



The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

**Women's Roles in Violent Islamist Extremism:
A Comparison of Australian and International
Experiences**

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2017 Churchill Fellow**

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Signed: Bianca Handyside

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Executive Summary

Although women's involvement in violent Islamism is not a new phenomenon, females are becoming increasingly prominent as leaders and active participants. Despite numerous instances of women's participation historically, and more recently, there still exists a prevailing view that women are unlikely to be involved in violent activity. This bias is preventing an effective response to the terrorism threat partially due to a hesitancy by the community to report women (including mothers) to authorities; as well as by law enforcement, who often overlook women whilst investigating Islamist activity.

It is anticipated that as ISIL's fight for relevancy and physical presence endures, women globally will continue to take a more active role. This has the potential to inspire locally-based women, particularly considering travel to the conflict zone is no longer encouraged or even practical. Social media has played a critical role in enabling women to become more active within the jihadist environment and has in essence acted as a vehicle for participation. Activities such as recruitment and facilitation are often performed online and are a direct contribution to the proliferation of the Salafi-Jihadi ideologyⁱ, without becoming physically involved themselves. As such, the importance of the roles that women undertake within a "support" capacity requires greater attention and consideration. This includes acting as a legitimate front for/concealing the activities of their partners/husbands. At a minimum, these women are likely to be sympathetic to their partner's ideological views. Additionally, their roles as mothers, and raising their youth in accordance with Salafi-jihadist doctrine, has the potential to impact the threat environment by priming the next generation of jihadists. That being said, there also exists great potential for women, and families, to be involved in the prevention and intervention of violent Islamism.

This project was undertaken to explore the under-researched role of females in violent Islamism within a number of Western liberal democracies, as well as any mitigation strategies being employed. By bringing together both international and local experiences and research, this project aims to enhance our understanding of the role of females in the Australian threat environment and its potential evolution. Creating an awareness of the roles of women in violent Islamism, from influencers and recruiters, to active participants in violence, will assist efforts to disrupt and degrade terror groups such as ISIL and its successors, whilst simultaneously mitigating the domestic terrorist threat. Furthermore, employing risk management strategies, particularly those that emphasise early intervention and prevention, will assist in avoiding circumstances that can breed inter and intra-community tensions that undermine Victoria's and Australia's social fabric. In essence, helping preserve social cohesion and mitigate circumstances that can lead to hate crime, racism and 'Islamophobia'.

ⁱ Salafi-Jihadism is the ideological foundation of the majority of current terrorist organisations, with specific emphasis on Jihad.

Major Lessons Learnt

- Women have undeniably become more active within violent Islamism, a situation likely to become more serious as the threat environment continues to evolve. Almost every country visited during this Fellowship had experienced examples of women either involved in attack planning or who had participated in actual violence;
- There is still a prominent bias that exists in relation to women, including perceptions around their ability to engage in violent activity and act independently of men. An awareness of this cognitive bias will enhance our ability to proactively address the threat of domestic terrorism;
- The development and implementation of Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts that consider gender equally, particularly those which are driven from within Muslim communities, need to be encouraged and supported. Furthermore, initiatives that focus on building resilience will assist in tackling the issue of radicalisation at its root;
- Much of the research undertaken into terrorism until recently has been “gender blind”. By engaging in studies that are more sensitive to the complexities of gender, we can create a basis upon which future projects can be developed. Moreover, it will assist in raising the profile of the role of women in violent Islamism, thereby helping to focus attention on this evolving and increasingly important area.

Dissemination and Implementation Strategy

Due to the sensitivity of much of the information obtained throughout the course of this Fellowship, a sanitised and abridged version has been provided to the Churchill Fellowship, whilst seeking, where possible, to retain the research’s key findings. However, an unbridged version of the findings will be disseminated as follows:

- Presentations/reports for Victoria Police, international partners, relevant government bodies, other policing jurisdictions and industry professionals, including those consulted as part of the Fellowship;
- Journals circulated exclusively among law enforcement personnel.

Programme

The Netherlands: Den Haag & Amsterdam

- The Dutch Police Force (names withheld)
- Leiden University – Dr Edwin Bakker
- Seran De Leede
- Europol (names withheld)
- The Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD) (names withheld)
- Dr Fiore Geelhoed
- Janny Groen

Germany: Berlin

- The Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) (names withheld)

France: Paris

- The Unite De Coordination De La Lutte Anti-Terroriste (UCLAT) (names withheld)
- The Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalisation (CIPDR)

The United Kingdom: London & Belfast

- Kings College: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) – Charlie Winter; Joana Cook
- Metropolitan Police Service: SO15; Community Engagement Team (names withheld)
- MI5-Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) - (names withheld)
- Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) – Chloe Colliver; Lucie Parker
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) (names withheld)

The Republic of Ireland: Dublin

- An Garda Siochana (names withheld)

The United States of America: Los Angeles, Orlando, Washington DC, New York & Boston

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), various field offices (names withheld)
- Joint Regional Intelligence Center (name withheld)
- George Washington University: Program on Extremism – Audrey Alexander
- Graphika – Melanie Smith
- The New York Police Department (NYPD) (names withheld)
- The United Nations Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN-CTED)/UN Women Research Symposium

Canada: Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto & Vancouver

- Hicham Tiflati

- Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) (names withheld)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), various offices (names withheld)
- Jessica Davis
- Toronto Police Service (names withheld)
- Peel Regional Police – Detective Feras Ismail

Indonesia: Jakarta

- Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) – Nava Nuraniyah
- Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice – Afnia Sari
- Rumah Kitab – Lies Marcoes
- Institute of International Peace Building – Dete Aliah
- Indonesian National Police (name withheld)

Introduction

The increasingly prominent role of women in violent Islamism, particularly that inspired or directed by groups like Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), is being witnessed with increasing frequency around the world. Women are proving to be highly motivated and as dedicated as their male counterparts, with many expressing violent tendencies. In some cases, women are also proving to be fiercer and more influential, often encouraging the men (and other women) to become more extremeⁱⁱ, to travel or undertake attacks. Further to this, some are reportedly becoming the family breadwinners to keep their husbands steadfast and focused on jihadⁱⁱⁱ. In fact, women's commitment to jihad has also been used as a tool, particularly by groups such as Al-Qaeda (AQ) and ISIL, to shame men into action.

There has been much debate around the use of women in conflict within the jihadist movement. Violent jihad has typically been a male's responsibility, with women's roles consisting of: logistical supporter; educator (imparting knowledge and instilling the spirit of the ideology in the community); supportive partner/mother. ISIL however, has advocated a shift in this responsibility to a more active and violent role for women. Moreover, women's logistical activities have been expanded upon, now becoming more involved and widespread. Collectively, these activities include:

- Campaigner: Producing and disseminating propaganda;
- Fundraiser: Collecting and distributing funds to support the jihadist cause. This includes the direct transfer of funds to terrorist organisations;
- Recruiter/Facilitator: Actively influencing, encouraging and supporting others, verbally, emotionally, or logistically, to take part in, or join the global jihadist movement;
- Radicaliser: Consciously and deliberately identifying, manipulating and directing an individual to adopt, or intensify their adherence to, a radical ideology, including support for key ideologues that are central to the global jihadi movement;
- Law Enforcer: This role is specific to women who have resided within ISIL held territory, and who undertake law enforcement activities on behalf of the Al-Khansaa Brigade^{iv};
- Actor/Combatant^v: Involvement in the planning, facilitation or undertaking of a terrorist attack.

Many of these roles have been increasingly undertaken by Western-based women who have been prevented from travel, or who feel unable to make the journey to the self-proclaimed Caliphate. The

ⁱⁱ Some women in Indonesia have been known to seek out male prisoners due to their proven radical views and status.

ⁱⁱⁱ In theological terms, Jihad means "struggle" or "striving" in the path of god. Within a military or "violence" context, Jihad usually takes one of two forms – defensive or offensive. Defensive Jihad pertains to warfare to repel an invading army or force, while Offensive Jihad is intended to spread the influence or reach of Islam. Salafi-Jihadi groups like ISIL promote engagement in violent Jihad as an individual obligation due to Western powers' invasion of, or even presence in, Islamic territory.

^{iv} The Al-Khansaa Brigade is an all-female police or religious enforcement unit of ISIL that operated in Raqqa and Mosul.

^v 'Travellers' have been kept distinct from other roles due to the overlap in activities. Migrating to the 'Caliphate' can be considered becoming actively involved in efforts; however, some of these women do go on to participate in campaigning, recruiting, law enforcement and potential combat.

internet has been instrumental in providing these women a platform to voice their views and opinions, as well as the means to widely disseminate propaganda material and incite violence, influencing the radicalisation of others.^{vi} This opportunity was successfully exploited by ISIL who effectively tailored a suite of propaganda to appeal to women and convince them to join the organisation. This campaign was so successful in fact, that there is a strong correlation between ISIL's propaganda and recruitment efforts targeting women, and an increase in their active involvement in violent Islamist activity. By encouraging active roles for women, ISIL has demonstrated a kind of pragmatic opportunism. This decision may have been motivated by a variety of situational factors such as the large loss of male fighters and an opportunity to shame men into action. The encouragement of women to engage in obligatory jihad was promoted in the following issues of one of their propaganda publications, Al-Naba:

- "Jihad of Women", April 2018;
- "Stories of Female Jihad" Part 1, October 2017;
- "The Duty of Women in Waging Jihad Against the Enemy", October 2017.

On 8th February 2018, ISIL's official media centre, Al-Hayat, disseminated footage of a female firing a weapon on what appeared to be a battleground through their propaganda series 'Inside the Caliphate'. In fact, Momena Shoma admitted to police when interviewed in relation to her attack in Mill Park (Melbourne) in February 2018, that she felt a sense of obligation to undertake the attack due to ISIL propaganda and seeing women fighting in Syria.

In addition to a variety of personal and societal factors that are likely influencing women from all cultures and nationalities to undertake acts of terrorism, we are living in a more Westernised age of enhanced female participation in civil society and a heightened awareness of women's rights. The sense of empowerment and independence engendered by this can manifest in a variety of ways – from humanitarian efforts and political activism to violent jihadism.

The Australian Experience

Although not at the same level currently being witnessed internationally, Australia has experienced a wide range of female involvement in extremist activity dating back to 2003. Rabiah Hutchinson is an Australian woman who travelled to Afghanistan and is believed to have been schooled in the Mujahidin camps, and was possibly part of Osama bin Laden's inner circle. She married multiple times, including to members of AQ and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and has been labelled the "matriarch" of radical Islam in Australia. Rabiah is thought to have been a key figure in the spread of Salafi-Jihadism in Australia.

The establishment of ISIL's 'Caliphate' in 2014 saw an influx of local female involvement in violent Islamism again, specifically as travellers to join the terrorist group. Women appeared to be predominantly functioning in support roles; however, this did not parallel the international

^{vi} Consultations conducted during the Fellowship indicated that some women have established "women's only" prayer groups when unable to attend mosque, and theologically-based information to support the groups' activities is sourced online. This situation is exacerbated among those women that do not speak Arabic, therefore restricting their access to mosques in which sermons are delivered exclusively in Arabic.

experience of women becoming increasingly violent, engaging in acts of domestic terrorism. It was apparent there was a need for Australia to learn from international experiences and to adopt precautionary measures to ensure we did not reach that stage. However, after being awarded this Churchill Fellowship in September 2017, a 24-year-old Bangladeshi woman undertook a terrorist attack in Melbourne on 9th February 2018. This incident demonstrated two points:

- It reinforced the importance of contributing to our collective knowledge on the role of women in violent extremism; and
- Highlighted the speed with which the global counter terrorism environment can evolve.

The following roles and corresponding case studies have been selected to demonstrate the scale, breadth, diversity and proximate nature of women's involvement in violent Islamism in Australia. They include, but are not limited to:

Travellers

Travellers can be defined as individuals who migrate to the Syria/Iraq conflict zone with the intention of joining a militant Islamist organisation such as ISIL.

Zehra DUMAN: A 21-year-old Melbourne woman of Turkish descent who travelled to Syria in November 2014 to join ISIL and former boyfriend, Mahmoud Abdullatif (believed to be deceased). She was prolific on social media, inciting violence and encouraging other women to make hijrah (migration). Zehra's recruitment efforts also consisted of answering the questions of other women about life in Syria.



(Source: Daily Telegraph; Herald Sun)

Tara NETTLETON: A Sydney-based convert who is believed to have died from natural causes, Tara travelled with her five young children to Syria in 2013 to join her husband, Khaled Sharrouf. Her young sons have appeared in propaganda images, with one holding the head of a deceased Syrian soldier. Nettleton’s eldest daughter, 14-year-old Zaynab, married her father's best friend, Mohamed Elomar in Syria and had a child.



(Source: The Western Journal, The Dailymail.co.uk, afr.com)

Attack Planners

In many cases, attack planners are individuals whose efforts to undertake an attack were disrupted, as opposed to someone undertaking a specific role planning and facilitating attacks for others. For the purpose of this report, and to differentiate between those who have undertaken an attack; attack planner will refer to those charged with ‘to do an act in preparation for a terrorist act’ (or the local equivalent).

Alo-Bridget Namoa: An 18-year-old Sydney-based convert who was the first Australian female to be arrested and charged, alongside her 18-year-old husband, Sameh Bayda, with: ***to do an act in preparation for a terrorist act***. Self-labelled the “Jihadi Bonnie and Clyde”, both Bridget and Sameh were planning to undertake an attack, likely on New Year’s Eve in Sydney, using an improvised explosive device (IED), incendiary device, or a bladed weapon in February 2016.



(Source: Dailymail.co.uk)

Actor

An actor, for the purpose of this report, is an individual who undertakes a terrorist attack, motivated by an Islamist ideology.

Momena Shoma: A 24-year-old Bangladeshi national on a student visa, stabbed her 56-year-old student accommodation host in the neck while he was asleep in his home in Mill Park on 9th February 2018. Momena had been moved on from her initial host family due to apparent attack practice she had been undertaking at their house (slashing a mattress and pillow). She had only been in Australia for one week, and lodged at the new accommodation for one day before she committed the attack. After the attack, she told a neighbour that she had ‘purposefully come [to Australia] to kill’ and that she was inspired by the ‘Caliph’. Momena is the first female in Australia to be charged with *engaging in a terrorist act*. Bangladeshi counter terrorism officers attended Momena’s family home in Mirpur, Dhaka, shortly after the attack, during which Momena’s sister, Asmaul Husna, attacked a police officer with a knife.

Support Roles

Support roles, for the purpose of this report, refer to activities that assist the efforts of others in furthering the cause associated with the global jihadi movement. These include but are not limited to membership of a terrorist organisation, funding and material support.

Zainab Abdurahman-Khalif: A 21-year-old African-born, South Australian-based woman is the first female in Australia to be found guilty of *membership of a terrorist organisation*. Zainab attempted to travel to Istanbul in July 2016, likely to join ISIL, but was stopped by police. She was arrested in May 2017 following a 12 month investigation which revealed footage of beheadings, suicide bombings, ISIL flags and recordings of her singing ISIL propaganda songs. She also had contact with female jihadists in Kenya.

16-year-old female: From Sydney, she was charged in March 2016 with *terrorism funding* along with 20-year-old male associate, Milad Atai. It is alleged she sent \$5000 to ISIL, where she was acting as a conduit by sending money to a relative, Ahmed Merhi, located in Syria.

Fatima Elomar: A 31-year-old Sydney-based woman who was the first Australian female to plead guilty to *providing support to a terrorist organisation* in 2014. Fatima attempted to leave Australia with her four children, and a range of items requested by her husband, Mohamed Elomar, who was located in Syria. Items included cash and supplies such as camouflage gear. She was arrested at Sydney airport. Fatima was given a two year suspended sentence and a three month good behaviour bond.

The International Experience

The following sections will explore the roles that women from Western liberal democracies are currently undertaking within the jihadist environment, and will present prominent themes that resulted from consultations with subject matter experts over the course of the Fellowship. It must be noted that due to the sensitivity of the topic, and the classified nature of some of the information

garnered, this report only contains the material considered appropriate for public release. To demonstrate the roles and themes discussed, a selection of cases studies that had the greatest amount of information available have been utilised. These case studies have been supported by open source information which has been referenced at the end of the report.

Travellers

According to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), females represent approximately 13% of foreign fighter travellers globally¹. This number is acknowledged as being conservative. Furthermore, female converts are also believed to be significantly over-represented amongst travellers. This was confirmed through the Fellowship consultations, which highlighted that in Germany, one-third of all the female travellers are converts, compared to 17% of male travellers. The situation in the Netherlands is similar where the number of converts among women is 31% and 7% for men.² There may be several reasons for this including that female converts likely have more to prove, entering a religion that is patriarchal in nature.^{vii}

ISIL has created roles and opportunities centred on notions of female emancipation. The reality, however, has been looking somewhat different.^{viii} Consultations indicated that women who chose to travel to join militant Islamist groups do so for a variety of reasons, ranging from escaping a particular life circumstance (such as family violence or 'Islamophobia'), marriage and children, belonging to a group of likeminded people/'sisterhood'^{ix} or, contribution to the cause/ combat effort. Despite the decline of ISIL's physical presence in Syria and Iraq, it was indicated that some women still want to travel with the notion of the ideal jihadist state continuing to appeal to some.

When considering the current global issue of individuals possibly returning to their home countries following the fall of the 'Caliphate', the importance of distinguishing between those who are returning of their own volition, and those who have been deported, was highlighted by Indonesia, who has had an influx of deportees since 2017. Both returnees and deportees have often received capability training and been exposed to a hyper violent environment, yet returnees are often coming

^{vii} Furthermore, the appeal is likely to stem from a keenness to embrace a belief system that offers purification and atonement for past questionable behaviour or bad life choices. In essence, a clean slate is offered to women (and men), restoring virtue.

^{viii} The research also indicated women that travelled to join other Salafi-jihadi groups had different experiences, a reflection of the ideological and strategic disparity of groups active in the Middle East. For instance, women who have joined Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the organisation formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, appear to have a different experience to those who joined ISIL. Similar to ISIL, their primary tasks are raising their children and caring for their husbands. Women with HTS however, have more freedom of movement than those that joined ISIL. They are able to participate independently in activities outside the home, including those less explicitly focused on the expansion of the jihadist movement. (AIVD publication: *Jihadist Women, a Threat not to be Underestimated*)

^{ix} Although it has been reported that one of the pull factors for young women is the notion of 'sisterhood', it has been suggested that the idea of it is more appealing than the reality. Many young women have reportedly been deterred from joining these groups of 'sisters' due to the power play, dominant personalities, competition and criticism/gossip that take place within. The sisterhood can be supportive, but also suffocating. The influence of groups of associates (such as the 'sisters'), and the desire to belong for youth is so great that there have even been examples of young women with no evidence of having been radicalised, mirroring the activities and clothing of friends to fit in.

home disillusioned. This cohort may represent the best opportunity for utilisation in CVE and counter-narrative efforts. Deportees however, are often frustrated with the circumstances under which they were forced to return home, with many only coming home due to their capture and subsequent deportation. This has the potential to motivate and inform their activities once back in their home countries. It has been indicated that many are not genuinely signing the 'allegiance to Indonesia' upon returning, stating, "I had no idea what my husband was doing" or "I was getting a job in Turkey", concealing their true intentions for being in the region.

This is problematic for authorities who are attempting to discern the authenticity of their accounts, as well as the likely roles they were performing whilst in ISIL held territory. Some women may actually have undertaken combat roles or been active members of the women's law enforcement group, the Al-Khansaa Brigade. Additionally, it was suggested that there may be a certain level of confidence amongst deportees in the limitations of police services and their ability to monitor everyone returning from the conflict zone. Despite all countries visited as part of this Fellowship who have experienced female travellers, the following cases exemplify some of these issues:

The Netherlands

Eighty Dutch women have travelled to Syria and Iraq since 2012. Some travellers were convinced of the ideology, whilst others to a lesser degree, but went along regardless. It is assessed that there are at least 100 Dutch children in the conflict area³ with a significant number believed to be aged four and under. Approximately 17 women have returned, albeit most before 2015, often with an undiminished ideological commitment and long-term exposure to a hyper-violent environment.⁴ Further to this, there are approximately 100 women in the Netherlands assessed as adhering to an Islamist ideology (with an average age of mid 20s).

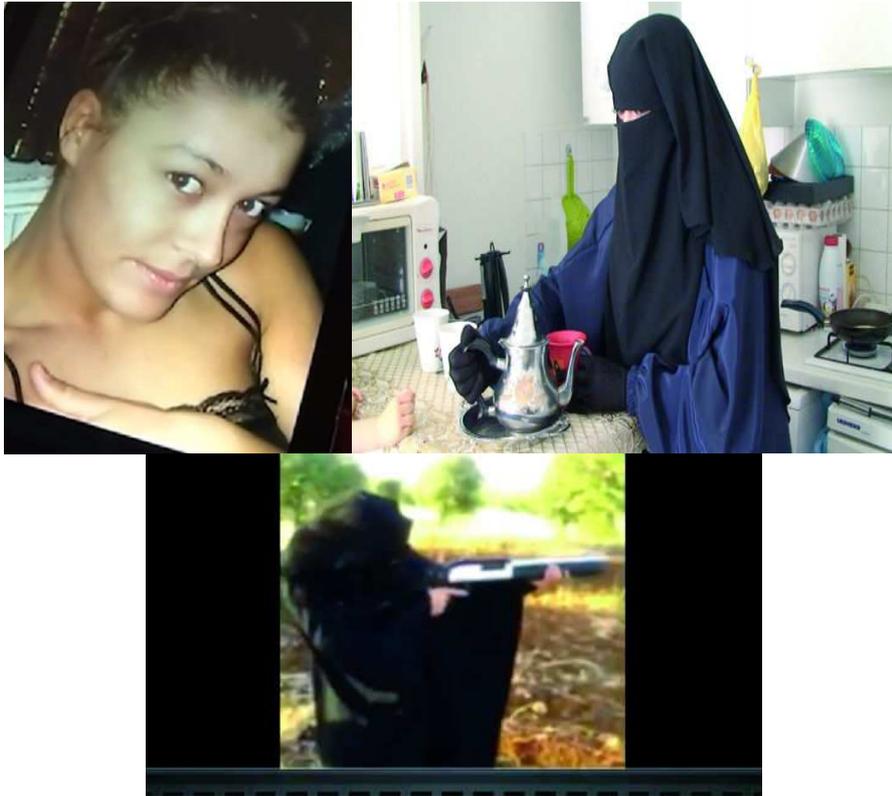
Laura Hansen

In 2016, Laura Hansen, a 22-year-old convert and mother of two, was the first female returnee to be convicted of planning to prepare and promote terrorist activities. She was sentenced to two years with 13 months suspended. Having already spent one year in detention, she did not go back to prison. Laura was also acquitted of belonging to ISIL. She reportedly met her partner, Ibrahim, via the internet in 2013, at age 17 but had already converted to Islam. She told judges during her hearing that she was forced to travel to Raqqa, Syria, in September 2015 by her violent partner. However, she reportedly knew before her departure that her husband harboured sympathy for ISIL and wanted to travel to Syria. Months after arriving, she fled with her children to a Kurdish-controlled area in Iraq with the help of her father located in The Netherlands. Laura was arrested when she arrived back in Amsterdam in July 2016. She is prohibited from travelling close to the Dutch borders, or any airports, and was instructed to not contact any current or former jihadists.⁵

France

As of 10 November 2017, 690 French nationals were believed to be fighting in Iraq and Syria. Of those, 295 were believed to be women, and approximately 28 were minors under the age of 15. An estimated 400 children have either been born into French jihadist families in Iraq and Syria or were brought to these countries by their parents.⁶ It has been reported that approximately 72 of the returnees to France are female (28%).⁷

Emilie Konig



(Source: Screengrab 20 Minutes/TFI; Agnes de Feo; The Local)

Emilie Konig, a 33-year-old convert, travelled to Syria in 2012, leaving her children in France. Emilie's life prior to joining ISIL was characterised by a family breakdown, lack of education success, an abusive relationship and increasingly provocative behaviour promoting jihadist propaganda and distributing flyers calling for holy war. This was observed once Emilie had been exposed to, and immersed herself in radical Islam. She allegedly became a prominent propagandist and recruiter for ISIL once in the 'Caliphate', appearing in propaganda videos shooting a firearm. In late 2017, Emilie was taken into Kurdish custody along with her three young children who were conceived and born in ISIL territory. She apologised to her family, and to France, and pleaded to be repatriated. She currently faces trial in Syria, accused of being an ISIL recruiter.⁸

Attack Planners

It was acknowledged by almost every country visited that women are increasingly engaging in attack planning. Since February 2017 in France alone, there have been three incidents of female involvement in attack planning. However, a commonality amongst the various cases experienced by the countries visited (including Australia) is that all incidents of women charged with attack planning

were terrorism plots with female actors, disrupted prior to the attack taking place. In many of these cases, there was often a male directing, coordinating or informing the event. Despite this lending credence to the notion that there is often a dominant male influence involved, it also highlights that these women are committed to die for the cause. This is a significant shift in the environment and one that highlights, very clearly, the direction of the movement from more passive to active roles for women.

The United Kingdom: Mina Ditch, Rizlaine & Safaa Boular

Mina Ditch, and her two daughters, Rizlaine and Safaa Boular, were convicted in August 2018 of preparing acts of terrorism, making them Britain's first all-female terror cell. Despite Rizlaine's attempt to travel to join ISIL in 2014, it was Safaa's radicalisation that acted as the catalyst for this series of events.

Safaa allegedly came into contact with Australian traveller and ISIL recruiter, Shadi JABAR^x online, following the 2015 Paris attacks. Shadi was likely influential in connecting her with people and platforms that would aid her radicalisation. Safaa met Naweed Hussein online, a British foreign fighter located in Syria, for whom she reportedly developed feelings. Safaa and Naweed were married via an online medium^{xi} during Safaa's family holiday to Morocco. They had plans to meet in Syria; however, upon her return to the UK, when questioned by authorities, Safaa revealed her plans to travel, omitting the part about her marriage. When it became apparent that Safaa would not be able to get to Syria, focus was directed toward a domestic attack, likely targeting the British Museum, coordinated by Naweed. Naweed was killed in a drone strike which devastated Safaa. However, the plan to attack the British Museum, likely using firearms and grenades, continued. Safaa was subsequently arrested and charged with preparing an act of terrorism. She was sentenced to life with a 13-year minimum. The trial judge acknowledged that she may have been encouraged to undertake the attack but ultimately had acted on her own volition.

Following Safaa's arrest, Rizlaine and Mina carried on with the plans which would now likely take place in the vicinity of Westminster with knives. Mina and Rizlaine were subsequently arrested in April 2017 for preparing an act of terrorism. Rizlaine was shot by police in the process. Both pleaded guilty to the charges with Mina being sentenced to six years and nine months, Rizlaine to life with a 16-year minimum.

Described by police as a "pretty dysfunctional family unit, they were unable to identify the "controlling mind" or ringleader amongst them – it is not even clear when Mina became a threat". Mina and her husband, both Moroccan/French nationals, divorced when the children were young. Following the relationship breakdown, Mina adopted a highly conservative interpretation of Islam, apparently without any proper religious instruction other than what she found online, which was forced on the children. Mina also started associating with women believed to hold similar views. Safaa described her mother throughout the court proceedings as vindictive and violent. "At times during the investigation she presented herself to the authorities as a concerned parent. When she first learned about Safaa's plan to go to Syria, she was furious and assaulted her. But her daughter also told the court that her mother had delved into IS-related material online and had become friends with a Leicester woman who had attempted to reach Syria." Perhaps just as importantly, Mina isolated Safaa from engaging with outside influences which likely facilitated a narrower world view based on information gleaned online.⁹

^x Shadi Jabar is the sister of Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar who shot and killed NSW Police employee, Curtis Cheng at the Parramatta Police Complex in October 2015.

^{xi} This has been observed as an increasing trend, particularly amongst those who look to migrate to Syria.

Actors

Although representing only a small percentage of active female participants, it is interesting to note that every country visited throughout the course of the Fellowship has experienced a female actor undertaking a terrorist attack, with the exception of the Netherlands and Ireland. Indonesia, for example, has seen an increase in enthusiasm amongst extremist women in relation to undertaking terrorist attacks - they were allegedly just waiting for a precedent, or justification (in the form of a fatwa). The following cases are indicative of activity seen in France, the UK, Canada and Indonesia:

Germany: Safia S

Safia S, a dual German/Moroccan citizen was 15 when she stabbed a police officer in the neck during an identification check at Hanover Central Railway Station. "In 2008, aged just seven, she appeared in a video with the German Islamist preacher Pierre Vogel, who praised her as "our little sister". The state domestic intelligence agency started investigating her for preparing a serious crime in 2014, while Germany's NDR television uncovered an online chat from the day after the Paris attacks where she described it as the "happiest day of my life", adding: "Allah bless our lions" ."¹⁰

Safia travelled to Istanbul in January 2016, where she met members of ISIL who planned to help her enter Syria. "Her 18-year-old brother had been jailed weeks earlier after being arrested by Turkish authorities at the Syrian border, where he was suspected of attempting to join ISIL." Safia returned to Germany in February and was met by police at Hanover airport. However, she was not detained and on 26 February undertook her attack at Hanover train station armed with two kitchen knives. Prior to the attack she filmed herself pledging allegiance to ISIL. She initially told police the stabbing was spontaneous. Evidence was subsequently found indicating it was a planned attack following ISIL instruction; the first terror attack directed by the group in Germany. Safia was convicted of attempted murder, helping a terrorist organisation and grievous bodily harm. She is currently serving a six-year prison sentence.¹¹

The USA: Tashfeen Malik

Tashfeen Malik and her husband Syed Rizwan Farook killed 14 people and seriously injured 22 others when they opened fire on a training event/holiday function at Syed's workplace in San Bernardino, California in December 2015. Both Tashfeen and Syed were killed during a subsequent police shootout, leaving behind a six month old daughter. They were motivated to undertake their attack due to their militant Islamist ideology; however, they are not thought to have been directed specifically by a militant group.

Indonesia: Surabaya Attacks

On 13 May 2018, a series of attacks took place in Surabaya, Indonesia that dramatically altered the threat landscape and revealed a concerning new attack methodology. Three families who were known to partake in a religious study group together, and home-school their children, were all killed whilst carrying out coordinated attacks, or activities associated with, across a 24-hour period. The attacks unfolded as follows:

- On the morning of 13 May, Dita Supriyanto, his wife Puji Kuswati, and their four children (two girls aged nine and 13 years old, and two teenage boys aged 16 and 18) carried out almost simultaneous suicide attacks on three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia. The attack resulted in 18 deaths (including the six attackers) and wounded 41. The parents were associated with Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) with Dita believed to be the leader of

JAD's Surabaya cell. On the morning of the attacks, Dita's sons drove two motorcycles into the front yard of the Santa Maria Catholic Church where they detonated their bombs, killing three. At the same time, Dita drove a van, dropping off his wife, and two daughters at the Christian Church of Diponegoro. Puji was carrying two bags and was initially stopped by officers; however, the three forced their way inside and detonated their bombs, killing only themselves. Dita then drove to the Pantekosta Church and detonated the bomb whilst in the vehicle, killing four people.

- On the evening of 13 May, three people from one family were killed in an accidental explosion in an apartment in Sidoarjo, near Surabaya. The deceased included Anton Febryanto, his wife, Puspita Sari, and their 17-year-old daughter. The survivors included Anton and Puspita's other three children.
- On 14 May, a family riding two motorbikes detonated two bombs at a security post at police headquarters in Surabaya. The explosion injured four police officers and six civilians. Four members of the family of five were killed, including the parents Tri Murtono and Tri Ernawati. Their eight-year-old daughter survived the blast due to being wedged between her mother and father as they carried out the attack.

The motivation for these attacks is believed to be centred around Islamic doctrine which teaches an apocalyptic prophecies, with violent jihad being the path to heaven. Undertaking the attacks together ensured access to heaven as a family unit and under circumstances controlled by them. The group was also reportedly influenced by Kholid Abu Bakar, a former member of JI, now with JAD, who police say mentored Dita. Whilst lauded by those from the Indonesian extremist community, the attacks have also instigated positive discussion around the value of women and children, and the potential impact of losing the next generation to violent extremism.

Additionally, Indonesia has also observed incidences of children radicalising and recruiting each other. This not only highlights the intergenerational nature of this problem, but also the potential for its proliferation amongst a vulnerable cohort of people, particularly in the absence of any moderating figures in their lives.

Support Roles

The following positions, although less violent in nature, are still equally important, if not more so, for the survival and longevity of the jihadist movement. Supportive partners, wives, mothers and associates play an underestimated role in providing personal support and encouragement. These women are also likely to be at least sympathetic to the views of their loved one.^{xii} It was commented on during the consultations that these relationships can be the hardest to infiltrate/exploit due to the significance of the personal ties. Additionally, authorities in the Netherlands indicated that some women help prospective travellers, or those attempting to leave by offering material support, putting them in touch with facilitators, or by hiding the fact that someone has left or is trying to leave to join the 'Caliphate'. Many of these women have been prevented from travel themselves.¹²

However, the most active, non-violent role women can play is as mothers raising the so-called "next generation of jihadists". A large part of the jihadist narrative is centred around the family unit, to

^{xii} The only exception to this could be friends of individuals who are considering travelling or planning an attack, and whose support is purely within the capacity of friendship. That is, their involvement with extremist ideology is likely superficial and does not extend beyond their association group/friendship, meaning they do not harbour any deep ideological convictions themselves.

support state building efforts and ensuring the survival and spread of the group's ideology. While these activities do not breach any laws, their potential to contribute to the global jihadist movement should not be underestimated. The following case highlights the importance of mothers and supportive wives in maintaining the steadfastness of men that pursue jihad.

The USA: Katherine Russell

Katherine Russell, the 27-year-old widow of Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was born in Rhode Island to upper-middle class Christian parents. She reportedly became interested in Islam during high school, possibly upon meeting Tamerlan. Her family indicated that soon after, Katherine, who loved David Bowie and was outgoing, changed. "Katie Russell became Katherine Tsarnaev, a studious, serious woman who reportedly seldom smiled and devoted herself to the Muslim faith." Katherine moved into the Tsarnaev family house and appeared to become the breadwinner of the couple, if not the family. She would work a lot, sometimes 80 hours a week, and would care for their daughter, Zahara during her downtime. Tamerlan was reportedly obsessed with two things - his boxing and his Muslim beliefs. He was allegedly unfaithful and aggressive in their relationship; however, Katherine remained committed to her role as a dutiful wife.¹³

During the investigation into her brother-in-law, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, it was revealed that Katherine's computer showed several Google searches on "the eternal rewards of dying as a martyr's spouse." Furthermore, she reportedly sent messages to friends following the bombing that read "A lot more people are killed every day in Syria and other places...Innocent people."¹⁴

The role that Zubiedat Tsarnaev, Tamerlan's mother, played in his radicalisation is unknown despite reports that she held radical beliefs herself, originating from her time spent in Chechnya. At a minimum she likely introduced her children to a belief system that contributed to her son's becoming cognitively open to ISIL's messaging. In any event, the combination of an influential mother, and a supportive wife, likely played an important role in empowering Tamerlan (and his brother) to undertake the activities they did.

Prominent Themes Impacting Upon Women and Their Roles in Violent Islamism

Stereotypes and Gender Bias

One outcome of the Fellowship suggests that stereotypes of gender and Islam are preventing proactive efforts to effectively address the underlying causes of terrorism. Muslim women are often viewed as oppressed, and when they do become involved in violent activity, are frequently labelled as either "crazy" or coerced. By shifting the source of influence/motivation it also removes their agency which suggests they are not capable of acting of their own volition and are therefore less committed than their male counterparts. An example of this is the use of the term "jihadi bride", which is reductionist, yet perpetuated by the media. However, it neatly and comfortably fits Western societal expectations of women's roles and capabilities. Moreover, the label of 'jihadi bride' does not accurately reflect the drivers of women's participation in Salafi-Jihadism and ignores the

myriad of complex factors that contribute to women’s radicalisation and mobilisation, which are often unique and specific to the individual. It therefore becomes clear that the romanticised idea of what the Caliphate is, and represents, affects both men and women in different ways, highlighting the importance of a gendered approach to our understanding of how individuals become radicalised to violence.

The importance of gender needs to be understood in terms of specific social and cultural contexts. Gender roles in certain societies can conflict with the religious expectations and standards within which some ethnic and cultural minorities reside. It is this conflict that is often exploited by groups such as ISIL who promulgate an “us versus them” binary worldview. For instance, for some women, this messaging reinforces a perception that their identity as a pious Muslim is incompatible with a Western lifestyle typified by perceptions of moral corruptibility, secularity and individuality. Considering that gender and identity are closely intertwined, and the fact that radicalisation can commence through identity seeking activities, understanding the intersection of the two can contribute to our understanding of radicalisation, and by extension, the means to address terrorism at its roots.

Judicial Systems

Further to the notion of stereotyping and gender bias, the judicial system is another social structure that experiences this inequality. There appears to be much hesitancy and confusion around what to charge women with as although they may be increasingly becoming involved in violent activity, they still predominantly occupy the non-violent space of extremism. “They may not be the tip of the spear, but they help throw it.”¹⁵ This is a frustration that is being felt in almost every country visited.

Legislation that addresses activities females are predominantly undertaking, particularly travel to the conflict zone, is unclear in many countries. This ambiguity stems, in part, from the uncertainty surrounding the nature of female membership within ISIL and what constitutes support. While each male fighter must pledge allegiance to the group and its leader, women rarely undergo any formal rite of passage.¹⁶ Interestingly, a number of publications have been released in the Netherlands by the AIVD and police/academia to dispel any misconceptions about the activities and roles women are engaging in within Syria and Iraq. The primary audiences for these products have been the judicial system and the community. The following case highlights some of these issues and the disparity with the legal response:

Germany: First female returnees - Sibel H and Sabine S

German-Turkish Sibel H. from Hessen, and 31-year-old convert, Sabine S. from Baden-Württemberg, travelled independently of each other to Syria in 2013 to join ISIL. “Sibel travelled with her first husband, Ali S. A short time later, Ali was killed, after which Sibel travelled back to Germany. In March 2016, she then migrated to the conflict zone again with a new husband, Deniz B. Last year, the couple were picked up by northern Iraqi combat groups and imprisoned in Erbil, Iraq.” Sibel’s father was permitted to bring her one-year-old son back to Germany earlier this year (this relationship was confirmed through DNA). In January, Sibel gave birth to another child whilst in prison. Sibel is regarded by German security authorities as a radical Islamist, whose actions are said to have been ideologically motivated.¹⁷

Sabine however, married an IS fighter once in Syria, and had two children. Her husband was reportedly killed, although she is believed to have married again. She has since been arrested and

charged with actively working on behalf of ISIL in Syria. Sabine was allegedly tasked with “promoting life in the ‘Caliphate’ in an online blog monitored by the jihadi group. [Through this medium] she also expressed her willingness to attack enemy combatants by carrying out suicide attacks.”¹⁸

Sibel and Sabine were escorted back to Germany by authorities in April 2018 (along with three small children), however, were not arrested as the Federal Court stated that the Federal Prosecutor’s Office lacked the legal basis. That is, no specific terrorist membership or support had been proven to justify warrants – only searches. The prosecutors filed a complaint against this decision last year. “So far, jihadist women in Germany have rarely been legally prosecuted, even those who have demonstrably joined ISIL. According to the Federal Court of Justice, membership or support of the terrorist group looks different for men and women. That is, jihadist men fight, whilst women take care of the household, have children and care for their family. According to the Federal Court, such acts are not punishable because they do not constitute explicit terrorist support. Attorney General Peter Frank announced last year that he wanted to step up action against women who joined the ranks of ISIL as they voluntarily belonged to the “national people of the IS”.”¹⁹

Another issue is that terrorism/extremism/radicalisation is defined differently in many countries. Unfortunately, it is often taking a terrorist attack to take place, to change the perception of women and their capability to participate in violent extremism. For example, French female returnees are now all automatically arrested upon returning to the country. This was not previously the case. The September 2016 attempted attack at Notre Dame by a group of young women^{xiii} demonstrated that radicalised women within France were capable of planning and undertaking a terrorist attack. As such, France changed its policy to include automatic arrest for female returnees in addition to males. In Indonesia, women are now also more frequently charged with membership of a terrorist organisation.

Within the sentencing process, there is a focus on the defence to create as sympathetic a view as possible of the defendant. This is easier to do for women and mothers as Judges and juries typically do not want to split families. In addition to this, much of the language used in cases/sentencing is victim centric in favour of the female defendant, which reinforces the notion again that women are incapable of violent behaviour in the absence of any male influence. Further to this, human rights organisations that perpetuate a generalised narrative of female victimhood²⁰ in relation to women’s participation in activities within the conflict zone, undermines efforts to engage women from a CVE perspective. By acknowledging that women’s intentions can be motivated by factors other than revenge or cohesion, we are better positioned to provide more meaningful and useful de-radicalisation strategies.

Sentences for females can vary widely. Women returning from Syria or Iraq have been punished with comparatively soft measures such as the confiscation of their passports, suspended sentences, or have been acquitted.²¹ In the US, a recent case study assessment undertaken by the George Washington University, Project on Extremism, found that the average duration of sentences for those convicted of ISIL-related offending behaviour (male and female) was 13 years. While the

^{xiii} On the 4th September 2016, three women (who were armed with knives at the time) tried to ignite several gas cylinders inside a car they had parked outside Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The three women were arrested and charged with terrorism offences. The women were believed to have been guided by Rashid Kassim, a now-deceased French ISIL fighter. He was a notorious presence online, directing many females and young people to undertake attacks.

average punishment for men amounted to 13.8 years, the average period of incarceration for women was only 5.8 years.²² Some of those consulted during the Fellowship indicated that this discrepancy in sentencing is failing to act as an adequate deterrent among women and that there is a risk that they will simply re-join their radical networks upon release. This in turn has implications for the State’s capacity to disengage and reintegrate female prisoners.

Over-representation of Youth

A receptiveness or cognitive opening to Islamist ideology is often initiated by a search for information or “the truth” – a process frequently observed during adolescence. This quest for answers and understanding, particularly around the interface between religion, politics and current affairs, is often satisfied by the teachings of this ideology. The appeal of the ideology, particularly among youth, has been likened to a drug. Often once experimented with, they are consumed by the excitement and keep going back for more. Many young adults in the UK have commented that they feel deceived at this juncture in their lives when trusted adults and Imams try to counter their newly discovered information with conservative Islamic doctrine, rather than honest discussion regarding the potential for diversity within religious scripture.

In addition to this, ISIL provides an environment within which previously prohibited behaviours are deemed halal^{xiv} such as, travel without a guardian for women, virtual marriages (often via skype), and sexual relations outside of marriage. All are activities that likely appeal to the rebellious, adventure seeking side of youth. For young women who are still conscious of their piousness, the notion of travelling to marry a jihadist still likely qualifies as acceptable, in their mind, as it satisfies their religious concerns and is sold as honourable. Figure 1 below demonstrates this thinking.



Figure 1: A social media post by 20-year-old British traveller, Aqsa Mahmood: “Other girls like me”

(Source: Dailyrecord.co.uk)

^{xiv} Good/permissible in Arabic

Social media is inherently intertwined with youth culture. It is a common practice to obtain social media “kudos” through the sharing and ‘liking’ of posts which acts as a force multiplier for ISIL’s online material amongst the most vulnerable cohort. Similar to a grooming process that is often seen amongst child exploitation rings, girls/young women are exploited by ISIL recruiters online whereby vulnerabilities are unearthed and manipulated – the type of information that girls are often more likely to share than boys. WhatsApp/YouTube preachers, particularly in Indonesia, lecturing girls on how to be better Muslim women/wives promotes a pursuit of perfection, often feeding the insecurity and self-esteem issues of the viewers. However, males are just as vulnerable to this messaging. The difference is the promotion of elements within the so-called Caliphate that appeal to the adventure-seeking/masculine side of young men. Building resilience amongst young men and women, particularly when exposed to a relentless online environment is crucial when attempting to limit the impact and damage of online content.

Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

CVE efforts to date have been heavily geared towards men due to their prominence within violent extremism. However, the personal factors that contribute to one’s radicalisation, as well as the unique push and pull factors, have gendered elements which resonate with individuals differently. For example, women who experience Islamophobia due to their religious attire, or are impacted by political decisions such as those involving the banning of headscarves, can result in a highly personalised form of grievance. As a result, they may become more susceptible to divisive messaging, particularly that which propagates an ‘us versus them’ narrative. As such, P/CVE programs should be focussed on addressing the personal factors and experiences that have led them down the path of radicalisation, as opposed to a ‘one size fits all’ approach. This could include customising and aligning CVE strategies to the roles undertaken by women i.e. ‘actor’, ‘fund-raiser’, ‘recruiter’ and so forth.

The following programs/initiatives, which were discussed during the course of the Fellowship with subject matter experts, are reportedly achieving positive results. Their inclusion in this report is not based on any empirical evidence or evaluation of the success of the projects (with the exception of the Digital Resilience program), representing the opinions of those consulted.

The Netherlands

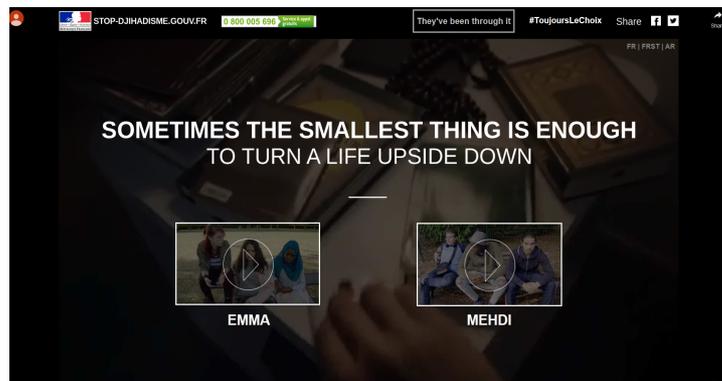
The Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD), in partnership with the Dutch citizenship education providers, *Codename Future*, implemented a pilot program providing a sample of teachers with training, support and resources to deliver a curriculum aimed at enhancing digital resilience. The **Digital Resilience curriculum** aims to provide 16-19-year-olds the knowledge and skills they need to be positive digital citizens in the 21st century. The curriculum focuses on the online challenges most relevant to grooming and online radicalisation, from effectively dealing with hate speech to spotting manipulation in images and bias in news. Four out of five participants (81%) reported that they gained new skills, while just under half (47%) of participants claimed that they would behave differently online because of the sessions.²³ The initiative has also reportedly resonated quite strongly with female participants.

Oumia Works: The main goal of Oumnia Works is to provide mothers with additional tools to help their child navigate Dutch society. Many youths from ethnic minorities, especially young Muslims, do not feel heard or valued as they try to find themselves and develop their own identity. During that search, some young people can lose themselves or lose their connection with society. In

some cases, this loss can lead to radicalisation. Mothers can be well positioned to recognise behavioural indicators of radicalisation at an early stage and to assist their child. The programme consists of interactive training in which knowledge is provided and skills developed. The participants learn from the trainer, but mainly from each other.²⁴

France

Counter narrative messaging program known as **“Always a choice”**, commenced in France in 2017 which is an interactive/online experience providing insight into scenarios that many young men and women are exposed to whilst being groomed by Islamist recruiters. Emma is the female interactive experience, who comes into contact with a recruiter attempting to convince her to marry an Islamic brother and travel to Syria. This initiative also promotes a toll-free number to report possible instances of radicalisation.²⁵



The UK

A broader movement that celebrates religiously diverse families/children who are comprised of both Sunni and Shia Muslims has been gaining traction in the UK. Termed **“Su-Shi” families**, they are promoting a harmonious way of life between the two Muslim sects, attempting to breakdown some long held communal tensions. This movement has reportedly been quite successful in encouraging inter-religious dialogue.

Indonesia Ali Fauzi (brother of Bali bombers Amrozi and Mukhlas Fauzi and Ali Imron) established the **Peace Circle** initiative following a period of imprisonment for terrorism related offences. From early on, Ali and his brothers were taught hard-line Islamic beliefs, leading to ingrained radical views – the four of them eventually turning to terrorism training in Afghanistan and the southern Philippines. The Peace Circle, a newly built Mosque and school, which opened in July 2017, provides a place for former members of the old networks like JI to re-educate and reject the new wave of terrorism led by ISIL. The location also provides a space for attendees to practice raising the Indonesian flag, a ceremony to mark Independence Day. “The foundation's attached school is run by the wives of terrorists — deceased, jailed and reformed, teaching the children to recite the Koran and the Arabic alphabet.” Through the school, Ali hopes is to instil moderation in the next generation. "Children of police will become policemen, and a terrorist's child would be a terrorist one day — I want to break the cycle". His vision for the Peace Circle is not to “...change people 100 per cent. We just want them to love this country, have tolerance for others". Reportedly, 40% of the initial 37 attendees have de-radicalised or reformed their ways.²⁶

It can be argued that families, specifically mothers, are generally best positioned to notice the changes in their loved ones as radicalisation is taking place. However, denial and a hesitancy to report a family member's behaviour to authorities often prevents early intervention opportunities. In some cases, a lack of education amongst parents/families may also prevent this recognition. Furthermore, some young people conceal these behaviour changes from parents, including using code words with their associates. It was indicated through the Fellowship that the role of sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles within this space may be more important due to relationship dynamics and preparedness to disclose information.

Family dynamics can also be greatly influential in enabling radicalisation. As discussed, the role of the mother in raising her children in accordance with an extreme ideology that may render them susceptible to jihadist propaganda, or encouraging their participation in militant Islamism, is greatly underestimated. As such, care must be given to not pigeon-hole or stereotype women based on a 'maternalistic logic' which assumes that women are guided by a maternal instinct that promotes peace and shuns violence²⁷, particularly in relation to their potential utility within CVE. Fathers can play an equally important role in CVE efforts, and the establishment of a stable family environment is likely to have a greater impact on preventing a child's radicalisation than focussing solely on women's participation.²⁸

The importance of role models within CVE cannot be underestimated. The Mujahidin are promoted by ISIL as the best role models for children, which is why women should aspire to marry them. By countering this with examples of, or access to individuals who promote more sensible life choices could yield results. For example, Muslim boxers or sports stars for individuals, particularly males, who are attracted to the appeal of the physicality of Jihad; or successful Muslim business leaders/CEOs who can promote a balanced lifestyle that still incorporates religious observance^{xv}. This must all be done without trying to impose Western ideals. It has to come from a place the participant is comfortable engaging in, or for women – empowering them in a way they feel they need or want to be empowered.

An additional concern regarding CVE programs that was raised in multiple consultations was the expertise of individuals/groups accessing funding to implement de-radicalisation programs. There exists a prominent view that due to the large amounts of money currently being offered to combat violent extremism, anyone can potentially access funding without possessing the appropriate credentials or experience^{xvi}, sometimes risking more damage to clients in the process. A stringent application process to access funds in the first instance, as well as thorough evaluation of these programs, is essential.

In any event, true grass roots P/CVE needs to be driven from within Muslim communities, particularly mainstream Sunni Islam, where the intricacies of theology and doctrine can be debated. This current generation is one of inquisitive minds, and rather than stifling curiosity and existential

^{xv} It was indicated in Indonesia that business mentors have proven useful within CVE efforts as they provide opportunity and dilute negative extremist community influence.

^{xvi} There is a prominent view that for P/CVE efforts to be successful, it can only be undertaken by someone with an Islamic background. However, it has been indicated that in some cases, former extremists who participate in intervention initiatives cannot relate to the way/manner radicalisation is taking place with individuals, particularly youth today, as their radicalisation experience took place in the 80's/90's prior to the internet and social media. It could be possible for individuals with appropriate training in understanding and addressing personal factors to undertake this service now e.g. teachers/counsellors.

questioning, exposing youth to progressive thinking, including open and honest discussion regarding diversity of religious scripture could help address some of the drivers of youth radicalisation. This includes issues such as women's roles within Islam. Female Imams have been a long-debated issue, along with the circumstances under which this could be considered permissible. There are a number of countries including Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the USA, that have females actively undertaking roles as Imams.

De-radicalisation can be a slow burn with years, sometimes decades, of immersion in, or exposure to, radical thinking needing to be challenged. However, a small seed of doubt has enormous potential for change and growth. In the short-term, openness and acceptance is something that needs to be practised when dealing with Muslim communities, which will likely go a long way in creating an inclusive and cohesive society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As evidenced by the themes presented throughout this report, it is undeniable that women are becoming more actively involved within violent Islamism. The current global movement of female empowerment has likely encouraged the active involvement of women in global political conflict. However, the inability to recognise women as capable entities within this space is still stifling attempts to effectively combat terrorism. This is in part due to the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of support roles that women are predominantly undertaking, and a more deeply ingrained societal mentality in which the environment (including response to) is so patriarchal/masculine that women are too often overlooked. This extends to a hesitancy by the broader community to report on the activities of women/mothers.

Women need to be treated as distinct entities, separate to children, with varying levels of agency.²⁹ Greater consideration is currently given to returning children and their exposure to radical ideologies in Syria/Iraq rather than women. As these women are not being successfully prosecuted upon their return, or effectively de-radicalised, the potential for these women to return to their communities with the ability to radicalise others and indoctrinate children is underestimated. Furthermore, these women are returning with a heightened level of security awareness and global networks. The real result may not be felt for several years.

Issues with recognising women's capability, also extends to the judicial system, particularly when prosecuting and sentencing women. Although not an experience exclusive to terrorism as a crime type, the process is in effect reducing their culpability. Preconceived notions about gender and conflict inform political and judicial responses to terrorism, potentially creating vulnerable security gaps.³⁰ Furthermore, we are denying these women access to critical support services that may assist de-radicalisation efforts by not accepting the true nature and extent of their involvement in violent extremist activity.

It was pleasing to see that Australia's efforts in detecting and preventing women's participation within violent Islamism is in fact highly considered and forward-thinking in many respects. Although we have charged multiple women with terror related offences here in Australia, the geographical isolation of the country, combined with the different socio-political climate, has likely assisted in

stemming some of the activity, particularly that of returning foreign fighters. This is not to say though that we should become complacent. There is much that can still be done to diffuse damaging gender stereotypes and influence the thinking of key social structures that have the ability to positively impact women's de-radicalisation/disengagement.

The following recommendations have been developed as a result of the consultations undertaken through this Fellowship:

- A greater integration and crosspollination of work between academia and law enforcement should be encouraged across jurisdictions. The amalgamation of empirically based research and critical thinking with operational knowledge will go a long way in addressing the information gaps that exist in relation to terrorism studies;
- Consideration to be given to the implementation of a Muslim female hotline, whereby any young women who may be seeking non-judgemental advice on Islamic issues can access assistance;
- Consideration be given to the establishment of a female preacher's program – someone young women can trust to seek advice and support from. This may also serve to act as a role model/mentoring opportunity for young Muslim women.
- The implementation of radicalisation behaviour indicator training for families, teachers and other members of the community who are operating in roles that have direct exposure to children/youth, and who are in a position to observe behaviours;
- Consideration be given to the implementation of digital resilience curriculum within secondary and vocational colleges to assist in preventing the potential for extremist messaging and hate speech from resonating with, and influencing vulnerable youth;
- The introduction of gendered analysis in Counter Terrorism policy due to the difference in drivers for men and women;
- Encouraging the creation of permissive environments where Mosques and other community centres can engage in open and frank dialogue with youth, including around sensitive political and ideological questions, but without fear of repercussion or reprisal. Where the intent is to mitigate the risk of radicalisation to violence;

The topic of women's roles in violent extremism is under-researched, in part due to the difficulty in accessing data. As such, the importance of first-hand voices/experiences informing qualitative research to enhance statistics cannot be over-emphasised. This also removes the potential for researcher prejudice and bias. Additionally, when undertaking terrorism research involving mixed gender populations, collecting data on gender is critical. In a space where motivations are so individual and unique, researchers need to focus on the commonalities within cases to try and increase our understanding of the complexities of radicalisation, specifically female. The following information gaps were also identified which could serve as valuable future research studies:

- As we are entering a phase of women returning from the conflict zone, learning what these women gained from travel, what made them happy, and what drove their decision making. Further to this, understanding what their potential behavioural triggers might be as trauma is complex and brings along feelings of anger and revenge seeking behaviour;

- Examining other disciplines to understand how Muslim women recover from rape/sex abuse, or how people have left and recovered from cults, and whether the same methods could be applied to disengagement from radical Islamist ideology;
- How women view, interpret and frame themes and issues such as Extremism/Jihadism/the Syrian Regime/Domestic Violence compared to men? Further to this, understanding how women view 'active' participation, or their responsibilities in relation to 'jihad';
- The impact of propaganda on women, particularly that which appears to target them directly;
- Gender specific push factors;
- The role of female recruiters.

Like the involvement of women within terrorism historically, the issues that plague the environment have not changed. Stereotyping, gender bias and a victimhood mentality continue to impede our ability to effectively address this issue, particularly when we are considering the importance of prevention. It is my hope with this project that reinforcement of this messaging will assist in shining a light on these simple, yet stubborn practices.

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