BRIEF

MISOGYNY & VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA, BANGLADESH AND THE PHILIPPINES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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MONASH University | MONASH GENDER PEACE AND SECURITY

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KEY FINDINGS[i]

▶ Hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism. Individuals who support violence against women are three times more likely to support violent extremism.

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

▶ Religiosity, age, gender, level of education, employment, or geographic area are not significantly associated with support for violent extremism[ii].

INTRODUCTION

Many analysts see terrorism and violent extremism as a part of a "man's world". Mostly men engage in violent acts and 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.[iii]

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[iv]). 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 that severely constrain their basic human rights, including to education, bodily integrity, freedom of movement, of speech, of association, and others.[v]

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 Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines, 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, including poverty, socio-economic grievances, extreme religiosity, and lack of education or exclusion from voice and opportunity, and state oppression.[vi] 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.[vii]

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.[viii] Scholars and practitioners analysing violent extremism have noticed the continuum and commonalities of violence, fear and control present in both domestic violence and terrorism.[ix] In political terms, there is an overlap between misogyny and conservative politics in religious fundamentalist and violent extremist groups.[x] 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.[xi] 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 research projects with UN Women, the Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre has addressed the lack of empirical gender analysis of violent extremism. The findings of that research produced constitute the most significant global research on this subject to date. In all 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.[xii] Responses were on a five-point scale. In Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines, 3019 people were surveyed (1479 women and 1527 men) between October and December 2019 across vulnerable areas known to be at risk of violent extremism.

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 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.[xiii]

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 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. Similarly, those who support harmful practices against women and girls, such as female genital mutilation, and forced, early and child marriage, are also likely to support violent extremism, although to a lesser extent than those who support violence against women.

Women's experiences of violence may influence them to either reject or support violent extremist groups. In Bangladesh and Indonesia, the strength of association between supporting violence against women and supporting violent extremism is stronger and higher for women than for men. Whereas this association for women in the Philippines is moderate and women in the Philippines reject violence against women more emphatically and in greater numbers. Extremist groups commonly 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 Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines.

For men in all three countries, and in line with other global studies, education does not have a significant impact on men's and women's attitudes to violence against women. For women in Bangladesh and Philippines, education does not have any significant relationship with any of the other variables. Relatedly, being young did not increase the likelihood of supporting violent extremism. In relation to religion, while all three countries show the role of religion to be crucial in violent extremist recruitment, many participants argue a lack of religious knowledge or faith facilitated recruitment.
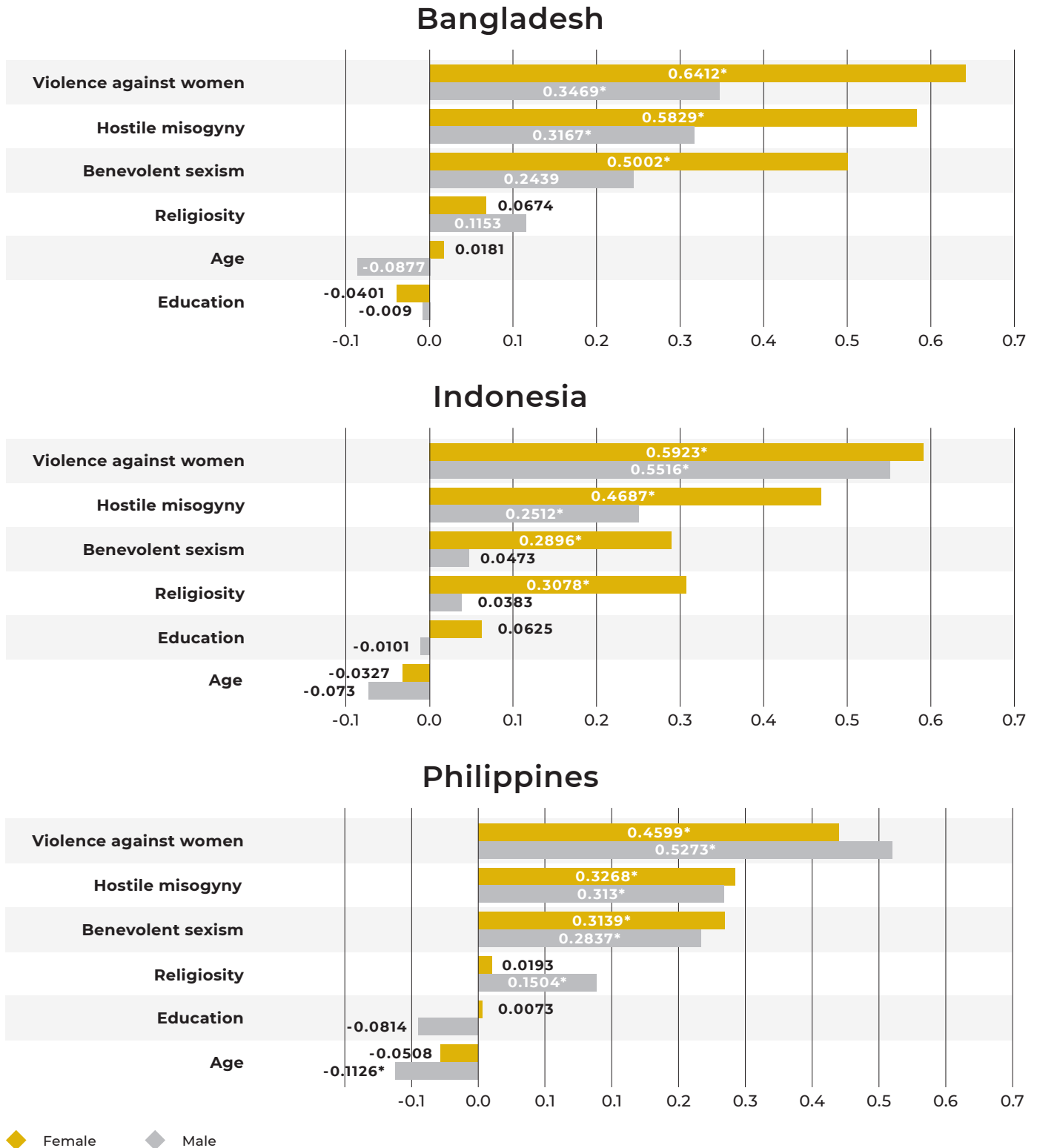
3. Misogyny is integral to the ideology, identity, and economy of current violent extremist groups.

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 Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, there is a significant, 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 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.

Qualitative research reveals misogyny to be integral to the ideology, political identity, and political economy of current violent extremist groups.[xiv] 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. However, in response, women are seeking to counter and prevent violent extremism by advocating for women's rights in all countries. Standing up for their rights motivates some women to resist violent extremist groups.

Figure 1.

Correlation between various factors and support for violent extremism in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, disaggregated by sex

Bangladesh

Factor	Female	Male
Violence against women	0.6412*	0.3469*
Hostile misogyny	0.5829*	0.3167*
Benevolent sexism	0.5002*	0.2439
Religiosity	0.0674	0.1153
Age	0.0181	-0.0877
Education	-0.0401	-0.009

Indonesia

Factor	Female	Male
Violence against women	0.5923*	0.5516*
Hostile misogyny	0.4687*	0.2512*
Benevolent sexism	0.2896*	0.0473
Religiosity	0.3078*	0.0383
Education	0.0625	-0.0101
Age	-0.0327	-0.073

Philippines

Factor	Female	Male
Violence against women	0.4599*	0.5273*
Hostile misogyny	0.3268*	0.313*
Benevolent sexism	0.3139*	0.2837*
Religiosity	0.0193	0.1504*
Education	0.0073	-0.0814
Age	-0.0508	-0.1126*

◆ Female　◆ Male

* Indicates statistical significance.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ('r') shows the strength and direction (positive or negative) of the association between the variables and support for violent extremism. A coefficient of 1 indicates a strong positive relationship. A coefficient of -1 indicates a strong negative relationship. A result of 0 indicates no relationship at all.

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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 radicalisation 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. The 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.

2. 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.[xv]

3. The 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. Many times, women perpetrate discrimination for their own protection.

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.

- Preventing and countering violent extremism policy should b e based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to women and girls' involvement in violent extremism.

- Preventing and countering violent extremism programmes for potential women victims/agents of violent extremism needs to be aware of the role of gender-based violence perpetrated by violent extremist groups.

End notes

i.   Based on survey research in Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines in 2018-19.

ii.   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.

iii. 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?fi leticket=jA1tbXKhobE%3D&portalid=1

iv.   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.

v.   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.

vi.   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.

vii. 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.

viii. 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.

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

x.   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.

xi.   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.

xii. 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.

xiii. 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.

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

xv.   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 Confl ict-related Sexual Violence. S/2015/203. New York, United Nations.

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