

Gender and Violent Extremism: an analysis of online behaviour across Asia Pacific

SUMMARY

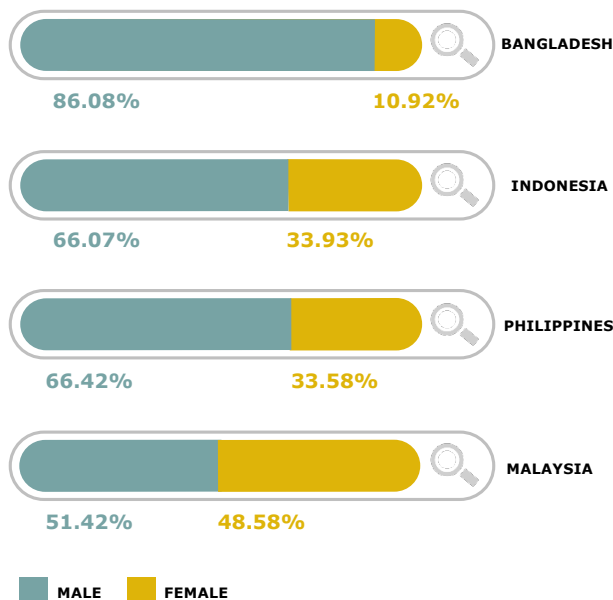
Moonshot CVE has been commissioned by UN Women to generate the first gender-disaggregated study of support for violent extremism in the online space in Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Malaysia. The project also aims to highlight any potential associations between rates of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and support for violent extremism in these countries. Data collection is currently underway using our interactive monitoring tool, *The Tracker*, which maps appetite for violently extremist content on search engines and social media platforms. Final reports will be published in April 2018.

The Tracker draws on two main sources of information to analyse gender and violent extremism online: search traffic and Facebook data – each adding different value to the overall analysis. Social media activities are often performative. As such, data obtained from channels such as Facebook provides information about how people publicly present themselves, including the opinions, interests, experiences and actions they wish to share. Search engine queries, on the other hand, provide valuable information because they are typically carried out with the expectation that they will not be seen or judged by others. Online searches are thus a reliable method of understanding true levels of interest in, or support for, activities, ideas and opinions which may be socially unacceptable. The results presented here are preliminary and subject to change.

OVERALL NUMBER OF WOMEN ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS EXTREMIST MATERIAL

For the first time, this project has gathered data on a large scale on the age and gender of people attempting to access extremist content online in Asia Pacific. The difference in the gender breakdown by country is striking, with almost half of Malaysia's women searching for extremist material. This has serious implications for how CVE programmes are planned and implemented and highlights the crucial role that an understanding of gender dynamics play in effectively reducing extremism.

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF SEARCH ENGINE USERS ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS EXTREMIST CONTENT



Only 28% of Malaysian women accessed extremist content on Facebook, versus 72% of men. But in the "private" realm of search engines, there was near parity between male and female searches. Of the four countries, Malaysia also has the highest rate of internet connectivity. In Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines there was greater consistency between the gender breakdown displayed in Google searches and Facebook data. Nonetheless the gap between male and female sympathy or support for violently extremist content was still narrower in "private" searches than in publicly available Facebook data. In other words, women were more likely to engage with extremist content when they thought nobody would know. This new insight into female interest in violently extremist online content attests to the value of a gendered methodology that considers both public and private online spaces.

POSITIVE CORRELATION BETWEEN GBV AND APPETITE FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM ONLINE

We recorded a positive correlation between the rate of specific sexual offences and searches for violent extremism in two countries: reported sexual assaults in Bangladesh and "outrage of modesty" cases in Malaysia.

DYNAMIC BETWEEN PHYSICAL, NON-SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM ONLINE IS MIXED ACROSS COUNTRIES

There was also a strong correlation between incidents of acid attacks and searches for violent extremist content in Bangladesh, but a negative correlation between reported incidents of physical violence and searches for violent extremism in the Philippines.

ONLINE SEARCHES FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM

By collecting data on the appetite for violently extremist content broken down by age and gender, Moonshot CVE is developing a clear risk profile of each of the four countries - region by region. The data is incredibly specific, benefiting from our databases of hundreds of thousands of online indicators, and clearly illustrates the value of analysing violent extremism through the lens of gender. Even searches for jihadist content alone expose users to material that plays on gender dynamics, and that can frame the way individuals view women and their role within society and violent extremist movements alike.

SHARED SPACES FOR GBV AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM ONLINE

The online spaces in which perpetrators were found to consume violent sexual and violent jihadist content are often the same, most notably Liveleak and BestGore. Sites such as these constitute a nexus between these two forms of content. The searches used to access them are also similar in terms of their unusual specificity. Once accessed, users find videos and images of extremist violence, such as executions, beheadings, and battle footage, coexisting alongside content relating to rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking and other forms of violence against women. Some of the most popular themes underpinning searches on BestGore relate to "rape" and "ISIS", further demonstrating their connection in the online space.

In these spaces, the line between GBV and violent extremist content is blurred, and often non-existent; the two are conflated with violence as their common denominator, demonstrating the potential role of attraction to violence in the radicalisation process. For individuals normalised to extreme sexual violence, the violence displayed in the media content of groups such as ISIS may not be off-putting; in fact they may be appealing for this very reason. Equally, people for whom violent jihadist content has become normalised are less likely to be disturbed by content that shows violence against women.



Even though the physical Jihad is primarily within the men's domain, our sister still needs to live the "life of a mujahid" which her husband lives. She needs to be supportive of him if he goes for Jihad, content if he is a shaheed and patient if he is taken as a POW.

- FROM ANWAR AL-AWLAKI'S
44 WAYS TO SUPPORT JIHAD