argument that individuals need not adhere to any radical ideas before taking the decision to join an armed group. A group of three Syrian refugees in one FGD specifically discussed the case of a local 'thug' from their hometown. He joined an armed group simply to find something to do after his family denounced him. Others in the discussion elaborated that when a thug gets bored of his life and reputation in his area, he joins an armed group searching for a new form of thuggery. Syrians made reference to individuals from their localities who joined one of the armed groups currently operating in Syria.

These arguments highlight the significance of contextual factors vis-à-vis ideological considerations. One explanation is found in Situational Action Theory in criminology that demonstrates how personal and contextual factors influence action that is perceived to be 'moral' i.e. right, and that is chosen as an alternative action.[11] Indoctrination in this instance comes as a result of contextual and personal factors that justify action as a moral imperative, and not necessarily because of ideological convictions.

The points raised by the Syrian participants should also focus attention on the ground realities of a civil war. Kalyvas posits that there is an 'urban bias' in civil war studies, whereby experts favour ideological justifications against situational factors that push individuals to participate in violence in any given civil war.[12] This argument deserves more attention in radicalisation studies, particularly when examining radicalisation in Iraq and Syria. The difficulty of accessing research subjects prevents accurate theorisation, but future research should direct attention to how contextual factors cognitively turn radical behaviour into a viable and desirable option.

The discussions also highlighted the need for a better definition of radicalisation, including the distinction between ideology and behaviour. A better definition will assist practitioners in developing strategies to counter the spread of radical ideology, and to contain radical behaviour. It will also assist youth in learning how to counter radicalisation in their local communities.

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[10] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[11] Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Why crime happens: A situational action theory," *Analytical Sociology,* ed. G. Manzo. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014); Noémie Bouhana and Per-Olof H. Wikström, *Al Qai'da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory*. RDS Occasional Paper 97. London, UK: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2011) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116724/occ97.pdf

[12] Stathis Kalyvas, "The Urban Bais in Research on Civil Wars," *Security Studies* 13 (2004): 173.

3. Emerging Sectarianism and Radicalisation

During the period when the FGDs were being conducted, expressions of Christian-Muslim tensions in Jordan were occurring, observable predominately in social media.[13] Participants were asked about whether these were expressions of radical ideology already evident in society, or whether such expressions would lead Jordanians *eventually* towards radicalisation.

Almost half of participants argued that these tensions evidence that radical ideas are already spreading in society. The growth of such expressions was being encouraged by Daesh discourse that advocates the killing non-Muslims.[14] At the same time, sectarian hatred has equally been fuelled by the external support that regional and international powers have offered to certain groups in Syria. Today "our religion has become politicised. Before the war we did not feel this sectarianism," one Syrian refugee pointed out.[15] Syrians in particular commented on the manipulation of religion for political purposes; specifically, attempts to portray the conflict as a sectarian one instead of one caused by legitimate political grievances. These sentiments have been exploited in Jordan, and in some cases this has influenced the decision of Jordanians to take part in the fight in Syria.[16]

The prevalence of radicalisation within some segments of Jordanian society, against recent incidents of hate crime and sectarian expression, suggest a troubling context. It seems reasonable to assume that the rise of these tensions — if not addressed immediately and decisively — may lead to various manifestations of sectarian violence. This presents a strong case for the development of radicalisation counter-narratives and their dissemination in local communities.

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[13] Rana Husseini, "Social media users to be sued over hate speech in reaction to Hattar shooting," *Jordan Times,* September 25th, 2016, http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/social-media-users-be-sued-over-hate-speech-reaction-hattar-shooting;"When Muslims do not love their neighbors: Jordan's 'Christian' car crash opens up raw wounds," *Al Bawaba*, July 31st, 2016, http://www.albawaba.com/news/shadi-abu-jaber-sophia-shanti-jordan-car-crash-867998

[14] The group has also advocated killing non-Sunni Muslims, see Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman,*The Islamic State Organisation* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015), 53.

[15] Syrian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.

[16] Mercy Corps, *From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups*, 5-6, http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/jordan-jihad-lure- syrias-violent-extremist-groups

4. Radicalisation Drivers Impacting Youth

The complex relation between psychological, social, and economic push factors is discussed in a previously published WANA Institute literature review.[17] This review stresses that such factors cannot be understood in isolation from each other. The current section builds upon this, and provides depth of insight into the complex nature of economic, psychological, social, and ideological push factors impacting youth in Jordan. The findings support the need for an interdisciplinary approach in countering violent extremism.

4.1 Ideological Responses to the Crisis of Unemployed Youth

FGD participants directly referred to unemployment and poverty as the main push factors relevant to radicalisation. This argument, however, goes beyond mere financial want. Socio-economic burdens lead individuals to adopt ideological responses to their frustrations. One participant explained, "Poverty and want make a person think that [by joining armed groups], he can support his family and at the same time become a martyr."[18] Articulated in a different way: "I have a lot of free time: no work, no wife, no children, and no car. So why don't I join [an armed group] and then die as a martyr!"[19] Similar notions were repeated by male youth in the four cities, in slightly different variations.

These statements are significant in at least two ways. First, they clarify that the conviction or desire to join the '*jihad*' is a secondary consideration. Had there been sources of income and stability in the form of a family and future in Jordan, the desire to join the fight would not have materialised in the first place. **This sets a foundation for a possible argument that religious and ideological push factors are activated only when contextual grievances are accentuated.**

The search for meaning and purpose takes the form of religious ideological expression by joining the '*jihad*.' Wiktorowicz explains a similar process of how 'exogenous conditions' lead to a 'cognitive opening' when a person is ready to change previous convictions.[20] For some individuals, as evident in the statements above, the change is expressed in religious ideology or in what Wiktorowicz calls 'religious seeking.'[21] A similar shift from individual alienation to the search for alternatives is described by Moghaddam. The only difference in Moghaddam's model is that recruiters actively tap into these feelings to direct a transition towards terrorism. In Wiktorowicz's model, individual agency is central to the transition. The data collected in the FGDs cannot be construed as concrete evidence on the role of individual agency in the radicalisation process in Jordan. This should, however, be a target area for future research.

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[17] Bondokji, Wilkinson and Aghabi, *Understanding Radicalisation: A Literature Review of Models and Drivers*, http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Understanding%20Rad%20Sept%208.pdf
[18] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.
[19] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[20] Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam", 7, http://insct.syr.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf
[21] Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam", 8, http://insct.syr.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf

A second point of significance is that these statements call into question the underlying perception that joining armed radical groups in Syria is *'jihad.'* While individual motivations maybe context-specific, they find an answer in collectively and institutionally legitimate concepts such as 'martyrdom' and *'jihad.'* In other words, individual grievances are directed into a response that falls within what is socially perceived to be a legitimate cause whether politically or ideologically. The need for positive self-esteem and finding a purpose in life are met in this case through the ideological response of martyrdom. This is expressed in the use of the word *'jihad'* instead of fighting.

In Ma'an, this notion was expressed differently, highlighting the dire choices faced by young people in the city: "there are two options here: either *jihad* or drugs."[22] While official statistics are not available about drug trade, addiction, or smuggling to and from Ma'an, discussions with participants, civil society actors, and other stakeholders all confirmed that drugs are a rampant phenomenon in the city.

Interestingly, for young Syrian men, joining an armed group was not a choice between two destructive options. Instead, the key push factors appeared to be idleness and unemployment. One participant noted: "Where would anyone who finished high school go? To university [in a sarcastic tone that this is not an option for Syrian refugees in Jordan]?! A Syrian refugee cannot work here, so what would he do?!"[23] Another explained that because he had nothing to do, he would try to fill his time. And when young men have nothing to do, they will go online and start watching or reading about 'weird' things [implying Daesh propaganda].[24]

4.1.1 Corruption and Nepotism

Young men, particularly in Salt and Ma'an, raised the problems of corruption and nepotism. "Many young men feel the injustice; they are not attaining their rights. When one feels they have no future, one is obliged to join them [armed radical groups]."[25] In Salt participants questioned why corrupt officials are not held accountable when they are "stealing people's money,"[26] and why qualified young men are jobless when unqualified individuals receive high-paying positions. The anger and frustration of these young men was observable in their facial expressions and tone. Importantly, there have been a number of far-reaching and well-publicised corruption cases in Jordan in recent years.[27] Moreover, it appears that corruption, coupled with unemployment, has particularly virulent consequences.

It is important to note that not all participants supported this assertion. Some argued that around a third of young men join groups for financial reasons, but others are motivated by religious and ideological considerations. One woman in Rusayfeh noted that most of those who left were

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[22] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

[23] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.

[24] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.

[25] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

[26] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[27] See, for example, Suleiman al-Khalidi, "Jordan ex-minister and tycoon go on trial for graft." *Reuters*, April 5, 2010, http://uk.reuters.com/article/jordan-corruption-trial-idUKLDE63409E20100405; BBC, "Jordan's ex-spy chief jailed for corruption," *BBC News*, November 11, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20286407; Ali Younes and Mark Mazzetti, "Weapons for Syrian rebels sold on Jordan's black market" *Al Jazeera,* June 27th, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/cia-weapons-syrian-rebels-jordan-black-market-160626141335170.htmll

educated and doing well financially. This was supported by one woman whose husband, a pharmacist, joined a radical armed group in Syria because of his religious duty of '*jihad*.'

When taken together, the FGD findings suggest that, in addition to unemployment and poverty, corruption and nepotism are determinant push factors that influence youth's search for alternatives to the status quo in Jordan. Young men feel that they have nothing to do and that there is no future awaiting them in Jordan because they lose opportunities to corruption and the mismanagement and poor planning of the Kingdom's economic sector. **This reinforces feelings of being trapped in a network of lost opportunity and injustice. In turn, this triggers youths' psychological search for meaning and purpose in life, thus activating religious and ideological push factors**.

4.2 The Marginalised Individual

Almost all FGD participants agreed that the marginalisation of youth, and particularly of young men, in their immediate family was playing a major role in the success of recruiters. "When a father keeps telling his unemployed son 'you are worthless,' or 'you stay at home like old women,' the person feels useless and angry."[28] Another participant explained:

> They tempt [potential recruits] with ideas that you will be a leader, and
> have responsibilities, or that you will be a commander for a large group
> and you will have weapons [under your command]. So an individual is
> influenced with these thoughts and that he will have status and
> authority.[29]

The narrative of heroism is constructed in Daesh media discourse by focusing on military victories documented in the field. According to FGD participants, the group communicates these larger scale military successes in order to attract youth to the most powerful actor on the ground.

This argument cannot be isolated from another well-documented push factor: an intensely felt desire to right or avenge injustices committed against the in-group with whom an individual identifies. Neumann's research discusses how Western foreign fighters identified with the in-group (Sunni Muslims) facing injustice,[30] and that in this way the conflict in Syria was seen as "fighting against an existential threat."[31] A similar argument is also made by Nawaz concerning his own radicalisation.[32]

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[28] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[29] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[30] Peter Neumann, "Western European Foreign Fighters in Syria: An Overview." In *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an Evidence Base for Policy and Practice,* edited by Sara Zeiger and Anne Aly, (Australia: Curtin University, 2015), 13-19, http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-23201691817.pdf

[31] Peter Neumann, "Western European Foreign Fighters in Syria: An Overview."

[32] Maajid Nawaz, *Radical* (United Kingdom: WH Allen, 2013), 83. It is important to note that although Neumann and Nawaz do not contextualise their work with reference to Social Identity Theory (SIT), existing research in this area provides a useful lens for exploring why individuals join radical groups. This shall be addressed at greater length in the WANA Institute's forthcoming review of SIT. On social identity, see for example John Turner, "Social Categorisation and the Self-Concept: A Social Cognitive Theory of Group Behaviour." In *Advances in Group Processes: Theory and Research*, edited by E. J. Lawler (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1985).

In a similar way, participants in all FGDs referred to the injustices being committed against Syrians. "When I see a Syrian kid being burnt alive, this makes me want to attack the regime that used violence against children and fight for their rights" said one respondent.[33] It is well documented that Daesh uses provocative graphics including of child corpses and tortured victims to portray itself as a force of justice against evil. If the FGD findings can be deemed representative, such tactics seem to be having some of the desired impact insofar as driving youth to join Daesh to contribute to its efforts as heroes.

Importantly, this sense of heroism balances the marginalisation individuals feel at home. Women participants' analysis of young men supported this view, although they did not voice any opinion concerning their own marginalisation and how this may lead them to radicalisation.

Youth feel that they are marginalised by both government policies and society more broadly. Indeed, feelings of economic and social marginalisation affect radicalisation. Participants expressed this in terms of rights and needs. For example, one Syrian respondent noted, "when my immediate environment marginalises me and does not grant me my rights, an [armed radical] group will attract me saying they will take care of me and my family [financially]."[34] This also applies to particularly marginalised individuals within a community: "When a local thug cannot stand his marginalisation in society and the marginalisation among his family and friends anymore, he will think of going elsewhere to practice his ways!"[35]

Daesh's media content also showcases itself as a group to be feared. "Their [Daesh's] way of killing people is distinctive, non-traditional, and unprecedented" said one respondent.[36] When emotionally-driven youth watch one of Daesh's videos, they are tempted to watch more; one respondent found this experience analogous to "watching action movies".[37]

The impact of these videos is twofold. First, youth become morally disengaged from the brutality they observe, which begins to be constructed as the only norm. A corollary is the 'mortality salience' (reminders of death or death related imagery) described by Pszcyznski et al. They argue that this mortality salience can "lead people to conform more closely to the norms of their culture, punish violators of those norms more severely, and react more negatively toward those whose worldviews conflict with one's own."[38] As Silke outlines, this can contribute to an individual's support for extremism when this is connected to group identity.[39]

A second impact is that **the association with a fearsome and powerful group can inspire youth to join Daesh to be part of their power structure, fighting against the enemy and/or the 'religious other.'** In this regard, participants specifically discussed the narratives of power and of injustice against the in-group, which features in the Daesh discourse.

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[33] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[34] Syrian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[35] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[36] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[37] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[38] Tom Pyszczynski, Abdolhossein Abdollahi, Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, Florette Cohen, David Weise, "Mortality Salience, Martyrdom, and Military Might: The Great Satan Versus the Axis of Evil", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 32 (2016): 525 – 537.*
[39] Andrew Silke, "Holy Warriors; Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalisation," *European Journal of Criminology* 5 (2008): 114.

4.2.1 Social and Family Disintegration

Participants in all FGDs noted the connection between socio-familial dynamics and radicalisation, concluding that social and family disintegration had created an environment conducive towards youth radicalisation in Jordan. Specific factors included negligence and lack of supervision, repressive family environments, and early marriage and its impact on the ability of mothers to counter radicalisation. There was a general consensus that clear supervision and direction from families and the surrounding community was lacking. Moreover, that negligence at the intra-family level played a role in radicalisation.[40]

This is most directly felt in families' inability to monitor the kind of friends their son and daughters have. In all FGDs, **the role of friends was stressed as one of the most determinant factors in radicalisation.** A Jordanian woman, whose husband had joined a radical group in Syria, noted her belief that his friends played a crucial role in his recruitment.[41] Similar assertions were made by a majority of respondents.

A local *imam* from Rusayfeh elaborated on this. He argued that while fathers are usually busy making a living, mothers are aware who their sons mingle with. However, even when mothers know that their children are friends with someone from an 'extremist family,' they tend not to speak out about it. Instead, they cover it up from the authorities and the fathers.[42] One result is that radicalisation tendencies are not addressed in the early stages. Additionally, in dysfunctional families (families experiencing martial breakdown or where parents are divorced) weak communication lines between parents can manifest in a decline in parental supervision and monitoring.

In most cases, families remain unaware of their child's plans until they have already arrived in Syria. Instead of finding support and direction from authorities, families fear social stigma and potential investigation. They thus suppress their knowledge and find support through informal means. One participant noted, "Fresh university graduates [sometimes] leave the country and join radical groups. Their families cover for them and claim that they travelled for a holiday!"[43]

Lack of supervision and monitoring can also drive young men and women towards alternate means of obtaining a sense of direction. Radical groups (and drug rings)[44] can provide this by offering emotional and financial support, and the feeling of belonging to an in-group, which in turn, provides stability and security for the individual.[45] **Gradually, the in-group can replace the family as the first point of reference for individual behaviour**.

Family disintegration can also impact radicalisation processes. Male participants argued that radicalisation stems from an individual's upbringing; if one is raised in a dysfunctional family where parents are divorced, the chance of radicalisation is more prominent. Participants in Ma'an

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[40] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[41] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

[42] Interview with Anonymous Imam (A), Rusayfeh, 28th of June 2016.

[43] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[44] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

[45] The impact and significance of in-group membership will be addressed a literature review of social identity and radicalisation to be published by the WANA Institute in early 2017.

lamented this point, directly connection family disintegration with what they described as high divorce rates in the city.[46]

Female participants presented a different point of view. Women from Rusayfeh, for example, raised the issue of the family environment not offering a space for free and unhindered discussion. "When we ask our parents questions about politics, they offer no answers. If we have a good grasp of related issues, radicalisation cannot take form."[47] This point was also emphasised by Syrian participants. **Families do not provide a safe environment where political and religious ideas are discussed and debated. Young people thus search for answers elsewhere, mainly from friends and online**.

Interestingly, young Syrian women highlighted how early marriage can impact radicalisation. They noted that when marriage takes place as young as 14 years old, girls are not mature enough to raise a family and shoulder their responsibilities.[48] Such wives are unprepared to address radicalisation concerns, often oblivious to the signs of radicalisation, and powerless to alter the situation if a husband or son begins to radicalise.

4.3 Religious Ideology vis-à-vis Opportunity

A few female Jordanian participants expressed the view that '*jihad*' is a religious duty and that it is God's calling when a person joins the fight because it is '*jihad*.' This resulted in a heated discussion where other women challenged that the situation in Syria is complex and cannot be classified as *jihad* against injustice (implying that many armed groups have different agendas). When it was suggested that challenged fighting in Israel is a more obvious case for *jihad*, the widow of a fighter who was killed in Syria said that, "I asked my husband before he left to Syria why he wasn't going to Palestine instead. He answered that it is possible to go to Syria, but there is no way to make it to Palestine. If there was a way we would have gone a long time back."[49]

This showcases how opportunity plays a key role in an individual's decision to join an armed group. Silke writes that "people cannot become active terrorists unless they can find a terrorist group that is willing to let them join."[50] The proximity of both the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts, the variety of militant groups active in these conflicts, and the (formally) porous borders clearly plays a role in youth joining these organisations. Indeed, a number of participants agreed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represented a 'truer' form of *jihad;* opportunity, however, may trump such concerns.

Generally, participants held conflicting views on whether the Syria conflict is a righteous '*jihad*' or if the use of this term was an example of manipulation by external actors and armed groups such as Daesh. In all FGDs, one or two participants expressed view that it is a religious duty to join the fight in Syria, or at least that the fight in Syria is a righteous '*jihad*.' They disagreed, however, on which group was the righteous one.

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[46] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[47] Syrian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[48] Syrian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[49] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.
[50] Silke, "Holy Warriors; Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalisation," 101.

Most participants expressed, in various forms, that religious discourse and concepts are being manipulated to encourage young men and women to join the fight, taking advantage of people's shallow understanding of 'jihad' and related concepts. "Ignorance about what constitutes *jihad* and whether you are convinced that Daesh's *'jihad'* is true [righteous] or not. There is a chance that [a recruiter] will fool you with incorrect [religious] information and tell you that what is happening in Syria is *jihad*."[51]

Participants attributed such ignorance about religious concepts (and recruiters' success in exploiting such knowledge gaps) to deficiencies in education institutions, mosques, and parents who fail to educate themselves and their families. The religious education curriculum in schools is limited, and does not address concepts that properly explain the difference between *jihad*, radicalisation, and terrorism. One participant observed:

> The root of the problem lies in the educational system. Most students of public schools...[graduate] knowing nothing about [the core questions of] religion. When these students join universities, they become more ignorant. Ignorance is the biggest problem: ignorance about religion, politics, and life. So an individual will have no solid religious understanding. [But then] after a year or so, this same person becomes a 'sheikh' and is completely changed [after being successfully indoctrinated by the radical group building on his poor understanding of religion].[52]

Women similarly expressed frustration with the current confusion in the religious discourse. "Things are so messed up now and one cannot make out what is right. Everyone speaks in the name of Islam!" one woman noted.[53] Another observation was the many competing understandings of the concept of caliphate. Other women honed in on Daesh's killing of innocents and children to argue that the group's practices cannot be considered Islamic. It was generally agreed that the killing of fellow Muslims by the different groups was un-Islamic.[54]

Male participants asserted that recruiters exploit people's weak understanding of religion by pushing theological and political arguments geared towards encouraging individuals to join. "Recruitment mainly relies on exploiting the political and religious ignorance of individuals [potential recruits]."[55] Another participant explained that "before a fighter takes the decision to join an armed radical group, the fighter goes through a period of ideological radicalisation. During this period a person is indoctrinated based on a shallow understanding of religion."[56]

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[51] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[52] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[53] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.
[54] Interestingly, Neumann found that the killing of other Sunni Muslims was a major reason offered by Daesh defectors to explain their decision, see Peter Neumann, *Victims, Perpetrators, Assets: The Narratives of Islamic State Defectors* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2015), 1, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ICSR-Report-Victims-Perpertrators-Assets-The-Narratives-of-Islamic-State-Defectors.pdf
[55] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[56] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

4.4 Religious Education

In all FGDs, participants tended to link their concerns about people's ignorance of core religious concepts to shortfalls in religious education, whether formal or informal. One of the key problems highlighted is that the curriculum does not address and expand on Islamic morals — which are, in effect, universal human morals — such as tolerance, honesty, generosity etc. Participants opined that the formal religious education that takes place in schools should be more focused on these areas, as opposed to prescriptive religious teachings. Interestingly, Jordan is currently undergoing a complicated curriculum reform process[57] that was rarely referred to by participants.

Similar comments were made in relation to informal religious education, which usually takes place in Quran recitation centres. Participants generally agreed on the positive role these centres play at the community level, especially in the absence of other forms of religious education and children's recreational activities. However, the concern raised again was that the focus should be on Islamic morals rather than having children memorise or recite the Quran. "What is the use when a child memorises the Quran but cannot treat others morally?" wondered one participant. "Religion is not about rituals and hadith [recorded saying of Mohamad]. It is about how to treat others."[58]

While these arguments relate more to participants' understanding of the role of religion in the public domain, the same ideas are promoted by scholars whose work examines identity and radicalisation. Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman argue that teaching and encouraging tolerance, caring, and humanity can help prevent the creation of the personality traits that make an individual susceptible to terrorist recruitment.[59]

Participants also raised concerns about the qualifications of teachers, and in particular that they were not capable of addressing, or willing to address, matters concerning radicalisation or terrorism. These topics are heavily monitored by security agencies and teachers generally feel uncomfortable dealing with them in schools. **Participants' felt that unless qualified and trained teachers are available in schools, religious education that disseminates incomplete information to students, is more destructive than helpful**.

4.5 Political Marginalisation

It is notable that only Syrian refugee respondents referred to political marginalisation as a push factor. They explained that throughout their lives before the civil war, youth were generally apolitical. However, as the conflict unfolded, the injustices suffered and their aspiration for political and social change became a strong driving force. "When I was in my fourth year in

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[57] See for example Samer Khair, "Revising the Curriculum: What's the problem?" (In Arabic) *Al-Ghad,* September 23rd, 2016, http://www.alghad.com/articles/1146312-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84%D8%A9%D8%9F!; "Thunaibat: Revising the Curriculum & Stopping Practices Contrary to Our Culture" (In Arabic) *Al-Rai*, May 13th, 2016, http://alrai.com/article/786918.html
[58] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.
[59] Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (2009): 554.

university in Syria, I joined a military faction to get rid of a bigger enemy (the regime), even though I did not support that faction's ideology," explained one man.[60]

Another participant commented on the role of direct injustice and humiliation. "The injustice I experienced after losing my brother and having my family disintegrated built up my frustration. And if I see anyone of those who tortured me, I will drink his blood".[61] 'Drink his blood' is an Arabic expression that signifies a desire for extreme revenge. This participant explained that he was not a radical and does not engage in violence for political change; however, the injustice and humiliation after being tortured activated a basic human desire to seek revenge. He was unapologetic about this.

Jordanian participants, by contrast, barely referred to political marginalisation (it should be noted, however, that widely held fears that such views might be discovered by security agencies may explain this discrepancy). At times, a sense of helplessness about the political structure in Jordan was perceptible, including some sarcastic comments made during discussions concerning corruption and nepotism, and one reference to the development gap between Amman and other governorates. One man from Salt directly referred to the need for stronger and more organised political parties to reflect the choices of youth — in his case, more moderate and Islam-oriented political parties. Broadly however, participants appeared more concerned with economic marginalisation.

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[60] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[61] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.

5. Gender Variations in Radicalisation

Gender has been an under-researched area in the radicalisation literature. Only a handful of studies focus on exploring radicalisation drivers among women both in the Arab and Western regions.[62] For Western female fighters, findings suggest that these women share common grievances towards the mistreatment of Muslims around the world.[63] They join armed radical groups like Daesh believing that they will live in and support a Muslim 'caliphate' where Shari'a Law is properly implemented.[64]

The views expressed by women FDG participants, by contrast, point to three main push factors: women's religious duties, the search for alternatives to the repressive environments they live in, and revenge. Before elaborating on these factors it is important to note that anecdotal evidence from the FGDs indicates that women from Jordan have joined armed radical groups in Syria in greater numbers than is usually acknowledged. Women participants from Rusayfeh confirmed that a number of women from their neighbourhoods had joined the fight. These were both single women and married women who had left their families.[65] Male participants from Ma'an, however, asserted that no women had joined the fight from their city.[66]

5.1 The Religious Duty of Women

In contrast to Western female fighters, **Jordanian respondents noted that their duty in 'jihad' takes a particular form**. One woman argued that women go to Syria only when their spouses ask them to join with their children. She perceived this as reflective of a wife's duty towards her husband.[67] This view was challenged by other women who pointed to the considerable risk of serial marriages and/or forced marriage when a women's husband passes away. In this respondent's case, this had deterred her from joining her husband in Syria.[68]

In Rusayfeh, the role of women was discussed at length. One respondent claimed that some women join the '*jihad*' to fight for the rights of Muslims, as men who are willing to do so are in rare supply.[69] In a ridiculing tone, she suggested that men are preoccupied with worldly concerns. Most women, however, believed that taking part in '*jihad*' (understood here as fighting) it is not part of a woman's religious duty in Islam. Some even argued that it is *haram* (forbidden) for women to travel alone without a *mahram* (male guardian).

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[62] For example, see Edwin Bakker and Seran de Leede, *European Female Jihadist in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic* (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2015), https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-de-Leede-European-Female-Jihadists-In-Syria-Exploring-An-Under-Researched-Topic-April2015(1).pdf; UN Women Jordan, *Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan* (Amman: UN Women, 2016); Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015) http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

[63] Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf

[64] Ibid.

[65] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

[66] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

[67] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

[68] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

[69] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

5.2 The Search for Alternatives

A final factor noted was that the constraining social and family environments in which women live drive rebellious feelings and a search for alternatives. For them, joining '*jihad*' is an escape and a way to express their suppressed identity. **One Jordanian woman noted: "for us, it is either joining '*jihad*' or committing suicide."**[70]

The choices presented here are of self-destruction. The use of the term '*jihad*' in this and similar instances is perplexing. Are youth really confused about the meaning of '*jihad*' or is this a mental and psychological self-defence mechanism i.e. to frame a nihilistic option in religious discourse and portray it as a religious calling. Both options have only one conclusion: personal demise.

On another level, this option of '*jihad*' is sought only because the immediate context is oppressive. Had the immediate family environment been more accommodating to the subject's aspirations and dreams, the option of joining '*jihad*' would not present itself. **This is strikingly similar to the notion expressed by young men about unemployment and having nothing to do. The choice of joining the fight — framed on both occasions as '*jihad*' — is the result of non-existent pathways for better socio-economic conditions.**

5.3 Revenge

It is striking to note that compared to Jordanian women, Syrian refugee women stressed the idea of revenge against injustice. They explain that most, if not all, Syrian women have lost a family member in the civil war, and that they join '*jihad*' as an act of revenge against this suffering and injustice.[71] The idea of revenge as a driver of radicalisation is entertained by a number of theorists. As one scholar puts it, "revenge for humiliation by an oppressor is, in fact, an ancient cultural tradition with direct link to the current violence in the Middle East."[72] **Further investigation into why this push factor is expressed more by women than men should be the subject of future research**.

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[70] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.
[71] Syrian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.
[72] Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (2005): 28.

6. Pull Factors Impacting Youth

In their discussion of radicalisation drivers, participants referred to a number of pull factors that influence the decision of young men and women to join armed radical groups. Each of these factors are the flip side of the push factors detailed above. They include financial rewards, the opportunity to be viewed as a hero, and the prospect of a new life.

Jordanian respondents cited that financial compensation as a significant pull factor in a similar way that financial pressures act as a push factor. One respondent summarised mainstream aspirations as follows: "youth in Jordan just want to graduate, get a job, and get married."[73] Money is a means for socio-economic stability — something that is unattainable in the four locales studied. **For youth, therefore, armed radical groups are offering the basic needs the government is failing to deliver**. "Daesh offers youth cars, houses, wives, and monthly salaries that they can give to their families after they pass away."[74]

Another important pull factor is the idea of heroism. Respondents posited that Daesh projects an idea of power into the minds of potential recruits.[75] **Recruiters tap into the struggles of marginalised individuals in their search for authority and dignity** — particularly the marginalisation and family humiliation discussed above. Recruiters also promise youth that by joining Daesh they will become *amirs* (leaders)[76] of certain areas, inferring a sense of influence and status.

Participants seemed aware that while these tactics were effectively used to recruit youth, upon arrival in Daesh-controlled territory, recruits would discover that these promises were fraudulent. Research by several scholars on Daesh defectors support the accuracy of this insight. Indeed, a key reason for defections from Daesh is that recruits find it to be un-Islamic, hypocritical, and disappointing.[77]

These pull factors can be usefully understood through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT). According to SIT, joining an extremist group can provide an elevation of status for individuals. Looking at a different type of extremist group — racist groups — Bjørgo and Carlsson argue that this search for status is the most important factor for those joining.[78] By donning the group's uniform, young people find that those who used to look down upon them or make fun of them, now "yield to them."[79] Similarly, Uncertainty Theory — a subset of SIT — sets out how

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[73] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[74] Jordanian Female in a Focus Group Discussion, Rusayfeh, 14th of July 2016.

[75] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

[76] Amir literally means prince, but in the context of Islamic history invoked by Daesh, it means a leader.

[77] For example, see Neumann, *Victims, Perpetrators, Assets: The Narratives of Islamic State Defectors*; Anne Speckhard and Ahmet Yayla, "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit," *Perspectives on Terrorism,* 9 (2015): 115, http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/475/html

[78] Tore Bjørgo and Yngve Carlsson, *Early Intervention with Violent and Racist Youth Groups* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2005), 677, https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2395395/WP_nr677_05_Bjoergo_Carlsson.pdf?sequence=3

[79] Ibid.

individuals who are going through periods of uncertainty join extremist groups because they provide them with a purpose, and clear instructions for behaviour.[80]

6.1 Marriage as a Pull Factor

Participants directly linked an individual's decision to join an armed radical group to their desire to marry (something many in Jordan are unable to do because of financial constraints). They also hinted towards unfulfilled sexual desires,[81] and how this affects young men's decision-making. The reference point is that radical armed groups make promises to young men about marriage and owning a house once they join.

Women did not present this argument about female fighters, but a *shari'a* expert interviewed argued that this desire for marriage is prominent among the female students she deals with. The temptation of acquiring the social status of a married woman — presented as a *sine qua non* for women in Arab societies — and their wish to start a family was presented as an all-consuming desire. Moreover, that although recruitment did not take place among her female students, the desire for marriage was a key determinant for young women, especially those from families that do not support women's career aspirations and preference their limited role in society.[82] This is consistent with the literature that emphasises the significance of marriage for females travelling to Daesh-controlled territories, and how. This body of research discusses how women can gain status through marriage,[83] and more so upon becoming a martyr's widow, which is frequent aspiration of Western female recruits.[84]

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[80] Michael Hogg, "From Uncertainty to Extremism: Social categorization and Identity Processes," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23 (2014): 338-342.

[81] All members of the research team are women. This may have affected young men's comfort level when addressing this topic.

[82] Interview with Dr Nama' al-Banna, Sharia Professor, University of Jordan, Amman, 15th of June 2016.

[83] Bakker and de Leede, *European Female Jihadist in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic*, 6, https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-de-Leede-European-Female-Jihadists-In-Syria-Exploring-An-Under-Researched-Topic-April2015(1).pdf

[84] Saltman and Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*, 24, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

7. Policy Recommendations

All participants were asked the question of what needs to change in Jordan to discourage youth from joining armed radical groups. While their answers generally reflected the concerns raised in the focus group session, in all FGDs issues were raised that had not been previously. The following policy recommendations are based directly on participant input:

7.1 Education

Schools should introduce extra-curricular activities, such as hosting debates featuring well-known figures or among students. Such activities are believed to introduce students to debating competitions, discussing ideas, and accepting that there are complex variations on truth and points of views that all need to be respected and tolerated. One young man explained,

> A subject should be added to the curriculum to teach students how to debate with others and accept opinions of others…[The topic can change each week…this can be a religious topic, a management topic, etc.]. This way a student will grow up with a wealth of knowledge [and exposure to different points of views].[85]

The teaching of critical thinking skills may enable Jordan's youth to better question the arguments provided by recruiters and extremist propaganda.

7.2 Religious Education

The Ministry of Education should reform the curriculum to incorporate more emphasis on morals and the humane principles of Islam. Respondents also felt that secondary education should cover topics pertaining to radicalism and terrorism, and that teachers be enabled to address students' questions to avoid them having to resort to online media. Offering a clearer argument line in the curriculum was thought to be a necessary alternative to relying on de-contextualised sayings of Mohamad and/or Quranic verses without sufficient explanation or discussion.

7.3 Anti-corruption Measures

The government should take a more serious and urgent approach to fighting corruption and upholding the rule of law. The current situation fuels a sense of injustice and frustration, and encourages youth to look for alternatives where there is equal and indiscriminate enforcement of law. One participant explained that at least with Daesh their law is enforced equally on everyone.[86] This is certainly a message that Daesh tries to promote: "The people are as equal as

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[85] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[86] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

the teeth of a comb. There is no difference between the rich and the poor and the strong and the weak."[87]

Nepotism (or *wasta*) must also be addressed. This is not a new or striking recommendation. However, given the connections between unemployment and radicalisation, coupled with the sense of injustice that corruption fuels, overcoming nepotism is an urgent entry point. In areas such as Ma'an, if action is not undertaken to equalise employment opportunities, social disconnect and youth anger may become unmanageable. One participant explained that in the new development projects in Ma'an, such as solar energy, the senior positions are occupied by foreigners and those with *wasta*. Irrespective of the accuracy of this statement, the general feeling in Ma'an and Salt, in particular, is that the government lacks the will and desire to address young people's grievances about unemployment and nepotism.

7.4 Employment Opportunities in Governorates

In the first quarter of 2016, Jordan's official unemployment rate was 14.6 percent — the highest in eight years.[88] The problem of educated but unemployed youth in Jordan has been the subject of discussion in both policy and academic circles for many years. Efforts to address this situation are largely unknown to the public and to the extent that measures have been taken — such as the Ministry of Labour limiting foreign work permits in an effort to protect local employment opportunities[89] — their outcome is yet to be felt.

Jordan is also witnessing an emerging crisis. Hundreds of students fail the national high school exam (Tawjihi) that qualifies them for undergraduate studies. Many argue that this is the result of measures at the Ministry of Education to make the exams more difficult,[90] although the accuracy of this claim is difficult to verify. Critically, the end result is that local communities are increasingly home to scores of youth who cannot participate in undergraduate studies and also lack avenues for either employment or vocational education. According to one participant, this group is the most vulnerable to recruitment because they have nothing to lose.[91]

The constructive option is to create income-earning opportunities for youth, other than drugs or joining armed groups. The government should also improve the existing (limited) options for vocational education among this specific demographic.

7.5 Reconceptualising the Role of Mosques

Participants raised concerns about the declining role of mosques in local communities. The Ministry of *Awqaf* (religious endowment) and Religious Affairs has attempted to control informal activities in mosques. To this end, mosques are now open to the public only during prayer

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[87] As quoted in Andrew March and Mara Revkin, "Caliphate of Law; ISIS' Ground Rules," *Foreign Affairs*, April 15th, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-04-15/caliphate-law

[88] Omar Obeidat, "Unemployment major concern for new gov't – experts," *Jordan Times,* May 31st, 2016, http://jordantimes.com/news/local/unemployment-major-concern-new-gov't-—-experts

[89] "Labour minister stresses need to reduce foreign labour" *Jordan Times,* July 11th, 2016, http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/labour-minister-stresses-need-reduce-foreign-labour

[90] Aaron Magid, "Not one student in 349 Jordanian schools passed critical exam" *Al-Monitor,* August 18th, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/jordan-official-exam-tawjihi-failure-students-education.html

[91] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.

times.[92] The public also have limited access to and engagement with *imams* (formal employees with the religious authority to lead prayers). As a result, young people feel there is no local religious authority they can turn to in order to discuss their concerns and questions.

The Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs might initiate a process of dialogue with local stakeholders to help reconceptualise the role of mosques. The Ministry should ensure that direct access to trusted local religious leaders is granted through formal channels, but at the same time safeguard and monitor activities to protect against the spreading of radical ideology. The immediate focus should be radicalisation hotbeds.

Such measures should be considered along with concerns raised by *imams* that they do not feel comfortable raising radicalisation issues with youth. Such discussions leave them vulnerable to questioning and acts of repression by intelligence authorities.[93] *Imams* likewise do not feel comfortable seeking guidance from their superiors at the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs on issues of radicalisation, as this may lead to questioning.[94]

7.6 Awareness Raising on Radicalisation

Jordan lacks coordinated and centrally organised activities geared towards raising awareness on how to discourage radical ideas and recognise the stages of radicalisation.[95] Such actions might fall to civil society, including NGOs, local *imams*, tribal leaders, teachers, and media professionals. This diverse group is best placed to ensure adequate outreach to the different typologies vulnerable to radicalisation. Moreover, de-radicalisation efforts should not be limited to religious institutions. "When you want to raise the awareness of a thug, you do not do it at a mosque. He does not go there [in the first place]."[96] A national effort is required to organise and divide responsibilities in full partnership with concerned stakeholders.

7.7 Counselling Support for Dysfunctional Families

Given the emphasis youth placed on the role of dysfunctional family environments in driving radicalisation, it is not surprising that many highlighted the need for providing institutional support for families at risk. Civil society organisations and NGOs appear best situated to take on such a role.

Family counselling centres, which are limited and — where they do exist — overloaded, should be established more widely in local communities. The emphasis should be on traditional needs like marriage and parental counselling as participants directly connected these problems with the radicalisation process. The potential for counselling activities to extend to cover radicalisation concerns at the intra-family level, should be informed by further specific research.

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[92] Interview with an anonymous Imam (C), Salt, 30th of June 2016.
[93] Interview with anonymous Imams (B), Rusayfeh, 28th of June 2016.
[94] Interview with two anonymous Imams (C) and (D), Salt, 30th of June 2016.
[95] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Ma'an, 30th of August 2016.
[96] Syrian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Irbid, 28th of August 2016.

7.8 New Media Discourse

Youth believe that radicalisation counter-narratives are best disseminated through social media, and that such potential has not been fully explored or utilised. More support from local and international actors to develop creative counter messaging is crucial, particularly given that a significant proportion of recruitment takes place online. From the perspective of FGD participants, the government is not trusted to shoulder this responsibility.

7.9 Youth Activities

Youth feel that the Ministry of Culture (MoC) has no role in their locales. In Ma'an, the MoC-run centre is located far from the city, while in Salt, it hosts no youth activities. To join an activity or a cultural event, youth are usually required to come to Amman. However, financial constraints, especially for unemployed youth, mean that many cannot afford public transport and a cup of coffee when they come to Amman for a free cultural event.

Similarly, the Ministry of Youth and Sports provides no services to attract youth or fill their abundant free time. In Salt, clubs and sports facilities exist only on a user-pays basis. In Ma'an, respondents were unable to name a functioning youth centre or sports facility; the city's one football ground is closed. Young men were particularly frustrated about this as they would like to occupy their time, and sports appeal to them. Importantly, some participants noted that recruiters use sporting activities as a means of targeting youth. This increases the urgency of providing alternate sporting opportunities, to ensure that these recruiting grounds lose their appeal. Both the Ministries of Culture and Youth should invest serious effort to activate their governorate-level offices to develop work plans for regular, free activities targeting youth. That the CVE Directorate operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture underscores that CVE actions should be included within the frame. Government resources and international funding should be specifically channelled and earmarked for these purposes.

7.10 Reintegration of Returnees

The Ministry of Interior should develop an action programme for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees. In the words of one young man, "those who have willingly returned to Jordan should be treated with special measures and processes, so that the community can accept them back."[97] Participants were unaware that rehabilitation programmes are in place in limited form (such programmes are not publicised, nor are the details made available for the purposes of CVE research). Other FGD participants argued that the government should develop reintegration programmes that specifically encourage fighters in Syria to return. Currently the government imprisons fighters and returnees, "why would anyone come back if they will be imprisoned!" wondered one man.[98]

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[97] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.
[98] Jordanian Male in a Focus Group Discussion, Salt, 12th of July 2016.

8. Conclusion

This report has discussed the main findings on radicalisation push and pull factors impacting youth in Jordan, drawing on FGDs with male and female Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth in four recruitment hotbeds in Jordan.

The findings demonstrate how and why youth feel trapped in a complex network of socio-economic frustration, and how the radical ideology presented by Daesh and other armed groups in Syria is providing an acceptable alternative for youth to seek better financial conditions, improved self-esteem, and a purpose and role in life. Youth in Jordan feel marginalised at home, and disempowered in their local communities with no government policies that address their concerns pertaining to employment, the rule of law, and the lack of opportunities for expressing themselves through sports and cultural activities.

Youth are confused about the definition of radicalisation and how radical ideology is different from violent radical behaviour. While they offered conflicting explanations, all seemed hesitant to associate the term with Islam. Youth had different views on the spread of radicalism in Jordanian society, but expressed concern about emerging Christian-Muslim tensions.

Three main findings can be gleaned from this research. First, poverty and unemployment frustrates youth who then search for alternatives to meet financial needs and find purpose in life. Most often this search leads them — as passive targets of recruiters or as active agents of change — to tap into religious ideology that constructs the fight in Syria as a righteous *'jihad'* that can meet their socio-economic needs and turn them into heroes in a battle instituting justice for Sunni Muslims.

Second, corruption, nepotism, and unequal protection under the law alienates youth from their local communities and government. The rights of youth and access to equal opportunities are not currently fulfilled by the government and this encourages them to search for alternative sources of good governance.

Third, family dynamics significantly influence the youth radicalisation process. The marginalisation of unemployed men by their families, particularly their fathers, impacts their self-esteem and transforms the Daesh media discourse about heroism into a successful pull factor. By joining Daesh, the marginalised individual finds power, authority, and status. Family disintegration and lack of monitoring and guidance is also impacting the radicalisation of men and women, who have to search for guidance outside the family for political and religious answers to their questions.

Discussions with youth also point to marriage as a pull factor. Daesh provides youth with the possibility of marriage at a time when financial conditions obstruct such unions at home. The status of being a married woman may also affect the desire of young women to join Daesh, although no conclusive findings can be drawn.

The research offered a number of policy recommendations presented by youth. One area of recommendation related to the reintegration of former fighters; another related to

institutionalising mechanisms that empower families to respond adequately and openly to the radicalisation of their own family members.

Finally, the research highlights four critical gap areas that should be targeted in future research:

- Arriving at an acceptable, clear, and operational definition of radicalisation is crucial before policy makers enact policy changes. Youth are confused about what makes a person a radical. As a result, they will be unable to raise counter-radicalisation narratives, nor identify how they can contribute to CVE efforts as active citizens. Research into how Jordanians define radicalisation and how to best combine the security-centric definition with a culturally-salient definition should be prioritised.
- Exploring further the role of families, particularly fathers, in the radicalisation of young individuals, and particularly how families contribute to the problem.
- Exploring in greater detail the pull factors influencing youth. Former fighters and defectors are a key resource in this regard. Their first-hand experiences offer the most accurate account of how to respond to radicalisation dynamics in a particular country context.
- Investigating the dynamic through which contextual factors (economic and social) turn radical violent behaviour into a moral and/or acceptable alternative. An interdisciplinary approach combining sociology, psychology, and criminology is necessary for this task.

Annex I:

Discussion Questions for FGD with Jordanian and Syrian Youth for the project "Religion for Peace and Development in West Asia-North Africa Region"

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to meet us. We are researchers at the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute, a policy think-tank chaired by HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal. (Introduce the team). We are conducting a study, with support from the Dutch Embassy, on human security and radicalisation. The study examines the reasons that make some young Jordanians radicalised, and the factors that have led few of them to go as far as joining armed groups. The research examines factors that relate to these individuals and to the general social environment in Jordan.

We need to hear from you because you are best able to inform us about factors that affect youth in Jordan. We have some questions to ask, but please feel free to share other ideas and concerns that you feel can help us understand the situation. We are looking forward for an open discussion. We are grateful for your participation.

Before starting, we wish to clarify some points:
- Your participation is anonymous; no audio-recording will be used. My colleague will be taking notes about the points discussed.
- There is no right or wrong answer. We hope to learn from you, so all opinions are welcomed.
- Please respect the opinions of others; it is important that you please do not interrupt each other
- The discussion will take around 1.5hrs
- Refreshments and travel allowance will be provided towards the end of the meeting

Questions:

1. What characteristics make you classify a person as a radical?

2. In your opinion, what is the relation between radical ideology (like Salafi Jihadism) on one hand, and participating in the fight in Syria and Iraq with groups like Daesh and al-Nusra, on the other? Is it a confirmed relation or is participating in armed activities not necessarily a product of this ideology?

3. What factors push youth in Jordan to adhere to radical ideology? (Probe for current regional conditions, education, and employment).

4. These factors affect everyone in Jordan. Why do you think they push some youth (compared to others) to join Daesh and al-Nusra? Think about people you know or have heard about who left to join the fight in Syria or Iraq.

5. What makes Daesh propaganda so successful?

6. How do years of schooling (the Arabic implies university too) contribute to an individuals' decision to join Daesh and al-Nusra? Or in refusing to do so?

7. There are rising concerns in Jordan about mutual respect and coexistence between individuals and groups who adhere to different ideologies or religions. Why do you think we are witnessing this change in inter-faith relations in Jordan?

8. Do you think this change towards rejecting the other will encourage the spread of radical ideology in Jordan, or is radical ideology already widespread and this is a manifestation of it?

9. What needs to change in Jordan to limit/stop/prevent youth from joining Daesh and al-Nusra? (Probe for: How can we address sectarianism trends in Jordan now so it does not lead to radicalisation later on?)

The facilitator will probe to address the role of schools, universities, political conditions, and identity if mentioned by participants.

Annex II:

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أسئلة حلقات النقاش مع الشباب الأردنيين و السوريين لمشروع

الدين من أجل السلام والتنمية في منطقة غرب آسيا وشمال افريقيا

المقدمة:

أشكركم جزيل الشكر على الأخذ من وقتكم لغايات لقائنا اليوم. نحن باحثين في معهد غرب آسيا وشمال أفريقيا، وهو مركز أبحاث سياسات يرأسه سمو الأمير الحسن بن طلال. (تعريف بالفريق). نجري دراسة حالياً، بدعم من السفارة الهولندية، حول الأمن الإنساني والتشدد. وتبحث هذه الدراسة الأسباب التي تجعل بعض الشباب الأردنيين يتجهون للتشدد، والعوامل التي دفعت قلة منهم للانضمام إلى الجماعات المسلحة. ويتناول هذا البحث العوامل التي تتعلق بهؤلاء الأفراد والبيئة الاجتماعية العامة في الأردن.

نحن نحتاج لأن نسمع منكم لأنكم الأقدر على معرفة العوامل التي تؤثر على الشباب في الأردن. لدينا بعض الأسئلة لنطرحها عليكم. ورجاءً لا تترددوا في عرض آراء وعوامل أخرى غير التي نسأل عنها إذا شعرتم بأنها قد تساعدنا على فهم الوضع العام. نتطلع معكم إلى نقاش مفتوح وصريح. ونشكركم مجددا لحضوركم ومشاركتكم.

قبل البدء بالنقاش، نرغب بتوضيح بعض النقاط:

- إن مشاركاتكم مجهولة، بمعنى أننا لا نعرف أسماءكم (ولن يتم تسجيل هذا النقاش). وإنما يقوم زملائي بأخذ ملاحظات مكتوبة حول النقاط التي نناقشها)
- لا توجد إجابة صحيحة أو خاطئة. ونحن نأمل أن نتعلم منكم ولذا فإن جميع الآراء هي موضع ترحيب.
- الرجاء احترام آراء الآخرين.، و منالمهم أن لا نقاطع بعضنا البعض.
- سيستغرق لقاؤنا حوالي ساعة ونصف.
- سيتم إعطاء بدل المواصلات وضيافة بسيطة في نهاية الاجتماع

الأسئلة:

1. ما هي الصفات التي تجعلك تصنف شخصاً ما على أنه متشدد\متطرف؟

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2. برأيك، ماهي العلاقة بين الفكر المتشدد (مثل السلفية الجهادية) من جهة، والمشاركة في القتال في سوريا والعراق مع جماعات مثل داعش والنصرة من جهة اخرى؟ هل هي علاقة حتمية أم أن المشاركة في القتال لا تنبع من هذا الفكر تحديدا؟

3. ما هي العوامل التي تدفع الشباب في الأردن إلى الانتماء للفكر المتشدد؟ (استطرد للسؤال عن حول ظروف المنطقة الراهنة والتعليم والبطالة)

4. توثر هذه العوامل على الجميع في الأردن. برأيك لماذا تدفع هذه العوامل بعض الشباب دون غيرهم على الالتحاق بداعش وجبهة النصرة؟ فكروا في الاشخاص الذين تعرفونهم أو سمعتم عنهم ممن تركوا الأردن وذهبوا للقتال في سوريا أو العراق.

5. برأيك ما الذي يجعل إعلام داعش بهذا النجاح؟

6. كيف تساهم مراحل الدراسة في انضمام الشخص لاحقا لداعش أو جبهة النصرة؟ او في امتناعه عن الانضمام لها؟

7. ظهرت في الأردن مؤخراُ مخاوف حول الاحترام المتبادل والتعايش المشترك مع الأشخاص والجماعات من أديان وتيارات فكرية مختلفة. لماذا نشهد اليوم هذا التغير في العلاقة بين المجموعات الدينية المختلفة في الأردن؟

8. هل تعتقدون بأن هذا التغيير نحو رفض أفكار الآخرين يشجع على انتشار التطرف في الأردن لاحقاً، أم أن الأفكار المتطرفة موجودة أصلاً وما نراه اليوم هو تعبيراً عنها؟

9. ما الذي يجب أن يتغير في الأردن للحد من انضمام الشباب لداعش وجبهة النصرة؟ (استطرد حول: كيف يمكن لنا مواجهة النعرات الطائفية في الأردن حتى لا تقودنا لاحقا نحو التطرف)؟

ستقوم ميسرة النقاش بالاستطراد حول دور المدارس والجامعات والاوضاع الساسية والهوية إذا ذكرت هذه من قبل المشاركين.

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