MISOGYNY & VIOLENT EXTREMISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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There is a troubling commonality in terrorist attacks, extremist ideologies and brutal crimes: the violent misogyny of the perpetrators.

Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General,
UN General Assembly Address, September 2019

KEY FINDINGS

1. *Hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism based on survey research in four countries in 2018-19. In three countries in Asia (Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines) individuals who support violence against women are three times more likely to support violent extremism. Similar results were found in Libya. More than any other factor, support for violence against women predicted support for violent extremism.*

2. *There was no correlation at all between common factors thought to affect support for violent extremism – such as the degree of religiosity, age, gender, level of education achieved, employment, and geographic area.*

3. *Quantitative and qualitative analysis reveals misogyny to be integral to the ideology, political identity, and political economy of current violent extremist groups.[1]*

INTRODUCTION

Many analysts see terrorism and violent extremism as a part of a "man's world". Mostly men engage in violent acts; men lead groups like Islamic State or the Ku Klux Klan and tend to be the main protagonists of "lone wolf" attacks. As a result, men's extremist violence is normalised, while women are stereotyped as non-violent. Because of this bias, violent extremism conducive to terrorism has been insufficiently analysed from a gender perspective.[2]

The rise and fall of Islamic State has illustrated that women can be active members of violent extremist groups. Women take active roles in recruitment, logistics, and finance, intelligence collection, reconnaissance, enforcement of morality laws with some evidence of fighting and suicide bombing. Even within strictly family roles, women may radicalize others to conduct violence including in their families and/or be radicalized to violence through marriage and family status (including through family suicide as in the case of Surabaya, Indonesia in May 2018[3] or as in Libya where mothers follow sons[4]). Although there are relatively few women violent extremists, women serve as their civilian bedrock. There are a complex range of factors that lead women to support violent extremist groups that advocate for practices which severely constrain their basic human rights to education, bodily integrity, freedom of movement, of speech, of association, and so on.[5]

The research reported here examines *why* and *how* radicalisation to violence occurs from a gender perspective. In particular, this policy brief analyses the underexplored relationship between attitudes and practices indicating misogyny (defined as both fear and hatred of women and/or the feminine) and support for violent extremism. Gender analysis of survey data collected in four countries (Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Libya) provides evidence of a mutually-reinforcing dynamic of misogyny and violent extremism.

WHAT CAUSES RADICALISATION?

Scholars have posed a number of causal factors of violent extremism: poverty, socio-economic grievances, extreme religiosity, and (lack of) education or exclusion from voice and opportunity, and state oppression.[6] Among those scholars examining gender, women and terrorism, the focus has been on explaining the motivations of individual women violent extremists, rather than examining the gender power dynamics in the spread of violent extremism.[7]

At an individual level, many perpetrators of so-called "lone wolf" terror attacks frequently have one thing in common—their prior perpetration of violence against women.[8] Scholars and practitioners analysing violent extremism have noticed the continuum and commonalities of violence, fear and control present in both domestic violence and terrorism.[9] In political terms, there is an overlap between misogyny and conservative politics in religious fundamentalist and violent extremist groups.[10] By understanding the gendered drivers of violence therefore, we may be able to isolate potential perpetrators of violence extremism and able to more accurately focus programming that seeks to prevent radicalisation to violence.[11] Despite this intuition, only now has empirical research begun to analyse the connections between violent extremism and gender, and by extension, between misogyny, violence against women and violent extremism.

WHAT DID WE STUDY?

In two research projects with UN Women in Asia and North Africa, the Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre has addressed the lack of empirical gender analysis of violent extremism. The findings of that research produced in four countries constitute the most significant global research on this subject to date. In all four countries, quantitative survey research adopted the same framework, methods and instruments was undertaken. Our research questions were:
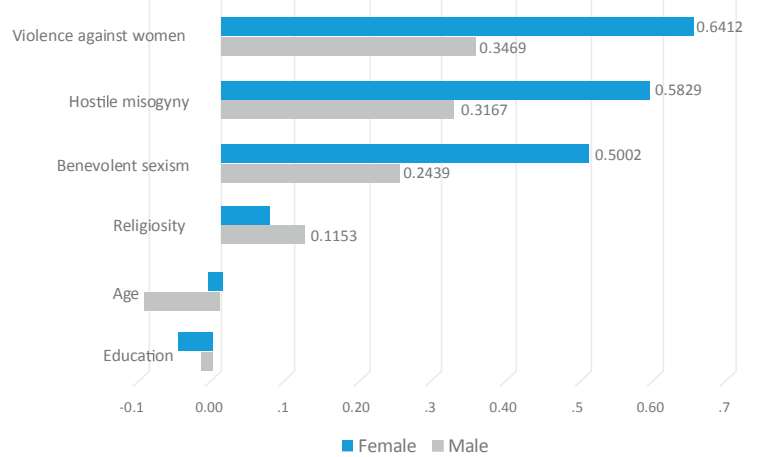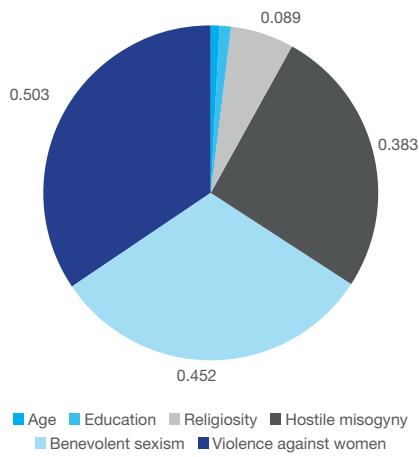
1. How and why are societal gender identities and relations drivers of violent extremism, both enabling and countering ideological fundamentalism and political violence?

2. How are constructions of masculinity and femininity used by violent extremist groups to recruit and mobilise men and women?

The survey research examined the extent to which societal gender identities and relations are drivers of violent extremism and how these differed for men and women. Questions related to individual's social media use, religiosity, masculinity, sexism, and attitudes and behaviours regarding violence against women.[12] Responses were on a five-point scale. In Asia, 3019 people were surveyed (1479 women and 1527 men) across vulnerable areas known to be at risk of violent extremism in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Indonesia between October and December 2019. In Libya, 1007 people were surveyed (507 men and 500 women) in three regions of the country (Sabha, Benghazi, and Tripoli) between April and June 2019.
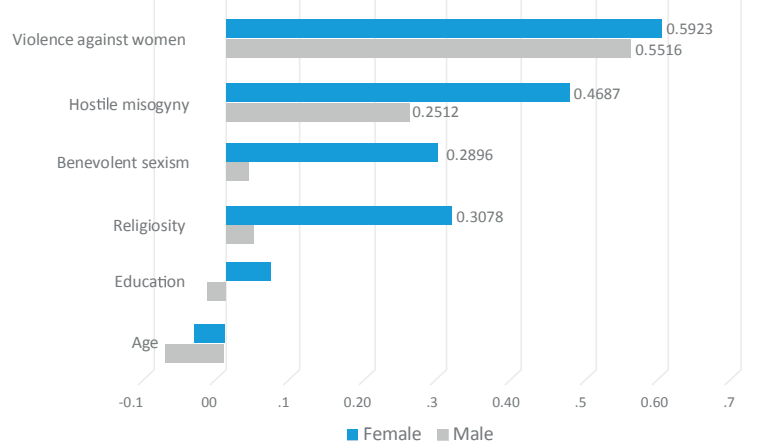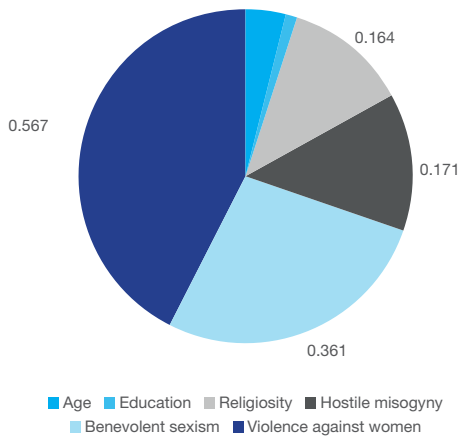
The analysis of the data involved bivariate regressions using the Pearson correlation coefficient ('r') to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between support for violent extremism and key variables thought to be of causal relevance: hostile and paternalist sexism, preference for male leadership, education, religiosity, gender, support for violence against women, support for practices

FIGURE 1: CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIOUS FACTORS AND SUPPORT FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ASIA
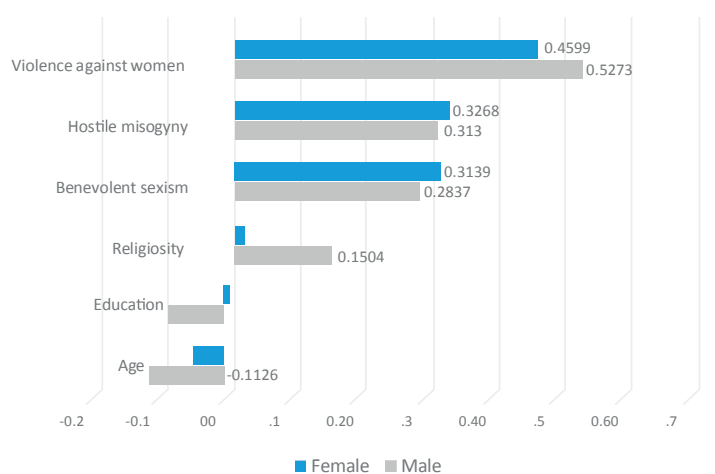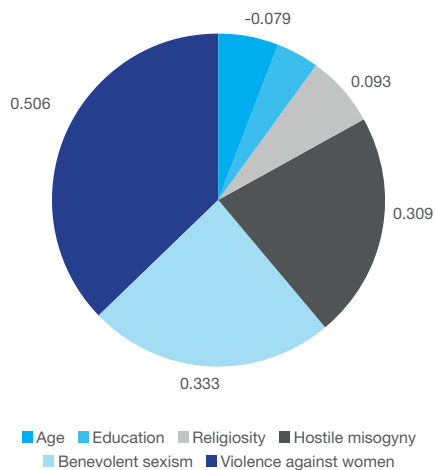
BANGLADESH

Pie chart values: 0.089, 0.503, 0.452, 0.383

Legend: Age, Education, Religiosity, Hostile misogyny, Benevolent sexism, Violence against women

Bar chart (Female / Male):
- Violence against women: 0.6412 / 0.3469
- Hostile misogyny: 0.5829 / 0.3167
- Benevolent sexism: 0.5002 / 0.2439
- Religiosity: — / 0.1153
- Age
- Education

INDONESIA

Pie chart values: 0.164, 0.567, 0.171, 0.361

Legend: Age, Education, Religiosity, Hostile misogyny, Benevolent sexism, Violence against women

Bar chart (Female / Male):
- Violence against women: 0.5923 / 0.5516
- Hostile misogyny: 0.4687 / 0.2512
- Benevolent sexism: 0.2896
- Religiosity: 0.3078
- Education
- Age

PHILIPPINES

Pie chart values: -0.079, 0.506, 0.093, 0.309, 0.333

Legend: Age, Education, Religiosity, Hostile misogyny, Benevolent sexism, Violence against women

Bar chart (Female / Male):
- Violence against women: 0.4599 / 0.5273
- Hostile misogyny: 0.3268 / 0.313
- Benevolent sexism: 0.3139 / 0.2837
- Religiosity: — / 0.1504
- Education
- Age: -0.1126

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harming women and girls, age, and tendency toward hyper-masculinity. Ordered logit regression modelling of all variables enabled us to further explore the significance of the bivariate analysis.[13]

In addition, field research was conducted across four sites in each of the country cases. This qualitative research has helped us to interpret the survey results and to corroborate them across different contexts contextually. People with direct experiences of violent extremism were interviewed, as well as a few members of extremist groups. Religious minorities and members of ultra-religious and moderate discussion groups also participated.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

1. Hostile sexism and support for violence against women are strongly associated with support for violent extremism

Our research finds that hostile sexism and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism. In Asia (Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines) people who support violence against women, that is, who think that men ought to be able to use violence against women, are three times more likely to support violent extremism. In Libya, the association between support for violence against women and violent extremism was more pronounced among men than women. However, support for violence against women was a significant factor associated with support for violent extremism among women as well.

Around half of our research participants in Libya agreed that gender-based violence could drive women to join violent extremist groups. In the Libya survey, 39 per cent of respondents thought rape was a factor pushing women to join violent extremist groups. Women's experiences of violence may influence them to either reject or support violent extremist groups. Extremist groups seek to stigmatise changing gender roles and use threats of gender-based violence and female dishonour because they see empowered women as a threat.

2. Religiosity, age, gender, level of education, employment, or geographic area are not associated with support for violent extremism

By contrast, there was no significant relation between religiosity, age, gender and level of education achieved and support for violent extremism in the Asia survey. In Libya, comparably, there was no correlation between religiosity, age, gender, level of education, employment, geographic area and support for violent extremism.

Figure 1 and 2 report these findings for each country. In all four countries, there is a positive and significant correlation between support violent extremism and support for violence against women. Surprising and noteworthy, in Bangladesh and Indonesia, this strength of the association is stronger and higher for women than for men. Conversely, in Philippines and Libya, this correlation is higher among men than women.

3. Misogyny is integral to the ideology, identity, and economy of current violent extremist groups.

Misogyny and support for violence against women are crucial and overlooked factors in propelling people, including women, to support violent extremism. Consistent with existing global research, support for violence against women correlates with misogyny (hostile sexism). In the three Asian countries, there is a significative, positive and moderate correlation between support for violent extremism and hostile sexism (misogyny) and a significant, but less strong relationship with support for benevolent sexism (traditional values) and violent extremism. While the relationship between support for violence against women and support for violent extremism was positive and significant in all four countries, in Indonesia, women who support violence against women, that is, who condone men's use of violence against women, are even more likely to support violent extremism than men who condone violence against women.

Our qualitative research reveals misogyny to be integral to the ideology, political identity, and political economy of both current violent extremist groups.[14] Attacks on women's rights and women's human rights defenders are early warning signs for extremist violence. Women and girls are often directly targeted by terrorist groups and subjected to gender-based violence. In Libya, for instance, almost all research participants in Sabha, Benghazi, and Tripoli stated that they knew of violence targeted at women leaders. That violence took many forms; violent extremist groups were known to use extortion, blackmail, and smear campaigns to obstruct women leaders specifically. However, in response, women are seeking to counter and prevent violent extremism by advocating for women's rights in all four countries. Standing up for their rights motivates some women to resist violent extremist groups.

Figure 2 shows that for Libya, individual factors such as religiosity are not at all related to support for violent extremism. As with the three Asian countries, there is no relationship between religiosity and support for violent extremism in Libya.

FIGURE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIOUS FACTORS AND SUPPORT FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN LIBYA
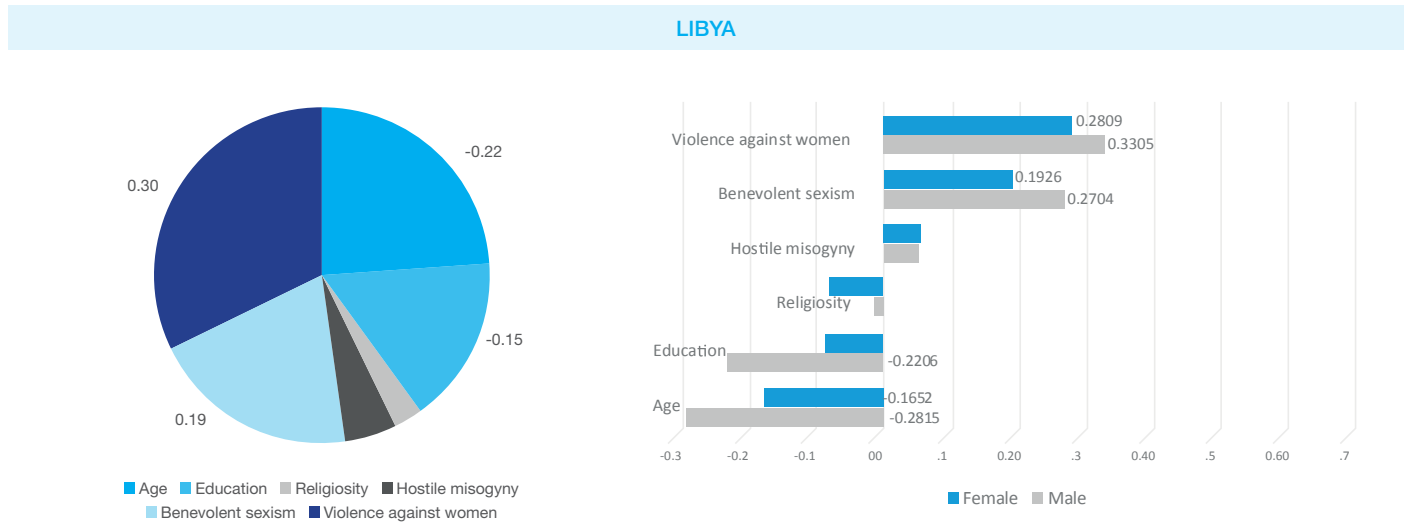
Note: Figures 1 and 2 show only those factors with statistically significant correlations to violent extremism at the 95% percentile probability.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

Demonstrating the connection between support for violence against women, misogyny, and violent extremism is a significant finding in the field of terrorism studies, with implications for preventing violent extremism and implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The WPS framework is crucial to address the gender dynamics and attraction of violent extremism, especially the systemic gender inequality and discrimination that provides a fertile ground for radicalization to violence, the use of gender-based violence as a tactic of violent extremist groups, and the limited spaces for women's participation in the countering and prevention responses to violent extremism.

1. It is important to understand that women's roles are not confined either to victim or perpetrator. Women and girls can be simultaneously victims of sexual or gender-based violence as well as recruiters, fundraisers and perpetrators of violent extremism.[15]

2. Our finding that women may support violence perpetrated against themselves or other women, including for their own protection, and that these women are likely to support violent extremism speaks directly to the lacuna surrounding women's roles as agents and/ or victims. Gendered violence likely affects women's involvement in extremist movements in ways researchers and practitioners do not yet fully understand. And many times, women perpetrate discrimination for their own protection (and it sometimes backfires).

3. Our research provides evidence supporting the claim that misogyny and violent extremism are connected at an individual level. Beyond the individual level, misogyny is part of the recruitment strategies and publicity campaigns of violent extremists worldwide appealing to both men and women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More evidence on misogyny (hatred of women including hate speech against women) within groups is needed to identify the risks of violent extremism.

- Risk assessment tools for violent extremism should routinely consider gender norms including attitudes such as hostile misogyny, benevolent sexism and perceptions regarding violence against women, and avoid stereotyping women as victims.

- Evidence on individuals perpetrating violence against women or domestic violence needs to inform efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism.

- P/CVE policy should be based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to women and girls' involvement in violent extremism.

- P/CVE programmes for potential female victims/agents of violent extremism needs to be aware of the role of gender-based violence perpetrated by violent extremist groups.

ENDNOTES

1   The quantitative survey research took place in countries or areas with a Muslim majority and so largely reflects a study of Islamic violent extremist groups.

2   For an exception, see GCTF (2019). The Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender. The Hague, Global Counterterrorism Forum, https://www.thegctf. org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=jA1tbXKhobE%3D&portalid=1

3   For example, the case of Nursadrina Kharia Dhania who travelled to Syria from Indonesia in 2015 at aged 16 having consumed the online propaganda of IS and persuaded 26 of her family members including her father to join her. E. Gordon and J. True (2019) "Gender Stereotyped or Gender Responsive? Hidden Threats and Missed Opportunities to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in Bangladesh and Indonesia." RUSI Journal 164 (4): 74-91.

4   See Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre (2019). "Gender Equality and Violent Extremism in Libya: A Research Report." UN Women.

5   See A. Dworkin (1974). Woman Hating. New York, E. P. Dutton; L. Blaydes and D. A. Linzer (2008). "The Political Economy of Women's Support for Fundamentalist Islam." World Politics 60 (4): 576-609.

6   See R. Alonso and M. R. García (2007). "The Evolution of Jihadist Terrorism in Morocco." Terrorism and Political Violence 19(4): 571-592; UNDP (2017). Journey into Extremism in Africa. New York, United Nations Development Program; Pedahzur, A. (2013). Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism. Hoboken, Taylor and Francis; A. A. Ghafar (2016). Educated but Unemployed: The Challenge Facing Egypt's Youth. Washington D.C., The Brookings Institution; A. Martiningui (2016). Towards Brighter Futures: Empowering Youth in the Arab Mediterranean Countries through Education for Employment Initiatives: A Handbook for Practitioners. Barcelona, SAHWA.

7   See M. Bloom (2010). "Death Becomes Her: The Changing Nature of Women's Role in Terror." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs 11(1): 91-98; E. L. Del Villar (2019). "Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation to Global Jihad in the Islamic State" Terrorism and Political Violence 31(2): 410-416.

8   J. McCulloch, S. Walklate, J. Maher, K. Fitz-Gibbon and J. McGowan (2019). "Lone Wolf Terrorism Through a Gendered Lens: Men Turning Violent or Violent Men Behaving Violently?" Critical Criminology; J. Smith (2019). Home Grown: How Domestic Violence Turns Men Into Terrorists. London: Riverrun.

9   R. Pain (2014). "Everyday Terrorism: Connecting Domestic Violence and Global Terrorism." Progress in Human Geography 38(4): 531-550.

10 S. J. Cohen, T. J. Holt, S. M. Chermak and J. D. Freilich (2018). "Invisible Empire of Hate: Gender Differences in the Ku Klux Klan's Online Justifications for Violence." Violence and Gender 5(4): 209-225; Ji, C. H. and Y. Ibrahim (2007). "Islamic Religiosity in Right-Wing Authoritarian Personality: The Case of Indonesian Muslims." Review of Religious Research 49(2): 128-146.

11 E. Bjarnegård, K. Brounéus and E. Melander (2017). "Honor and political violence: Micro-level findings from a survey in Thailand." Journal of Peace Research 54(6): 748-761.

12 N. Choi, D. R. Fuqua and J. L. Newman (2009). "Exploratory and Confirmatory Studies of the Structure of the BEM Sex Role Inventory Short Form with Two Divergent Samples." Educational and Psychological Measurement 69(4): 696-705; P. Glick and S. T. Fiske (1996). "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism" Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 70(3): 491-512. Hostile sexism scale comprised 8 items and the paternalist (benevolent) sexism scale comprised 8 items. M. Flood (2008). Measures for the Assessment of Dimensions of Violence Against Women: A Compendium. Melbourne, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society.

13 R. Williams (2016). "Understanding and Interpreting Generalized Ordered Logit Models." The Journal of Mathematical Sociology, 40(1): 7-20. The Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square is highly statistically significant. The independent variables in the model have a significant effect on the support for violent extremism.

14 M. Johnston and J. True, "The Political Economy of Misogyny and Violent Extremism." Forthcoming.

15 As noted in a report of the UN Secretary-General, sexual and gender-based violence has become a standard tool for controlling territory, dehumanizing victims and recruiting new supporters. UN Secretary General (2015). Report to the Security Council on Situations of Conflict-related Sexual Violence. S/2015/203. New York, United Nations.

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