EX POST PAPER
The role of gender in extremism and P/CVE

Summary

The topic of gender in P/CVE has been discussed quite extensively in the field outside of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), and there are more and more projects and practices that are adopting gender-specific approaches in the EU. RAN Youth, Families and Communities (RAN YF&C) has further built on this knowledge in its meeting on the role of gender in extremism and P/CVE. It seems that there are different ways in which men and women play a role in extremist groups. Furthermore, there are differences in the role that gender plays in different types of extremism, for example with regard to gender (in)equality within FRE groups. Gender does seem to play a role in certain aspects of P/CVE work as well, and gender-sensitive approaches could therefore help in certain (but not all) cases. The same goes for practitioners themselves: the gender of the P/CVE professional may play a role in some cases or activities, but does not need to in others.

This ex post paper will address the main outcomes. It is written for practitioners who encounter the influence of gender on their daily P/CVE activities and experts active on this topic.

Introduction

"I do not suggest that once we understand gender, we will fully understand the lure of violent extremism. … But … **we cannot fully understand violent extremist movements without a gender analysis**." (Kimmel, 2018)

The role of gender in radicalisation and the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) has not been discussed in any RAN meeting yet. In 2015, RAN produced an issue paper (RAN, 2015) concerning this topic, but this paper is mostly limited to the role of women in extremist groups. However, the topic of gender in P/CVE is discussed quite extensively in the field outside of RAN, and there are also projects and practices that adopt gender-specific approaches in the EU. RAN Youth, Families and Communities (RAN YF&C) has further built on this knowledge in its meeting on the role of gender in extremism and P/CVE, and addresses the main outcomes in this ex post paper.

This paper will first discuss the role of gender within extremist groups and in one's radicalisation process. It will look into the roles of masculinity and women within these groups, and address whether they join them for different reasons and whether there are any differences in the role of gender in different types of extremism. Secondly, it will discuss if, and if so how, gender-specific approaches will affect P/CVE work and can be utilised for a more effective approach. Finally, the paper discusses whether the gender of professionals themselves also influences P/CVE work.

ROLE OF GENDER WITHIN EXTREMIST GROUPS

Do both genders play different roles in extremist groups?

When looking into the role of gender in extremist groups, a first question that comes up is whether both genders play different roles in these groups. In the paragraph below, the role of masculinity in far right extremist groups as well as within Daesh will be discussed. It will furthermore look into the relation between masculinity and attachment theory and how this influences the radicalisation process. Secondly, this chapter focuses on the role of women within extremist groups, and the paradox of women's empowerment one can encounter in these.

Masculinity

Michael Kimmel (2018) finds it remarkable that while the vast majority of extremists are men, both in far right extremism (FRE) and Islamist extremism, the role of masculinity is not more widely recognised and discussed as an important factor of the radicalisation process: "If we imagine for a moment that all those amassing on all the different sides of this looming cataclysm, all those drifting to the edges of the political spectrum and towards violent extremism, were female, would there be any other story? Wouldn't magazines be filled with individual profiles, TV news shows highlighting the relationship between femininity and violence, bookshelves sagging from the weight of the "gender"?" In order to understand the role of masculinity within extremism, it is interesting to look at the role it has in FRE groups and Islamist extremist groups.

Characteristics of masculinity within Daesh

Within Daesh, men tend to be portrayed as leaders and are often associated with violence. They are the ones who need to (physically) protect their families. Pearson (2018) notes that the ideology of Daesh is a response to the secular West and its sexual morality. "Certain masculinities were vaunted (brave, ideological, virile, warriors), and in opposition to particular femininities (caring, maternal, ideological, chaste). Real men proved manhood in battle to protect." The status of a good Muslim man within the Daesh narrative is thus deeply embedded in masculinity and male violence.

Characteristics of masculinity within far right extremist groups

Research shows that FRE movements forge "an only-masculine world" (Ezekiel, 2002: 57) in which there is an "implied or explicit restoration of masculinity" (Kimmel, 2007: 207). However, in Hilary Pilkington's studies of the English Defence League (EDL) (Pilkington, 2017) and Russian skinheads (Pilkington, Omel'chenko, & Garifzianova, 2010), masculinity is expressed more diversely than merely being a warrior and using violence. Within the EDL, people with a more traditional interpretation of dominant, bullying masculinity are called out and there is a need for emotional support from both other men and women. Russian skinheads also do not have a clear, universal expression of masculinity, and the ambiguity they have in their bonds is an important element. The masculine identity in these groups therefore seems more complex.

Relation between masculinity, attachment theory and the radicalisation process

During the meeting, the cohesion between masculinity and attachment theory was discussed in relation to the radicalisation process of extremists. The male gender roles of a person are shaped by attachment figures such as parents. If young boys are constantly told in their upbringing that they should not cry and be weak but should be strong, they can experience this as rejection. They can instrumentalise these criteria of the male role by becoming less sensitive, emotionally available, compassionate and empathetic. As an adult, their tendency to avoid emotional situations, closeness, affection or love and their aggressiveness due to high stress and anxiety levels could make them well-fitted to join extremist groups. As a parent, this could lead them to be dismissive and show an avoidant attachment style to their children as well. The risk of generational transmission to their children is in this case probable. This process was addressed as the 'circle of masculinity': the effect of attachment figures on the development of male gender roles is a starting point for radicalisation. Extremist groups can benefit from these internalised roles by offering bonds for life that the men might have never experienced before in their own families. Furthermore, internalising these roles keeps a radicalised system running for future generations.

Considerations for practitioners
- Practitioners can deal with the 'circle of masculinity' by increasing their sensitivity of the relationship between boys and their parents and talking about subcultures with them.
- Attachment work can be used when working in the context of FRE, Islamist extremism and delinquency.

The role of women in extremist groups

Overlooked and underrated

Where the research of, among others, Pilkington and Mudde (2014: 10) shows that women are overall underrepresented across the spectrum, the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (2017) indicates that there used to be a tendency to overlook and underrate women and their role in extremism, despite the number of known cases of women who had active roles in their extremist groups. In the case of FRE groups, white women are stereotypically seen as "peaceful, non-violent, loving and caring" (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2017: 2). Because of this stereotypical image the role of women was often neglected in research and prevention of FRE. In the case of Daesh, men are more visible than women due to the militaristic essence in their ideology (violent jihad) and the decision-making role they have in this.

However, while male extremists are currently still dominating extremist groups, there seems to be a shift in perception from women being peaceful and loving to women being active contributors. Most recent attention has been given to the relatively large group of women who travelled to Iraq and Syria to join Daesh. According to a recent report of the ICSR (Cook & Vale, 2018), 13 % of the foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) were women (4 761 woman in total). Daesh furthermore devoted a specific section in their glossy 'Dabiq' to the role of women in the so-called caliphate. The Dabiq portrays women to be as essential as men to the establishment and longevity of the caliphate. The Amadeu Antonio Stiftung sees an increase in the number of active FRE women as well as a growing number of women's groups related to FRE in Germany. Women play an important role as members of extremist families and communities, but also as "activists, street fighters and gang leaders to local government politicians, and from demonstration coordinators to internet activists" (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2017: 3).

> [**Expert Center on Gender and Right-Wing Extremism**](link)**, Amadeu Antonio Foundation**
>
> The primary goal of the Expert Center on Gender and Right-Wing Extremism is to look at right-wing extremism from a gender perspective and achieve gender-sensitive approaches in all strategies and actions to prevent right-wing extremism.

What does the role of women in extremist groups look like?

When looking at the contribution of women to extremist groups, the following roles can be identified:

Partners & wives

Pearson (2018) argues that knowing what the roles of masculinity and male violence in extremist groups are is essential to understand the role of women in these groups as well. As the status of a good Muslim man within the Daesh narrative is deeply embedded in masculinity and male violence, women can "buy into" this honour and status by marrying a masculine fighter. Within the EDL, it is often assumed that women participate in the EDL because they desire to find a partner (Pilkington, 2017: 13-14). This does not mean that they are by definition peaceful supporters of their husbands: while most women will not use violence, some might be the driving forces behind their men to engage in violence. In contrast to what is often expected, women are often in the frontline of grieved entitlement.

Supportive and internal roles vs leadership role

However, the role of women should not be seen as limited to merely being a partner, since women play an important role in feeding the extremist narratives. Daesh's Dabiq divides women in two groups: those who join Daesh and those who don't, and tries to convince women to identify themselves with an extremist archetype. The first group is portrayed as a supporter, sister or fighter with words such as "strong, pious, brave" (Ingram, 2017: 5). The latter is described as a victim or corrupter with words like "promiscuous, immoral, deceiving". As Ingram notes: "The objective of this strategy is to drive their female readers to develop their own identity in line with in-group archetypes ("supporter", "mother/sister/wife", "fighter") and denounce trait characteristics of out-group archetypes ("corruptor"). It is important to note that one's identity is not a fixed state but a process which can constantly evolve. Because of this, Dabiq assures its "corruptor" and "victim" archetypes that they can indeed redeem and save themselves through supporting IS and fulfilling "supporter" and "mother/sister/wife" roles" (2017: 5). Meeting participants indicated that Daesh sees good Muslim mothers and wives as teachers of the extremist ideology who feed the narratives to their children to strengthen their belief.

In FRE groups the role of women is not integral, but more inferior and supportive. Pilkington et al. (2010) indicate that in the setting of Russian skinheads, a membership, let alone a leadership position, is not an option for women. However, in more popular and flat-structured FRE groups such as the EDL, women are increasingly gaining authority and become part of strong leadership groups. Where women used to have more administrative roles, they are now speakers during demonstrations (Pilkington, 2017: 8). The flat structure of the EDL allows space for women to be visible, while more closed FRE groups or masculinist subcultures close that space down. Furthermore, a comparable "teaching" role for women can be identified within FRE groups as well. A strategy that has become visible is for FRE women to be actively involved in social sectors, for example in school boards. Once they have established a trustworthy and likeable position, they start discretely passing on their ideologies to other people.

The paradox of women's empowerment in extremist groups

Both FRE and Islamist extremist groups are propagating that they value women's empowerment, which is a push factor for some women to join these groups. However, this is a paradox of the very women-unfriendly environments that both movements are in reality.

Women's empowerment in FRE groups

Within FRE groups, more and more strategies can be found of women's empowerment, in which self-defence groups and hybrid roles for women are pushed. On the other hand, FRE groups often have a very anti-feministic attitude towards women. Provost and Whyte (2018) ask themselves why women would feel attracted to join extremist groups that advocate to suppress women's rights. They note that this is not a new phenomenon, and that women have been part of FRE movements in history: from the KKK to fascist movements during the Second World War. Bachetta and Power (2002: 3) provide an overview of studies that discuss the role of women in far right (extremist) groups the world over. They argue that "… men and women may be drawn to the right because it produces and affirms masculinities and feminities with which they identify. … In so doing, right-wing women carve out a space and identity for themselves and enhance the ability of their right wings to implement their agendas. In many cases, right-wing women and right-wing men interpret women's place and role in the right quite differently: it is not uncommon for men to understand women as just tea makers, while women act and see themselves as essential." What is even more interesting than men having anti-feminist ideas, is that FRE women are themselves often very vocally

against gender ideology and often take a very anti-feministic stance. This suggests overcompensation: both FRE women being anti-feminist and Islamist extremist women pushing their husbands to engage in violence shows that women want to be recognised by their extremist groups and show that they are in line with their thoughts.

Paradox in Daesh

Daesh may have the ability to sell itself as empowering to women, but its actions do not show this. According to Ingram (2017) and Keijzer (2017: 100), the empowerment of women is an important pull factor that is included in the narrative in the Dabiq. As indicated above, the nurturer and teaching role of women suggests that women are empowered to play a key role in the creation of the caliphate, namely by having children and raising, teaching and shaping them according to Daesh's norms. However, this pivotal role can also be a reason not to join Daesh. During the meeting a case was discussed of a woman who had profound plans to join Daesh to play this pivotal part, but who decided not to go when she found out she was pregnant. Where she may have known the stories about the fates of women and children within Daesh before when making plans to join Daesh, having a child was a protective factor from going: she did not want to take the risk to raise her child in the dangerous Daesh territory. This pivotal role may therefore initially be attractive to women, but when actually in the situation women may start perceiving this differently. Using the stories of returnee women about how the caliphate only pretends to empower women, but in fact chooses their husbands and treats them badly, can be an effective way to counter the Dabiq rhetorics.

Do men and women join extremist groups for different reasons?

There is a kaleidoscope of both individual and societal push and pull factors why women and men join extremist groups and what the role of gender is in these. The specific drivers for women and men can be difficult to establish, since there is often a situational aspect to what brings people in and out of these movements. When looking at Daesh on an individual level, a driver for both FTF men and women may be that they have troubled backgrounds, but there are also a lot of different reasons for why they join. Furthermore, some pathways may be exclusively for one gender: football crowds (among the EDL) or territorial gangs (among Russian skinheads) focus specifically on men. This chapter will look into the different drivers for men and women as well as similar drivers.

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.
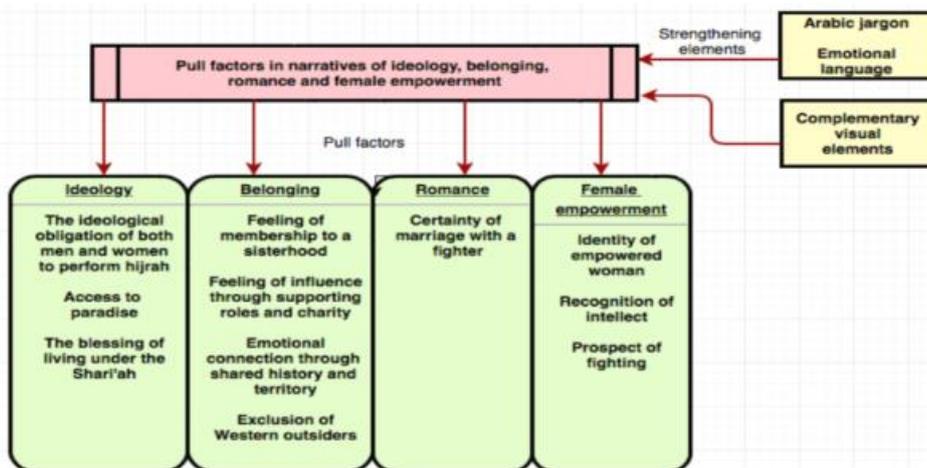

Figure 1. Push and pull factors in the narratives of Dabiq and Rumiyah. Keijzer, F., Western women in the Islamic State: Pull factors in the narratives of Dabiq and Rumiyah. Leiden University, 2017 (supervised by L. Elias Carillo)

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

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

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
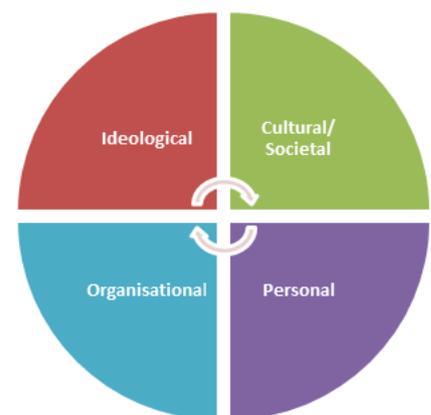
money to travel to join Daesh. Kimmel (2018) agrees with this and describes the main push factors that drive young men towards extremist groups as economic displacement (a lack of perspective) and isolation (a lack of belonging). These are very much in line with the general consensus on push factors in the field (Ranstorp, 2016). However, Pearson stressed the importance of understanding and interrogating how these 'general' factors might impact men and women differently, and why.

However, following interviews with over 100 former extremists, Kimmel (2018) argues that these push factors are deeply embedded in a gendered experience: "… they feel themselves to be emasculated. This political-economic emasculation is often accompanied by a more personal sense of emasculation: they come because they are isolated or bullied in school and feel they need the support of something much bigger than they are." According to Kimmel, extremist groups offer these individuals a chance to reclaim their manhood. He argues that gender can explain why so many of the people who are confronted with the same push factors in their lives do not turn to extremism while some do. The key lies within the gendered connection between humiliation and violence. A topic that touches upon this but was not discussed extensively in this meeting is honour-based violence. This should be further elaborated on in future meetings.

Affective bonds among men and among women

There appears to be a difference between the way women and men form relationships in extremist groups. Among the Russian skinheads (both male and female) that Pilkington studied, the idea exists that only men are capable of having real friendships. Men often have a strong sense of belonging to these communities and seem to have more solidarity with and be more loyal towards each other; a main focus is on creating "affective solidarity" (Juris, 2008: 66) among men, the feeling of being a "band of brothers" who will protect each other. Where some suggest that women are often excluded from these affective bonds, others emphasise the role of competition among women in closed environments: in these, women may be more hateful towards each other because they have to compete with each other. Blee and Linden (2012: 103-105) suggest that because FRE women do not experience the sense of belonging and comradeship that men gain from activism, they become socially isolated. However, Pilkington indicates that within the EDL enduring friendships and bonds were forged and sustained by women as well and they were therefore part of the EDL "family". The way in which men and women create friendships and networks may therefore influence their roles in extremist groups and what they get out of them. Especially for men who want to join a strong community, the image of an extremist group as being a "band of brothers" and having each other's backs may be very appealing.

Similarities in drivers

Belonging

Following the above, there seems to be a similarity among men and women when it comes to a sense of belonging as a driver to join extremist groups. As indicated before, men are often missing something and may find a strong sense of belonging in extremist groups. Whereas women may not experience the same feeling of comradeship among themselves, the study of Keijzer (2017: 100) does show that belonging is a pull factor for women to join Daesh. Elements that indicate this are a feeling of influence through supporting roles and charity, a membership to a sisterhood, an emotional connection through shared history and territory, and an exclusion of western outsiders.

When looking at other similarities in drivers for men and women, the following two trajectories are identified as gendered:

Compliance and continuity

In EDL groups, women's trajectories when entering are often characterised by "compliancy" (Blee & Linden, 2012): other people are supposedly the reason why women are entering. However, some participants acknowledged that they encountered more single women who joined the groups on their own than through partners in their work and studies. Trajectories of men are referred to more as trajectories of "continuity" (socialisation), which is in line with "compliancy". An example was provided of two brothers who joined the EDL because their father and uncle had run a local EDL division.

Childhood trauma and abuse

Pilkington (2017) found in her research that childhood trauma and abuse is a repeated pattern in the stories of both men and women about joining extremist movements. Blee (2002: 36) identified assaults on the body as central to women's stories of their routes into activism.

Drivers for men and women to join extremist groups		
Different drivers	**Men**	**Women**
Cultural/Social: Status	• Lack of perspective (getting a job) • Lack of belonging (isolation) • Lack of resilience • Feeling emasculated	More recognition by men
Cultural/Social: Locations	Being approached in public environments	Being approached in private spaces and online environment
Ideological and organisational	Fighters, heroes	Supporting/internal role, wife, mother, teacher
Personal	• Less idealistic • Power, domination • Being a war hero • Friendship and comradeship • Excitement/adventure	• More ideologically driven: learning about the ideology at a deeper level • Humanitarian reasons • Earning independency and freedom • Romance • Female empowerment
Similar drivers	• Compliancy and continuity • Childhood trauma and abuse • Belonging	

Are there any differences in the role of gender in different types of extremism?

Gender (in)equality in FRE groups

Where Islamist extremist groups in general do not propagate gender equality and far left extremists centralise equality in their groups, FRE groups are more ambiguous in what they propagate. Within individual FRE groups, there is not one traditional white supremacist focus on the role of gender; the differences are bigger than the similarities. Both the wider (country) context and the type of extremism strongly affect (the interpretation of) ideologies and attitudes towards gender and sexuality. In Russian skinhead groups, gender inequality is seen as "natural" (de Lange & Mügge, 2015: 63); women could participate in some activities, but in general they were not recognised as members. In contrast, the EDL says it is open to all (to some extent also to LGBTQ members), is pro gender equality and has a special women's division (EDL Angels). Despite this, the Angels division appears to be more symbolic. Participants agreed that by showing that they are defending the rights of women and LGBTQ, the EDL instrumentalises gender as a way to mainstream its appeal. When taking a deeper look at the role that gender equality actually has in these groups, it shows that gender equality is only used as a strategy and a weapon: the EDL is defending these rights against Islam. Further than this, there is no actual call for gender equality within its own narrative and identity politics: the EDL consciously did not adapt a pro-LGBTQ stance (Pilkington, 2017: 13) and EDL images still perpetuate the sexual objectification of women.

Direct targeting of women

Within Daesh, women are directly targeted because they are crucial for building the foundations of the caliphate within their communities. The essence of creating a new society causes Daesh to have a much more defined role for women than in other Islamist extremist groups such as Al Qaida. Within FRE groups such as the EDL, women are not targeted directly but join by themselves. In the ideology of white supremacy, women are not needed to create white supremacists: young people are targeted because they symbolise the future. The position that women have within extremist groups may therefore be influenced more by whether the extremist group has a religious or an ideological perspective than by it being either FRE or Islamist extremist.

GENDER-SPECIFIC APPROACHES IN P/CVE

If gender plays a role in the root causes of radicalisation and in extremist groups, this could also have implications for the prevention of radicalisation and exit work. If men and women get different things out of extremist groups, then preventative and exit programmes should consider tailoring their approach to these differences as well. This chapter will discuss both whether gender-specific approaches can help to improve P/CVE work and whether the gender of the professional affects P/CVE work as well.

Can gender-specific approaches help to improve P/CVE work?

When wanting to answer the question whether gender-specific approaches should be used in P/CVE, it is interesting to look into what underlying assumptions P/CVE practitioners may have regarding gender and what the influence of gender is on P/CVE work.

Underlying assumptions of P/CVE practitioners regarding gender

During the meeting the following assumptions were discussed that practitioners may have when working with Muslim communities:

- ‘Maternalistic logic’: An underlying assumption of practitioners can be that women are peaceful supporters and mothers, which effectively removes their agency (Mason & Sherwood, 2016): “Female Muslim participants suggested this approach failed to challenge existing negative gender relations and entrenched stereotypical ideas about women within Muslim communities.” (Winterbotham & Pearson, 2016: 59)
- Women's empowerment: Women's empowerment is often conflated with CVE approaches. The assumptions of what empowerment should look like are often based on the norms of what empowered women do in this specific society or context: “Muslim participants suggested CVE interventions with a focus on Muslim women, and the ensuing implication that they require specific ‘empowerment’, did not help them resist ‘Islamophobic stereotypes’” (Winterbotham & Pearson, 2016: 59). This may result in women feeling that they are being dictated to regarding what their empowerment should look like and are judged when they want something different (being a good mother or Muslim woman instead of having a career). In order to avoid this, CVE work and women's empowerment should be addressed separately.
- Mothers are better able to spot signs of radicalisation: Practitioners may feel that the issue in their work is often about absent fathers, and confirm the stereotype that mothers are best-placed to spot signs of radicalisation in their children. Winterbotham and Pearson (2016: 60-61) indicated that fathers are often missing in Islamist extremist CVE work, even though their specific influence on their sons and theoretical knowledge of the religion could be very effective in P/CVE work.

Influence of gender in P/CVE work

Next to the practitioner's underlying assumptions, gender can also play a role in P/CVE work itself. During the meeting several examples were given where gender was assumed to play a role:

Influence of gender in youth clubs

Where youth clubs used to be more male dominated, they are now visited more and more by both genders. However, there is a difference in the way that Muslim boys and girls were still approachable once in their radicalising process. Boys would remain present in public spaces and would therefore still be available for approach. However, once girls were at a certain stage of radicalisation they would no longer be approachable:

Example of a paradox intervention in youth work: in response to an Instagram story where Chechen boys mocked Chechen girls as “b*tches” just for coming to the youth centre, youth workers printed t-shirts with the text “we are youth centre b*tches too!”. By displaying solidarity with the girls, they felt more welcome to come. The t-shirts also had a good effect on the boys by stimulating discussion through a humorous approach.

women within Daesh should not be very present in public spaces, and the girls would therefore not come back to the centres. A challenge in open youth work is to have people, especially girls, attend in the long term.

Influence of gender in working with ex-combatants

For Fighters for Freedom, an organisation that works with ex-combatants as role models for boys, an initial assumption was that the Arabian cultural perception of masculinity made the engagement of specifically **male** fighters extremely important. However, the importance of working with male ex-combatants as role models was not so much based on the fact that they were male but more that they were ex-fighters who shared the same experiences as the young boys. The gender perspective turned out to be secondary; more important was that the ex-fighters were able to build trust with the young boys because they had been in their shoes.

Fighters for Freedom
Fighters for Freedom works with (mostly male) ex-combatants who are used as role models for young boys. They coach the ex-fighters to get rid of their rigid perception of masculinity and help them in employing soft skills such as active listening. With these skills and their experiences, they pass on their own war experiences and personal stories of change and warn the youth about violence and extremism.

Is there a need for gender-specific approaches?

Gender does seem to play a role in certain aspects of P/CVE work, and gender-sensitive approaches could therefore help in certain (but not all) cases. These specific approaches can especially be useful in exit work. In this, men often share more similar experiences than women, in which case gender does make a difference in the approach needed. While there may be more differences in the experiences of women, women are often in more danger when they want to exit an extremist group because they have children, which may make a female-specific approach important. In order to asses if gender-specific approaches are needed, practitioners should know the groups they are working with and understand if and how gender plays a role in these groups.

There are already some projects and approaches in the RAN Collection mentioned in this paper that include a gender component. Other RAN practices that take gender into consideration are:

Networking Platform/Afghan and Chechen Communities, **City of Vienna**
The main objective is to strengthen resilience in terms of dealing with the challenges of everyday life, social participation and prevention of radicalisation. Part of this is a training and discussion platform, which focuses on different target groups (girls and women, boys and men) and on the following topics: non-violent methods of conflict resolution, drug prevention, health, safety issues, sexuality, civil courage, domestic violence, etc. The project also organises women's cafés and women's platforms (creation of safe spaces for women, where they can meet and develop various activities, e.g. discussions and training on gender; women's role in society; religion; social, health and educational issues; prevention and deradicalisation).

MotherSchools, **Women without Borders**

Mothers' emotional connection to their children places them well in reclaiming the recruiters' key tools — they may invest time, listen, gain trust, empathise and provide an emotional anchor. The MotherSchools empower mothers in a five-step model over the course of 5–7 months.

WomEx – Women/Girls, Gender in Extremism and Prevention, **Cultures Interactive**

WomEx has produced various methods with which young people at risk can work on gaining awareness about gender roles and how they have affected key situations of conflict, hatred and escalation in their lives. In particular, WomEx interventions aim at making participants more aware of the intrinsic connection between rigid/restrictive gender roles, polarisation and violent extremism.

Considerations for practitioners

- There should be more men's programmes that focus on specific engagement of fathers in CVE work as well as on shared parenting. They should furthermore focus on creating a positive image of the role of men and fathers in P/CVE.

Elements of a gender-sensitive approach are:

- Have knowledge on gender norms, roles and expectations. Gender is a social construct and has no single definition. Practitioners should acknowledge that this construct exists and that it affects people's lives, for example because of sexual biases. They should make people aware of these structures and open them up for discussion in their work.
- Be aware of the client's needs. If many clients are affected by the same thing then practitioners need to find a way to address this. Having open conversations can be effective in assessing the needs that someone has.
- Be aware that by creating a gender-sensitive approach you might reinforce the construct. Examples of this are:
  - Addressing body shaming: this is often stereotypically linked to girls, although men may also suffer from this.
  - Boy approaches are often very physical (sports, etc.), whereas girl approaches are often very focused on arts and self-reflection.
- Create a safe space to discuss gender and involve everyone in creating this space. Part of creating a physical safe setting is also the language that is used. Practitioners cannot guarantee that the way young boys or girls talk about gender in general will change, but they can steer the language used inside the safe space.
- Stimulate mixed-group discussions wherever possible. In some cases, having separate men's and women's groups is important. However, discussing gender roles in mixed groups can be helpful for the reflections that participants have on this topic and the relationships that they build.
- Positive role models can play an important role in P/CVE. Working with role models of the same gender may be more valid in societies that practice gender segregation in daily life. However, working with role models of the other sex can also help: men can sometimes open up to a female practitioner because they may show more compassion, or they may have the feeling that they do not have to show a hardened level of masculinity.

Does the gender of professionals affect P/CVE work?

Just like within P/CVE work, participants agreed that the gender of the P/CVE professional themself may play a role in some cases or activities but does not need to in others. Gender is considered to be one of many starting points for, among other things:

- creating and sustaining contact with an individual on a radicalisation pathway;
- creating a safe space for conversation.

It was suggested that many other dimensions of identity may be equally important to both the client and the practitioner and to how each views the other.

Self-awareness and self-distance

A way in which the professional's gender does play a role is in his/her self-awareness and self-distance. Practitioners should acknowledge that everyone is influenced by their own experiences and belief system. Therefore, one's interpretations are not objective but subjective. Practitioners should be aware that they express their own gender in a certain way and should not reflect their own opinions on another's gender, but create a space where they can express their own gender. This is important because in conversations with others one cannot know whether how they interpret someone else's gender is also how the other experiences this.

Considerations for practitioners
- Practitioners can gain credibility by being sensitive about gender.
- Be critical of your own approach: do not talk about things as they are, but as you experience them.
- Depending on the group and the goal practitioners want to achieve, it can be important to reflect on one's gender <u>before</u> the intervention. This can create a safe space for having these discussions.
- Do not reinforce stereotypes but focus on breaking them.

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