

SPOTLIGHT

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GENDER

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Practitioners



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EDITORIAL

The topic of ‘gender and P/CVE’ has risen to prominence in recent years. ‘Gender’ in P/CVE has a number of meanings. It means that practitioners must think about gender when both understanding the problem and designing solutions to it. To this end, it is widely recognised that gender dynamics can play a significant role both in how an individual might become (self-) radicalised and in how violent extremists might target and recruit. With this in mind, it is important to empower both men and women to play a role in P/CVE and ensure that both male and female perspectives are considered when designing P/CVE approaches.

There are a number of gender-related challenges facing practitioners today, from the rise of the violent incel movement and issues surrounding new masculinity and gender identity, including queer and trans rights, to the return of women and children from refugee camps and conflict zones, and underlying gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, to name but a few. Understanding these dynamics and taking into account the gendered aspects of violent extremism is critical for practitioners when designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating P/CVE programmes.

This edition of the RAN Practitioners Spotlight magazine therefore takes a look at some of these gender-related challenges, including trauma in men and boys, youth and masculinity, and incel propaganda, gender-related hate speech and misogyny. The publication features a number of original articles by experts on the topic, papers produced by RAN Practitioners, and case studies of programmes being delivered.

As always, we want to hear from you. If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for a topic, article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at ran@radaradvies.nl

RAN Practitioners Staff

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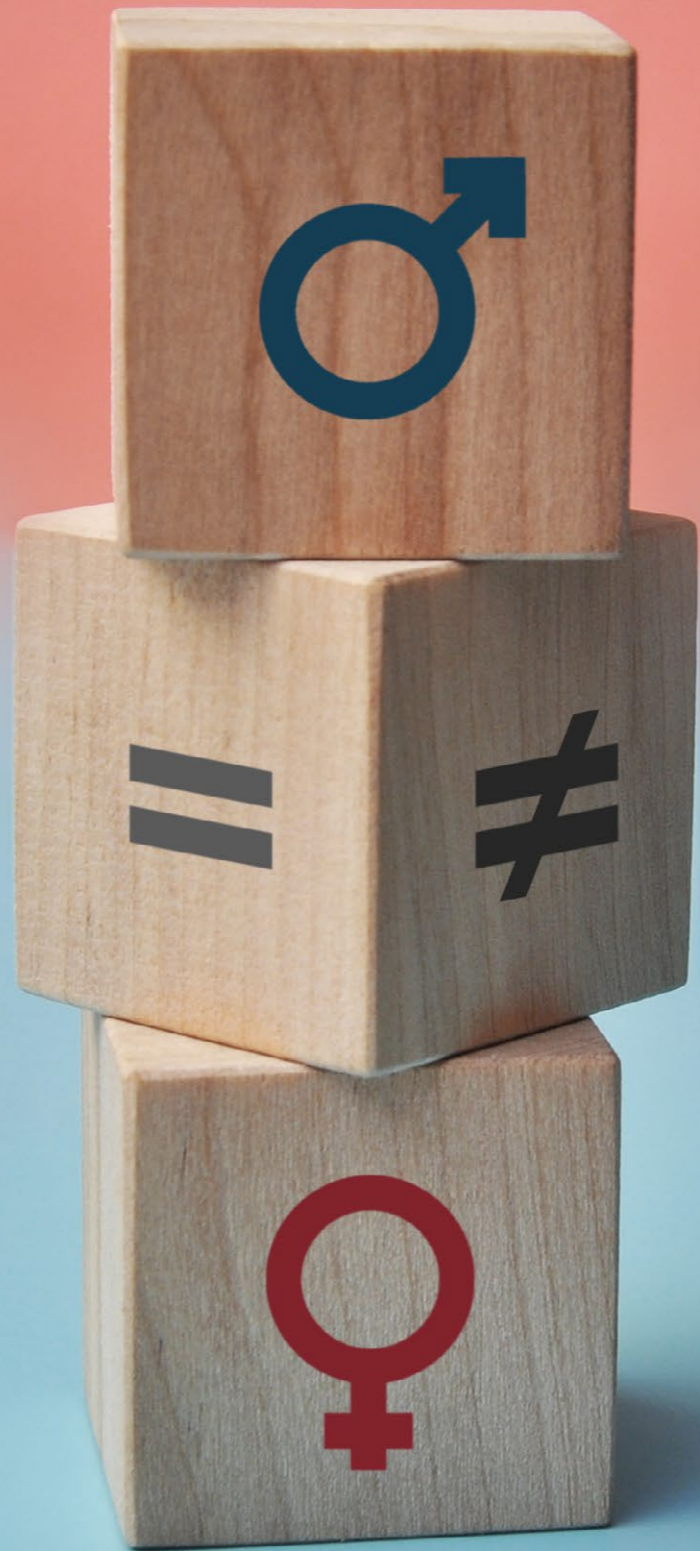
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ARTICLE

The importance of gender mainstreaming to effective P/CVE

Jessica WHITE

While there are many high-level agreements on the necessity of considering the roles of women or accounting for inequalities and human-rights abuses as drivers of violent extremism, we often continue to struggle today to convince policy and practice of the importance of gender mainstreaming – an approach to policy-making or programme design that takes into account both women’s and men’s interests and concerns. Importantly, there remains a lack of understanding that we have to consider these points together through a comprehensive gender mainstreaming approach that not only deals with gender inequalities, but also considers where they intersect with other inequalities.

At their roots, gender mainstreaming strategies are meant to ensure that preventing and countering violent-extremism (P/CVE) policies and practices are considering gender inequalities as potential drivers of violent extremism (VE) and are shaped to work towards a gendered assessment of the threat and development of the response. It remains important to note that while empowerment of women is an essential element of gender mainstreaming, it is only one of the key elements. Gender in this context needs to be considered as it applies to all individuals and the socio-cultural expectations placed upon them due to their sex. Hence, gender mainstreaming means thinking about expectations of masculinity and femininity and ensuring that P/CVE efforts are responsive to these, as well as seeking to transform existing inequalities where possible to achieve equality as a more effective long-term, sustainable approach to security.

Furthermore, it is essential to think about how a person's radicalisation process has been gendered, because it might help you to understand what drew them towards a certain ideology or organisation (e.g., is it because expectations of men in that context are that they provide or defend the conceived honour/racial purity/homeland/etc. of their families?). It might also help to understand where they might be approached by recruiters (e.g., for men in the mosque or the gym, for women in online social spaces that are more easily accessible, etc.). It most definitely would help to assess the roles they might be taking up within a VE network or organisation, the ways in which these VE networks and organisations would seek to retain them, and what might be needed in a strategy to disrupt or disengage them. Without considering how all these things are shaped by people's identity, including their gendered identity, the assessment will fall short – thus, leaving the potential responses also falling short.

Gendered Threat Assessment

All effective responses need to be based on an understanding of the target population – why, how, where they got involved in VE; what roles they play within these networks and organisations;

and how to effectively disrupt, disengage, and deradicalise them. This knowledge ensures more effective engagements.

Gender mainstreaming is essential to a comprehensive threat assessment. If you think about the identities that shape you as an individual, it might be your socio-economic status, your racial or ethnic identity, or other important identities. However, there is no doubt that no matter where you live in this world or were raised, there were gendered socio-cultural contexts that shaped expectations of the role you would play in life, the traits you would exhibit, and the decisions that you would make. This is true for those who participate in VE also. In fact, terrorist organisations have historically been much better than security agencies at exploiting these gendered norms.

Gendered Response Development

Planning hard security responses to terrorist threats is often about ensuring effectiveness both at operational level (i.e., the immediate military/police/etc. action) and at strategic level (i.e., the larger series of actions or plan to 'win the war' rather than just 'the battle'). In reality, P/CVE planning is much the same. There is only so much that one P/CVE programme can do within the time, budget, and practical limitations of on-the-ground contexts. However, this makes it even more necessary to think about whether this single P/CVE action is feeding into a larger strategic goal to address the underlying drivers of VE within a local context – and this is where a gender mainstreaming strategy becomes essential.

If P/CVE programmes implement a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy, it means that throughout the conception, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a programme there is a constant thread of considering how gendered identities and inequalities, alongside the intersecting identities and inequalities, are contributing to the local context of vulnerability to VE. This then helps to shape the theories of change and efforts to address these vulnerabilities through the programme's interventions. Ultimately, this will help ensure that what is possible with the immediate P/CVE programme is feeding

into a more sustainable, effective, efficient, responsive strategic effort to reduce the impact of VE on local communities and security more generally.

Mainstreaming gender is not a small ask, and it is not possible without security and P/CVE practitioners, organisations, agencies, donors, also looking inward at the institutional gendered inequalities that are shaping policies, practices, and security goals to begin with. We have to all work together, working from the inside out, to really implement transformative gender mainstreaming approaches that will help to secure a more stable, peaceful, and equitable future.

Dr Jessica White is a Senior Research Fellow in RUSI's Terrorism and Conflict group. Her expertise encompasses counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism policy and programming, as well as gender mainstreaming strategies.

“Gender mainstreaming is essential to a comprehensive threat assessment. If you think about the identities that shape you as an individual, it might be your socio-economic status, your racial or ethnic identity, or other important identities. However, there is no doubt that no matter where you live in this world or were raised, there were gendered socio-cultural contexts that shaped expectations of the role you would play in life, the traits you would exhibit.”

A RAN Practitioners paper, entitled ‘The role of gender in extremism and P/CVE’, discusses the role of gender within extremist groups and in an individual’s radicalisation process. The paper looks into the roles of masculinity and women within these groups; if and how gender-specific approaches will affect P/CVE work; and, whether the gender of professionals themselves also influences P/CVE work. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

Difference in drivers for men and women

Drivers for women

Both Ingram (2017) and Keijzer (2017) analysed sections of the Dabiq to establish which narratives are used to pull women to join Daesh. The study of Keijzer distinguishes ideology, belonging, romance and female empowerment as pull factors. These narratives are strengthened by the use of emotional language, Arabic jargon and visual elements.

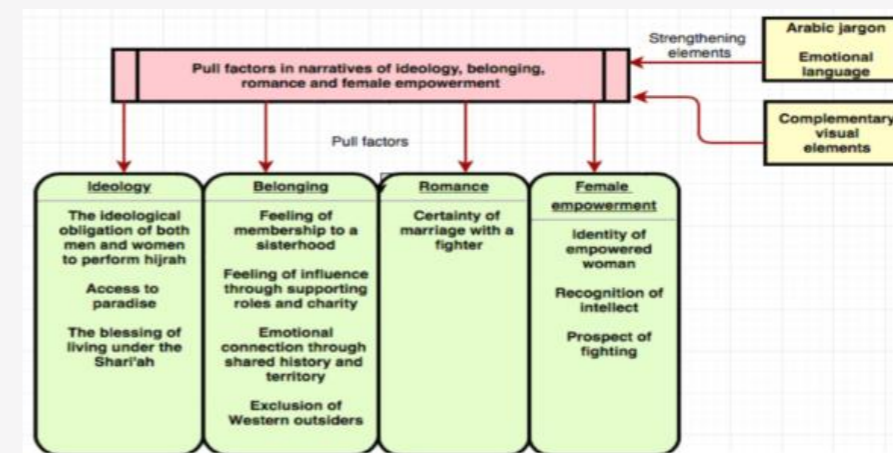


Figure 1. Push and pull factors in the narratives of Dabiq and Rumiya. Keijzer, F., Western women in the Islamic State: Pull factors in the narratives of Dabiq and Rumiya. Leiden University, 2017 (supervised by L. Elias Carillo)

Literature does not completely agree on the role of sexuality in the radicalisation process. Ingram (2017) did not find any evidence that lust and romance are included in the narratives of the Dabiq. However, marriage and the role of a wife and mother are clearly mentioned as part of the female identity, which makes romance inherently a part of the narrative, at least implicitly.

Drivers for men

In her presentation based on the two research studies ‘Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation’ and ‘Different cities, shared stories’, conducted with Emily Winterbotham and RUSI, Dr. Pearson identified several overlapping and indistinct push and pull factors that can be understood to impact differently on men and women. These are based on the intersections between: different social expectations of both genders; their access to public space; the different ways in which organisations such as Daesh frame recruitment and propaganda messaging to attract men and women; and the different gendered personal drivers people may have. Pearson indicated that both men and women can be ideologically driven to join extremist groups. There were however nuanced gender factors distinguishing aspects of male and female radicalisation. Communities who had lost young men to Daesh suggested male youths were less able, for instance, to deal with set-backs such as unemployment. They believed young women demonstrated more resilience when things went wrong. Communities described pressures on young men to meet particular societal expectations, such as earning money and forging a career, and they felt this contributed to radicalisation, with some young men receiving



Figure 2. Gender and CVE: Push and pull factors presentation, Dr. Elizabeth Pearson, 29 November 2018, Manchester (UK).

In an episode of RAN Practitioners' podcast series, 'RAN in Focus', we hear from three practitioners – Katherine Brown, Eviane Leidig and Christian Mogensen – who discuss the need to recognise and work with gender in the P/CVE world, as well as some of the gender dynamics of violent right wing extremism (VRWE) and violent Islamist extremism. You can listen to the podcast in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel [here](#).



RAN PROFILES



Christian MOGENSEN

Christian Mogensen is a senior tech advisor at the Tech Ambassador's Office in the Danish Foreign Ministry. Prior to this, Christian was a specialist consultant with the Center for Digital Youth Care in Aarhus, Denmark, with responsibility for online communities and destructive online behaviour. In this role, much of Christian's work, including research and the delivery of workshops in schools, with educators and parents, focused on gender, sexuality and online culture.

He wrote a couple of papers on the topic, entitled 'The angry internet: A threat to gender equality, democracy & well-being' which can be found [here](#) and 'Angry young men: A look inside extreme communities' which can be found [here](#).

ARTICLE

The iceberg model of masculinity



Bas ZWIERS

‘The boy that is not embraced by the village, will burn it down to feel its warmth’

– Ubuntu

How can youth work prevent the radicalisation of boys and young men? How do we keep them out of the manosphere, gangs, crime and terrorism? The answer to all this seems to be quite simple, but in no way easy. Trigger warning, it might have to do with an ‘F-word’.

When I walk in my neighborhood in Amsterdam, I see boys trying to show how much of a ‘man’ they are. They try to keep certain parts of themselves hidden, such as feelings, fears, femininity, fragility, friendships and vulnerability. Why?

I think men and boys can be seen as icebergs, not because they are as cool as ice, but because there is much more happening beneath the surface than we get to see at first sight.

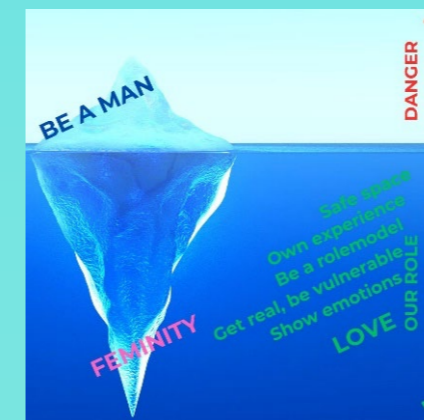
Above the surface we get to see an image they want to project of themselves. There is nothing wrong with having an image, but how is it formed? Is it because of who you are and what you love, or is the image formed by stereotypical and restrictive gender norms about masculinity? This is something we call the ‘Be the Man Box’.

Growing up, boys learn about stereotypes through explicit and implicit messages from (social) media, parents, friends, strangers, other men, women, teachers, youth workers, role models and many others.

We learn what to eat, what to wear, what our role in our (future) family should be, who we should choose as a partner, how we should look, how we should treat others and so many more things. We learn to compete with other boys, from the testosterone fueled, so-called “pissing contests” to bragging about our sexual conquests.

We also learn what to hide, such as our feelings – crying is often not allowed. But it is difficult to always keep feelings suppressed, so they often manifest in the form of anger or aggression. Or we manage our feelings through drugs, alcohol or other addictions.

So many feelings stay hidden, including love, friendship, self-doubt and the roots of some of the problems that manifest at surface level.



Why is it so dangerous to show what is really going on? There might be reactions like: ‘Real men don’t cry’ or ‘Man up’. You might be called names, such as faggot, sissy or girl. And there is the fear of rejection by peers, family, potential sexual partners and others.

In some places, not being ‘manly’ enough can get you prosecuted and murdered. In many other places, boys and men take their own lives. This is often the case with homosexual boys, or anyone else that is perceived to be ‘gay’, for instance, because they wear nail polish, or they don’t like football.

Such dangers keep boys from sharing with friends, families, teachers and youth workers. As a result, they are not aware they aren’t the only ones dealing with all sorts of issues. Their classmates, friends or even their bullies, all deal with similar issues as them. One might call this a feeling of ‘Terminal Uniqueness’ – the belief that you are special or different from everybody else.

This can make boys easy prey for negative influences, such as the manosphere, terrorism and criminality, as they promise (false) solutions – such as the luxurious cars that Andrew Tate boasts about and how you could attain them yourself – or how an answer can be found in hypermasculinity.

To counter this we need to allow our boys to be more than just the image they present of themselves. We need to dive deeper.

At Emancipator we use the IMAGINE-methodology to train teachers and youth workers about their role in the process: How they can make it safer for our boys to explore within themselves by creating a safe space, by normalising the issues boys don’t talk about. If they are willing to take a risk and open-up, they can start to have new conversations with boys, sometimes within a group, or at least in a one-on-one setting.


“At Emancipator we use the IMAGINE-methodology, to train teachers and youth workers about their role in the process: How they can make it safer for our boys to explore within themselves by creating a safe space, by normalising the issues boys don’t talk about. If they are willing to take a risk and open-up, they can start to have new conversations with boys, sometimes within a group, or at least in a one-on-one setting.”

To prevent radicalisation we should help our boys to grow up to be the (hu)man they want to be. We should embrace them and all that is stirring within them, to show them we are just like them, that we understand them, that we don’t offer easy and empty promises, but that we believe in their potential.





Bas Zwiers designs and delivers gender-based interventions for Emancipator, a Dutch organisation which aims to involve boys, men and masculinity in gender issues.

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in 2022, entitled 'Gender-specific approaches in PVE', discusses the role of misogyny within different extremist ideologies and explores how to provide accurate programmes for girls to build resilience (against both misogynist behaviour and extremist recruitment) and how to facilitate dialogue for respect and understanding between boys and girls. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

Radicalisation Awareness Network

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RAN Y&E

30/07/2022

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN Working Group Meeting
31 May to 1 June 2022, Lisbon, Portugal

Gender-specific approaches in PVE

Preventive work for girls in and around schools

Key outcomes

In recent years, practitioners of our RAN Youth & Education (Y&E) Working Group observed an increase and a normalisation of misogynist narratives and behaviour amongst their male pupils, undermining the democratic rights of gender equality. This is perceived as problematic for the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) because various extremist movements have sexism and gender inequality at the core of their ideology, and thus benefit from the normalisation of such discourses. Moreover, resilience building programmes to meet the specific developmental needs of girls¹², are still often reported to be a blind spot in preventive youth work. After all, many initiatives are aimed at boys and young men, as they cause more visible trouble when they radicalise or become vulnerable to radicalisation.

On 31 May and 1 June, the RAN Y&E Working Group assembled educators, youth workers and related experts from around Europe for a working session about this topic. The purpose of this meeting was to: 1) exchange insights on the role of misogyny within different extremist ideologies; 2) share tips on how to provide targeted programmes for girls to build resilience (against both misogynist behaviour and extremist recruitment); and 3) discuss how to facilitate dialogue for respect and understanding between boys and girls.

The following key outcomes were identified:

- Understand which **specific ideas about gender roles extremist ideologies have**, and get to know the popular discourses that accompany these ideas.
- Preventive interventions aimed at building resilience specifically for girls are key, but in addition interventions aimed at **fostering gender equality and respecting (sexual) boundaries** for boys are essential when countering and preventing these extremist gender narratives.
- Messages within **recruiting narratives are tailored to very gender-specific needs**, so try to meet these needs within your practice, before extremists do.
- **With your pupils, look critically at gender narratives** that seem rather innocent at first sight but hide a darker and extremist view behind them. Make sure the youngsters recognise when they are being targeted, and pre-expose them to these narratives to protect them against a potential future threat of extremist narratives. This follows the idea of the so-called inoculation theory.
- Be aware that **progressive ideas about gender are not accepted in every family or community**. Youngsters might feel torn between the values of their family and the values outside home, so act carefully and try to engage together with the family or community.

ARTICLE

Gender-sensitive approach focusing on trauma in men and boys



Ola SALEH

Different forms of trauma can have a significant impact upon men and boys, and can be a vulnerability which can be targeted by violent extremists and/or a factor in them being radicalised or self-radicalised. In this article, we explore different types of trauma and how mental health and P/CVE practitioners can deal with issues of trauma in their work.

Our lived experience and therefore how we relate to trauma is influenced by intersecting factors such as our upbringing, the norms we were socialised into, socio-economic background, gender, and racialised experiences, to name a few. Therefore, gender-sensitive approaches focused on trauma in men and boys first and foremost need to be intersectional, take into account the impacts of trauma responses or poor coping mechanisms on the individual's behaviour, as well as employ a whole of society approach to create opportunities for healing.

Masculinity norms and trauma

Hegemonic heteronormative masculinity is the stereotypic notion of masculinity that shapes the socialisation and aspirations of young men. Understanding what constitutes a good man or boy, and the masculinity norms associated with this image, is key to designing interview techniques for researchers and intervention programmes for practitioners.

Hegemonic heteronormative masculinity leaves no space for “soft” or feminised emotions. Men and boys who are socialised in this environment often hear phrases such as: “Men don’t cry” or “man up”. Emotions are trivialised as a subject of discussion between fathers and sons. Men and boys who grew up with absent fathers, or with larger than life father figures, who are unapproachable, or those who express shame for showing emotions, bottle up their emotions or pour them onto the female family members, especially their mother or wife.

Those norms also normalise male exertion of physical violence as an extension of their manhood or an acceptable method of expressing emotionality (such as sadness, anger, frustration). In violent extremist environments, refusing to inflict violence can be seen by peers to detract from their manhood.

Are all traumas visible?

Trauma can be multifaceted and multi-layered. Witnessing and/or being subjected to violence in the family, and witnessing and/or being subjected to violence in war, including through the recruitment of children into combat, can be direct causes of trauma. However, not all traumas are caused by an event such as war, physical violence or abuse. The sense of inadequacy men and boys experience can be equally impactful as traumatic experiences.

Transgenerational trauma – the subconscious transmission of traumatic experiences to future generations and to society – can impact individuals, groups or communities. It can shape the (often gendered) way in which children are raised and treated and therefore how they respond to future traumatic events.

Non-binary men or boys who are from a young age socialised into hegemonic heteronormative masculine norms as an expression of manhood, can suffer a sexual identity related trauma with self-loathing and blame. Those men and boys can view themselves as deserving of the violence inflicted on them by the family, during war, in prison, as a form of “divine” punishment.

Can men be victims?

Boys and men who are socialised in an environment that idealises hegemonic masculinity norms around heroism and “invulnerable and impenetrable” manhood find it especially difficult to share or seek help. Belittling their traumatic experiences as “not a big deal”, prevents them from acknowledging their victimhood, particularly, if their experience of assault or abuse was sexual in nature.

Care for men and boys

For prevention practitioners from outside the mental health and psychosocial support system (MHPSS), the following considerations can enhance gender sensitive and trauma informed interviewing and programme design:

- **Acknowledge that trauma is indiscriminate and can affect people from different backgrounds anywhere in the world.**
- **Ensure a non-judgemental and relatable interviewee client – practitioner relationship. This includes offering access to male practitioners, a non-binary practitioner, a team of male and female practitioners, especially in the case of boys, or any other constellation as deemed appropriate.**
- **Understand the positive and negative patterns in which men and boys express vulnerability and helplessness to inform a trauma sensitive approach.**

For example, do men and boys defuse their helplessness through physical exercise or sports, substance abuse or domestic violence?

- **Consider introducing positive masculinity norms to inform forms replacing maladaptive behaviours.**
- **Be aware of the power relation between the practitioner and the client, especially survivors of abuse or battlefield traumatic experience, and ensure a safe space with the client where they can express their need to speak with a male interviewer should they require it.**
- **Consider the impact of trauma on men and boys on the family and society's resilience to violence (or lack of it) as well as societal inadequacy to respond to male trauma putting more pressure on men and women who substitute the role of society.**
- **Scan for PTSD early warning signs and refer the case to MHPSS professionals.**

Ola Saleh is a peacebuilding and gender responsive security expert with over 18 years of experience in the field. She is a member of the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network expert pool on P/CVE, a member of the Swedish women's mediation network, a trustee of Saferworld and Conducive Space for Peace.

“Boys and men who are socialised in an environment that idealises hegemonic masculinity norms around heroism and “invulnerable and impenetrable” manhood find it especially difficult to share or seek help. Belittling their traumatic experiences as “not a big deal”, prevents them from acknowledging their victimhood, particularly, if their experience of assault or abuse was sexual in nature.”

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in 2022, entitled 'Extremists' Targeting of Young Women on Social Media', examines extremists' activities on different social media platforms and explores which narratives and strategies are used by violent right-wing (VRWE) and violent Islamist extremist actors to lure and recruit young women and girls to (violent) extremism. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

Recommendations

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting (sudden) need for a wider range of digital P/CVE measures has created challenges for practitioners who are used to working in offline settings. In addition to the already often intense workload for practitioners, familiarising themselves with the rapidly changing world of social media platforms and offering tailored prevention and intervention services is not feasible for many. When it comes to better understanding girls' and young women's online behaviours, RAN YOUNG can help to identify relevant platforms and emerging trends. The list that follows provides a brief overview of relevant online practices making headway in the field.
- In order to help young women and girls to better understand and identify propaganda, misinformation and extremist content, developing programmes to **strengthen digital literacy source verification skills** can be a helpful tool for primary and secondary prevention. There are a variety of websites and search engines designed to help users identify whether information they found online is reliable or not. The Irish initiative BE MEDIA SMART summarises organisations and websites focused on providing fact-checking tools and databases ⁽⁴⁷⁾. It is crucial to better equip girls and young women to also spot subtle forms of IE and RWE propaganda and recruitment efforts.
- Increasing online presence on social media of civil society organisations and P/CVE practitioners seems crucial. In order to have a credible voice on digital platforms, organisations can provide low-threshold educational content, participate in discussions under social media posts with extremist narratives, and cooperate with influencers who can function as role models in preventing and countering online violent extremism.
- As discussed above, the sometimes limited or short-lived effect of alternative or counter-narrative campaigns is often due to the fact that they are set for a short period of time before projects end. Schlegel suggests a '**bookstore approach**' based on collaboration

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Gielen, Exit programmes for female jihadists: A proposal for conducting realistic evaluation of the Dutch approach, p. 15.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Schlegel, A Bookstore, Not a Customized Page.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ See: <http://www.bemediasmart.ie/fact-check#check>

ARTICLE

Misogyny as a gateway to extremism



Elisabeth
CAPPON

Lisa
DE SMEDT

Oliver
CAUBERGHS

On the afternoon of May 6, this year, a gunman opened fire in an outlet centre in Allen, Texas. He killed eight people and wounded seven more, including several children, after which he was killed by a police officer. The perpetrator, a 33-year-old man, left no manifesto or specific explanation for his act, but did leave a years-long history of online posts up to the day of the mass shooting on the Russian social media site Odnoklassniki. His messages contain jargon typical of the Incel community, quotes from Incel fora and even a quote from Andrew Anglin, the founder of neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer: “Women deserve to be beaten and raped, NOT treated like they are humans, because they are NOT humans”.^{02/03}

Incel ideology

The Allen, Texas mall shooting was yet another act in a series of mass violence connected to Incel⁰⁴ ideology. Such mass-casualty Incel attacks have led the security services in the U.S., Canada,⁰⁵ and the U.K. to classify Incels as a violent extremist threat. But what does Incel ideology actually entail? ‘Incel’ is short for ‘involuntary celibate’. Members of the predominantly male Incel community experience a lack of romantic and/or sexual interactions, and mainly blame women for this. Almost their entire world-view is based on sexual access and the idea of the sexual marketplace: the most attractive 20% of men have access to 80% of available women. This means that the vast majority of men must compete over the remaining, limited number of women. The result is a sexual hierarchy based on genetic superiority, where Incels place themselves at the very bottom of the hierarchy, identifying as genetic and sexual pariahs. Making the idea of the ‘sexual’ marketplace a true analogy, Incels label women as sub-human and discuss women as if they were marketable inanimate objects. Women are seen as predatory “beasts” who are “incapable of having morals or thinking rationally”.⁰⁶ Within the Incel community the lack of romantic and/or sexual experience is entwined with a deep hatred of women, viewing them as inferior, hostile, and in need of being controlled.⁰⁷

The Incel community is known for their extensive use of very distinct jargon to indicate, among other things, ranks in the sexual hierarchy and their own perceived inferiority.⁰⁸ For example, women are referred to with dehumanising slurs such as ‘foid’ or ‘femoid’. Another such recurring term that stands out within Incel vernacular is the idea of the so-called ‘black pill’. The term ‘black pill’ is a derivative of ‘red pill’, which again is derived from the 1999 movie ‘The Matrix’. In violent right wing extremist (VRWE) circles ‘taking the red pill’ refers to experiencing a political awakening.⁰⁹ ‘Taking the black pill’ is its Incel equivalent and stands for the revelation and acceptance of the idea of invariably being inferior on a genetic and sexual level, and having no chance of ever finding a romantic partner in a society that is infinitely cruel and ignorant. This belief can lead

to extreme self-loathing, self-destructive behaviour and (mass) violence, particularly aimed at women, in real life.^{10/11}

The ‘online heart of modern misogyny’¹²

The Incel community is part of what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Manosphere’, an umbrella term for multiple interconnected misogynistic communities online, mainly in the English-speaking world. Within these spaces, an ideological agenda is constructed based on anti-feminist and male-supremacist rhetoric, and the idea that masculinity is being oppressed in our current society. In addition to involuntary celibates, the manosphere also consists of subcultures such as Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), all expressing varying degrees of violence against women.^{13/14}

This modern form of digital misogyny is in turn part of a broader, VRWE ideology that consists of an often paradoxical patchwork of elements such as traditionalism, white supremacism, conspiracy theories, religion and even wellness.¹⁵ Current Western society is rejected as ‘degenerate’ and the only way to nurture it back to health is to embrace a traditional lifestyle. This usually refers to the white, heteronormative nuclear-family with clearly divided gender roles, embedded in a Christian or even Pagan context. Globalism, multiculturalism, and feminism are all seen as threats that undermine this ‘natural order of things’. It is here where conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement,¹⁶ White Genocide,¹⁷ and the anti-Semitic Blood Libel make their appearance. This leads to narratives where feminism is also suspected of being a weapon to bring down Western Society, wielded by a Jewish elite.^{18/19}

The manosphere as a recruiting ground

Misogyny often serves as a gateway to, or unifying feature of, diverse extremist ideas and the manosphere provides a perfect recruiting ground. As vulnerable individuals are drawn deeper into these online communities, anti-feminism transforms from rage against feminism into a broader ideology that encompasses racial and religious hatred.²⁰ These narratives circulate on anonymous image boards such as 4chan, subreddits, private

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“The Incel community is part of what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Manosphere’, an umbrella term for multiple interconnected misogynistic communities online, mainly in the English-speaking world. Within these spaces, an ideological agenda is constructed based on anti-feminist and male-supremacist rhetoric, and the idea that masculinity is being oppressed in our current society. In addition to involuntary celibates, the manosphere also consists of subcultures such as Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), all expressing varying degrees of violence against women.”

Facebook groups and Telegram channels, but are also more openly pushed by public Twitter accounts with thousands of followers.²¹ Disinhibition provided by algorithmic bias and the echo chamber effect induces a phenomenon called ‘group polarisation’ – members of a group move towards a more extreme position than indicated prior to their meeting.^{22/23} Both VREW and violent Islamist-inspired extremism misuse and exploit these dynamics of social media platforms and messaging services to groom vulnerable individuals.²⁴

Surveys with self-proclaimed Incels, and analyses of content on online Incel spaces and of actual Incel-related crimes, connect Incels to negative or adverse early childhood experiences (AECEs), ostracism, feelings of rejection, and a history of mental health struggles and bullying. One study finds that there are behavioural overlaps between Incels and lone-actor terrorists, but also states that further research is required.²⁵ Another study states that only a small number of Incels embrace the most violent aspects of the Incel subculture.²⁶

Conclusion

Misogyny serves as a gateway drawing vulnerable individuals deeper into different extremist communities. In contrast to other extremist organisations and phenomena, it does not yet attract the same level of attention from law enforcement, social workers, or policymakers, including content moderation policies.

The horrible events that occurred in Texas serve as yet another reminder of the essential need to address and battle online gender hate speech because they poison minds and inspire mindless acts of violence. Dismantling these online digital breeding grounds for hate should become a priority and further promote that tolerance, comprehension, and empathy in our societies are common duties.

Elisabeth Cappon and Lisa De Smedt are data scientists at artificial intelligence (AI) company, Textgain. Olivier Cauberghs is Head of the Textgain Academy, which helps firstline practitioners bridge the gap and understand the use of AI products that automate the detection of online hate speech.

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A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in 2021, entitled ‘Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations’ highlights the gendered experiences of women in Daesh, discusses the gender needs of women returnees, and identifies rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) opportunities for various professions supporting women returnees to the European Union (EU). You can read the paper in full [here](#).

Gender-specific considerations for practitioners

Immediate and short-term

1. Trauma. Women’s ability to coherently discuss and process trauma from living within the conflict zone, the IDP camps, and from any prior gender-based violence, will not be immediate. Support from trained PTSD and gender-based violence professionals may enable women to communicate more effectively with other practitioners and facilitate their R&R.
2. Reconfiguring Motherhood. Motherhood within Daesh is a key feature of their ideology and women’s lives. However, it is heavily ‘weaponised’ and ‘instrumentalised’ for the good of the group. Women will need support reconfiguring what motherhood will be in practice (especially if they are not to be the primary caregivers) and how to develop appropriate bonds with their children in the new environments.
3. Supporting Networks. Women returnees may not have the wider support of their family, and even if they do, families may not wish to discuss returnees’ experiences—which may hinder returnees’ R&R. Practitioners may need to help the returnee identify alternative support networks. Families and other support networks will therefore need guidance and their own support to enable them to support the returnee (and her children).
4. Scheduling Appointments and Support. There needs to be coordination across agencies and with the returnee to minimise disruption to her efforts to establish normalcy—for example, avoiding clashes with taking children to and from school. Women also report that their concerns, experiences and insights are dismissed and minimised by practitioners, and that they are “not taken seriously”. Efforts should be made to engage cooperatively and build trust.

Medium and long-term

1. Transferable skills. While men had a variety of roles in Daesh (⁴⁰), due to strict gender segregation rules, women’s time was typically spent in family and home-centred tasks, combined with their lack of prior employment, means vocational training and developing transferable skills is important. Women’s R&R therefore requires external financial

³⁹ RAN (2021) Conclusion Paper; PBC and RAN (2021) Conclusion Paper. See Further Reading.

⁴⁰ Daesh set itself up as a governing authority, and therefore “employed” men in a variety of roles to facilitate the functioning of its society. It drew on extreme violence and normalised violence in everyday governing to ensure compliance of the population within its territories – including those within the group, and this should not

gender in extremism
WomEx
prevention | intervention

FEATURE

FEATURE
WomEx

Violent extremist, terrorist or hate crime offenders very frequently hold sexist and homophobic attitudes. For example, practitioners have recurrently found that violent extremist young men compensate for an insecure sense of male identity and masculinity by acting out in hateful ways against women, homosexuals and others who by appearance or behaviour may confuse the restrictive gender role order valued by these young men.

“In particular, WomEx interventions aim to make participants more aware of the intrinsic connection between rigid/restrictive gender roles, polarisation and violent extremism. Participants also learn how certain biographical and milieu-specific conditions (violent/relational/sexual abuse, neglect, degradation and psychological trauma) may lead to the adoption of restrictive and exclusionary gender role concepts, and at the same time may make women susceptible to violent extremist behaviour.”

Moreover, findings have shown that women active in extremism overwhelmingly tend to support and actively reaffirm such restrictive gender roles: they thus share these sexist and homophobic attitudes and draw motivation from them for extremist activities. Practitioners note that at the same time, these women may feel empowered thanks to their newly gained opportunities for extremist engagement and activities. In turn, extremist movements take strategic advantage of such socially imposed gender roles: they position their female followers in inconspicuous positions where they can propagate extremism unobtrusively.

It is in this context that the ‘WomEx’ practice, funded by the ISEC programme of the EU and the Federal Agency for Political Education, was developed. WomEx’s gender-specific interventions with girls/women and its gender-focused methods across different settings are necessary components of any prevention strategy, and may be applied to great effect in deradicalisation and prevention settings. Originating in the Cultures Interactive (CI) ‘Girrrl Power’ workshops, WomEx has provided young at-risk persons with various methods for increasing awareness of gender roles and the part they play in key situations of conflict, hatred and escalation in their lives.

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WomEx methods work on promoting alternative and more inclusive modes of male and female identity practices, and training to establish alternative patterns of behaviour which comply with a human rights-based and prosocial understanding of gender within democratic citizenship.

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For more information about the WomEx project and project results you can visit the website [here](#).

**W O M E N
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B O R D E R S**
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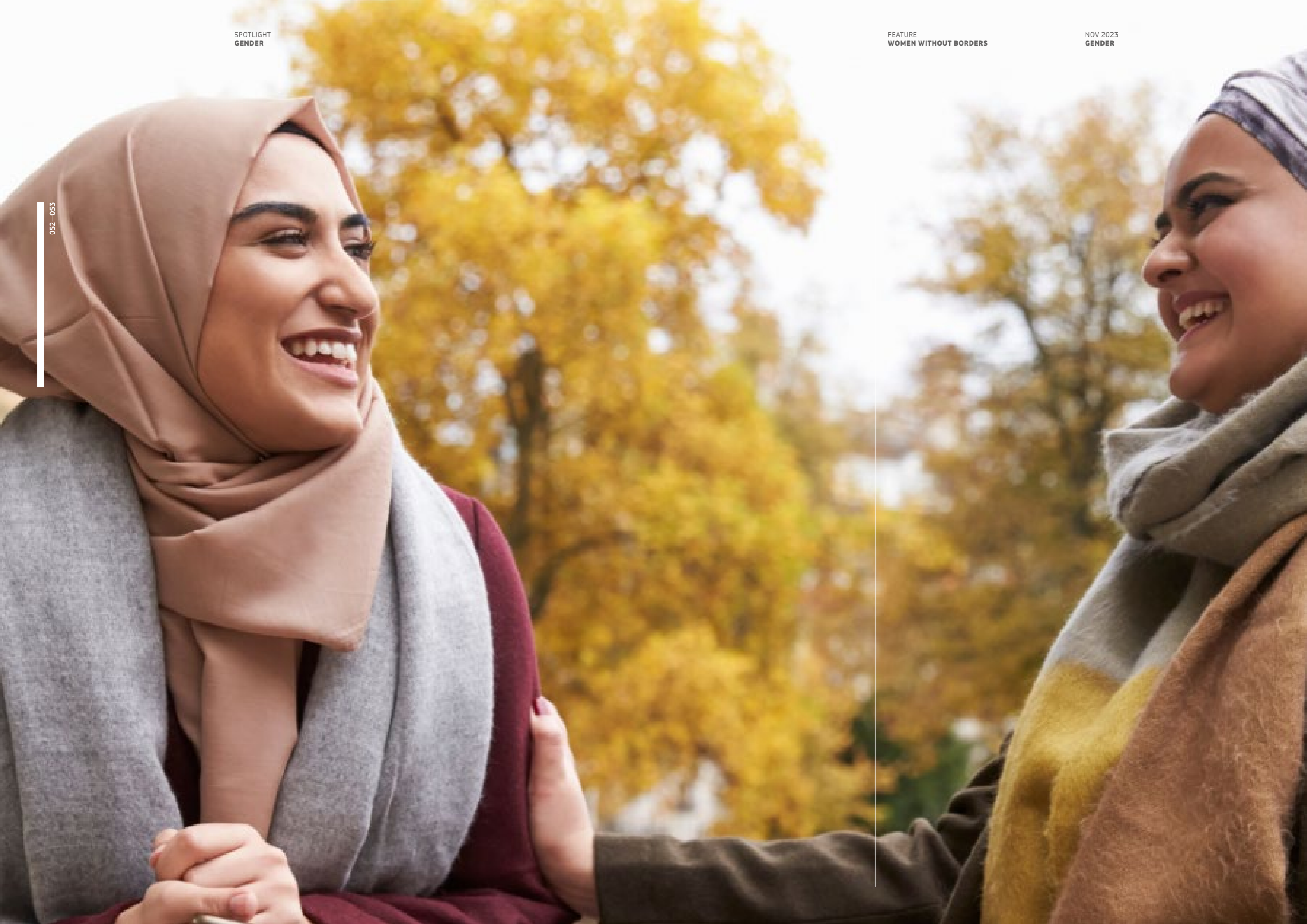
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Women without Borders

Women without Borders (WwB) is an international non-profit organisation headquartered in Vienna, which focuses on a number of gender-related issues in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), including female leadership, capacity building and tackling gender-based violence.

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“Mothers present a missing link in the entire community approach to preventing the spread of violent extremism. Their physical and emotional proximity make them witness to each stage of their child’s development. While mothers, like fathers, have the potential to intervene in the initial stages of the radicalisation process, they often lack the essential competence and self-confidence to recognise and address the warning signs in their sons and daughters.”

Through various projects, throughout Europe and around the world, WwB works to empower the female leaders of tomorrow, advocate for a future without fear, suppression and violence against women, support and inspire women in the process of moving from victimhood towards agency, and introduce and normalise the idea of mothers as the first line of defense against violent extremism in their homes and communities.

The role of mothers in P/CVE

Mothers present a missing link in the entire community approach to preventing the spread of violent extremism. Their physical and emotional proximity make them witness to each stage of their child’s development. While mothers, like fathers, have the potential to intervene in the initial stages of the radicalisation process, they often lack the essential competence and self-confidence to recognise and address the warning signs in their sons and daughters.

Responding to its research study findings from surveys and interviews with 1023 mothers across five countries, WwB developed and designed the pioneering ‘MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace’ Model. When put into practice, this bottom-up prevention approach positions concerned and affected mothers as the first line of defence in at-risk communities. Through a series of training exercises the MotherSchools curriculum strengthens the participant’s individual capacity, capability, and emotional literacy, and heightens her awareness of radical influence.

MotherSchools also features multiple community outreach components offering a sense of agency, hope and engagement, and a path forward. This public forum lifts their voices, elevates their social status, helps to grow their community network, and heightens local awareness of extremism while highlighting women’s role and mothers’ unique capacity in P/CVE.

Violence against women

Violence against women is still one of the major challenges we face in achieving a just and peaceful society. Global data shows that every fourth woman is affected by intimate partner violence at least once in her life. Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights; it endangers and harms the physical and mental health of women and has far-reaching effects on their children and society as a whole. Thus far, support has been focused primarily on women directly affected by violence. But sustainable violence prevention must start in advance to break the cycle.

In response to and with the aim to end violence against women, Women without Borders has developed the prevention project “Women Know How!” to support women in breaking the taboo on the phenomenon and to question the silence and social stigma.

The “Women Know How!” project will bring the women together in Story Telling Circles, offering a safe space to address their own experiences of violence and to break through the strongest barrier – individual isolation – by capitalising on group dynamics, trust, and bonding. Through these regular meetings, the participants will build up self-confidence, which is often impaired by latent or manifest experiences of violence. The women will be encouraged to respect and stand up for themselves, as shame and disgrace can only be overcome through empathy and a willingness to be open. The fears and experiences of violence will no longer be a subjective problem that must remain in the private sphere, but instead a social and societal challenge that we need to address together.

The “Women Know How!” project is being piloted in Vienna and Graz in Austria. The first round of “Women Know How!” Circle Meetings will begin this year. Following this first iteration of the project, the successes and challenges will be evaluated to further refine the project and with the aim to reach more women in the prevention of gender-based violence. If you would like to learn more about WwB, its MotherSchools programme and some of its other work you can visit the website [here](#).

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LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

If you would like to discover more about gender and P/CVE you can get in touch with the RAN Practitioners Staff, take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#). We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN Practitioners (2021)
[‘Management of returning FTFs with a focus on returning women’](#)

RAN Practitioners (2019)
[‘Gender-specific approaches in exit work’](#)



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