



CTED

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE



CTED/UN-Women Research Symposium

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 18 July 2018

I. Background

1. In its resolution 2242 (2015), the Security Council requests CTED, in collaboration with UN-Women, to conduct gender-sensitive research and collect data on the drivers of radicalization for women and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses. In accordance with the Council's request, CTED and UN-Women held a joint research symposium at United Nations Headquarters on 18 July 2018.

2. The symposium was attended by around 20 researchers, including academics conducting research commissioned by UN-Women, members of [CTED's Global Research Network](#), and other eminent researchers and academics to discuss emerging trends and research findings in this area. The symposium also offered an opportunity for CTED, UN-Women and the participating researchers to identify remaining research gaps and discuss options for future cooperation.

II. Summary of discussions

3. The discussions focused on the gender dimensions of (i) radicalization and recruitment; and (ii) prevention and countering violent extremism (CVE). The participants presented their respective research on these topics and discussed insights from the wider body of research on women, peace and security.

Scope of the phenomenon

4. It was noted that women had historically engaged in terrorism, including in leadership and combat roles. They had also performed a range of other support functions and been victims of terrorism. The extent to which the current mobilization of women in the context of the foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) phenomenon constituted a significant increase in women's radicalization and their participation in terrorist activity was unclear. The FTF phenomenon had not been sufficiently analysed, and data was too scarce to draw any firm conclusions. Nonetheless, new research, based on a global dataset of 41,490 international citizens, from 80 countries, who had become affiliated with ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, showed that 4,761 (13 per cent)

were women and 4,640 (12 per cent) were minors.¹ However, the significant lack of data for many countries suggested that there were significant gaps in real figures for women and minors globally. There was therefore an urgent need for Member States to collect more gender and age-disaggregated data.

5. The major reason why the gender dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism required urgent attention was not just the sheer number of women involved. Gender must be considered because of the specific threat posed by women and the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women in the context of responses to terrorism, including both punitive measures and softer preventive and CVE tools. Risk assessment would likely be less effective if it was gender-blind, and counter-terrorism measures might have a differential impact on women's human rights if gender considerations were not integrated into their design, implementation and monitoring. More effective data collection was essential, but in-depth qualitative research must also be continued.

Female returnees

6. A significant research finding was that, of a total of 7,366 recorded FTF returnees, only 256 (four per cent) were women, and those women accounted for around five per cent of women who had travelled to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. In contrast, 1,180 (17 per cent) of total returnees were minors, and those minors accounted for around 25 per cent of minors who had travelled to, or had been born in, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. These findings posed many significant questions, from both the research and policy perspectives. They suggested the need for closer analysis of the reasons why women were not returning; ways to facilitate their return in a human rights-compliant manner; the fate of those who remained; and the fate of those who returned. There was also a need to consider the cases of women affiliated with terrorist groups other than ISIL (notably Boko Haram) in order to better understand the barriers preventing women from returning. In this regard, it was noted that some States prioritized the repatriation of minors and did not pay sufficient attention to women.

Drivers of radicalization

7. It was noted that, since women were not a monolithic group, there was no single, all-encompassing explanation for female radicalization. Women living in different contexts, with different life experiences and needs, and different individual trajectories had joined terrorist groups. The drivers could be ideological or non-ideological. In many cases, economic factors, as well as a desire for greater independence, could be a crucial incentive. The local drivers of radicalization could vary significantly from those that applied to FTFs. Human rights violations, and particularly violence against women, constituted an important driver, which remained understudied.

Narratives and counter-narratives

8. Research had shown how ISIL had strategically used gendered messaging to attract both male and female recruits and enforce strict gender norms in territories under its control.² This

¹ https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Women-in-ISIS-report_20180719_web.pdf.

² <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/6/empowerment-or-subjugation#view>.

included the use of sexual slavery and the complete subjugation of women as recruitment tools. With regard to counter-narratives, some participants called for a global strategic approach, while others cautioned against the inherent tendency of such narratives to reduce a highly complex reality to simplified black-and-white world views. If counter-narratives were indeed to be deployed, they must be conveyed by credible messengers and take the local context fully into account. For women, those messengers would not be the same as for men or for children and youth. Some research suggested that, for women, it was particularly important to maintain anonymity.

Criminal-justice responses

9. Changes in the definition and criminalization of acts of terrorism had had profound effects on women. In addition to violent acts, there had been a growing focus on a range of supports acts, leading to increased convictions of women who engaged in such behaviour as terrorist offenders. With regard to the prosecution of women, a forthcoming research paper analysed the gendered language used in court cases and identified a tendency to give women more lenient sentences for terrorist offences, yet provide them with inadequate rehabilitation support. The research indicated a further consequence of gender stereotyping: men received significantly harsher sentences.

Preventing and countering violent extremism

10. Research into the impact of CVE policies and programmes on civil society and human rights remained scarce and was fraught with methodological challenges. Some good practices could nonetheless be identified. They included the participation of local grassroots organizations; the implementation of tailored and context-specific interventions; and the participation of women in the design, implementation and monitoring of all programmes. Even though women's equality was a powerful factor preventing violent extremism, there was a risk of instrumentalizing women's rights programmes for CVE purposes. Lessons could also be learned from other contexts and programmes, such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

III. Future research agenda

11. The participants identified a number of potential avenues for further research:

- There is a need for quantitative and qualitative research to better understand the gender dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism/CVE
- There is a need for more comparative research (both contemporary and historical), including across different Member States, regions, and terrorist groups
- Research should cover the gender aspects of different types of terrorism (including, inter alia, extreme right-wing terrorism)
- Research needs to pay greater attention to local contexts
- Research into gender and human rights should include both the role of human rights abuses as a driver of radicalization and the human rights impact of counter-terrorism and CVE
- Research on gender should not limit itself to the role of women
- Inter-disciplinary research and full integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda would offer valuable additional insights.

IV. CTED/UN-Women cooperation with research community

12. CTED and UN-Women reaffirmed their commitment to continued engagement with researchers aimed at strengthening the evidence base on the gender dimensions of counter-terrorism and CVE efforts, in accordance with their respective mandates pursuant to Security Council resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2395 (2017).

13. CTED will continue to engage on this topic with the members of its Global Research Network and strive to increase the participation in the Network of research institutes with gender expertise, with a view to bringing the best analysis and latest trends and developments to the attention of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Security Council. CTED and UN-Women will also strive to ensure geographical diversity among the researchers with which they engage. UN-Women will capitalize on its established field presence to facilitate contact with relevant actors at the national and community levels.

14. CTED and UN-Women encourage donors to consider funding further research into the gender dimensions of counter-terrorism and CVE, in particular with a view to addressing the research gaps identified above.