

ACADEMIC PAPER

GENDERED PATHWAYS  
TO RADICALIZATION  
AND DESISTANCE FROM  
VIOLENT EXTREMISM

LESSONS FROM EARLY-INTERVENTION  
PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



APRIL 2019  
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GLOBAL CENTER ON COOPERATIVE SECURITY

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**PEACE AND SECURITY SECTION  
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# INTRODUCTION

Women and girls, although relatively less represented in the ranks of terrorist fighters, have long played key roles as ideologues, facilitators, fund-raisers, and recruiters for violent extremist groups and have inspired others to join these groups. History offers plenty of examples of female involvement in political violence, but a certain fascination and disbelief continue to surround female violent extremists because women are often still viewed as homemakers and mothers, surprising society by the number of young girls and women joining the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

“[S]ociety, through its body of rules and its numerous institutions, has conventionally dictated [women’s] roles within the boundaries of militancy.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, the modalities of female participation in ISIL are unprecedented. The central role of family and the territorial ambitions of ISIL, creating a state with an independent infrastructure, recruiting not only fighters but individuals for a multiplicity of roles, including medics, police, mothers, and wives, allow for an intensified focus on female participation in violent extremism. Indeed, recent reports suggest that women are up to 20 percent of the contingent in ISIL-held territory.<sup>2</sup>

This brief explores the drivers of radicalization to and engagement in violent extremism and the factors of disengagement and desistance among women and girls by examining data generated through the United Kingdom’s Channel program.<sup>3</sup> Channel cases were chosen for this analysis because it is one of the longest running (since 2007) and most documented early-intervention programs<sup>4</sup> developed specifically to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism and violent extremism.<sup>5</sup> Limitations of the Channel program include the threshold for referrals, racial and religious bias in the referral process, the intent and content of interventions, and qualifications of intervention providers, as well as a lack of robust evaluation of its outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, most of the girls and women who have gone through the Channel program were inspired by Islamist groups such as ISIL, limiting the analysis in this brief to only one form of violent extremism. Similar limitations apply to the level of extrapolation of results outside of the United Kingdom.

This brief is based on in-depth interviews with Hadiya Masieh, who has worked with the Channel program as an intervention provider (IP) since 2010, in which she reflected on her assessments of 50 women and girls between the ages of 13 and 30 whom she mentored between 2013 and 2016.<sup>7</sup> Two additional IPs were surveyed for this research, but preferred to remain anonymous. Consultations with these IPs followed a structured and semistructured format. The questionnaire focused on radicalization and desistance processes aimed at identifying specific trends and indicators of gendered pathways of engagement in and disengagement from violent extremism. This analysis was conducted to determine if there are gendered pathways or factors that distinguish women’s engagement in and disengagement from ISIL and how intervention programs could be made more effective by accounting for these distinctions. The brief is structured and framed around four main areas of inquiry.

- What were the circumstances under which a young woman became involved with ISIL and ISIL-linked violent extremist groups or became inclined toward violent ideologies, and what were the modes and means by which a young woman came into contact or engaged with ISIL and ISIL-linked violent extremist groups or ideologies?
- What were the circumstances under which a young woman began questioning her beliefs or rethinking her support for ISIL and ISIL-linked violent extremist groups and ideologies?
- How did her attitude change over the duration of the intervention, and what factors have aided or obstructed successful outcomes?

- What were the postintervention measures adopted to provide continuity of support?

In November 2017, the UK Home Office estimated that, from April 2015 to March 2016, 21 percent of its referrals were female, 20 percent of the discussed cases were women, and 15 percent of these women received Channel support.<sup>8</sup> According to the estimates, a large portion of referred women and girls were predominately from areas of London, Luton, the West Midlands, and Lancashire; and they varied in ethnicity, economic status, and age, although most were under the age of 20.

The diverse roles women play in terrorism, violent extremism, and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts is increasingly recognized by security sector policymakers and counterterrorism practitioners around the world. There remain underlying assumptions, however, about female engagement in ISIL as being mostly passive, despite growing evidence of women's active roles, for example, receiving sniper training, becoming suicide bombers, and recruiting other women.<sup>9</sup> These assumptions often stem from insufficient focus on this issue and the historical lack of major roles, with some exceptions, for women in the formal structure or leadership of violent extremist groups.

# GENDERED PATHWAYS TO RADICALIZATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Gender norms and gender relations have a significant influence on issues related to isolation, self-esteem, and social, economic, and political opportunities.

For example, factors contributing to young women raised in Western countries joining ISIL can include “rejection of Western feminism; online contact with recruiters who offer marriage and adventure; peer or family influence; adherence to the ideology and politics of Daesh; naivety and romantic optimism; and the chance to be part of something new, exciting and illicit.”<sup>10</sup> Although men and women share factors, the mechanisms and their personal manifestation differ. Given that radicalization is often the culmination of economic, social, and political factors and all of these processes are gendered, so is the pathway of radicalization to and disengagement from violent extremism.

Normative expectations of women help explain why women seeking to join ISIL are more likely to travel with their families or in all-female groups.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly applicable in the case of ISIL, which places central importance on broad, culturally understood notions of traditional family values and started at a later point specifically targeting women in its recruitment strategy.<sup>12</sup> Intervention programs should account for gender expectations and not fall into the trap of stereotyping women as only being groomed or brainwashed or as predominantly passive in their radicalization. Masieh noted, “In more cases than not, the quest for female empowerment contributed to the women’s decision to support or join ISIL.”<sup>13</sup>

The following trends were identified predominantly through Masieh’s interactions with girls and women referred to her through the Channel program from 2013 to 2016. These trends include isolation due to restrictions in public spaces, alienation, inequality, and marginalization; imposed identity expectations;

longing for adventurism; and changing modes of engagement that support the surpassing of these circumstances.

## Isolation Due to Restrictions in Public Spaces, Alienation, Inequality, and Marginalization

### Foreign and Domestic Policy

The young women referred to Masieh through the Channel program were predominantly high achieving and secondary-school students.<sup>14</sup> As such, they were relatively well educated, politically aware, and often frustrated with foreign and national policies. Injustices that they, their community, and society as a whole are seemingly powerless to change add to their frustrations and feelings of helplessness. Many of Masieh’s clients ultimately subscribed to the utopian version of ISIL, which they believed would take care of those suffering, defend against Western powers that massacre Muslim civilians, and provide a form of Islamic lifestyle that cannot be lived in Western countries.

### Sense of Belonging

Masieh observed that recruiters seem to specifically target young women who have no family ties, tapping into the gendered expectations and culturally understood importance of the traditional family and filling this void by promising them a substitute family in ISIL. Many referrals were young women who lived in social care.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the promise of friendships and family-like ties was utilized by ISIL and used

in the early stages of the recruitment process. The strategic use of specific, culturally appropriate, and mutually understood words and terms can be used to facilitate relationship building and can influence social behavior.<sup>16</sup> Masieh noted that once recruiters gain their targets' trust and are perceived as credible voices, these individuals become easy to influence and manipulate. They offer an escape route and sell them the idea of a utopian dream: a place where they can practice their religion freely and not be subjected to marginalization or Islamophobia. For those clients who were less versed in religion, particularly young and impressionable people, recruiters sometimes served as their only point of religious reference.

### Social Behavioral and Mental Health Concerns

Another trend detected among the young women mentored by Masieh was recruiters' deftness at exploiting the behavioral and mental health of those targeted for recruitment. Recruiters tailored their approach to an individual's personal and emotional problems. For example, recruiters would take advantage of a target suffering from depression by pitching uplifting messages and holding out the promise of a better life. Masieh found that recruiters actively looked for signs and were quick to notice and exploit a target's perceived mental health. Recruiters tried to "counsel" such individuals and offer them the alternative of life in ISIL territory where, they were told, they would be happier and "free from sadness" with a new-found purpose in life.<sup>17</sup>

### Imposed Identity Expectations and Gendered Practices of Religious Identity

Recruiters have shown a tendency to target newly converted Muslims in the hope of manipulating their motivation and commitment to their community and faith.<sup>18</sup> Newly converted or observant targets may be actively seeking ways to expand their spiritual knowledge and direct their devotional energies.<sup>19</sup> A significant number of cases involved converts who were fervent and ready to prove their devotion.<sup>20</sup> Masieh observed that her clients felt the need to prove themselves and be accepted into a community.

Converts can equally, if not more extensively, be the target of marginalization and discrimination, being asked or forced to explain and justify their choice to convert to Islam. In combination with gendered practices, including the wear of religious garments, women become the target of marginalization. Muslim converts who were directly contacted by ISIL indicated that they followed a similar path. Masieh's clients indicated that they would first research the faith online as they often were not confident enough to enter their local mosques alone and felt it was more convenient to learn from the comfort of their homes. The majority of Masieh's clients between the ages of 18 and 25 who converted to Islam described an active attempt by recruiters to contact them to offer them the "true and only way" to practice their faith. Through these interactions, these women were able to feel like they were pursuing their learning. Masieh noted that her clients grew to trust and rely on the sources and materials provided to them by recruiters to the exclusion of others.

### Longing for Empowerment and Adventurism

Masieh's clients described a strong desire for empowerment and adventure, particularly influenced by the quest to improve their participation in public discourse and gain control over their own lives. They expressed the feeling of being trapped between seemingly equalizing opportunities, such as higher education and the obvious gender inequalities in other parts of their lives, including structural gender inequalities, on family, community, and national levels. Contradicting mainstream notions and "echoing the arguments of feminist scholar Nancy Frazer ..., there is implicit in the narrative of these women to call to more beyond identity[-] and right[-]based approaches to social justice towards a redistributive agenda in which gender and rights are critical axes."<sup>21</sup>

ISIL has recognized these frustrations and used its propaganda to address Western audiences. "As such, the editors of Dabiq and Dar al-Islam may have decided to adopt a tone that projected female empowerment in the hope of attracting women to travel to the caliphate."<sup>22</sup>



## Modes of Engagement

Most of Masieh's referrals stated that their initial contact with recruiters was online, with interactions often spanning months. Particularly "for women, the biggest challenge in getting involved in political violence may be overcoming barriers to participation."<sup>23</sup> The majority of Masieh's clients were contacted by recruiters after their online interests had been monitored. Online recruitment of girls and young women is proportionately more prevalent than their male counterparts as they often face restrictions in public spaces due to societal gender norms. For example, women who wear religious garments in public in the United Kingdom can face suspicion and discrimination. Women's online engagement gives them a greater sense of freedom. "The ability of social media to give female terrorists an unedited voice about their involvement in conflict may create a breakthrough for terrorism researchers. Analysts can track their narratives through social media, and, if these women take an operational role, additional information can be gleaned from their writings to understand their motives."<sup>24</sup>

Many referrals interacted with recruiters over social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Google Plus, as well as various messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Kik Messenger, and Surespot.<sup>25</sup> The internet and social media created an equalitarian space for women. Very few clients of Masieh came into contact with recruiters through offline engagements, but individuals who came into contact with them over the internet were usually introduced by friends that they know offline. These friends would come into contact with violent extremist groups online and speak about their encounters with their friends at school or in their mosques, widening the reach of recruitment networks. Further research suggests that "social networking may play a crucial role in getting women involved in terrorist organizations. Social networking sites have 'greatly expanded video-sharing, instant-messaging, and blogging. This facilitated the distribution of the narrative of the Al

Qaeda movement far more widely; it allowed for more expressive interaction among like-minded individuals, for instance through video communication and sharing.' This has allowed previously neglected demographics, like women, to become involved in the discussion."<sup>26</sup>

Recruiters tailor their engagement and tactics to individuals based on personal information they uncover about hobbies and desires.<sup>27</sup> Some young women are told that they can continue their university studies, while others are promised economic incentives such as free housing. An individual who had a passion for water sports and kayaking was told that there was a diving school and she would be allowed to continue her hobbies in ISIL territory. The recruitment process is far more complex than a simple sales pitch based on a target's hobby, but a greater underlying strategy is deployed, creating interpersonal rapport with the target and a sense of belonging in the individual.

As observed by the IPs, women's engagement with and in the public space is impacting their online behavior. Within highly gendered recruitment strategies of violent extremist groups such as ISIL, women's rights, empowerment, and place in society play a central role. Radicalization of women appears to be less visible, which the IPs see connected to traditional, culturally framed gender norms and expectations.<sup>28</sup> For example, the recruitment of boys and men can more easily occur in the street or in mosques, while the recruitment of women and girls tends to take place in the private sphere and online. These findings coincide with the IPs' observations and the role of online platforms in the recruitment process, as well as women's participation in the so-called alt-right movement in the United States. Writer Seyward Darby observes that "women must perform to justify participating in a movement so hostile to their freedoms,"<sup>29</sup> often willing to prove their devotion through any means necessary to others. Women feeling a sense of empowerment in the newly found environment are particularly eager to prove themselves to the group.

# GENDERED PATHWAYS TO DESISTANCE AND DISENGAGEMENT

Research on terrorist disengagement focuses less on gendered aspects and the implications for P/CVE policy and programming. In addition, studies, including monitoring and evaluation results that focus on voluntary or governmental exit programs, generally concentrate on males or a combination of males and females. There are no empirical studies on government-led exit programs specifically targeted toward females.

Just as with initial engagement, the disengagement process is transformative in nature, reinventing and reconnecting with oneself. As such, similar push and pull factors are relevant to men and women (table 1).<sup>30</sup> Many individuals will need time and support to recognize and develop multiple aspects of identity to

discover where they belong.<sup>31</sup> IP observations and supporting research, however, point to the role of social bonds and networks playing a far more important role for women than men. “They are much more likely to base their moral reasoning on caring relationships.”<sup>32</sup>

**TABLE 1.**  
**Push and Pull Factors Related to Desistance and Disengagement**

Push Factors	Pull Factors
Unmet expectations	Competing loyalties
Disillusionment with strategy or action	Positive personal interactions and connections
Disillusionment with personnel	Employment and educational demands or opportunities
Difficulty adapting to clandestine lifestyle	Desire to marry and establish a family or family demands
Inability to cope with physiological and psychological effects of violence	Financial incentives
Evolution of politics and ideology	Amnesty
Burnout	

Although these factors apply to men and women, the IPs identified the following trends during the early intervention stage with their female clients, observing that confidence building and the creation of new social bonds in particular play a pivotal role for female pathways to desistance and disengagement.

Encouraging a process of questioning one's political and ideological positions can be a crucial first step of disengagement. The IPs emphasized that the consideration of alternative perspectives is best urged gradually over a prolonged time. In their experience, challenging and criticizing an individual too early in an intervention can obstruct successful outcomes. Their clients existed in a community convinced of and constantly reinforcing the idea of a utopian Islamic state through frequent interaction with recruiters and those who traveled to ISIL-controlled territory.

The women started to change their views when the IPs challenged them after they realized that they were persuaded into believing the ISIL narrative. Masieh, for example, introduced the women to the Khawarij, a militant political faction that arose to contest the succession of leadership in the early Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad on which many Muslim jurists have drawn to describe ISIL and other violent extremists groups whose beliefs and practices are antithetical to Islam.

Distancing themselves from the violent extremist environment while being presented with other interpretations and sources of religious texts helped women to rethink their engagement with ISIL. Equipping them with additional sources of information before they make decisions further helped to change their attitudes (box 1).

## Familial and Social Reconnections

The realization that they have been gullible and that recruiters have lied to them is often another cause for changing attitudes. This can be quite challenging to some who have been isolated and solely dependent on the friendship of their recruiters and other group members to feel less alone. It is the IP's role to support the creation of new friendships or reengage existing positive friendships.<sup>33</sup> Active participation in family,

work, community, or prosocial activities are examples of different aspects of a nonviolent action orientation.

Relationships are a primary vehicle for disengagement from violent extremism and appear to be what best enables former violent extremists to adopt a new sense of self and belonging elsewhere in society.<sup>34</sup> Social ties also can be an anchor for those in the early stages of intervention. Indeed, those former violent extremists who have reintegrated most successfully and who report feeling most connected with mainstream society have made significant changes in six domains: social relations, coping, identity, ideology, action orientation, and disillusionment.<sup>35</sup> Masieh often introduced her clients to local women's groups, where they could meet and discuss religion in a safe environment. The discussions also were often held in mosques during weekly organized talks or youth centers. The mentor may have to attend the facility with them initially, particularly when individuals were dependent solely on their online friendships. Additionally, interests and hobbies are identified as an opportunity to connect with others.

## Continuous Mentorship

Mentoring is critical in the disengagement process because it can help promote and enhance empathy, confidence, relationship skills, responsibility, and introspection about one's actions and life history. Furthermore, religious and ideological support can reduce the attraction of the extremist narrative, and practical support in establishing a stable environment and daily routine can foster and sustain desistance and disengagement. Psychological support and counseling can address struggles with existential questions and mental health issues, as well as making sense of things and finding a meaningful place in society.<sup>36</sup>

The wish to proceed with a normal life or a demonstrated desire to draw or write about their experiences is a sign of a successful disengagement process. Another is the desire of clients to maintain a relationship with their IP after the end of the formal process. Equally important, however, is maintaining a mentor relationship that is not institutionalized, in the form of friendship or family support. Building

**BOX 1.****The Case of Ms. X.**

Ms. X had previously heard of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and wanted to learn more after extensively following news coverage in the United Kingdom. Only 13 years old, she started tweeting about her interest in the hope of finding people to answer some of her questions. A young woman responded to one of her tweets. Over the following weeks, a friendship developed between the two. Ms. X described a sense of loneliness and isolation before meeting the young woman on Twitter. Her mother was on bed rest due a complicated pregnancy, and her father worked most of the time to support the family.

Her new friend introduced Ms. X to more people, and Ms. X started using WhatsApp and Kik Messenger to stay in touch with her new friends, most of whom were based in the United Kingdom.

After several months, one of her friends asked her to steal money from her father to help one of their mutual friends travel to Syria. Although initially unsettled, she was not opposed to the idea herself, having discussed and heard about her friend's reasoning behind the decision to travel. Police officers showed up at her front door shortly thereafter; they had tracked her online engagement since her initial Twitter posting. After assessments and evaluation, she started to work with an intervention provider (IP).

Particularly in Ms. X's position, the IP played a key role, as a newfound confidant and friend. Over time, Ms. X's views of ISIL changed, realizing the violence used by ISIL and other groups was not justifiable and that she came very close to losing her own family. The IP stayed in touch with Ms. X after the official intervention process ended and introduced her to a variety of groups and activities based on her interests, including sports clubs and Koran classes. The IP and Ms. X are still in touch from time to time.

and maintaining relationships with individuals who support and reinforce nondeviant behavior are vital to constructing a noncriminal identity.<sup>37</sup>

As a result, after an intervention ends, Masieh offers the individual the option of keeping in touch. A few have preferred not to maintain the relationship because they may not be keen to be seen to have continued links with the authorities, but in most cases, the individuals are happy to keep in touch. Very few decide to cut ties straight away, and they have the ability to reach out if they start to have doubts or need to speak to someone. The mentor must help the individual identify the groups and activities in her local areas where she can meet people in a safe environment. These can include a range of activities, including the search for new employment and character-building programs.

Masieh has worked with programs such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which seeks to give young people alternatives and a sense of belonging through

the use of wilderness skills and physical activities, and the Prince's Trust, which focuses on team-building skills.<sup>38</sup> Outings to museums, exhibitions, and other activities are used to build new relationships. At the core of these programs lays the assumption that, through creating and supporting positive relationships, the individual will become more resilient to violent extremism. According to Masieh, several of her cases genuinely benefited from participating in these schemes. They have said that these programs supported their process of distancing themselves and disengaging from violent extremist narratives. These activities are inclusive for all youth regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, reducing any sense of isolation or marginalization. Depending on their personal experiences and socialization prior to entering a violent extremist group, some individuals will need support in finding constructive and lawful ways to pursue their cause or otherwise engage in a prosocial lifestyle. Providing educational or vocational training may prove useful in this area.

# DISCUSSION

**A larger sample size of primary data is needed to develop more authoritative conclusions on individual radicalization and disengagement processes beyond this specific group of girls and women in the United Kingdom.**

Interviews with individuals who have joined ISIL and other groups, individuals who have disengaged, and individuals who have chosen not to leave will add valuable insights to understand their decision-making process. Further research about failed recruitment attempts is encouraged, and access to this data should be made available to researchers and academics.

In addition, comparative studies, including data on male and female recruits from the same communities, as well as studies of different forms of violent extremism, should be conducted. This could include relational analysis of gender as part of social identity. Further research analyzing the correlation between state responses and the impact of counterterrorism policies on disengagement processes should be considered.

Early-intervention programs should include an analysis not only of the individual risk factors but also of cultural and social identities and their relationship to each other.<sup>39</sup> Cultural identity represents the specific values a person incorporates throughout life as guiding principles for behavior. Such values are internalized perspectives derived from multiple sources, including involvement affinity with national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and educational communities, exposure through various media, and participation in personal social networks. Social identity represents the self-ascribed significance attached to the social groups to which one belongs and with which one interacts directly, along with the feelings associated with participation in these groups' activities. Social identity also reflects the beliefs and feelings about those groups that one perceives as standing in opposition to the groups with which one is affiliated, that is, groups that are "not us." Whereas the values comprising cultural identity are abstract and may be vague, the loyalties to those groups associated with one's social identity are likely to be intense and specific.

Gender-sensitive research could also help policymakers and practitioners broaden the discussion on gender in a more sophisticated manner. Oversimplified stereotypes can be harmful to the individual and allow female violent extremists to navigate security measures more easily because they are not perceived to be a threat. Furthermore, "[w]hile gender can also be understood as 'the socially constructed expectation that persons perceived to be members of a biological sex category will have certain characteristics', the majority of [countering violent extremism] work incorporating gender perspective primarily addresses the inclusion of women and/or girls."<sup>40</sup> These efforts are crucial and should continue to be supported, but a more complex conversation around gender, gender relations, and gender norms should be considered.

As highlighted by the Channel cases and supporting research, joining a terrorist group can be based on the quest for empowerment. Violent extremist groups such as ISIL have provided a source of empowerment for women, particularly young women, but societies have not managed to offer equal opportunities and treatment. Examples for good practices include a stronger focus on education and support of roles, including leadership and decision-making positions, for women in law enforcement and local administrations. Other examples include facilitating alternative mechanisms for women and men to claim their rights and have their grievances heard while ensuring accountability mechanisms.<sup>41</sup> "For instance, it is hard to argue that a woman living in an oppressive society without options is not experiencing some element of political coercion, at least in the sense that their options are extremely limited."<sup>42</sup>

There is a need to more effectively combine online and offline P/CVE actions. Arguably, the internet has removed some barriers for women's political participation; but counternarratives, which receive increasing

attention, do not address underlying root causes of violent extremism. Particularly institutionalized social structures that promote female inequality and dependency cannot be addressed by counternarratives and are not sufficient as a standalone approach to prevention of violent extremism.

The findings highlight the need to share good practices in multiagency approaches. Different actors have specific roles in the disengagement process, which includes in the United Kingdom the involvement of voluntary organizations such as Inspire, the Woman Against Radicalisation Network, and the

Henna Foundation. Involving a diversity of actors seems to be successful,<sup>43</sup> but this approach is only sustainable if everyone involved receives specific training and learns to trust and communicate with each other for the best interest of the individual at hand. Although the UK government has attempted to include gender-relevant P/CVE programming, with projects such as “community groups focusing on women and mosque empowerment” in 2005, the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group in 2007, and Prevent Tragedies in 2014, the Channel process itself has no explicit focus on gender.

## CONCLUSION

**This brief expands and deepens the evidence base on the drivers of violent extremism and factors of disengagement and desistance among women and girls from the United Kingdom associated with ISIL.**

It attempts to enhance understanding of the need for gender-sensitive interventions that address the specific needs of women and girls. Some key themes have emerged that should be considered when designing or revising early P/CVE intervention programs to account for the needs of women and girls.

First, men and women share many of the same push and pull factors that lead to engaging with violent extremism, although they differ in their extent and correlation from person to person. Disengagement is an individual process that must account for the complexity of an individual’s personality, including gendered social expectations and identity traits.

Second, neglecting gendered pathways to radicalization, engagement, desistance, and disengagement

can have crucial negative impacts for prevention or exit, disengagement, and reintegration programs. Policies that neglect the importance of a more complex and nuanced gender debate can create further human rights violations and ultimately serve as a breeding ground for further recruitment by deepening or advancing marginalization and discrimination. Supporting equality and particularly women’s agency can prevent radicalization to violent extremism. “Social structures that promote female inequality and dependency provide more pressures that could attract a radicalized female to suicide terrorism.”<sup>44</sup> These structures can hinder the ability of communities to become or remain resilient to violent extremism recruitment.



# ENDNOTES

- 1 Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 94–102.
- 2 Sofia Patel, "The Sultanate of Women: Exploring Female Roles in Perpetrating and Preventing Violent Extremism," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2017, [https://s3-ap-south-east-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/SR100\\_Sultanate-of-women\\_v2.pdf?7BtsSZBgl0DezLXkbPXgQXW.A5UiiYFz](https://s3-ap-south-east-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/SR100_Sultanate-of-women_v2.pdf?7BtsSZBgl0DezLXkbPXgQXW.A5UiiYFz).
- 3 Radicalization to violent extremism refers to the process of coming to support or commit violence on behalf of a group, cause, or ideology advocating political or social change. Engagement refers to the process of becoming interested or involved in a violent extremist group, cause, or ideology, while disengagement is a behavioral move away from a group, cause, or ideology that justifies violence to bring about political or social change. Desistance is the cessation of involvement in acts of violent extremism.
- 4 Early intervention programs are designed to "dissuade, counsel, and mentor individuals at risk of committing to extremist violence." Peter Romaniuk, "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned From the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism," *Global Center on Cooperative Security*, September 2015, p. 4, [https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work\\_2015.pdf](https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work_2015.pdf).
- 5 See Amy Thornton and Noémie Bouhana, "Preventing Radicalization in the UK: Expanding the Knowledge-Base on the Channel Programme," *Policing*, 7 June 2017; Open Society Justice Initiative, "Eroding Trust: The UK's Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education," Open Society Foundations, 2016, [https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/eroding-trust-20161017\\_0.pdf](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/eroding-trust-20161017_0.pdf); Joana Cook, "Avoiding the Pitfalls of Prevent," Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2017, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/avoiding-the-pitfalls-of-prevent/>.
- 6 Thornton and Bouhana, "Preventing Radicalization in the UK."
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