SPECIAL REPORT

The Sultanate of Women

Exploring female roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism

Sofia Patel

February 2017

ASPI
AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE

COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICY CENTRE

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Cover image: Masked Spanish police officers lead a detained woman in Melilla, 16 December 2014. Spanish and Moroccan police have arrested seven people in an ongoing joint swoop on suspected efforts to recruit women to go to Syria and Iraq to support Islamic State insurgents, the Spanish Interior Ministry said. © Jesus Blasco de Avellaneda / Reuters / Picture Media

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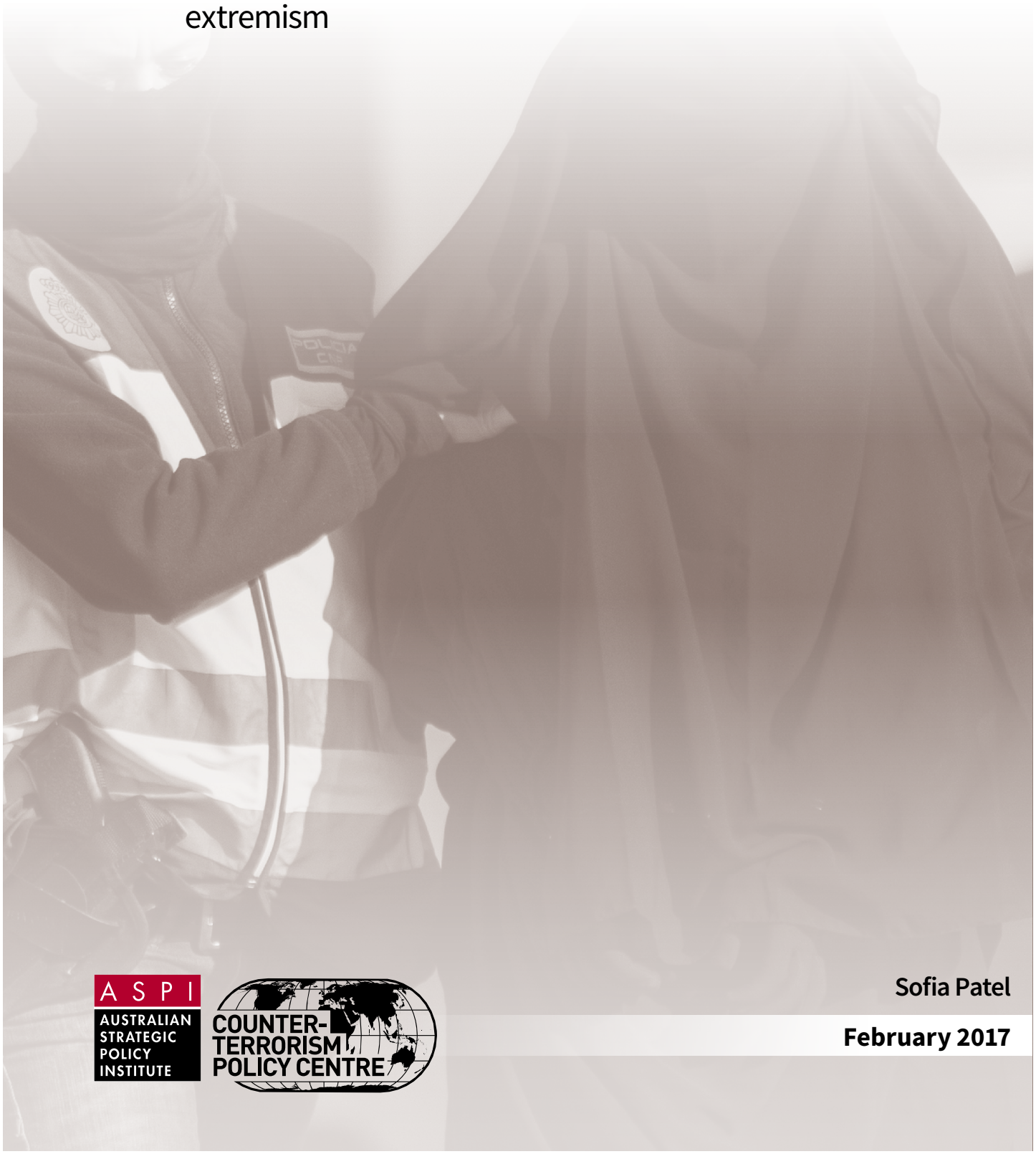

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the appeal of Islamic State (IS) to Western women and explores how women can be employed in countering violent extremism (CVE) structures to prevent further involvement. It aims to deliver a comprehensive analysis for academics, policymakers and practitioners working in CVE program and policy design and implementation in order to bridge the gap between community development work and security and intelligence.

There's a long history of women's involvement in violent extremism. Their roles have varied from active combatant to passive supporter. Violent extremist causes have ranged from secular nationalist movements to religiously motivated movements, the current manifestation of which is IS's *Salafi-jihadi* campaign, based on an archaic, fundamentalist interpretation of religious doctrine. The focus of this paper is restricted to women's involvement in CVE, with specific reference to the current threat posed by IS.

Unlike propaganda in previous conflicts, the propaganda disseminated by IS has framed the notion of jihad to transcend gender, thus ascribing specific—and equally important—roles to men and women. Women are positioned as integral to IS's caliphate-building project in Syria and Iraq and have been persuaded to migrate to the region. However, the reality is a far cry from the glamorised version of a 'five-star jihad' that's been propagated by the media. IS has used a convergence of propaganda, media attention, intellectual and theological ignorance and a 'warped version of feminism'[1] to construct a hybrid role for the women of its caliphate.

The number of Western women, in particular, who have migrated to IS-held territories has surprised governments, and that has affected the way policy has been developed and executed. The varied types of women drawn towards violent extremism in different capacities need to be addressed in CVE policy.

Key findings

First, women aren't a homogeneous entity; they play various roles, not just as jihadi brides, so their involvement in violent extremism shouldn't be understood as one dimensional, or linear.

Second, the motivations of women to join or support violent extremist causes don't differ dramatically from those of men. Women's roles in violent extremism vary considerably across conflicts, and the current conflict in Iraq and Syria is a unique challenge because of the nature of women's participation. Not only are they migrating to the Middle East, but their role as facilitators, supporters and recruiters on home soil is problematic for security agencies.

Authorities are paying more attention to the roles women can play as perpetrators and preventers of terrorism, rather than mainly as victims of violence. While women are disproportionately affected by violence in conflicts, they are also motivated for the same reasons as men to carry out violent and terrorist operations. CVE policy and practice need to reflect the multifaceted roles women play in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism. Women are already actively engaged in community efforts to build strength and resilience, but those projects aren't always acknowledged by government. Initiatives that aren't necessarily security-focused shouldn't be disregarded; rather, they should be supported and promoted through community integration work.

The Victorian Government appears to be working to refocus CVE as a practice: it is distancing from counterterrorism operations and moving towards community development and integration practices. The next step would be for civil society, rather than law enforcement, to take the lead.

Conclusions

The aims and objectives of CVE and preventing violent extremism (PVE) policy and practices need further clarification. PVE and CVE should be pursued separately so as not to conflate their objectives. Failing to do so has resulted in confusion over what, exactly, we're trying to achieve.

CVE as a practice has lost much legitimacy in communities that it seeks to penetrate. It would benefit from an overhaul to rebuild lost trust between communities and authorities, and communication and transparency are the key. A cross-sector approach that incorporates expertise and knowledge from different public policy areas, such as education, health care, development and social services, would make for a more holistic, integrated approach to CVE.

To successfully counter the appeal of violent extremism to women, policy and practice need to reflect the varied push and pull factors in play, as well as the roles of women.

Women have multiple roles to play in PVE and CVE as mothers, mentors and community organisers. Those roles are vital and should be properly supported through sustainable initiatives such as engaging with women who are already organised in their communities and strengthening their support networks. Although former radicals have been successfully employed as mentors to deliver counter-narratives, it might be wise to instead leverage the positive experiences of women who have never turned to violent extremism. Such women are in the majority and would be able to provide greatly varied experiences and histories. Further research into this approach would be worthwhile.

Policy recommendations

1. CVE as a discipline needs to be 'rebranded', as it has lost much of its legitimacy within the communities that it hopes to penetrate.
2. CVE intervention frameworks should separate PVE and CVE.
3. Encourage interstate partnerships between women's organisations.
4. Evaluate CVE projects and retain skills.
5. Equip families with relevant tools, knowledge and skills.
6. Develop exit strategies for all future programs.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, up to 31,000 people have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join Islamic State (IS) and other violent extremist groups.[2] It has been estimated that women account for one-fifth[3] of all foreign recruits and that around 550 of them have come from Western countries. These figures took many Western governments by surprise, as they were unable to comprehend the appeal of the authoritarian, medieval principles of IS to individuals raised with democratic and liberal values in the West.

In February 2015, Australia's Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, advised that up to 40 Australian women are known to have taken part in or supported terrorist activity in Syria, Iraq and Australia, and may also be contributing towards the radicalisation and recruitment of other women. Bishop expressed her surprise that so many women chose to participate and commit to IS, 'given that it is women and girls who are disproportionately affected by the activities of terrorist groups'.[4] That assertion, as indicated by Simone Roworth, demonstrates that political discourse in Australia and internationally 'lacks an understanding of the complex and varied push/pull factors that drive women to become involved with IS'[5] and violent extremism more broadly.

Throughout modern history, women have been involved in planning, supporting and executing terrorist attacks in support of political and religious movements. Their involvement has differed according to the ideology and principles of their chosen organisation. The current manifestation of this is IS's *Salafi-jihadi* ideology, which has attracted relatively large numbers of Western women to join its ranks in a variety of roles and positions.

Motivations for joining are varied, but researchers have concluded that both men and women tend to be influenced by similar factors and have migrated to IS territory for related reasons. The reasons include religious, economic and political ones, but also personal and psychological ones, such as a desire for adventure or identity or to overcome social or cultural alienation. Despite this, policy, security and development studies have tended to focus on a rather linear and simplistic approach to women's involvement in violent extremism—one that presents women as passive voices or victims. This understanding denies them agency or complicity in promoting or perpetrating extremist acts. The media's recent focus on the 'jihadi bride' phenomenon in the current wave of violent extremism illustrates this: women are depicted as accessories to their war-waging husbands, rather than as people who are responsible for inciting violence. As indicated by Roworth, 'ignoring the variety of women's motivations in favour of stereotypes will limit the reach of any policy designed to counter or prevent their involvement in violent extremism.'[6]

In IS's use of propaganda, different rhetoric is disseminated to different audiences. The grievances that are drawn upon in order to recruit Westerners are far different in propaganda messages sent to women of other nationalities. This raises the question of whether Western women are assigned different roles and responsibilities within the caliphate and whether or not there's a hierarchy among women of different cultures.

Women should be acknowledged equally as perpetrators and preventers of terrorist acts. The roles that they can play in preventing violent extremism (PVE) and countering violent extremism (CVE) should reflect the multifaceted motivational factors behind women's involvement in IS and similar groups. According to Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg's research, women 'are the emotional link to their children'.[7] Therefore, they are able to assess the behaviour of their family members and may be able to identify early tendencies towards radicalisation.[8] Not only can women be effective in their roles within the family, but they can also make valuable contributions to community

organisations, educational initiatives, mentoring and intervening initiatives, and so on. Women need to be incorporated into a holistic CVE strategy in which they can make an impact from the top down and the bottom up. Failing to include them as equal actors in security efforts as a whole might result in key intervention opportunities being missed.

This paper deconstructs the myths of the 'female jihadi' phenomenon and provides a more nuanced understanding of the major influencing factors for women. It's hoped that this will assist and inform the development of future PVE and CVE measures.

The research gives an overview of women's involvement in violent extremism, including the appeal of IS to women, noting the varied motivational factors. It explores how IS views women and how it has curated a specific image for Western women through its propaganda, in order to recruit migrants into particular roles within the caliphate as well as loyal followers in their home countries. The analysis exposes internal contradictions in IS's portrayal of women that could be harnessed by policymakers and researchers to develop nuanced counter-narratives. Two case studies of Australian women—Zehra Duman (a.k.a. Umm Abdullatif al-Australi) and Zaynab Sharrouf (a.k.a. Umm Hafs)—illustrate the appeal as well as the contradictions.

The second part of the paper is dedicated to refocusing CVE as a practice and considers how to better integrate women in different roles, from strategy to program design and implementation. It argues that, in order to respond to the extent and range of female involvement in violent extremism, governments and policymakers need to use women's roles more effectively to counter the appeal of extremist narratives. A series of recommendations suggests changes to existing CVE structures and their approaches to integrating women.

Terminology

This paper uses the Australian Government's legal definition of 'violent extremism', which refers to 'the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence'.[9]

In this text:

- the words 'migrant' and '*muhajirah*' (plural: *muhajirat*) are used interchangeably and refer to women
- the term 'foreign fighter' is used to describe male migrants exclusively
- *hijrah* (migration) is used when referring to men and women who have migrated to IS territory
- the term *salafi-jihadi* refers to the Islamist extremist or fundamentalist ideology that the men and women analysed in the research adhere to.

Limitations and scope

The paper looks at Western women's engagement with violent extremism within the context of IS. The research covers women who have travelled to the Middle East with their families as well as those who have travelled alone or with small groups of friends.

The experience of Australian women in violent extremism is of particular interest because important lessons can be learned for future PVE and CVE scenarios. Although the numbers of female migrants from Australia to IS territories have been limited, their vociferous involvement in violent extremist behaviour has contributed to generating an international narrative about the appeal of violent extremism to women. While the paper refers to South and Southeast Asian women, a different study would be needed to assess differences and similarities and to cross-reference details.

For this research, primary data was gathered through one-to-one telephone interviews with practitioners in only some cases. The researcher had limited engagement with government departments and community organisations and, unless specified, all information has been taken from open-source websites and documents.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This section examines women's involvement in violent extremism in support of political and religious movements, including IS.

Political movements

Since the 19th century, women have participated directly and indirectly in geographically and ideologically diverse violent extremist organisations.[10] They have been involved in many secular, liberation and nationalist movements, including radical Islamism.

Although the number of female combatants during the 20th century was limited, female suicide bombers were commonly used in terrorist attacks. According to a study by Yoram Schweitzer, female bombers committed more than 220 suicide attacks between 1985 and 2006, or almost 15% of all suicide operations.[11] Dr Katherine Brown from King's College London has further asserted that between 1981 and 2007 women perpetrated about 26% of all suicide attacks.[12] Despite this, women are still not portrayed as perpetrators of violence, and are more commonly known to have played key supporting (non-combatant) roles for violent extremist groups (for example, as facilitators, fundraisers and recruiters), as well as having inspired others to join the cause.

The movements and causes have varied, from far-left and far-right political movements in Europe to nationalist and radical Islamist movements in Central Asia and the Middle East. Women tended to assume more combative roles within secular political movements and participated in a considerable number of suicide missions in Russia, Sri Lanka, Israel, Palestine, Chechnya and Turkey.

During the 1960s and 1970s, women carried out suicide missions for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.[13] The Syrian Socialist National Party, operating in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, also made prominent use of women in suicide missions in response to Israel's occupation of the area. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's use of female combatants during the 1980s and 1990s 'helped them sustain a robust opposition campaign against the Sri Lankan government'.[14] Kurdish women in Turkey have carried out several suicide attacks against the government, and two-thirds of attacks by the Kurdistan Workers' Party in the mid- and late 1990s were by women.[15] Probably the most widely known attack involving women was in 2002, when the Chechen 'Black Widows' seized the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow. Forty-one Chechen terrorists, including 19 women, held around 800 people hostage for three days.

Terrorist organisations have used female operatives to carry out attacks for strategic purposes and tactical advantage. For example, women suicide bombers have been used systematically to surprise the enemy (stereotypes present women as mothers and nurturers rather than bombers), which gains media attention for the cause. Mia Bloom observes[16] that women can often access areas that could be harder for men to infiltrate; they are less likely to arouse suspicion due to the perceived unlikelihood of females being terrorists. Furthermore, in conservative societies women are encouraged to dress modestly in loose-fitting garments, which means they are able to conceal equipment such as suicide vests underneath their clothes.[17] Women have also been used, particularly in Chechnya

and Sri Lanka, after authoritarian crackdowns killed or imprisoned men and boys of particular demographic and ethnic groups.

Salafi-jihadi movements

This research uses Shiraz Maher's interpretation of *Salafi-jihadism* to mean individuals or organisations that are 'violent-rejectionists'; that is, they are 'irreconcilably estranged from the modern nation-state'. Organisations that can be considered to be violent-rejectionist include al-Qaeda, IS, Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.[18] However, the theological, ideological and practical concepts of *salafi-jihadism* far exceed the scope of this paper, and are therefore not discussed further.

Salafi-jihadi movements have been divided in their interpretations of roles of women in jihad. The key question is whether women should be allowed to carry out combative jihad or should stay at home and nurture their sons, husbands, brothers and fathers, who carry out suicide missions or fight in battles. This has divided the *jihadi* community into two camps: those who advocate active involvement and those who advocate passive (supporting) involvement in jihad.

According to Dorit Naaman, most adherents of *salafi-jihadi* doctrine tend to adopt a 'misogynistic fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that constructs female identity as inherently non-violent and espouses women's place in the home'.[19] On the other hand, some organisations, such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda in Iraq, have advocated the involvement of female combatants based on their interpretation that it's the duty of every Muslim to fight the enemy of the *ummah* (the global Muslim community). Hamas's official charter decreed women as legitimate fighters in combative jihad in the 1980s:

> Resisting and quelling the enemy becomes the individual duty of every Muslim, male or female. A woman can go out to fight the enemy without her husband's permission …[20]

IS has taken this one step further and has portrayed women's involvement in its mission under the guise of female empowerment and liberation. Through specific forms of propaganda and rhetoric, IS has transformed passive roles for women (staying at home, cooking, reproducing) into active roles integral to sustaining the caliphate. This negates the dichotomy between schools of thought and perhaps creates an environment for women in which supportive and active roles in jihad are no longer mutually exclusive.

Ayman al-Zawahiri (the leader of al-Qaeda) and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq until his death in 2006) were seminal to decreeing the 'correct' roles for women in *salafi-jihadi* practice, clearly exposing contradictions and tensions within jihadist circles.

Al-Zawahiri (then the deputy leader of al-Qaeda central) maintained that women's role in jihad was purely domestic, in supporting and facilitating combative jihad by their men:

> Al-Qaeda has no women, but the women of the mujahideen do their heroic part in taking care of their homes and sons …[21]

In 2005, al-Zarqawi explicitly called on women to participate more actively in jihad, whether at home or in suicide terrorism, marking a substantial change in traditional al-Qaeda philosophy:

> The jihadi woman is the woman who raises her children to join the jihad, to fight and dies [*sic*] for jihad. This is the honorable thing to do.[22]

Immediately afterwards, suicide bombings by women escalated. In November 2005, Sajida Mubarak al-Rishawi and her husband attempted to carry out an attack on the Radisson Hotel in Amman, Jordan, but her explosive belt failed to detonate.[23] In December, a Belgian convert named Muriel Degauque became Al-Qaeda in Iraq's first successful female suicide bomber when she detonated her bomb in an attack with her husband against a US patrol in Iraq.[24]

Since then, as a result of the activities of groups such as al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Taliban, women have featured more frequently in combative jihad.

Maintaining gender stereotypes that present women as inherently non-violent has allowed terrorist organisations to recruit female suicide bombers to their advantage; women can often carry out certain actions that men cannot. Bloom asserts that according to such stereotypes, women are less likely to arouse suspicion, and therefore more likely to avoid detection.[25] This is assisted further in socially conservative societies where searching women for bombs or other weaponry wouldn't be mandated as it's not allowed for a man to search a woman.[26]

Islamic State

Western women have been drawn to IS for a variety of reasons. Similar to their male counterparts, some are motivated by a sense of adventure and thrill. Issues of identity, revenge, duty and empathy with fellow Muslims are some other reasons that resonate among the women who have been recruited.[27] After IS's declaration of its caliphate, Western women's willingness to participate in radical Islamist terrorism, especially in recruitment, terrorist propaganda dissemination and state building, increased notably. This suggests that their interest in contributing to the cause peaked when they felt they had a stake in the process of state building—a direct result of successful propaganda efforts.

IS has used a convergence of propaganda, media attention, intellectual and theological ignorance and a 'warped version of feminism'[28] to construct a hybrid role for the women of the caliphate. Perhaps contradictorily, IS's narrative of women in jihad involves the confluence of the two separate ideas of women's roles (passive and active). Women are at once revered in their (passive) domestic roles taking care of the home, producing new generations of *mujahideen*, and simultaneously celebrated as being integral to the (active) creation and sustenance of the caliphate. They are afforded tokenistic positions in education, health care and policing, and are sometimes trained to use weaponry should the occasion arise (woman aren't permitted to undertake combat roles), which gives the impression that they have responsibility and status equal to that of men. Their contribution to jihad is to support their men, which subsequently builds the caliphate.

IS seeks to feed a narrative of empowerment to the women whom it recruits. The roles and responsibilities it promises women on social media and via its propaganda are interlaced with notions of divine responsibility and duty, the promise of liberation and an idealised, utopian existence in the caliphate. However, the roles that IS promises women are vastly different from the reality of life in the caliphate. A combination of social media posts, IS propaganda and official documents demonstrates that IS really sees women's worth as predominantly to maintain the numbers of male *mujahideen*.[29]

WOMEN OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

Motivations explained

It's important to acknowledge variations in the profiles of women who have travelled to IS territory or shown interest in supporting the organisation. As with their male counterparts, they aren't a homogeneous group but come from a multitude of cultural, ethnic, social and educational backgrounds. The broad appeal of IS to a range of different women is clear, but their motivations for travelling to the caliphate aren't uniform. Therefore, policymakers need to address that diversity and not design programs with a 'one size fits all' element to them.

A typical characteristic of IS recruitment is that it's aimed at the younger generation: girls as young as 15 have made their own way to the Middle East to support the caliphate.[30] Moreover, the influx of Western *muhajirat* is something that policymakers have struggled to understand. Previous case studies of women in violent extremism have found that extremist groups have generally had a support base within local communities, rather than on an international scale as large as IS's. For example, women's involvement in insurgency and terrorist movements in Russia, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Palestine has largely been a response to the localised needs of the conflict or cause.

Motivations for Western migrants differ from those of people travelling to IS territory from Asia or the Middle East. While the main focus of this paper is on the experience of Western female migrants, comments and analysis of women from the region can give the fullest possible perspective on women's experiences. For example, the numbers of European and Middle Eastern migrants are overwhelmingly higher than those of migrants from South and Southeast Asia, despite the higher numbers of Muslims in those areas.

IS thrives on instability and exploits vulnerable situations and individuals; its ideology resonates with those who have experienced sentiments of marginalisation or alienation, and in places where there's a political or cultural void and where strong, representative leadership is lacking. IS has found key opportunities to recruit in countries that are known to be either 'politically repressive (Saudi Arabia, 2,500 migrants); politically unstable (Tunisia, 6,000 migrants) or discriminatory towards Muslims (Europe—excluding Russia—5,000 migrants).'[31] According to Sidney Jones, a possible explanation for the low numbers of Malaysian (100) and Indonesian (700) migrants may be the relative political stability[32] in those countries and their Muslim populations' lack of a domestic Muslim 'identity crisis' compared to the West.[33]

The appeal of violent extremism to Muslims across the globe is multifaceted, but has been strengthened by leveraging the grievances faced by Muslims in their home countries and presenting them with the prospect of eternal salvation. Another factor to consider is that the long distance from Southeast Asia to the Levant may play a part in keeping numbers of migrants from this part of the world to low levels.

Push factors

Based on extensive research from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the Quilliam Foundation, Erin Saltman et al., Nikita Malik and Haras Rafiq[34] have concluded that the broad **push** factors driving women and men to make *hijrah* (to migrate) to IS have been:

- perceived persecution of Muslims (the *ummah* under attack)
- the desire to support a just cause against the tyranny of the Assad regime
- social or cultural isolation in the West.

The *ummah* under attack

IS propagates a narrative of Muslim persecution to justify its aims and objectives. It uses binary descriptors ('believers' and 'unbelievers') to narrate this history of struggle:[35] 'the empathy that women undergoing a process of radicalization feel for Muslim victims of violence' around the world is intensified by the fact that Western powers are seen either to be failing to alleviate the suffering or to be complicit in propagating the conflict that creates the suffering.[36]

Although Australia hasn't engaged in ground combat in the Middle East since officially ending Operation Slipper in 2014, it's still very much part of the Western coalition alliance. As the first international partner to commit to air strikes in Iraq,[37] Australia is perceived by IS as complicit in Western 'attacks' on the *ummah*, and IS has used this as a key justification to encourage migrants as well as to justify attacks on home soil:

> The Khilafah [caliphate] has called for you to mobilize from your dens to alleviate the pain afflicting the hearts of the Muslims by striking the kuffar in their homelands … Light the ground beneath them aflame and scorch them with terror. Kill them on the streets of Brunswick, Broadmeadows, Bankstown and Bondi. Kill them at the MCG, the SCG and the Opera House … Stab them, shoot them, poison them, and run them down with your vehicles … and then through your sacrifices, this Ummah will be victorious.[38]

IS preaches that, in making the decision to leave their homes in the West, Muslims from all over the world will join together to remove Western influence of any type from the holy lands. In doing so, their grievances experienced in the West will be alleviated and they'll be rewarded with an alternative society that will liberate them and their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters in peril. This is more than a request: it's presented as a duty, supported by an interpretation of Islamic theology, that's subsequently sold as the only way to earn a place in paradise.

Supporting a just cause against the tyranny of Assad's regime

The suffering experienced by Syrian Muslims under Assad's regime is a powerful narrative within which to frame the urgent need for justice and has been used as leverage to coerce individuals to join a just cause. The sectarian narrative has huge impact here: IS ideology—as with much other *salafi-jihadi* ideology—uses *takfir* (excommunication of those pronounced infidels) to justify killing those considered apostates. In clear propaganda rhetoric, Assad—a member of the minority Shia sect, the Alawites—and anyone else who doesn't fall into IS's version of Sunni Islam must legitimately be eliminated. When that's achieved, a utopian, purist caliphate will prevail.

Social and cultural isolation

Muslims in the West have experienced an ongoing change in attitude—both perceived and real—towards their communities since 9/11.[39] This has manifested in a number of ways, such as a rise in Islamophobia, heightened levels of government scrutiny of Muslim communities and a consistent media spotlight on Islam. Furthermore, noticeable markers of practising Islam, such as clothing or any public form of religious observance, such as Friday prayers, have led to a backlash on the community, leaving many Muslims feeling a growing sense of marginalisation and alienation.

All of a sudden, Western culture and Islamic culture are deemed incompatible, in line with the 'clash of civilisations' narrative, which proclaims the impossibility of coexistence between the West and Islam due to their opposing value systems and principles.[40] Despite many generations of peaceful coexistence refuting that thesis, this rhetoric has been manipulated by IS as ideal for its fundamentalist recruitment propaganda: it divides the world into binaries and poses one against the other. IS's narrative draws on these local grievances and uses binary language to further

encourage the real and perceived alienation and isolation of Muslims in the West by describing two opposing entities: them and us; *kufr* and *ummah*; non-believers and believers.

France's impromptu 'burkini' ban on public beaches in the southeast was a recent example of how easy it is for this narrative to be constructed, and, simultaneously how mistakes in policymaking can fuel propaganda for organisations such as IS, which exploits the situation on the ground to its advantage. France is home to the largest Muslim population in Western Europe (7.5% of the French population).[41] Even though the nation's highest court outlawed the ban, demonstrating national rejection of this discriminatory policy, this type of ill-advised decision-making plays into Muslims' social and cultural isolation and the '*ummah* under attack' rhetoric that IS propagates.

An additional push factor is the paradigm through which IS presents the roles of men and women. Women's empowerment is synonymous with men's masculinity, both of which are explained as having been stripped from them as a result of Western cultural corruption.[42] IS propaganda identifies what it calls the 'Western project of feminism' as a failure.[43] In his translation of an official IS document, Charlie Winter exposes IS's logic.[44] It explains that the roles ascribed to each gender in the West are based on superficial and materialistic principles that have deviated from the true meaningful roles and responsibilities as intended by God. In making *hijrah*, women can emancipate themselves from what is forced upon them by the West and can also allow their men to reach the peak of their masculinity. The roles of man and woman are presented using binary language that assigns specific responsibilities for each; in living in the West, Muslim men have allegedly been emasculated by a feminist agenda and are therefore unable to fulfil their obligation as designated by God.

Through this warped world view, the propaganda argues that the current state of instability and turmoil can be eliminated only when Muslims of the *ummah* remove themselves from the West and become liberated citizens of the caliphate, where the purest form of being can be realised.[45] All arguments are framed within a religious paradigm to maintain an element of divine obligation on the part of Muslims.

Pull factors

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Quilliam Foundation have further demonstrated the **pull** factors drawing women into IS territory, such as:[46]

- a desire to participate in the idea of building a utopian caliphate
- the prospect of creating a sisterhood identity based on shared experiences and goals, supported with sentiments of adventure and romance
- the possibility of reclaiming spirituality and meaning in life.

The utopian caliphate

According to research conducted by the Quilliam Foundation,[47] women are promised 'empowerment, deliverance, participation and piety' upon making *hijrah,* so their commitment to the cause is simultaneously ideological and practical. Thus, the most important aspect of IS's pull factors for women, and the most notable explanation for the prominence of women's involvement with it, is that they now have a real stake in the creation of an ideologically pure state and can practically contribute to building and maintaining the caliphate—without women the physical manifestation of a caliphate couldn't exist. IS propaganda claims that women are as integral to the state-building project as men, and that their roles as mothers, teachers and nurses are as essential to sustaining the caliphate into the future as men's roles are in protecting and defending its territory.

This narrative is compounded with the promise of rewards in the afterlife and provides strong incentives for women who are suffering identity crises or who see no real opportunity for themselves to fully integrate as Muslim women living in the West. The reality of the situation, however, is that 'women have no value other than boosting recruitment and helping to retain foreign fighters.'[48]

Creating a shared identity

Feelings of unity and community are directly connected to being part of the state-building project. A shared cause provides the basis for shared ideals and aspirations, thus shaping a common identity to some degree. As discussed above, a crucial push factor driving these women to the caliphate is their lack of a sense of belonging and meaningful companionship while living in the West.[49] Meeting like-minded individuals who have had similar experiences is comforting, and circulating these shared grievances and experiences is a useful tool to recruit more women.

Furthermore, sentiments of adventurism and romance, as demonstrated by IS propaganda, are just as powerful pull factors for women as they are for men.[50] Whether or not the women are able to fight in combat, the concept of migrating to the caliphate is sold as some sort of adventure tourism package that presents anyone who reaches the destination as some sort of hero or heroine. This is a far cry from their experiences of perceived persecution and isolation—and a much more attractive prospect.

Reclaiming meaning from life

The superficiality of the materialistic goals and achievements that are sought after in the West is juxtaposed with the spiritual and the divine element that IS claims as the foundation for its caliphate. 'IS expertly leverages the grievances' that Muslims have experienced living in the West, 'with positive promises of utopian state-building' and sisterhood bonding.[51]

Jihadi brides

The media are responsible for propagating a reductionist narrative that portrays the women who migrate to the caliphate as an extension of their male *mujahideen*. Clearly, some women do travel as a result of relationships or with a romanticised view of finding a *jihadi* husband, but that assumption shouldn't be made about all of them. IS propaganda clearly resonates with a number of personal and political grievances experienced in their former lives in the West, but that appeal transcends gender: motivating factors for men and women have considerable overlap.

Adopting the *jihadi* bride narrative to understand the gender element within IS does not allow for nuanced reasoning or analysis by women who are motivated by various tenets in the violent extremist narrative. Overlooking the range of elements that contribute to sympathising with IS could certainly negatively affect the way policy responses are developed.

The overlap between the push and pull factors involved in encouraging women's participation in jihad for IS highlights the complex nexus of ideological, practical and theological arguments presented as part of IS's strategy to advocate for its cause. It's through a comparative analysis, incorporating all these components, that a framework for understanding *hijrah* can be built.

ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE ISLAMIC STATE

While it's impossible to create a completely accurate picture of women's lives in IS-held territory, anecdotes and comments from social media accounts as well as official and unofficial IS propaganda can provide insights into that lived reality.

From a range of these sources, we can confidently confirm that women have largely taken up domestic roles (wife, mother, homemaker), but occasionally there have been accounts of women in positions of authority (doctor, teacher, or member of the all-female religious police group, the Al-Khanssaa Brigade). Furthermore, they are integral to IS's recruitment strategy[52] as they engage with other girls and women—in just the same way as men do—on online and offline platforms, encouraging them to also make *hijrah*.

Domestic roles for women

The woman is obliged to support and facilitate the jihad of her brothers. She's first and foremost a wife, a mother and a homemaker:

> … woman was created to populate the Earth just as man was … she was made from Adam and for Adam.[53]

While this role may seem incredibly restrictive and archaic, it's been packaged and explained in such a way by IS propagandists that it denotes liberation and empowerment. The creation of the caliphate has provided a means for a more interactive role for women, although the degree to which this is carried out is very restricted. Without women to produce the next generation of *mujahideen*, IS would cease to exist. Women have a real stake in the creation of a utopian, pure, Islamic nation, and their role is just as essential as the role of those defending territory. This is her jihad:

> … you are in jihad when you uphold your loyalty to him [your husband] … when you teach his children the difference between the truth and falsehood …[54]

> My Muslim sister, indeed you are a mujahidah [fighter] and if the weapon of the men is the assault rifle and the explosive belt, then know that the weapon of the women is good behaviour and knowledge …[55]

There's a strict instruction that women aren't permitted to fight in combative jihad unless properly authorised.[56] This negates any speculation about women's involvement in combative jihad within the caliphate, which has been promoted by the media's publication of photos of veiled women toting guns.

Professional roles for women

Aside from continuing recruitment, for the caliphate to function in all its aspects, women have been employed in roles that require physical contact with other women, such as doctors or nurses. In addition, unrelated men and women can't accompany one another in public in the caliphate, so education requires segregated students and female teachers. However, such roles and responsibilities are very limited and are sustained out of necessity rather than to encourage well-rounded female participation in state building.

It would be interesting to research further into the sustained development of the female contribution to the caliphate, and whether women are trained to take over certain roles in the future or whether the model requires a consistent stream of already qualified individuals for those roles. Recently, Brenda Stoter ascertained that as 'IS loses power, it is to be expected that IS will increasingly use women in fighting or attacks' out of necessity.[57] This aligns with women's historical involvement in previous jihadist and insurgency operations.

The all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigade is the closest thing the caliphate has to a female police force. It regulates behaviour, clothing, relationships and general conduct, operating across towns in both Iraq and Syria.[58] The members are required to administer a selection of harsh punishments to other women who have stepped out of line and fail to abide by IS's strict brand of Islamic law and practice.

Women of the Islamic State: a manifesto on women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade was circulated online in January 2015.[59] It clarifies the 'official' roles and responsibilities of women in the caliphate and stipulates the appropriate behaviour for women on going outdoors, working, dress, and other matters. It also provides information on the occasions that jihad may be permissible for women:

> … Women may go out to serve the community in … Jihad (by appointment)—if the enemy is attacking her country and the men are not enough to protect it and the imams give a fatwa for it …[60]

IS's first monthly English-language propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, included a chapter written by women and addressed to women from issue 9 (May 2015) until *Dabiq* was replaced by a similar publication, *Rumiyah*, in September 2016. This literature largely consists of a series of theological references in justification of women's prescribed roles and duties to God through the lens of IS. In employing female authors to write on women-relevant topics, IS's narrative appears to be legitimised, thus encouraging more women to subscribe.

Women as recruiters

Women are crucial ambassadors for producing and maintaining the IS propaganda machine and have been integral to recruiting other women to make *hijrah*. They have facilitated the flow of cash to potential *muhajirat* and provided all sorts of information, such as step-by-step travel guidance, contingency plans in case migrants are caught by the authorities, clothing advice, and advice on how to say goodbye to family members.[61]

The younger generation of Western female migrants, such as the Australians Zehra Duman and Zaynab Sharrouf and their British counterparts—Aqsa Mahmood, Salma and Zahra Halane and the Bethnal Green girls—were very active and candid online. Their digital literacy and the ease with which they share information are a direct contribution to the dissemination of crucial IS propaganda through various social media platforms: Twitter, Ask.fm, Facebook and Tumblr.[62] Although their accounts on open social media sites are now disabled, they managed to dodge earlier censorship attempts by quick, reactive and efficient handle and username changes to maintain a steady flow of material.[63] Their accounts have allowed deep insights into peer-to-peer social interaction, dynamics between women within the IS and the way life experienced by single and married women, as explained below.

Life in the caliphate for women

From an examination of Western social media posts, as well as from interviews with Arab female IS escapees, it's evident that life for women under the caliphate is challenging. Not only is the journey to IS territory likely to be rough, but upon arrival women are subject to strict codes of conduct and a rigorous set of rules and regulations. Details of harsh living conditions have emerged, and limited electricity supplies and water shortages are common.[64] The accounts of restrictions on freedom of movement and the lack of lifestyle choices or occupations other than homemaking paint a bleak picture of life for women inside the caliphate. There's limited interaction between foreign and local *muhajirat* due to language barriers and perceived hostilities. Lastly, women are unable to participate in combative jihad, other than if explicitly decreed by a *fatwa* (a ruling given by Islamic authority), as advised in

the Al-Khanssaa Brigade manifesto. This directly contradicts much of the sensationalist media reporting that has glamorised women's lifestyles based on a few images cherrypicked from the internet.

Women's freedom to move outside the home is heavily restricted unless they are accompanied by a *mahram* (male guardian).[65] Their lack of independence and mobility is a prime factor in encouraging women to get married, and then subsequently remarried upon the inevitable death of their husbands. Multiple accounts by female foreign migrants have alluded to the necessity of and dependence on men. For example, Umm Ubaydah recounts: 'being single in Sham is extremely difficult, its best if you're not married when coming, to mentally prepare yourself.'[66] This shows that life in the caliphate doesn't live up to media portrayals of a 'five-star jihad' and claims of luxurious living standards.

'Shams', a 27-year-old British Malaysian woman, echoes this sentiment, stressing the importance of evaluating the reasons to make *hijrah*.[67] She advises women to reject romanticised notions of marriage in order to prepare for the situation that awaits: '… when you come here for any other reason than Allah, you will be disappointed in the end.'[68]

As argued by Saltman et al., both these accounts dispel the popular myth of the '*jihadi* bride' circulated by the media. Instead, we find women implicitly aware that after making *hijrah* their lives will be hard and challenging, and that any form of romance will inevitably be short-lived. While some accounts (such as those of the Australian Sharrouf and Duman women) continue to romanticise and laud relationships with *jihadi* fighters, they are few and far between. Contextualising a broad array of accounts from different sources is a far more nuanced way to analyse the variation of life for Western migrants to Iraq and Syria.

The practical implications of being a migrant in a foreign land also include language barriers and limited integration with the local population. Some sources have suggested that Western migrants and local women rarely interact, let alone develop close relationships; the migrants tend to stick with other women from their home countries and those who speak the same language.[69] One account suggests that IS deliberately restricts 'mingling between natives and foreigners' due to fear of 'gossip'[70] that might expose favouritism between communities, fostering sentiments of division and competition. IS allegedly considers foreign women as valuable assets and, according to reports, foreign fighters prefer foreign women as they are perceived to be more sexually obliging than Syrian women.[71] IS's deliberate separation of foreign and Arab women is seemingly at odds with the claims of sisterhood and a united Sunni *ummah* in recruitment propaganda. However, it serves to reinforce the idea, as argued by Bloom and Winter, that women are of no value to IS, or to male foreign fighters, other than for recruitment and reproduction.[72]

The range of anecdotal accounts as well as the 'official' guidance from the Al-Khanssaa Brigade's manifesto explicitly negates the idea of participation in combative jihad, as well as the prospect of a comfortable or luxurious lifestyle in the caliphate. Narratives, such as those captured in images propagated by the Australians Zehra Duman and Zaynab Sharrouf showing them and their friends all fully veiled and brandishing Kalashnikovs while reclining on the bonnet of a white BMW, with the caption '5 star jihad',[73] should therefore not be taken at face value: this is clear IS propaganda that Western media have capitalised on through widespread dissemination and fetishised headlines, inadvertently feeding into the hands of recruiters.

An account posted on Aqsa Mahmood's (Umm Layth) blog directly refers to misconceptions about life for women in the caliphate:

> I will be straight up and blunt with you all, there is absolutely nothing for sisters to participate in Qitaal [fighting] … the women you may have seen online are all part of [secular] propaganda who are not calling for the law of Allah …[74]

The post deals with a number of complex issues. It contributes to IS's online propaganda strategy by adding to the 'us versus them' narrative. It also exposes the contradictions within IS propaganda and the reality of life in the caliphate. Lastly, it's an especially good insight into the convergence between the practical and the theological underpinnings of IS logic and the fact that, although women indeed have agency within the narrative of violent extremism, that agency has been manipulated and exists within a particular framework that's inherently dictatorial

and misogynistic. Thus, when examining the material posted online by girls and women who have travelled to the caliphate, it's important to contextualise everything that's being said by referring to multiple documents in multiple languages before drawing any definitive conclusion.

These accounts give a substantial amount of information to us about what life inside the caliphate is like for women: it's hard, challenging and probably quite lonely. Women are regularly exploited and demeaned rather than revered.[75] The destitution of women within IS can be exposed to provide a powerful counter-narrative that harnesses the negative experiences of women at the hands of the group to reduce the appeal of engaging in violent extremist activity in the future. IS's propaganda and rhetoric promoting sisterhood and belonging, promising exciting and fulfilling lives in the caliphate, is limited in its scope when played out on the ground. This is the message that needs to be disseminated to limit the reach of IS propaganda to potential new recruits: the roles and lifestyle that are promised to women through social media propaganda differ greatly from reality.

AUSTRALIAN *MUHAJIRAT* CASE STUDIES

Zehra Duman and Zaynab Sharrouf

Some Australian women have travelled to IS territory, while others have been known to support IS and recruit for it on Australian soil. While accurate biographical information on the women in the caliphate has been limited, we have details of nine prominent Australian women who made *hijrah* and a handful of other case studies of individual women who have not left the country but have either been convicted of supporting or facilitating terrorism or identified as having been radicalised, such as Fatima Elomar, who was charged with foreign incursion offences in June 2016 (Table 1).[76]

There's no one route to radicalisation for these women: the sample includes second-generation Muslims, converts, and private and public school girls. Some travelled with their husbands and some travelled alone. Although Western Sydney has notoriously been associated with extremism and radicalisation, these girls and women originated from different areas of the country, including Melbourne and the Gold Coast. The broad appeal of IS to a range of different women is thus clear, and their motivations for travelling to the caliphate shouldn't be interpreted as uniform. For these reasons, policymakers need to address the diversity within the female recruitment pool for violent extremism and should avoid creating programs that use a 'one size fits all' approach.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue conducted research on a large database of women migrants to IS territory throughout 2014 and 2015. The two case studies below, of Zehra Duman and Zaynab Sharrouf, use data from that research as well as information documented in the media. From this, we can piece together an idea of life within the caliphate for Western migrant women. These women were chosen as key examples of Australian *muhajirat* due to their vociferous online presence over a sustained period. Other open source information has been very limited; Amira Karroum's Facebook page[77] is still available although there have been no posts since 2013. Furthermore, Zaynab Sharrouf was a young teenager when her parents brought her to IS territory, so she provides an interesting case study of radicalisation after migration.[78]

It should be acknowledged that, given their circumstances, it is impossible to know for certain whether the girls were tweeting entirely of their own free will, and therefore whether the posts express their true thoughts and feelings.

Table 1: Australian women who have travelled abroad to support violent extremism since 2014

Name, age when travelled (if known)	Where from	Dead or alive	Comments
Tara Nettleton, 40+	Sydney	Reportedly died 2015	Married to Khaled Sharrouf Mother of Sharrouf's children
Zaynab Sharrouf, 15	Sydney	Reportedly alive	Widow of Mohammed Elomar Mother to Ayesha Elomar
Zehra Duman, 20s	Melbourne	Reportedly alive	Widow of Mahmoud Abdullatif
Hafsa Mohamed, 20	Sydney (Somali descent)		Her parents travelled to Syria to convince her to return home. They failed and she appears to still be there.
Amira Karroum, 21	Gold Coast	Reportedly died, Aleppo, 2014	Married to Tyler Casey (Yusuf Ali) (also killed) by Jabhat al-Nusra.
Hodan Abby, 18	Sydney		Went with Hafsa Mohamed to Middle East.
Jasmina Milovanov, 26	Sydney		Radicalised by Zehra Duman. Left her two children with a babysitter under the pretence that she was going to Queensland to pick up a car. She never returned.
Dullel Kassab, 28	Melbourne	Reportedly alive	Travelled to Syria with her two children under five after her husband was killed there. Believed to have since married another fighter.
Shadi Jabar Khalil Mohammad, 18+	Sydney	Dead, al Bab, April 2016	Sister of Farhad Jabar (Curtis Cheng shooter). Left Australia the day before her brother's attack. Boarded a Singapore Airlines flight to Turkey. Left her SIM card in the rubbish. Joined IS under the name Umm Issa al-Amrikiah. Married a Somali man.

Source: 'Who are the Australian women travelling to Syria as brides of the caliphate?', News.com.au, 7 May 2016, online.

Zehra Duman

A Melbourne girl from a Turkish background, Zehra Duman, travelled to Iraq in December 2014, aged 21. She has been noted for her role in assisting IS's online communications strategy through her very vocal online presence, painting a romantic picture of life inside the caliphate. In her role as a recruiter, she allegedly assisted Sydney mother of two Jasmina Milovanov to make *hijrah* in May 2015.[79]

Despite being widowed after just five weeks of marriage to fellow Melbournian *jihadi*, Mahmoud Abdullatif,[80] her expressed commitment to life as a woman of the caliphate—as ordained by IS authority—is evident from her candid social media postings. Her willingness to submit to the rules and regulations for women as set down by IS display a 'complete dedication to the ideological notions'[81] of the caliphate. While she refers to her desire to execute violent acts and to her craving for martyrdom, as a woman she acknowledges that this isn't permissible. Her posts indicate that she had radicalised over some time, and that as soon as the caliphate was declared: 'I couldn't sit back 1 second.'[82]

She speaks of her satisfaction in the caliphate and happiness to be surrounded by family and friends:

> alhamdulillah I have my sisters whom I love for the sake of Allah always at my house.[83]

Saltman and Smith argue that Duman's grievances with Western foreign policy have been central to her arguments to encourage other women to make *hijrah.*[84] She specifically subscribes to the 'us versus them' narrative, arguing the incompatibility between being Muslim and continuing to support Western alliances; she clearly rejects Muslims who support the coalition involved in defeating IS:

> A Muslim will never be proud of a country who is at war with Islam! Who bombs your ummah! #disgrace[85]

This also acts as a rejection of her Australian identity, as current Australian foreign policy has strongly supported coalition air strikes against IS. Furthermore, Duman closely links lone-wolf attacks in Australia and support of the caliphate, writing that restricting Muslims' attempts to make *hijrah* will mean 'attacks on your soil,'[86] which demonstrates open support—and justification—for those who can't make the journey to the Middle East to launch attacks in their home country.

Zaynab Sharrouf

Zaynab Sharrouf, the eldest of five siblings, was 13 when her parents—Tara Nettleton and Khaled Sharrouf—relocated to IS territory. Khaled Sharrouf has been a notorious supporter and proponent of violent extremism in Australia; in 2005, he was arrested under Operation Pendennis, which found his Sydney-based cell to be amassing guns, ammunition and bombmaking equipment.[87]

Zaynab's social media accounts provide a rare window into how radical ideology can form and resonate within an individual after migration.[88] Although she appeared to have been on the path to radicalisation before her departure, as indicated through her online activity (intermittent posts glorifying violent extremist acts), Zaynab still exhibited the mindset of a typical teenage girl, posting more frequently about celebrities, beach holidays and television shows.[89] The rate at which she stopped posting about adolescent topics in favour of violent extremist content increased rapidly upon her arrival to the caliphate, reflecting the degree of influence on the ground.

After Zaynab married long-time Australian extremist Mohamed Elomar after over a year in the caliphate, and was subsequently widowed just two months later, her social media accounts demonstrated a quick development in the advancement of her radicalisation process. Her Twitter bio used to read:[90]

> … Names zaynab, 13 years old, Instagram … I love the walking dead. Also celebrities …

Which changed to:[91]

> … Umm Hafs aka, Zaynab Sharrouf. From the land down under, to a Muhajirah in the land of the khilafah. Zawji Abu Hafs Australi…

As argued by Saltman and Smith, this shows not only her commitment to her husband and his role as a *mujahid*, but also her own resolute belief in the concept of the caliphate, which she now identifies with rather than her home country, Australia.[92] Thus, similarly to Duman, the persecution of the *ummah* by the West clearly resonates with Sharrouf and serves to validate her rejection of her nationality in favour of the liberation promised by IS.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue reports that no posts have shown any dissatisfaction at her parents' decision to move her there from Australia; she has since formed strong relationships with fellow Australian *muhajirat* and has been known for posting photos of her and her friends posing fully veiled and holding weapons, with various captions such as:

> chillin in the khilafah, lovin life #sharrouffamily #ummjihad #ummabdullatif #ummzarqawi #ummhafs #ummdukhill..[93]

Analysis

Both these young women have adopted IS's lifestyle, which essentially reduces women to wives, widows and mothers, and have no trouble in praising acts of violence.[94] Their aggressive and frequent posting throughout 2014 and 2015 contributed to the publicised, 'glamorised vision of jihadi lifestyle'[95] that was picked up by the media—especially with the photo of them reclining on Khaled Sharrouf's white BMW.[96]

As in other case studies (for example, the two Somali-Australian girls who made hijrah in December 2014),[97] Zehra's family appeared to not be aware of her jihadi views and were unable to trace her path into radicalisation. This is key to note, as many policymakers advocate families as being the first to notice early signs of radicalisation. Zehra's case demonstrates the challenges with that approach and that more needs to be done to effectively support families. Parents need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, tools and skills to be able to confidently dispel the appeal of violent extremist propaganda to their children.

The Sharrouf case, in particular, brings to light the issue of children who are taken by their parents to IS-held territory and raises the question of what the appropriate policy response should be to tackle future incidents of that type. There should be a policy review to determine how to address the problem of bringing home children and young adults who no longer wish to remain in the caliphate.

Australian leaders haven't taken a definitive stance on whether such children should come back to Australia. When he was the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott didn't give any strong indication about the fate of Tara Nettleton (before she died) and her children, but his proposals to strip citizenship from dual-nationals suspected of joining IS indicates where the government would like to position itself. The Opposition Leader, Bill Shorten, called the Sharrouf children victims of child abuse but was reluctant to stand on one side. Islamic Council of Victoria Secretary Kuranda Seyit argued that 'Sharrouf's children don't deserve to be left in such a dire situation' there and that 'they [the children] have been manipulated by their parents'.[98]

All the Sharrouf children remain in IS-held territory, despite efforts by their grandmother to work with Australian authorities to bring them home. If policy is legislated to bring such children back to Australia, a comprehensive program to reintegrate them into society without alienating and marginalising them as killers and terrorists would need to be urgently and carefully developed. The children would need to go through rehabilitation procedures that would allow them to understand Australian authorities in a positive way. Clearly, Zaynab Sharrouf has displayed an ideological commitment to violent Islamism, but the extent to which this resonates is unclear, and whether or not she would be receptive to disengaging from her newly adopted mentality—or wholly deradicalising—is uncertain. The challenges for policymakers in dealing with these questions are indeed significant.

COUNTERING AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Definitions and program analysis

This section discusses the nature of PVE and CVE work and explores the challenges faced by policymakers and practitioners in Australia and other Western countries. It outlines how CVE has been developed and then explains how gender could be better incorporated into program design and execution. It draws upon some Australian and international CVE policy and practices and advises on the challenges for future development. It discusses deradicalisation as a form of CVE, but doesn't use the two terms synonymously. Deradicalisation as a strategy is a particular element of CVE but exceeds the scope of this paper and requires further research for a discussion in more depth.

Legislative and practical systems of CVE aren't uniform across regions or across countries. Fundamental concepts of target audience, program aims and objectives and definitions in this space are vague and non-linear and differ internationally. Governments approach the challenge of violent extremism in very different ways based on local strands of extremism, local attitudes towards violent and nonviolent extremism, and demographics. Furthermore, a lack of access to program evaluation using evidence-based metrics limits the ability to make concrete recommendations for the future.

Current approaches to CVE

CVE is a challenging part of all governments' counterterrorism (CT) strategies. It's perhaps the most difficult to 'get right' while simultaneously the easiest to 'get wrong'. It's an extremely complex security issue that engages disruption activities at the community level. CVE is presented as the 'softer' arm of government's CT strategy; it's framed within a security discourse, and intervention operations are led by law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies.

It has been acknowledged that top-down approaches to CVE and community resilience activities are largely unsuccessful,[99] and, while a lot of good work has been dedicated to encouraging and funding communities and grassroots organisations, a lot more needs to be done to implement sound policy changes that will lead to long-lasting and viable initiatives. If policy isn't executed with sensitivity and nuance, it risks inadvertently demonising whole groups of people, which results in the loss of trust between communities and authorities. On the other hand, if it's not executed with exact direction and precision, critical information can be missed, which might lead to avoidable fatalities.

Terms and definitions

At the basic level, there's much misunderstanding and a lack of consensus over what CVE as a practice is trying to do. It simultaneously deals with a whole range of issues without distinguishing between them (disengagement versus deradicalisation; nonviolent extremism versus violent extremism).[100] At the higher levels, there's also contestation about how CVE should be implemented, and what the roles of civil society, law enforcement and intelligence should be. Furthermore, CVE strategy has struggled to integrate the multiple roles of women in

responding to the appeal of violent extremism, which has restricted the impact of existing CVE measures and missed key intervention opportunities.[101] A consideration of women's roles as mentors, community organisers, intervention officers, mothers, sisters, policy advisers, educators and healthcare professionals should be part of designing and implementing CVE initiatives.

It has become commonplace to use *countering* violent extremism and *preventing* violent extremism as synonymous terms, but this is problematic. CVE requires the individual to have been engaged already at some level, whereas PVE aims to stop the processes of radicalisation that lead individuals towards violent extremism. At the broadest level, prevention techniques rest on an assumption that certain individuals are perceived as 'at risk' and 'vulnerable' to violent extremist ideology, even if they have yet to show signs of extreme or radical behaviour. Furthermore, experts are divided over 'whether CVE seeks to counter the *V* (acts of violence through disengagement) or the *E* (the adoption of extremism) through deradicalisation or counter-radicalisation.'[102] The debate here is about 'whether or not the extremist ideology leading to violent extremism needs to be challenged or if the focus should remain on tackling social and emotional issues that serve to make an individual "at risk"'.[103]

While a primary concern for governments is to stop individuals from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism in the first place, JM Berger has argued that:

> …programmes should really aim to target people who are already engaged, to some extent, with violent extremist recruitment and propaganda**,** rather than including purely preventative activities under the rubric of either CVE or PVE, seeking to inoculate communities against extremism.[104]

Conflating CVE and PVE work has resulted in certain communities and groups feeling vilified and alienated due to real and perceived profiling based on racial or ethnic grounds, which has undermined the legitimacy of CVE programs. Prevention and countering violent extremism need to be approached along two separate avenues.

For example, prevention work should be strictly led by civil society, with no connection to security or intelligence operations. Although a security-led intervention framework allows the mitigation of risk, it should be reserved for countering initiatives. This would require a dedicated effort to properly train practitioners in their existing roles, equipping them with the skill sets required, through careful trust-building initiatives. It would require the ability to recognise that often recruitment into violent extremism doesn't initially target the ideological level but rather the individual, who might very well be unaware of the strings attached to their commitment. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg have carefully argued that holistic 'preventive strategies embedded in civil society are the key to the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of countering violent extremism'.[105]

Problems with current approaches

Currently, there are few examples of CVE programs or policies grounded on evidence-based assessments, which means that the scope of their aims and their successes are limited. In order to understand what works and what doesn't, evidence-based analysis of existing programs is essential before investing more funding and resources into future initiatives and drafting new policy.

Another key and fundamental error made by policymakers and practitioners working in CVE strategy and program design is the failure to distinguish between *disengagement* ('individuals are dissuaded from violent participation in and material support for violent extremist movements') and *deradicalisation* ('individuals are dissuaded from adopting or promoting extremist ideologies').[106]

JM Berger argues that disengagement is a 'realistic and achievable goal for CVE initiatives and that de-radicalisation should be pursued as a separate and secondary line of effort'.[107] This is because deradicalisation requires an individual to completely purge the radical ideology from their way of thinking, which is a complex psychological process. Disengagement requires an individual to be physically removed from engagement with extremist content. It should therefore be acknowledged here that disengaged individuals may still hold radical views; however, their intent to act upon them is where concerns start.

A further problem with some CVE policy—such as in the UK's proposed Counter Extremism and Safeguarding Bill—is the conflation of cultural or traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and honour killings, with security and CT initiatives. Such practices should be left out of the security framework and tackled through policy relating to child abuse and domestic violence, which is within the remit of social services.

In addition, maintaining a high degree of transparency in funding, design and implementation is vital to garner trust. Counter-narrative efforts in the UK and Australia have been negatively interpreted by communities after revelations that civil society organisations were indeed government funded, which has had a counterproductive effect.[108]

There are currently few opportunities for practitioners in different sectors to interact and inform the development of more nuanced and effective prevention strategies.[109] Neglecting this cross-sector approach has resulted in the CVE brand being damaged due to the perception that it's an extension of the government's security and intelligence apparatus. By incorporating multisector research expertise and skill sets—from development, human rights, health care and education to advocacy, conflict prevention, CT and security—new angles from which to approach CVE may be developed.

Australia would benefit from such an approach. A more subtle CVE framework could be established, preferably using different terminology, which would allow for CVE to move beyond the focus of CT operations.

WOMEN AND CVE

Women's involvement in this conflict ranges from promoting jihad to participating in an ideological state-building project, and to recruiting others and mobilising them to participate in the cause. CVE practitioners are increasingly recognising the real and extant threat of women as violent extremists; indeed, the first female-only ISIS cell was thwarted in Paris in September 2016,[110] as was a second in Morocco just a month later,[111] highlighting the urgency for policy developments in this field.

As the Global Center on Cooperative Security has acknowledged, it's important to recognise that women can be 'enablers and actors' in violent extremism 'or they can play a key role in countering fundamentalism and extremism'.[112] The diversity of roles of women in violent extremism should be reflected in the development of effective policies and programs: 'women are positioned to be effective partners in CVE efforts against intolerance and extremism, and as positive change agents in their families, communities and public spaces in order to prevent radicalisation that leads to … terrorism'.[113] Different countries have different approaches, based on the specific challenges they face.

So far, women's involvement within the CVE framework has largely been in harnessing the traditional roles of mother, wife and sister to detect early signs of radicalisation of their male relatives or friends. While this is a crucial role in conflict prevention, women can be powerful agents of change in many other areas if their experiences and expertise are incorporated strategically.

Women's roles in conflict prevention

From 2000, the diversity of women's roles in the field of security and peacebuilding started to feature more prominently within the UN and among other multilateral actors, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Global Counter-terrorism Forum and the European Union.[114] UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 emphasised the 'role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace-building'[115] for the first time. Women's roles in conflict prevention were further developed in 2014 (UNSCR 2178) to 'address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism … including by empowering youth, families, women …',[116] thus recognising the significant impact women have in stopping the expansion of extremism.[117] Finally, in October 2015, UNSCR 2242 called for 'closer integration of efforts to implement women, peace and security CT and CVE agendas'.[118] This explicitly highlights the need for more interaction across disciplines, between women, peace and security, CT and CVE, which, although it has broadly been recognised, has not been met in practice.

The language used by media and by governments to explain women's involvement in violent extremism remains rooted in a victim narrative that denies women agency in their commitment and desire to be part of the cause. For example, the UN Secretary-General's January 2016 report on ISIS emphasised the issue of sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism:

> … the nexus between sexual violence and violent extremism is becoming increasingly evident, and combatting extremist groups is an essential component of the fight against conflict-related sexual violence.'[119]

He asserted that better gender analysis was needed in order to build counter-narratives and counter-strategies, which would better incorporate the participation of women and girls in CVE.[120] While this is a leap forward in implementing gender at the heart of peace and security initiatives, this approach still frames women as victims of violence rather than perpetrators of violence.

The '*jihadi* bride' concept disseminated by the media identifies women as either migrating to the caliphate in search of a warrior husband or as vulnerable victims manipulated by recruiters. This narrative reinforces stereotypes that are rooted in sexism and that contribute to sustaining a limited understanding of women's roles as perpetrators of violence. Initiatives that reference women solely as victims within the narrative of violent extremism thus appear slightly one-dimensional and perhaps oversimplified.

This narrative demonstrates a basic disregard for women's autonomy or roles as leaders, as well as their voluntary or independent roles in violent extremism and terrorism,[121] neglecting their agency and motivations as supporters of violent extremism. This is counterproductive, and can result in an incomplete understanding of the multiple dynamics involved, which could hinder the development of a more integrated approach to women's positions within CVE. Recognising women's experiences as supporters, sympathisers, mobilisers or perpetrators of violent extremism will enable policymakers to change the way CVE and PVE work is carried out.

Efforts to integrate women in CVE structures

Incorporating gender into CVE strategy is complex; many attempts to 'empower' women in this field have proven unsuccessful due to the stark nature of the approach taken.

For example, in 2008, the British Government established the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group specifically to give Muslim women a voice and representation in the construction of PVE programs, but the initiative ended up being dismissed as a 'box ticking exercise' that failed to achieve aims as promised by ministers during its launch.[122] The advisory group was accused of harnessing South Asian Muslim women already working in government in relevant policy areas, thereby skewing the recruitment process in their favour. According to Rashid, this fact 'questions the presumption of silence or lack of voice within these communities' and 'raised issues about its representativeness in terms of different Muslim communities.'[123] Although the scheme was diversified to include Muslim women of different ethnicities, such as Arab and Somali women, this was not well integrated and contributed to enhancing stereotypes and racial profiling of Muslim women.

Rashid asserts that a more successful and less superficial approach would have been to invite a broad social spectrum of Muslim women (third and fourth generation, working and middle class, from all areas of the country) to apply for roles, rather than to bring in those who were already working on relevant policy areas.[124] In this way, society's understanding of women's roles in providing resilience to violent extremism can be repositioned.

Little has changed since then. Many initiatives incorporating women within CVE remain haphazard and simplistic, resulting in ill-equipped and poorly resourced program structures. For example, although Roworth[125] identifies a UK Metropolitan Police campaign[126] aimed at mothers to help prevent their daughters from joining IS, this was complicit in negatively reinforcing stereotypes about the Muslim communities in the UK. The Metropolitan Police specifically targeted Asian mothers, exemplifying the limited levels of nuance used in designing and implementing CVE policy. Consolidating the idea of racial and ethnic profiling of those considered vulnerable to or at risk of extremism does little to inspire faith in the program. Targeting whole communities in such a way only serves to alienate them rather than garner their much-needed support.

Those analysing the traditional roles of women in conflict prevention usually fail to identify women as perpetrators or mobilisers of violent extremism, and instead succumb to the stereotype of women as passive victims of violence. Policy regarding women in conflict has tended to favour protection at the expense of participation. As a result of the unprecedented numbers of female migrants to Iraq and Syria, who have demonstrated solid ideological

commitment to the radical Islamist cause, policymakers have been forced to confront this issue differently and are now attempting to incorporate gender into the heart of existing CVE strategy.

How women can be employed in CVE: the Australian experience

Open-source information on the status and range of CVE programs is limited, meaning that exact data isn't available for public dissemination. Furthermore, due to the relatively small number of individuals involved in violent extremist activity in Australia and abroad no data is comprehensive enough to allow generalised conclusions to be drawn.

In Australia, government-funded schemes have led to the establishment of various CVE programs rolled out across different states. However, the federal structure means that strategy and programs rolled out at the federal level don't translate to the state and territory level, so the Australian Government can't force unilateral CVE strategy to be implemented on the ground. Furthermore, state autonomy in CVE strategy and program design means that interstate interaction and collaboration are also limited, despite shared goals and similar initiatives. For example, the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition and the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights in Melbourne have never worked with or liaised with the Muslim Women's Association and the Community Partnership Action (COMPACT) Program in NSW. There's much scope for potential partnership, shared resources and interstate collaboration.

In 2010, the Attorney-General's Department funded three grassroots and community-level programs (under the Building Community Resilience Grants Program) directed at understanding the roles of Muslim women within society as well as preventing their involvement in violent extremism: the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria's Youth for Peace Building Project; the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights' Dialogue Across Sectarian Divide project; and the Women Against Violent Extremism (WAVE) project, which was run by the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC).[127]

In 2016, the NSW Government awarded $8 million through Multicultural NSW's COMPACT initiative to 14 organisations to counter the rise of violent extremism.[128] The Muslim Women's Association is one organisation to receive funding, but details of specific programs don't seem to be publicly available as yet.

In Victoria, it seems as though language has recently changed, and community-led initiatives are starting to become more focused on 'social cohesion' and 'resilience building', incorporating the issues of violent extremism rather than leading with them. This is reflected in the government's Community Resilience Unit's *Strategic framework*.[129] In theory, this is indeed a positive step forward, and future programs rolled out of this *framework* may be successful.

In practice, however, Grossman and colleagues[130] observed challenges and criticism surrounding 'social cohesion'. A key concern is that it is 'rooted in conceptual blurriness … which allows it to serve as a "code" for a number of different policy agendas, including CVE'. Essentially, program objectives—perhaps akin to those rolled out by the Community Resilience Units framework—are often vague and tend to conflate three separate concepts: CVE, social cohesion and community resilience. This affects the effectiveness of the project in question, as well as potential evaluation processes. December 2016 marks the first year since the *Strategic framework* was implemented. A review of the programs rolled out during the past 12 months would be welcomed by researchers and analysts to inform future development and best practice in this field.

In NSW, the COMPACT Program supports local projects to bring young Australians together 'to promote positive behaviours and engage critically, creatively, and constructively on local and global issues impacting social cohesion and community harmony.'[131] The objectives of this initiative reflect Victoria's *Strategic framework* and are also focused on community resilience building and multiculturalism. According to its two-year plan, COMPACT's projects are supposed to be undergoing evaluations, although details of them aren't publicly available.

There appears to be more emphasis on integrating diverse communities rather than on engaging with specific ethnoreligious communities, as has been the case in the past. The follow-on project to WAVE is the Family Champions project, which consciously does not focus on CVE outwardly, but rather tackles key issues that are of

concern to the community, such as the mental health of socially isolated women, identity issues among youth and relationships between parents and children. The focus is on building a strength-based community, using difficult past experiences of individuals—such as emigrating—and channelling them into positive, integrated, community-oriented goals. CVE is very much built into the project, but as an underlying issue only.

The current projects within the VIRWC are dedicated to encouraging ethnic and social diversity within communities, and the priority is to empower immigrant and refugee women and families through various training and leadership initiatives from cybersafety to identity concerns. According to a spokesperson for the VIRWC, the aim is to build up positive relationships based on strength and community development.[132] There's been an increase in encouragement for gender-based dimensions of community resilience. This doesn't seek to establish 'gendered' projects, which tend to exclude the roles and participation of men and boys, but rather seeks to reposition understanding and analysis of the complexity of women's roles in building culturally embedded resilience to violent extremism.

For example, the Family Champions project and the Training Program of Multicultural Women for Local Government primarily educate women, with the support of their families, to become good community leaders and to position themselves in spaces where their voices are heard. More than 100 women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds are engaged in each project.[133] This is a positive step forward, as it seems to be moving away from the racial and ethnic profiling of 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' communities.

These programs are vast and varied in their aims and objectives: they don't necessarily tackle only issues of violent extremism, but aim to change frameworks around the roles of women within their communities as Muslims, as Australian citizens, as mothers, as professionals and so on. However, although there's a good deal of information outlining the different programs on offer and what they aim to achieve, as with many initiatives in this space it's difficult to find further information on assessments or evidence-based reviews of how effective they have been. For example, Su Sullivan, the former community development officer for the WAVE project, highlighted the lack of post-project evaluation to assess the status of participants in the year following their involvement with the program. Despite the good work and progress that may have been made during their time in the program, lack of funding and resources meant that necessary project assessments and evaluations were not possible.[134] Similarly, the recently terminated Family Champions project[135] within the VIRWC engaged more than 100 people to build capacity in e-learning, cybersafety and community cohesion, but future engagement with the same people is unlikely. Instead, a new project is being developed, information on which is yet to be disclosed.

It might be more useful to allocate recurrent funding to fewer programs so that the important work that's being done can be consolidated through phased elements of the same project, rather than moving on to something new. This way, it would be easier to discern progress and to develop project-based evaluations and assessments. Although numerical data isn't always needed to denote success or failure, to be able to properly assess and compare programs nationally and to assert whether they could be comparatively assessed internationally it's important to understand the outreach of programs, the levels of engagement that they stimulate, how to retain skills, and the demographics of participants.

A different approach

There's a need for better cross-sector cooperation that seeks to incorporate women within hard security practices (law enforcement, criminal justice and intelligence) and softer practices (civil society initiatives, research, social and rehabilitation programs). According to Michele Grossman's recent analysis of international CVE programs, 'women are regularly overlooked as a resource in CVE policy and planning, which fails to acknowledge the pivotal role they can play in preventing extremist violence'.[136] In other words, a more interdisciplinary approach that engages women holistically in CVE strategies will enable a reframing of the practice to occur and will enable women to act as positive agents of change. However, women's voices need to be implemented at the centre of community resilience

programs with care and nuance, without contributing to the 'replication or perpetuation of stereotypes about Muslim women'.[137]

Effective CVE strategies, plans and programs must recognise and account for the broad-ranging roles that women play to prevent and counter violent extremism at local, national and international levels. The interdisciplinary approach incorporates multilateral research and practitioners from fields such as development, education, health care and security and might be a better way to implement long-lasting solutions. Women who are already active in their communities—informally or formally—can organise themselves to share experiences, encourage mutual support and find common ground. This is an organic way of building up community resilience, and authorities should listen to their voices.

Furthermore, women's positive lived experiences might provide a solid basis for a different dialogue to develop in creating counter-narratives. This approach is currently under-researched and neglected in favour of harnessing the negative experiences of violent extremism to counter its appeal.

Counter-narratives: two sides to the coin

On the one hand, women who have had experience in supporting violent extremism can be harnessed in roles as mentors and intervention officers in the same way that men have been in order to provide legitimacy and a more personal element to CVE initiatives. Careful implementation of such roles should be considered because some social norms may prevent women engaging with men.

Anecdotal accounts of personal experiences are influential, and there's strong evidence to suggest that intervention officers dealing on a case-by-case basis with individuals who have also had some experience in identifying with a particular strand of violent extremism will be more effective in their role. As Saltman and Smith correctly assert, 'creating a platform and voice for those turning away from violent extremist networks presents a resolution to the issue of lacking credible voices creating counter-narratives.'[138] This is something that can be built on relatively straightforwardly, provided that the necessary training and support infrastructure are readily available, online and offline. However, limitations to this approach include resource barriers that must be overcome, as well as challenges in fitting women into a framework of mentoring by mostly male former extremists. For example, out of 65 trained intervention officers on the UK's covert Channel Process, only four are reported to be women.[139]

An alternative approach could aim to harness the positive experiences of women who haven't had any affiliation with violent extremism; this could be used as powerful tool for counter-narrative creation. To date, Western CVE procedures haven't successfully integrated these lived experiences of women. Instead, they have fixated on the negative, which has managed to reproduce stereotypes of women as vulnerable victims of their cultures and religious backgrounds, which has thwarted progress.

The positive experiences of women, especially those from immigrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, should be championed in the public sphere in order to normalise their experiences and to demonstrate that pathways into violent extremism represent the exception, not the rule. There's a lot to be said for role models as inspirational figures in civil society; for example, Dr Anne Aly's recent election to the Australian Parliament was especially significant, as she's the first Muslim woman and the first Egyptian-Australian woman to be elected as a member of parliament.[140] There needs to be just as much of a contribution to this space by those who haven't been inspired by violent extremism, not just those who have redemption tales. The two sides of the coin are as important as each other, but the current focus is on harnessing the few negative experiences to make them positive, rather than harnessing the plethora of positive lives that are being lived on a daily basis.

Roles of families and communities

An umbrella organisation known as Families Against Terrorism and Extremism was set up in early 2016 to bring together a network of families and family-oriented organisations and counter-extremism groups across Europe and North Africa. The aim is to encourage cross-platform communication, shared resources and engagement in order

to build resilience between groups, communities and nations. This is a first of its kind that brings together multiple international organisations under one roof, all dedicated to fighting violent extremism from the same perspective.

Schlaffer and Kropiunigg's research has shown that 'families are confident in their own potential as actors in preventing their children from adopting violent extremist ideology, provided that they are equipped with the right tools, knowledge and support' from authorities and communities.[141] However, it appears as though not enough is being done to provide the necessary skills to parents to enable them to confront the issue of radicalisation with confidence, which leaves families feeling helpless or powerless to detect warning signs or intervene with preventive measures.

The Women Without Borders organisation—part of FATE—developed a study that analysed mothers' perceptions and understanding of violent extremism, and what further information would be valuable for them.[142] All mothers in the study indicated that 'increased knowledge, training in self-confidence, improved knowledge of computers and potentially the establishment of a network with similarly concerned parents were primary needs to effectively respond to confronting radical influences'.[143] A cross-sector toolkit could be developed by experts, to be available upon request by families to help them learn skills that might help them confront radicalisation with more confidence.

CONCLUSION

The roles of women in violent extremism are wide-ranging and varied. Women aren't a homogeneous entity, and those who are sympathetic to violent extremism emerge from assorted socioeconomic, ethnic and demographic backgrounds. The high number of Western women who have joined IS's cause is of grave concern to national security and warrants a re-examination of women's roles as perpetrators of violent extremism. The following comments highlight key areas where an urgent shift in policy regarding countering and preventing violent extremism can be made.

First, CVE and PVE need to be tackled separately.

Second, research has suggested that renaming CVE might help change perceptions. Governments are wedded to the idea of 'social cohesion' as a relabelling of CVE. Whether or not this will be effective is to be determined; leading researchers in the field doubt that it will change things, as the concept still 'refuses to address the core issues and meaningfully address the problem'.[144]

Third, distancing prospective programs—particularly PVE—from CT structures would be advisable so as not to 'blur community cohesion work and CT operations'.[145] A cross-sector approach to CVE strategy could help to better integrate women into CVE processes. A more integrated approach that draws upon the experiences of development and conflict studies, as well as engaging education, healthcare and psychological professionals, could benefit future CVE policy and practice.

Fourth, in order to identify what works and what doesn't, and how to rebuild lost trust between communities and authority, urgent unclassified evaluations and assessments need to be conducted to inform and advise on how to proceed and develop in this space.[146]

Fifth, issues such as honour killings and female genital mutilation shouldn't be tackled within the CVE framework; rather, they should be under the remit of domestic violence and social services. There are complex social issues in play here that can't be fixed by superficial rebranding.

CVE as a practice needs to be reassessed, as it has lost much of its legitimacy within the communities it hopes to penetrate. Unfortunately, government rhetoric has undermined the work of organisations that receive government funding. The credibility of programs implemented through government funding has been lost, meaning that future initiatives are reluctant to touch government money for fear of being labelled as an arm of the government.[147] Those that opt in for government funding are cautious not to openly advertise where their money's coming from for fear of being discredited. In the interest of transparency and trust-building, it would be far better to disclose such information from the outset.

Government needs to reflect on existing CVE efforts and how women are included within policy and practices. Among other things, women are effective as mentors, intervention officers, educators, mothers, healthcare professionals, policy advisers and community activists. Chantal de Jonge Oudraat argues that their contributions to community organisations should be harnessed positively without being 'instrumentalized'[148] or securitised. In Victoria, for example, women who are already active participants in community development efforts should be

enabled, supported and recognised in their current positions, without being harnessed for security objectives. The goal is to reframe women's participation in this space and to allow them to become consistent leaders of their communities.

Employing former radicals as mentors and intervention officers can be a very effective way to design counter-narratives. However, resources are limited, and difficulties are compounded by security concerns about returning migrants or former violent extremists. One area that is under-researched, but that could be very helpful, is the representation within CVE initiatives of the voices of those who haven't been attracted to the propaganda of violent extremism. Those voices are in the majority, not the minority, and their stories and experiences could be valuable in CVE and PVE efforts. With the right support system and networks, their experiences can be used to create powerful counter-narratives to prevent engagement in violent extremism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CVE as a discipline needs to be 'rebranded', as it has lost much of its legitimacy within the communities that it hopes to penetrate

Reconstructing government approaches to CVE education, training and social integration in order to equip citizens, young and old, to critically assess and deconstruct extremist arguments in all forms would be a good place to start. Using a community development framework might be a better path to go down, prioritising key issues present in the local community, such as mental health, identity and education, which will inevitably be linked to issues of violent extremism. In addition, maintaining a high degree of transparency about funding, design and implementation is vital to garner trust. Organisations reluctant to disclose funding channels have been criticised by communities they work with, which has had a counterproductive effect.[149] Lastly, changing the name of the practice might be something to think about. This could be the subject of future research based on working groups that identify what people respond to and why.

2. CVE intervention frameworks should separate PVE and CVE

PVE should be scrapped from CVE frameworks. Communities feel racially and ethnically profiled by programs created and implemented by security services that are dedicated to protecting 'vulnerable' individuals or preventing those individuals from participating in violent extremism. Securitising the issue of violent extremism has resulted in a loss of faith in law enforcement and may have, in fact, played into the hands of violent extremists instead of mitigating the problem. Preventive strategies embedded in civil society are the key to sustainable and long-lasting solutions to CVE. They can be developed based on a review of CVE as set out in Recommendation 1. This will be a multilateral approach that combines the expertise of different disciplines from academia, health care, security, law enforcement and development and is supported through public–private partnerships that engage communities at the grassroots level as well as corporate CEOs at the top level. More research could be done to explore efforts internationally and lessons learned to examine best practice from a diverse array of backgrounds.

3. Encourage interstate partnerships between women's organisations

Women are already active and organising themselves formally and informally within their communities. Initiatives such as the 'women's friendship café' operated by the VIRWC since 2013 seek to integrate and support women who are socially isolated for a range of reasons. Currently, the café is solely volunteer led and engages around 150 women each week. There are probably a number of similar initiatives in place within different communities in Victoria and other states. More effort should be made to support these initiatives and to connect them to create organic networks of women leaders.

4. Evaluate CVE projects and retain skills

Although there have been some CVE project evaluations, the conclusions are usually classified and not publicly available. For communities to benefit from the funding pouring into CVE programs, a different way of measuring

impact that doesn't involve primary metrics could be developed. For example, measuring skills retention and application is arguably a useful avenue to go down. Infrastructure to encourage regular post-project meetings could effectively demonstrate the degree to which learnt skills are retained and how they can be applied. In this way, even if funding is pulled from a particular program, the individuals who have participated can transfer their skills to others. Stronger networks, better education and transferable skills will leave people and communities in a better position than before.

5. Equip families with relevant tools, knowledge and skills

For families to be effective and confident in recognising and tackling exposure to violent extremism among their members, they need to be properly educated and equipped. Empowering children and adults with solid critical thinking skills, such as in conflict management and resolution, will enable them to recognise and respond to situations appropriately. As research has shown, mothers in particular are positioned to be able to be the first responders in tackling issues with their children.

Prominent women are already active in this space, fighting patriarchy and misconceptions within both Muslim communities and the broader Australian community. These voices need to be heard. Building upon Recommendation 3, they need to be properly supported and provided with the necessary means to continue vital work at the grassroots level. A toolkit could be created as a collaborative initiative between different sectors of civil society to provide basic training for families, upon request. The components of the toolkit would include information about who and what programs are available and how they are funded, safeguarding initiatives, online safety (e-learning), child protection, gender empowerment and issues relating to identity. The toolkit would need to be carefully developed so as not to reinforce racial, ethnic or mental health profiling. It would be available in multiple languages, and there would be trained personnel to talk to about any topic, if required.

6. Develop exit strategies for all future programs

A key problem with CVE programs is the short-term nature of their funding. After grants end, projects end, and those who have been trained, educated and equipped with important skills may not have the means to use them practically. An exit strategy to ensure the sustainability of funding should be a priority when designing the program from the outset. An integrated approach that creates collaborative partnerships between private-sector, interstate and international government actors or crowdfunding campaigns would be worth investigating. As mentioned in Recommendation 4, follow-ups with participants are needed to evaluate to what extent, and at what level of ability, the skills and knowledge they have learned can be retained and transferred to achieve sustainability and longevity.

Further research

Possible lines of further research include the following:

- Assess the impact of using the positive experiences of those who haven't turned to violent extremism.
- Assess the capabilities of individuals from specific communities who have never been interested in violent extremism, and channel those results into projects to build stronger communities, perhaps using identity as the 'hook'.
- Study the women and families left behind. How do individuals and families whose relatives are either in jail or overseas organise themselves? Using focus groups and one-to-one interviews, collect primary data to understand the degree of their involvement in facilitating violent extremism. Were they passive or active? What are they doing now? What are their current support systems?
- Work collaboratively to connect interstate women's organisations to share resources, information and education.

APPENDIX

Some international programs engaging women within CVE initiatives

Name of project	Organiser	Date	About
Women Without Borders	Dr Edit Schlaffer	2002	Vienna-based advocacy and research organisation for women around the globe. Encourages women to become active participants in their communities to shape the present and the future. Promotes the role of women in the security sphere and sensitises mothers, in particular, to their role and responsibility to challenge violent extremist ideologies.[a]
Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE)	Dr Edit Schlaffer	2008	The world's first female CT platform. A transatlantic initiative that unites women and men from around the world in a research-based CT platform. Mobilises women and promotes their roles in alternative diplomacy, dialogue and leadership for security. Links women at the community level where radicalism is propagated with decision-makers shaping CVE strategies, raising awareness for the potential of women to contribute to new avenues to peace.
Mothers Schools program	Launched by Dr Edit Schlaffer under SAVE	2013	Aims to build capacity by providing women with the tools and space to consider sensitive family issues, particularly relating to children. Engages women in societies that are inherently patriarchal and leave women powerless, with limited freedom, independence or authority to speak of their own accord. 'SAVE has developed the Mothers Schools model to empower women to take an active role in safeguarding their families against the threat of violent extremism. The workshops offer mothers training in personal, communication and parenting skills so they can recognise and react to early warning signs of possible radicalisation in their children. Mothers learn to provide counter narratives and offer alternatives that foster positive youth development and resilience'. In 2015, women from India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, Indonesia and other countries met at a three-day symposium at the US Institute of Peace to compare notes on pilot projects: USIP's Women Preventing Extremist Violence program and SAVE's Mothers Schools program.[b]

Name of project	Organiser	Date	About
Mothers for Life	Coordinated by Christianne Boudreau and Daniel Koehler, German Institute for Radicalisation and De-radicalisation Studies	2015	Christianne Boudreau's son was killed after leaving Canada to fight for Islamic State in 2014. A global network of mothers who have experienced violent extremism and radicalisation in their own families. It aims to provide crucial support to those whose families have been destroyed by the burden of radicalisation through coordinated activities such as guidance, information sharing, and counselling. Mothers for Life also aims to create strong counter-narratives. At present, eight countries are represented in the network: Canada, the US, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and France.[c]
Families for Life	Launched by Nicola Benyahia as the UK's arm of Mothers for Life	2016	Nicola Benyahia's son was killed in a drone strike in 2015 after leaving Birmingham, UK, to fight for Islamic State. The organisation seeks to provide support, counselling, advice and training to families who have already lost a member to violent extremism, or those who are concerned about individuals who may be vulnerable to recruitment. It aims to build resilience against all forms of extremism through improving awareness and understanding of pathways leading to radicalisation.[d]

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CT	counterterrorism
CVE	countering violent extremism
PVE	preventing violent extremism
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council resolution
VIRWC	Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition
WAVE	Women Against Violent Extremism

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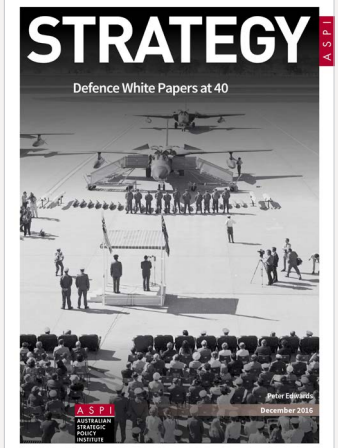

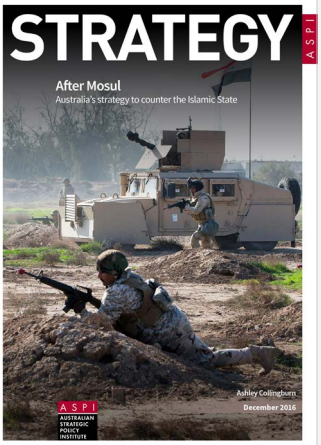

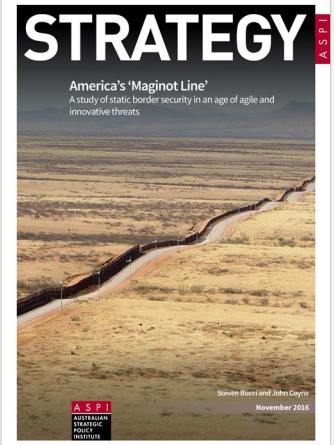

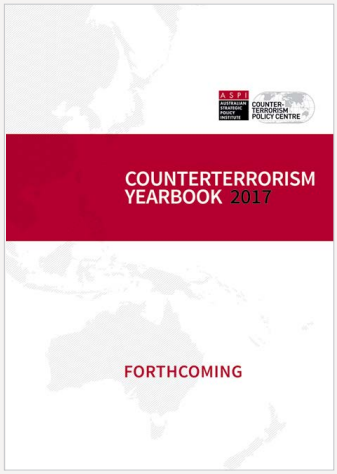

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