

MISOGYNY & VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE PHILIPPINES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This brief presents novel research findings on the relationship between support for misogyny, violence against women, and extremist violence in the Philippines¹. It analyses the underexplored relationship between attitudes and practices indicating misogyny (defined as both fear and hatred of women and/or the feminine), support for violence against women, and support for violent extremism.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ 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.

Additional findings:

- While there are links between gender identities and violent extremism in the Philippines, gender norms are transforming thereby creating opportunities both for women and men and preventing violent extremism.
- Violent extremist groups exploit gender identities, specifically the desire of men to be financial providers for their families, and for women to be loyal or obedient to their husbands and other family members, in order to recruit or gain support.
- Women and men may join violent extremist groups for a sense of security and protection. This perceived need for protection can be manipulated through the messaging of violent extremist groups if women are alone or their husbands have joined violent extremist groups.
- Perceived opportunities for adventure, liberation and revenge attract men as well as those women who might want to challenge traditional gender norms (or at least escape some of the constraints imposed by such norms in their lives) to join or support violent extremist groups.
- A significant number of Filipinos are worried about religious fundamentalism impeding women's human rights.
- The presence of a strong and caring mother in a household is considered important in preventing violent extremism as mothers can watch for signs that a child might join a violent extremist group.
- The greater numbers of women entering the job market is perceived by some as exposing the family to instability and exposing children to the threat of violent extremism recruitment.

¹ In the Philippines, qualitative research was conducted in four sites in the Southern part of the country: Basilan, Maguindanao, Zamboanga and Lanao del Sur. In October and November 2018, the research team conducted a survey of 3,052 people (1479 women and 1527 men) across Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Sexism and support for violence against women correlated with support for violent extremism

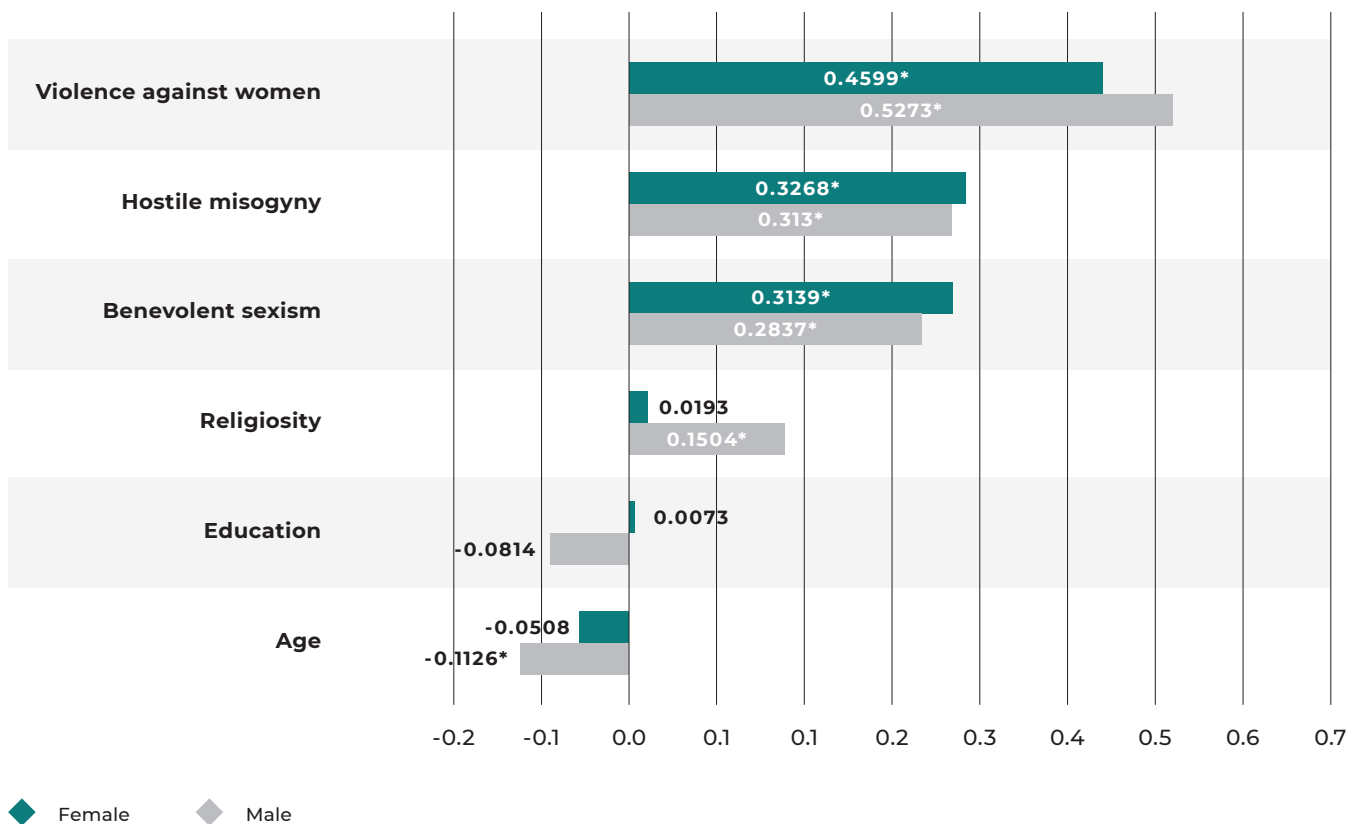
Correlations from a countrywide survey reveal the connection between gender regressive views, including support for violence against women and hostile misogyny, and violent extremism in the Philippines. There is a positive and significant correlation between supporting violent extremism and supporting violence against women, across both genders. That is, people who support violence against women are more likely to support violent extremism. Women

in the Philippines, however, are more likely to emphatically reject violence against women with 72 per cent of women strongly disagreeing that a husband would be entitled to use physical force if his wife argues with him, or refuses to obey him, compared to 48 per cent of men. Anti-women's human rights sentiments are reasonably widespread in the Philippines with almost half of men and a third of women agreeing that women seek special favours and preferential treatment under the guise of equality.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the survey shows that attitudes in support of violence against women and hostile misogyny explain more of the variation in support for violent extremism than other factors, such as youth, education, socio-economic background or religiosity.

Figure 1.

Correlation between support for violent extremism and other variables in the Philippines, disaggregated by sex



* 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. The definition of terminology included is available in the full research paper.

Gender norms and societal gender identities are transforming

There are clear links between societal gender identities and violent extremism in the Philippines. Dominant gender identities include notions of masculinity associated with being a provider for one's family, a protector, and a leader; while femininity is associated with being nurturing, a good mother, obedient, and undertaking household chores. However, there are indications that traditional gender norms are undergoing a transformation in the Philippines, with participants showing broad support for women's leadership in the public sphere; women's increased economic participation; and, that "a good man" can also do household chores and "plays a vital role in raising the children". Such shifts in gender norms creates important opportunities both for women and men and preventing violent extremism.

Traditional gender norms and identities exploited by violent extremist groups

Notions of masculinity and femininity are exploited by violent extremist groups to radicalise and recruit men and women in the Philippines. Specifically, violent extremist groups exploit the desire of men to be financial providers for their families, and the desire of women to be loyal or obedient to their husbands and other family members.

Most people agreed that "men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives". In this regard, participants noted that the expectation that men provide for their families feeds violent extremism recruitment as violent extremist organisations provide financial incentives, including scholarships for children, especially Toril religious boarding schools.

Violent extremist groups can also exploit women's appearance, with a number of research participants suggesting that women's attractiveness is exploited by violent extremist groups that use women, particularly those considered to be "pretty", to run errands, carry ammunition, fundraise, recruit people, or engage in bombing activities, because they would not ordinarily be suspected and can easily to move around certain areas without raising suspicion.

Additionally, several research participants described how both women and men join violent extremist groups for a sense of security or protection, whether because of the allure of the gun, or because they face threats as a result of family feuds, political rivalries or general insecurity. Almost half of respondents (47 per cent women and 42 per cent men) agreed that women need a male guardian to ensure their security and protection. This perceived need for protection is manipulated through the messaging of violent extremist groups if women are alone or their husbands have joined violent extremist groups.

Women's participation in extremist activities

Women's participation in violent extremist groups in the Philippines has been extensive and visible. Many research participants knew of women who were engaged in or supportive of violent extremist groups, as well as the critical role they play in preventing violent extremism. Research participants referred to women in violent extremist groups as "suicide bombers, combatants, snipers and spies", as well as fulfilling support roles such as providing first aid or cooking for combatants, or engaging in public information and recruitment campaigns, particularly through the use of social media.

While most participants suggested that women follow their husbands in joining violent extremist groups, a number of people suggested that some women who support gender equality also engage in violent extremist groups, believing they should be able to do what men can do and also equally thrive on the adventure and freedom it can bring. In such instances, it was perceived that women have an active, rather than just a support role, in violent extremist groups. In support of this, references were made to women snipers during the Marawi Siege.

The case of women's participation in violent extremism in the Philippines presents a paradox and a tension managed by some violent extremist groups, with traditional gender norms (dominant men, obedient women) attracting predominantly men, while at the same time perceived opportunities for adventure and liberation attracting women and men alike who seek to challenge traditional gender norms, or at least escape some of the constraints imposed by such norms in their lives. The ability of violent extremist groups to manage this tension and tailor recruitment strategies to women and men is evidence of their understanding of gender norms and how to manipulate them to their advantage.

Societal emphasis on the role and responsibility of mothers

The role of the mother has been highlighted as critical to effectively preventing violent extremism in the Philippines. Mothers are regarded by many participants as the major factor affecting whether children are vulnerable or not to extremist ideologies. This is because many see the role of the mother as being critical to educating her children and teaching them right from wrong. The vast majority of survey respondents agreed that it was important to have a caring and strong mother in a household. Even more respondents consider it important or extremely important to have a caring mother in the household and that mothers can watch for signs that a child might join a violent extremist group.

Conversely, some participants reiterated the gender bias that violent extremism is fed by the apparent breakdown in traditional family life—a tradition reliant on a stay-at-home, ever-vigilante and self-sacrificial mother—and undermined by women’s paid work, especially overseas. That is, women entering the job market is perceived by some as exposing the family to instability and exposed children to the threat of violent extremism recruitment without the mother’s moral guidance and close vigilance. Some research participants attributed poverty or even advances towards gender equality with women increasingly working outside the home, as reasons for the increased radicalisation and violent extremism. However, sentiments of traditional gender roles for women and hegemonic femininity as mitigating against extremism were more common in older, male participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Presence of gender regressive views utilised as early warning signs of violent extremism.**

There is a positive and significant correlation between “Supporting Violent Extremism” and “Supporting Violence Against Women” across both genders. Risk assessment tools for violent extremism should routinely consider gender norms, including attitudes such as hostile misogyny and perceptions regarding violence against women. In addition, evidence on individuals perpetrating violence against women should inform efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism.

- **Support gender equality and mitigate radicalisation through transforming traditional social norms.**

Variations in the traditional gender roles assigned to women, with space for negotiation of power increasingly recognised in the Philippines, are crucial in understanding the politics of supporting and preventing violent extremism. Shifting gender norms creates opportunities both for women and men, as well as mechanism for increased protection of women’s human rights, reducing the risks associated with gender-based recruitment and exploitation by violent extremist groups, and can inform strategies for preventing violent extremism.

- **Engage and support mothers to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.**

Recognising the role of the mother and her moral authority in the home legitimises her engagement in community and broader societal matters when it comes to discussions on how to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. Engagement with mothers must take into account women’s wider engagement, burdens, and capacities, and avoid excluding women who are not mothers. Efforts to promote peaceful communities must avoid consigning women’s roles to the domestic sphere only and, inadvertently, undermine efforts to promote gender equality interventions, not least because this can, in fact, increase the threat of violent extremism as well as other forms of insecurity.

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To read the full research paper and find more information, please visit:

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/preventing-violent-extremism>