PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: GENDER PERSPECTIVES AND WOMEN'S ROLES

JACQUI TRUE AND SRI EDDYONO[1]

This policy brief explores the links between women's roles and perceptions, gender relations and the spread of fundamentalist ideologies and extremist violence. It synthesises new research evidence on the participation and leadership of women and women-led organisations in strategies to prevent violent extremism (PVE) based on a pilot project in Indonesia. In doing so, it directly addresses the lack of gendered analysis of counter-terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE) and PVE dynamics and agendas in South-East Asia.

Indonesia was chosen as the case for this research due to its significance as the world's largest Muslim majority state, its history of Islamic fundamentalism leading to conflict and the participation of it citizens in global jihadi networks, and its strong democratic women's movement. Four research sites within Indonesia were selected to ensure variation in urban/rural, conflict and non-conflict-affected settings and for their varying proximity to past political violence or terrorist events, and known extremist jihadi networks.

A rigorous methodology was developed to examine women's perceptions of violent extremism, and their contributions and challenges in its prevention. Through almost 100 interviews and focus groups the research team engaged with a diversity of women and women's perspectives on their roles as family members, teachers, workers, religious leaders and students and as members of civil society. Participants were asked about their perceptions and experiences of fundamentalist ideologies and extremist violence; their observations of warning signs for rising extremism and terrorist violence; and how, in what ways, and why they have been involved in countering or preventing extremist attitudes and behaviors.

Four overarching research findings emerged from this research (and are further elucidated at the end of this document):

1) Everyday gender- specific warning signs: Gender-specific warning signs were observed in everyday life and were critical early indicators of fundamentalism and extremist behaviour and violence. This included a change in social norms relating to women and girls' dress, veiling, mobility and religious practices. While the degree of constraint being imposed upon women varied across the sites, this behaviour was increasingly coercively enforced by extremist actors and/or seen as a form of protection employed by women in response to rising extremism. The research found that observing and responding to the activities of Islamist groups in everyday life is as important as responding to major terrorist events in terms of

addressing this issue.

2) Women's agency in preventing and countering violent extremism: The research revealed an impressive variety of ways in which women are individually and collectively acting to prevent violent extremism. There exists great potential to scale up the support and financing for their activities, this will likely enhance their impact on preventing extremist and terrorist related activity and violence. Women's capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism extends far beyond their family roles. For instance, many women-led PVE activities in civil society and social and religious settings remain 'under the radar.' Yet they are making an important impact in shaping the decisions of community members to refrain from fundamentalist activities. Moreover, women's leadership and authority within their workplaces and communities - including in state, religious, women's and youth networks - itself represents a challenge to fundamentalist ideologies that script men as leaders and women as passive members of society.

3) Gender equality and religious counter-discourses: Promoting gender equality is potentially the single most powerful counter-discourse to extremist interpretations of religion. Women ulamas (religious leaders), in particular, are playing crucial roles in challenging extremist ideologies and individuals, and

drawing on Islamic teachings and texts that promote tolerance and gender equality. Promoting gender equality within the family and community are primary preventative factor for extremist behaviour, as family norms and structures that exemplify equality confront fundamentalist views that hold women as subordinate to men.

4) Building a prevention-focused movement: Investing in women's political and social participation and leadership has the potential to prevent violent extremism in Indonesia and in South-East Asia. This is because women bring distinct perspectives and experiences on 'security' -

encompassing security within the family and community. Supporting women's initiatives to identify and prevent extremist behavior- through training and networking may in turn encourage women's greater participation in these initiatives and enhance the overall impact of women's PVE efforts. Enabling women and women- led organisations to participate in the development of CT, CVE and PVE strategies may improve the effectiveness of those strategies and their broader reach. At present, however, there are no explicit government or intergovernmental frameworks and/or institutional mechanisms for recognising and supporting women's PVE roles and

activities in Indonesia or in South-East Asia.

WPS AND CVE FRAMEWORKS

Violent extremism and acts of terrorism are a major threat to global peace and security. In South-East Asia, these are having a visible, and growing, impact on women and girls' security. Although there is substantial awareness of the gendered and unequal dynamics and impacts of armed conflict on men and women, there remains far less understanding of the gender specific causes and consequences of violent extremism. In South-East Asia, there is a paucity of research,

BOX 1.

2000: UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security first stressed the critical contributions of women and women's organisations to conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building

2013: UNSC Resolution 2122 introduced terrorism to the WPS agenda identifying that women can play important roles in countering violent extremism and delegitimising and reducing support for extremist groups

2013: UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN CTED) mandate renewed through passing of UNSCR 2129. Includes: "increase its attention to women, peace and security issues in all relevant thematic areas of work on its agenda, including in threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts" (UN Security Council 2013).

September 2014: UNSC Resolution 2178, focuses on the emerging threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and calls for the need to empower women as a prevention response and mitigating factor to the spread of violent extremism and radicalization (UN Security Council 2014a).

October 2014: Security Council Open Debate on WPS, a Presidential Statement was issued that reiterated the role of women's participation and empowerment as a buffer to the spread of extremism, while also noting the specific consequences of violent extremism on the rights of women and girls (UN Security Council 2014b).

October 2015: UNSCR 2242 built on the connection between the CT/CVE and WPS agendas emphasising a gender perspective on prevention and opportunities for experienced women to participate in high-level decision-making where strategies are designed and implemented (see Operative paragraphs in note 3).

October 2015: Global Study on the Implementation of 1325 raises the issue of rising cultural and religious fundamentalisms and the connections to the WPS agenda as an important issue for women's organisations working in the Asia Pacific region based on consultations with them[3].

December 2016: UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism identified gender equality and empowering women as one of its seven priority areas for action.

2016: Fifth review resolution of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy - adopted by consensus in September 2006 - called upon all UN Member States to empower women and consider the impact of counter terrorism measures on women's human rights and women's organizations and consider providing funds within these efforts to further women's rights and empowerment.

information as well as programming and policy-relevant resources on the contributions of women to violent extremism and its prevention. There is a further lack of engagement with women and women's groups working against fundamentalism and violence in the development of CVE and CT strategies.

The purpose of this research project was to identify how commitments under the international Women, Peace and Security agenda[2] and the CT and CVE agendas can be brought together, through the lens of a specific country case study. In recent years there has been increasing international policy attention on the importance of understanding the gender dynamics of violent extremism, as summarized in *Box 1.*

In order to implement these international commitments in South-East Asia, an evidence based and nuanced gender perspective is required to design, and redesign, CVE policies and programmes. The key research findings of this project begin to provide this deeper evidence base that connects systemic gender-based discrimination and extremism. They indicate both the challenges and the lessons learned on CVE and PVE from a gender perspective that has taken into account women's diverse roles and activities. As such, they can support the development of more effective, gender-aware national and regional CT/CVE and WPS policies with the active participation of women and women-led organisations.

'COUNTERING' VERSUS 'PREVENTING' VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This research used gender analysis to explore gendered ideas and gender-specific strategies of fundamentalist and extremist groups and to examine women's perceptions and experiences of, and their approaches to negotiating and preventing, violent extremism. The purchase of gender analysis in the study of violent extremism is threefold:
1. A gender perspective broadens the analysis of terrorism and violent extremism beyond an exclusive focus on response to major terrorist attacks and events to consider the everyday violence and extremism that is typically hidden 'under the radar'. This includes community tensions and confrontation, domestic, gender-based harassment and violence (e.g. Sjoberg 2015). Such an approach is crucial in order to prevent extremism well before it becomes violent and leads to acts of terrorism. Indeed, everyday violence, including violence that women face, should be a cause for alarm and needs to be pre-empted.

2. Gender analysis provides insight into the private sphere of family and intimate relations, which with few exceptions has largely remained outside of CT/CVE strategy and programming. Women's traditional gender-specific roles and engagements in the family and community give them particular access to this realm.

3. Gender analysis enables deeper exploration of hidden structures and forms of power, and thus asking gender-sensitive questions and probing with a gender lens can reveal both visible, and less visible, warning signs for extremism and violence.

Most research to date examining women's roles and the gender dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism in Indonesia has focused either on the radicalisation of women (IPAC 2017; also Parashar 2011) or on initiatives with wives and mothers of terrorists, or former terrorists in prison (Chowdhury et al 2016; YPP 2016; Varagur 2017). Such research helps to understand strategies for countering terrorism and violent extremism once it is already a problem or identified as a threat. It is less helpful in identifying the role of gender dynamics and gender relations as part of the root causes of extremism, as well as pathways that lead to violence and non-violence, that are crucial for developing long-term prevention strategies. If the intention is to prevent terrorism and violent extremism, then it is social conditions that need to be investigated and changed to reduce the propensity for violence.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuum of Fundamentalism, Extremism and Violent Extremism

- Extremism exists in all research sites, and women unanimously expressed opposition to the use of violence.
- Relationship between the spread of fundamentalist political ideologies and groups and rising extremism - including violent forms - was cited by most participants.
- Religious or Islamic fundamentalism was connected to a sense of safety and to patriarchal protection/order:
- Consensus among research participants that fundamentalism is a problem when force is used.
- Greatest contestation of any causal relationship between fundamentalism and violent extremism in Jakarta.

Recommendation For All Actors

- Support initiatives that observe and respond to activities of Islamist groups in everyday life as a key terrorism prevention strategy.

Everyday Warning Signs

Four warning signs were identified in the research: the shifting use of the hijab; constraints on women's mobility and exclusiveness of mosques; social naming and 'hate crimes'; threats or acts of gender-based violence:

- Shifting use of the hijab: Across all sites, women's concern for warning signs of radicalisation is the judgement as well as the coercive direction about what not to wear. The context-specific but moving target of the hijab especially the Shari hijab across all research sites was seen as a warning sign for radicalisation.
- Constraints on women's and girls' mobility in everyday life can be a warning sign and potentially defined as a form of violence. There are a number of religious practices that are constraining women and girls' mobility and rights in public spaces, including in mosques (with increasing social exclusion identified at all sites, as well as Friday prayers spreading messages of intolerance) at work and at school.
- Social naming and hate speech against those who follow a different religion is being shared more openly through social media and TV. Further, there is an increasing degree and greater visibility of intolerant views and behaviour (Wardah 2015), including those targeted at sexual minorities such as transgender individuals and LGBTQI groups, religious minorities such as Ahmadiyah, Christian, Shiah, and indigenous peoples, as well as Islamist groups threatening women activists that campaign against violence against women.
- Gender-based violence as a warning sign of radicalisation was not explicitly explored in the research, however it was identified – both violence against women and girls (VAW) and intolerance toward LGBTQI groups in the community were recognised as warning signs for violent extremism in all sites, as was early marriage.

Recommendation For All Actors

- Observing and responding to activities of Islamist groups in everyday life – including in the four gender specific warning signs of – should be integrated into PVE strategies.
- Changes in women's dress and mobility should be systematically monitored at the community level to inform a grounded approach to PVE and the promotion of tolerance and women's rights.

Recommendation For Security Sector, including police, military, defence policy and justice

Security sector actors, including the military, police and justice sector, must ensure political and civil rights of citizens are upheld and provide protection especially

Women's Agency in Preventing and Countering Extremism

Women are individually and collectively acting to prevent violent extremism in many ways:

- Women's Family Activism: Women are often the first responders in their families and communities to address extremism.
- The role of mothers, sisters and daughters in opposing, countering or preventing extremism within the family (particularly of male family members) is increasingly documented. Supporting and empowering women to be attentive to the potential of family members being influenced by extremist ideas and/or recruited by extremist groups remains a critical prevention strategy.
- Empowering women and men, as parents, is a critical prevention strategy.

- Women's Educational Empowerment and Leadership: Women leaders, and civil society organisations led by women, are strongly engaged in prevention-focused educational initiatives - that counter fundamentalist groups' own educational strategies and recruitment.
- Education that teaches critical thinking and analysis has major impacts on empowering individual women and women leaders to break through fundamentalist ideology and develop counter-discourses.
- Women's Peacebuilding: Women's capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism also extends far beyond their family roles. Many women-led PVE activities remain 'under the radar', including their leadership and authority within workplaces and communities - including state, religious, women's and youth networks - which represents a challenge to fundamentalist ideologies about gender roles and relations.

Recommendations For All Actors

- Initiatives supporting women and women's organisations to prevent extremism should be resourced and scaled up, in particular those where women are working directly with women in communities; are utilising a religious framework; are strengthening women's religious leadership; and are working closely with men.
- Governments should prioritise support for and work with community organisations in which women participate and often lead, rather than partnering only with often self-proclaimed community leaders or large, well-established religious organisations, where men are most often in positions of leadership or power.
- Support and enable women

and women's organisations to participate in the development of CT and CVE strategies, which is likely to improve the effectiveness of those strategies.

Recommendations for Governments and International Organisations

- A Regional ASEAN Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security is urgently needed to mobilise and coordinate women's participation in the development of CT/CVE strategies and to promote lessons learned across communities and to ensure robust and nuanced integration of the CT and CVE agendas as relevant to the ASEAN region[4].
- Existing and future National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in the South-East Asian region could be more comprehensive by including PVE and CVE, given the direct and negative influence of violent extremism on women's security.
- Governments must support the role of women, girls and women's organisations in discussions and negotiations relating to conflict resolution, peace-building, CT and CVE, particularly women living in state-identified radical territories.
- Promote and support women to actively participate in the security sector, which is likely to positively influence the work of women in the community countering violent extremism.

Recommendations For the Australian Government

- Ensure the planning, development and implementation of the Australian government's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security incorporates international normative developments on gender and CVE; includes gender-aware and evidenced-based analysis relating to the gender dynamics of CVE/PVE; includes women as decision-makers in all policy responses and provides long-term financing and support for women's organisations engaged in CVE/PVE work.
- Strengthen regional financial assistance to women's groups in the South-East Asia facing related threats of violent extremisms
- Ensure Australia's funding to the Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action incorporates long term funding to women's rights organisations engaged in CVE/PVE-related work, as well as research and capacity building to support efforts across different regions of the world.

'If women are not actively involved in the debate, they would be overwhelmed by the gender-biased tafsir [interpretation of Islamic teachings]'

Promoting gender equality and religious counter-discourses

Three strategies are integral to the work of women's organisations to promote tolerance and prevent extremism:

- Working directly with women in communities through a human rights and/or religious approach: Women's organisations in all research sites are engaged in reinterpreting Islamic religious texts and challenging the ideological basis for violent extremism - which is linked to rigid, patriarchal understandings of Islam.
- Strengthening women's leadership in community, women's organisation as well as religious leadership: Women's participation and representation in religious institutions and religious teachings is crucial to transform the cultural basis for extremism, and justifications for gender-based violence. Governments should prioritise support for

and work with community organisations in which women participate and often lead, rather than partnering only with often self-proclaimed community leaders or large, well-established religious organisations, where men are most often in positions of leadership or power.

- Working together with men: Working with women and men religious leaders and their organisations is an effective way for the government to reach grassroots communities to spread messages of tolerance, given their extensive connections.

Recommendations For All Actors

- Promoting gender equality is potentially the single most powerful counter-discourse to extremist interpretations of religion, in both theory and practice.
- Providing education on the importance of gender equality and enabling critical engagement with religious texts within religious communities and organisations is a crucial strategy for promoting a culture of tolerance and peace.
- Empower women leaders which includes women religious leaders to interpret religious texts and engage with communities should be a major focus of PVE initiatives.
- Supporting counter-discourse by religious leaders, especially women religious leaders, needs to be scaled up and supported across media and social media platforms.

Recommendations For the Indonesian Government

- The government should increase funding to join up and scale up counter-discourses and prevention activities to have a greater impact, and to enhance coordination of those activities.
- The government should ensure that CVE and PVE interventions are tailored and context-specific for major urban areas – for instance, Jakarta requires particular attention given its unique political dynamics and influence on other Provinces.
- Supporting both men and women migrant workers, including education on gender equality norms, is an important strategy for preventing extremist behaviour for those that work away from home and social networks, and spouses at home aiming to counter extremist influences in their community and family.

Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism, to ensure the that all planning, design and implementation of CVE-related investments includes context-specific and robust gender analysis.
- In Indonesia, ensure all CVE related development programming contains strong gender analysis and that monitoring is supported by action research exploring gender dynamics.
- The government should continue to enhance policy, program and research engagement on integrating gender analysis and gender perspectives into Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE) and Counter-Terrorism (CT) work, ensuring regular engagement with Australian, regional and international research institutions and civil society, including refugee, migrant and diaspora women in Australia, to develop evidence-informed policy and program work across government.

Building a prevention focused movement

- A broad PVE movement could be built across gender equality, women's rights, human rights, pluralist religious organisations and LGBTI groups.
- CVE/PVE interventions could leverage learning from peace-building initiatives in areas prone to radicalisation.
- Challenges in building a prevention-focused movement include limited government capacity to coordinate non-violent approaches to CVE/PVE and the lack of available funding for non-violent approaches.
- Most PVE initiatives identified in this research project were scattered and small scale and need to be significantly scaled up.

Recommendations For All Actors

- Engaging men: Engage men in their roles as husbands and fathers, including through parenting education that includes education on gender equality.

Recommendations For All Governments

- Governments should mainstream a gender perspective into all national and sub-national CVE programming and policies.
- Governments should ensure long term and sustainable support for women's initiatives at the community level as part of PVE and CVE strategies and programming, both in conflict and post conflict settings.
- Government actors must uphold civil and political rights of citizens, including women's rights to freedom of movement, dress, association and religious practice as well as hold perpetrators accountable for violations of women's human rights.

> "If you want to know what the security situation is, what the indicators of safety are, don't ask the military, don't ask the government, ask the women."

Recommendations For the Australian Government

- Invest in technical expertise on gender and PVE/CVE within DFAT, including as part of the Indonesia program, the Gender Equality Branch and as part of the Australian Civilian Corps Standby Cadre to provide policy and programmatic advice.
- Update or provide complimentary guidance and resources to DFAT's 2017 framework, Development

- Continue to playing a leadership role advancing integration of the Women, Peace and CVE agendas within the UN Security Council and other international and multilateral for a in which Australia is engaged and has scope to influence, including in the UN General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and in the Commission on the Status of Women.

- States must not give over their roles in CVE and PVE to civil society, community initiatives or international donors. Support to communities must be clearly defined to ensure it does not justify less state involvement and/or result in women bearing additional burdens of volunteer community work.
- Governments should recognise the potential of CT/CVE funding to either strengthen or undermine gender equality and peace – by funding militarised responses rather than community-level prevention initiatives. Governments should undertake audits to assess and ensure CVE and PVE resources benefit women and men equally.

Recommendations For Security Sector, including police, military, defence policy and justice

- Security actors should encourage greater coverage and promotion of individuals, organisations and networks, including women, who are actively working to prevent violence, to counter a common narrative in Police statements that most often acknowledge only help 'from Muslim communities' generically.

Recommendations For International Organisations and Donors[5]

- The UN, donors and the international community should continue to support and invest in evidence-based and context-specific research, as well as technical expertise, to better understand and ensure that all CT, CVE and PVE-related work takes into account the gendered social relationships within communities, organisations and movements.
- Implement the updated UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2016) recommendation that calls upon all Member States to consider the impact of counter terrorism measures on women's human rights and women's organizations and to provide funds within CT/CVE efforts to further women's rights and empowerment.
- Provide long term and core support to women's organisations working in CVE/PVE and support cross-regional opportunities to connect women-led organisations and their strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism.
- Ensure coordination across peacebuilding and CVE/PVE program and funding streams to ensure lessons are learnt from experience within peacebuilding practice on the integration of gender analysis and supporting women's community organisations.

Recommendations For Civil Society

- Provide long term support and capacity building for volunteers working on community-level activities to prevent and counter extremism.

- Engage and support women and men who have been through a de-radicalisation process as an effective strategy to talk to communities including people convicted of terrorist offences.
- Promote solidarity between women and men working in different movements and alliances - to advance gender equality, women's rights and human rights, as well as pluralist religious organisations and LGBT groups – as this has the potential to expand and broaden an anti-violence platform to prevent violent extremism and terrorism.

Recommendations For Researchers

- In conflict-affected as well as non-conflict-affected areas, families and community organizations may have better access to vulnerable individuals and may be more effective in leading movements against fundamentalism and violence than governments. This approach remains an unexplored area of research on terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism agenda

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