



Policy and Program Recommendations: Role of Women in Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Compiled by: Sara Zeiger, Senior Research Analyst

Background

From 27–28 October 2015, Hedayah organized one of four thematic workshops at the Madrid +10 2015 Global Policy Dialogue convened by the Club de Madrid and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. This workshop focused on the role of women in countering radicalization and violent extremism, and aimed to expand on the existing international policy and good practices frameworks through articulating specific programmatic and policy recommendations.

The workshop comprised of two panels, each of which was followed by a discussion session to generate recommendations and solutions. With opening remarks by former President of Costa Rica, Laura Chincilla, and former President of Colombia, Andres Pastrana, the first panel explored the process of radicalization for women and girls and identified possible interventions aimed to prevent women and girls from becoming involved in violent extremism. This panel featured Farah Pandith from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Anne Speckhard of Georgetown University, and Sara Zeiger from Hedayah. Speakers considered recruitment techniques by violent extremists aimed at women and girls, and the highlighted the different ways women and girls passively or actively support violent extremism.

The second panel was opened by Alejandro Toledo, former President of Peru, and Timothy Phillips, co-founder and chair of Beyond Conflict. The speakers on the panel featured Georgia Holmer from the US Institute of Peace, Mariam Safi from the Organization for Policy, Research, and Development Studies (DROPS) in Afghanistan, and Edit Schlaffer of Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE). Speakers discussed the roles women can play in countering violent extremism and if/how these roles can be more effective than their male counterparts. This panel also examined the risks and benefits of a more inclusive approach to ensuring women and girls are active participants in CVE programming and policy.

The workshop concluded with a number of ideas generated by the discussions, as follows¹:

Radicalization and Recruitment of Women and Girls

The first panelists and subsequent discussions noted that recruitment and radicalization of women and girls into violent extremism is complex, just as with their male counterparts, and there are sometimes marked differences between males and females in these processes. There is an urgent need to develop effective policies that:

¹ The recommendations in this paper reflect the outcomes of the discussions and debates that took place at the Global Policy Dialogue, and do not necessarily represent the views of Hedayah.

- **Do not assume that women cannot be perpetrators of violent extremism.** There are a number of cases² from Syria and Iraq to Chechnya, Nigeria, France, Spain, Australia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Rwanda, the United States and others where women and girls actively and willingly participate in violent extremism and terrorism;
- **Recognize the nuanced dynamic between the role of women and girls as victims of violent extremism and perpetrators of violent extremism, as these roles are not mutually exclusive.** Effective responses might consider multi-variable motivations for women and girls to participate, including coercion and/or survival, but also revenge or atonement for past behavior (e.g. rape, sexual assault);
- **Recognize that women in many cases can make value judgements and behavioral decisions based on relationships, and CVE programs and policy can utilize this in interventions.** This dynamic could have both positive and negative effects on their involvement in violent extremism and in preventing violent extremism. For example, women may become involved in terrorism because their husband, brother or father is involved. On the other hand, women may be more effective at dissuading a family member from joining a terrorist group because of a strong relationship with that family member;
- **Recognize that mothers are the family's first educator in many cases, and the radicalization (or the reverse) of mothers can have ripple effects into the family.** Similarly, when women play roles as trusted community members (such as teachers or health care workers), the radicalization (or the reverse) of these individuals can have ripple effects into the community;

Role of Women in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Programs

The speakers and subsequent discussions from the second panel concluded that women may have a key role to play in preventing and countering violent extremism efforts. Some of the recommendations that came out of the discussions include:

- **If CVE is essentially about relationship-building and creating networks of individuals that are resilient to violent extremism, then women may be well-placed (although not always) to facilitate these networks naturally.** Mothers and teachers, for example, may be particularly well-placed in this regard if given the proper resources and tools to carry out CVE effectively;
- **When it comes to engaging women in CVE efforts, a bottom-up security strategy is crucial to ensure buy-in and locally-generated solutions.** This means creating regular feedback mechanisms to ensure grassroots organizations and key influencers are part of the design, implementation and assessment phases of the policy or program;
- **Before devising a national policy or set of programs on CVE, it is important to assess the divergent effects of violent extremism on women (which may vary even within one locality**

² For example, see Cragin, Kim and Daly, Sara A., *Women as Terrorists: Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Security International, 2009); Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Sara E Brown, "Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, no. ahead-of-print (2013): 1–22; Dan Berkowitz, "Suicide Bombers as Women Warriors: Making News through Mythical Archetypes," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2005): 607–22; Tamara Herath, *Women in Terrorism: Case of the LTTE* (SAGE Publications, 2012).

or region). This is to ensure that the subsequent CT and CVE policies and programs that affect women do so in a way that is not causing more harm than good;

- **National Action Plans in support of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions that focus on Women, Peace and Security should be better linked and complementary to the National Counter-terrorism and CVE strategies.** Similarly, regional and international policies and strategies should also make this explicit link at the policy level, and better coordinate at the programming level. However, this is not to say that including women in peace and security efforts necessarily or always counters violent extremism. Governments should work to identify the ways in which advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda can also make CVE policies and strategies more effective that fits their own country's context. For example, countries may develop programs for female police officers and/or better ensure that women's safety and security concerns (for example, sexually-based or domestic violent) are addressed in the community;³
- **Engaging women in CVE efforts, particularly in conflict zones, should be done in an indirect way (i.e. not necessarily labeled as CVE) to protect against securitizing trusted spaces and putting the lives of key influencers at risk.** While this is also the case with respect to engaging local partners in CVE in general, women and women's organizations should be recognized as one of the number of actors that may need discretion when labeling a work with them as CVE;
- **There are a number of good initiatives engaging women in CVE programs, but there is a significant lack of funding to scale up and expand these programs.** If the role of women in preventing violent extremism is seen as a policy priority, funding opportunities should be provided.

³ For example, see Holmer, Georgia and Fulco van Deventer, "Inclusive Approaches to Community Policing and CVE," United States Institute of Peace Special Report, September 2014, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR352_Inclusive-Approaches-to-Community-Policing-and-CVE.pdf