
Where is the Mother?:

The Securitization of Mothers in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Bukola Solomon,
PhD Candidate, Global Governance, Balsillie School of International
Affairs

Corresponding Author

Bukola Solomon, University of Waterloo
bsolomonng@gmail.com

TSAS RB 2023-02



Introduction

In the search for effective strategies for countering terrorism and violent extremism, there is a growing recognition of the role of women as ‘new security threats’ due to the diverse roles women play in building and sustaining violent extremism¹— or as ‘new security actors’ providing the state with access to hard-to-reach spaces.² This research asks, how is the role of women, often framed by maternal logics, understood in P/CVE programming and what are the effects? Who do women trust the most when seeking support or help in interacting with individuals ‘at risk’ of radicalization? What factors should be considered to ensure that women can intervene safely and meaningfully? In what ways are women (re)negotiating their agency in P/CVE programming? In asking these questions, it presents evidence to help prevent the unintended consequences of even the best-intentioned programs by exploring the perceptions of gender as elements in designing and implementing P/CVE policies.

Methodology

This research is informed by insights gathered from 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with P/CVE practitioners, scholars, and women leaders within law enforcement and civil society. The interview data were supplemented with a feminist discourse analysis of how the role of women and gender are constructed in official policy documents, media articles, legal proceedings, transcripts of speeches, interviews, and seminar briefings. It is therefore crucial to note that this research does not claim to represent the entire ‘expert’ community in the field of study, nor does it attempt to draw generalizations. At best, it presents itself as a preliminary effort to understand women’s role in preventing and countering violent extremism. It highlights the notion that while there is an increasing appreciation for the roles that women play or could play in preventing and countering violent extremism, women often find themselves at the margin of decision-making and participation, while being at the forefront of the brunt of militarized counteroperations.

While the interviewees are drawn from different local and national contexts, with variations in approaches and programming, the gendered constructions the programs they either entrench or contest are strikingly similar. The crux is that it is in women's gendered role in the private sphere (as mothers or motherly) that their agency in P/CVE is understood and developed.

This research brief is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of the maternal logics through which P/CVE policies and measures that engage women are developed; then it proceeds to discuss their harmful effects. The second part describes how women are re-imagining their agency. This section informs an alternative model that enhances women’s agency and moves beyond the current instrumentalist and securitized approach.

¹ Joana Cook, “A woman’s place: U.S. counterterrorism since 9/11.” Oxford University Press, 2020.

² Jenny Lorentzen, Women as ‘new security actors’ in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali, *International Affairs*, Volume 97, Issue 3, May 2021, Pages 721–738, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab039>

Maternal Logics and their Effects on P/CVE work

The notion that mothers can play an essential role in combatting violent extremism saturates the P/CVE discourse, traveling across policy documents to scholarly and media publications. For instance, UK groups such as think-tank Quilliam, UK National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), Inspire, Women Against Radicalization Network (WARN); Oumnia Works in Netherlands, Mothers Schools in Austria and TOLANA mothers in Pakistan all promote the engagement of mothers in preventing and countering violent extremism. Feeding into this narrative of mothers or mothering (through the ethics of care) as a resource for prevention is the idea that women as mothers have the innate ability and are uniquely positioned in their families and communities to detect signs of radicalization in their children and spouses.³ The role carved out for mothers operates on two levels- strategic and tactical levels. On the strategic level, women as mothers are seen as shapers of good behavior and norms in their families. On the tactical level, they are expected to instrumentalize their innate maternal instinct and 'spy' skills to monitor their children's behavior to spot signs of behavioral change that display extreme views, including their activities online. Given the assumed complementarity of women's role in intelligence gathering and mothering, women assume a new subject position, I refer to as 'Mother Spies'.⁴

At the strategic level, the gendered expectation of P/CVE programs that focus on mothers in the words of an interviewee is "that young people are shaped by the women who are in charge of nurturing them. Women are nurturers and a child's upbringing is a key role of women as they nurture values into children. And so, if they can understand radicalization, and the factors that could lead people into radicalization, they will be helping to prevent that and help the children they get to nurture."⁵ Another interviewee noted that "because mothers are the nurturers, they're the caregivers, that's really why we kind of focused on them. it's no secret"⁶ And through nurturing, women are viewed to have a natural access to young people and sometimes, the mother's care work is supported by other women; aunties, sisters and grandmothers.⁷ These quotes imply that all women; whether biological mothers, adoptive mothers, foster mothers, stepmothers or women without children (voluntarily or involuntarily); are subjected to these expectations of nurturing as a P/CVE resource. As the founder of the Mothers School postulates, "terrorists do not fall from the sky, they were somewhere produced... what did the families,

³ Interview by author, Researcher/PVE Analyst (CP3).

⁴ Bukola Solomon, (2019). Mothers as the Missing Link: The 'Failed Mother' Narrative in Counterterrorism. Paper presented at WIIS Canada's 12th Annual Workshop: "Security and Power in a Tumultuous World Order" at Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, Toronto, ON.

⁵ Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP5).

⁶ Interview by author, Fmr Police Officer/Consultant (LE1).

⁷ Interview by author, CVE Practitioner (CP2).

particularly the mother realize and did not realize...and mothers are the first school in their children's lives."⁸

The logic of these strategic expectations built into P/CVE programs aimed at mothers accentuates the notion that if mothering is done 'right', we can perhaps produce a future world with no extremists. It presents radicalization as an effect of 'bad' mothering, a label that could deter many women from seeking external support when they spot signs of radicalization. In other words, when radicalization occurs, it is primarily attributable to maternal malfunctioning, either in the form of maternal absenteeism, poor maternal oversight, or not adhering to the norms of 'good' motherhood. Simply put, the idea is that a good mother raises 'good' and 'normal' children while a bad mother could only raise extremists.

At the tactical level, the assumptions are summed up as the "higher the level of involvement a parent has, the more in tune they are regarding what's happening with their child"⁹, that when the early signs of radicalization are present, women can use their relational skills to steer relatives from violent extremism (i.e., deradicalize). As an interviewee points out, the state [Pakistan] relies on women's nurturing skills, empathy, and relational ties to influence men to disengage.¹⁰ According to the Program Director of Morocco's CVE program (morchidat), Abdeslam El-Azaar, "women, just by virtue of their role in society, have so much contact with the people—children, young people, other women, even men. ... it is natural for them to provide advice."¹¹

These gendered assumptions reinforce an essentialist notion of motherhood, that is, mothers are inherently peaceful, and when mothers spot the signs of radicalization, they are motivated to intervene because their lives are guided by 'maternal nonviolence' whereby they are tasked with preserving life and sustaining peace-making efforts.¹² The assumption of a mother's natural keenness for peace ignores or trivializes the security threat that women pose as participants or enablers of violent extremism. This was summed up by an interviewee who argued that "we can't just assume that because women see radicalization happening around them, they disagree with it. They may also be feeling and experiencing the same conditions, material conditions, and structural conditions that make violent extremism appealing."¹³ A P/CVE practitioner revealed that in Afghanistan, many women recruited their children to join the Taliban because they were promised a better future for their families¹⁴ while another interviewee noted that in defection

⁸ Interview with Edit Schlaffer, "Mothers: A powerful weapon against terrorism", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4e8rUyxumY> at the 2015 Women in the World Salon in Chicago. Video accessed on February 24, 2020.

⁹ Interview by author, Academic & P/CVE Practitioner (AP1).

¹⁰ Interview by author, Academic/Fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (AP3)

¹¹ The Atlantic (2018), "The Female Quran Experts Fighting Radical Islam in Morocco", retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/the-female-quran-experts-fighting-radical-islam-in-morocco/551996/> on October 16, 2022.

¹² Sara Ruddick, (1989), *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

¹³ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2)

¹⁴ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP4).

center in Somalia where they worked, it was reported that some mothers influenced their sons to join Al-Shabaab.¹⁵ It is widely presumed that sons recruit their mothers and not the other way round. The assumption is that mothers' involvement or support for violent extremism results from a mother's unconditional love for her "radicalized" male children. Hence, maternal violence is an effect of a child's radicalization. Clearly, this misconception ignores women's role as indoctrinators of violent extreme beliefs and as recruiters.¹⁶

Maternal logics postulate that women are equally positioned in the family and society or have central roles in their communities, which is not the case. As an interviewee draws out, "we can't assume in every community or culture that children listen to their mothers. And in some societies, mothers are not the influencer in their [children] everyday life"¹⁷. Even in contexts where the mother is present, maternal presence also does not translate to the ability or power to counter radicalization. The interviewees, in the different cultural contexts they work in, stated that sometimes, the most present parent reported not being able to recognize the warning signs or tell them apart from what is typical of the youth experimentation phase.¹⁸ Also, the mothers they engaged argued that they didn't know what to do or where to turn for help when they spot signs of radicalization; that they lack trust in security forces; that their knowledge is underappreciated, especially by security services, and that they fear being ostracized by their communities.¹⁹

These maternal logics also promulgate religious-racialized and classist understandings of the 'good mother'. As Deborah Connolly argues, "black women [and in general, racialized women] are more readily assumed to be deviant mothers and their children are viewed as less socially valuable [or as threats]"²⁰ This has led to a securitized climate where racialized motherhood is consistently questioned as it ties to the racial and gendered construction of security threats. The *good mother* is mainly deployed as a moral imperative that patronizes racialized women, who are only considered 'good mothers' if they use their relational work to serve the state's interests. If racialized motherhood is securitized, at best, racialized mothers who work with the authorities are considered the 'lesser evil' (moderate) mothers but not necessarily the 'good' mothers. With all things considered, the institutionalization of 'good mothering' norms is another instrumentalist strategy that targets women without addressing the deeply rooted racialized and gendered stereotypes that produce insecurity and violence, the human rights considerations, and

¹⁵ Interview by author, CVE Practitioner (CP2).

¹⁶ Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP5).

¹⁷ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

¹⁸ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP1).

¹⁹ Interviews by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP3), Academic Practitioner (AP4), Academic Practitioner (AP2), fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (CP4), Academic Practitioner/Fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (AP3), P/CVE Practitioner (CP5), Fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (CP1), CVE Practitioner (CP2).

²⁰ Deborah Connolly, (2000), "Mythical Mothers and Dichotomies of Good and Evil: Homeless mothers in the United States." in Helena Ragone & France Winddance Twine (eds.) *Ideologies and Technologies of Motherhood: Race, Class, Sexuality, Nationalism*, Routledge, New York, p. 266-268.

the boomerang effect of such a strategy. For instance, the placement of *mother spies* on the frontline of prevention may increase women's risk of stigmatization and exclusion within their families and communities. Also, they often become targets by violent extremists as the women are suspected to be government informants.²¹

Maternal nonviolence also heightens the ability of women to avoid detection and access lenient sentencing. This scenario plays out in the case of Farhana Ahmed, who encouraged 'terrorism' on social media through "Power Strangers" Facebook group and allegedly financed 'terrorist' activities.²² To the British media, she was "a mother of five" and all other identifying factors become inconsequential. She was spared jail in the UK as the Judge argued that he was moved by the 'suffering' of the children and said to her "the sooner you are returned to your children, the better for all concerned. You have devoted your life, apart from this abhorrent behaviour to the care of your children. Your case is in an entirely exceptional category".²³ Viewed in this way, as a mother, she has an exceptional role to play if she returns to her children and limits their vulnerability to radicalization. Her role and identity as a mother ruled out other ways, she had represented herself and exercised her agency (i.e., disseminating violent messages to potential recruits on Facebook). Similarly, a German former ISIS fighter walked free, even though she was found guilty of being a member of a terrorist organisation and unlawful possession of several firearms and ammunition.²⁴ One of the judges in her trial, noted that the sentencing was influenced by her vow to "rehabilitate and integrate her daughters into society".²⁵ Leniency in sentencing for women, especially those associated with children in their care, neglects their agency.

Although mothers often receive lenient sentencing, they nevertheless are objurgated more severely because they have children and if they had radicalized their children. As mentioned by an interviewee who sometimes grants expert witness testimonials in court proceedings, "that they have children is seen as further damning of the crime. it's like a sign of the 'extra' deviancy. How could you possibly bring your children into this? You, bad mother".²⁶ A tension thus emerges here as mothers involved in violent extremism are vilified as 'bad mother', but their mothering also deified as the primary resource for protecting the children from radicalization. And as such,

²¹ Fionnuala Ni Aolain (2015), Jihad, Counter-Terrorism and Mothers.

²² Telegraph Reporters (2017), Mother-of-five who encouraged terrorism on Facebook is spared jail so she can 'get back to her children', <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/08/mother-of-five-encouraged-terrorism-facebook-spared-jail-can/>

²³ The Sun (2017), "Outrageous Fury as mum who encouraged UK ISIS terror attacks on Facebook group is spared jail" retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4863614/isis-terror-attacks-facebook-mum-slammed-philip-davies/> on September 9, 2022.

²⁴ Daily Mail (2022), Jihadi Bride Walks Free from German court", retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10833025/Jihadi-bride-accused-enslaving-Yazidi-woman-joining-ISIS-walks-FREE-German-court.html>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

the leniency the courts may grant to mothers often sits in the gendered desire to preserve the mother-child bond as the more time the mother devotes to the child, the less vulnerable they are to radicalization and the better for the child, the family, and the society.

Mobilizing mothers as ‘prevent actors’ also would rely on a significant level of trust and cooperation with law enforcement, that is, mothers reporting to the police and seeking assistance when they spot early signs of radicalization in their children. Dissenting from this view, an interviewee argues that this cannot be good mothering on the part of racialized mothers from communities who often are entangled in abusive and violent relationships with the police.²⁷ Knowing the systemic racism and racial profiling in policing in some contexts and the police brutality that occurs in many countries, the fear of what may happen if they report their children often deters them from doing so. Besides, some community members are of the opinion that the police are only interested in them because they view their youth as terrorist threats or criminals.

When the research interviewees were asked who the mothers trust the most, many said they hardly trust the police or state agencies and would rather talk to an NGO or religious leaders.²⁸ Similarly, another interviewee echoed this perspective that the “women trust themselves, most women trust fellow women, and because they fear the repercussions and retaliation from violent extremists and community leaders, they're likely to share with fellow women.”²⁹ Another participant continued that “mothers would often talk to [other] parents, teachers, or talk to an NGO that works in the area... or other actors rather than the police.”³⁰ The police are the least trusted because of the “atrocious track record dealing with minority communities and we can't expect communities or families just to ignore a history of prejudice and racism, just because they might need the police on this occasion. Why on earth would they trust them?”³¹ This lack of trust can weaken the efforts to strengthen community-based approaches as they often depend on community partnerships to identify at-risk individuals and develop intervention strategies. P/CVE policies and practices continue to underestimate these issues, thereby leading to weak or counterproductive measures.

Because some women depend on their spouses, relatives, and community support, they reported being afraid to speak out after spotting warning signs of radicalization as they did not want to be cut off from their support sources.³² Other reasons why some mothers may not report to the police include the fear of losing the son both physically and emotionally, the fear of misinterpreting the signs as radicalization when they could just be experimenting, and the fear of the family being under constant surveillance by both the security services and the community,

²⁷ Interviews by author, Academic Practitioner & fmr. -CVE Practitioner (AP3), Academic Practitioner (AP2), P/CVE Practitioner (CP5), fmr. Police Officer (LE1)

²⁸ Interviews by author, Academic Practitioner & P-CVE Practitioner (AP1), Academic Practitioner (AP2),

²⁹ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner & fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (AP3).

³⁰ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP1).

³¹ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

³² Interview by author, Academic Practitioner & fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (AP3).

particularly the stigmatization tied to it.³³ However, they may report to the police when they think that “we've got nothing left to lose, and we would rather lose them to the prison system than lose them to traveling overseas.”³⁴

Re-imagining women’s agency in the P/CVE space

The first part of this research brief has argued against basing prevention of radicalization on maternalistic assumptions because of the gendered effects they produce when women’s agency and participation are activated through traditional gender roles. The role that women can and want to play in P/CVE will differ across cultural contexts and family. In some P/CVE contexts, women define their agency based on their role as mothers, like the *Brigades des Meres* in France and *Mothers for Life* who offer mother-to-mother support and engage in developing counter narratives. In other contexts, the role is often resisted by women who advocate for a deeper level of participation across all aspects of the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of P/CVE programs. Their counterargument is that women can play any role that is open and welcoming to men. As Rehema Zaid, a peacebuilder in Kenya, argues:

“Women are not your informants. Women’s role in P/CVE programs is influenced by the existing gender stereotypes within Kenya. There is a belief that men should take the upper hand in this type of work. People want women to play a narrow and restricted role in P/CVE. Women are seen as secondary and viewed as synonymous to youth, which leads to women and youth being treated similarly. Most people working in P/CVE just call on women when they want information from the community. For example, when there is a problem in a community, P/CVE experts want women to speak and mobilize. When P/CVE experts are starting a program or there is a security challenge, the first person [the] donors will contact is a woman. But when the program has taken shape, the women are no longer important.”³⁵

Besides, any effort to understand women’s participation in P/CVE needs to acknowledge that woman is not a single, homogenized category, and the influence and agency women have will differ across locations and contexts. For instance, while women in Indonesia are championing peacebuilding initiatives called peace villages that address radicalization by promoting social

³³ Interviews by author, Academic Practitioner & fmr. -CVE Practitioner (AP3), Academic Practitioner (AP2), P/CVE Practitioner (CP5), fmr. Police Officer (LE1),

³⁴ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

³⁵ Phoebe Donnelly (2021), “Women Aren’t Your Informants: Evaluating True Participation for Women in CVE”, The Global Observatory, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/06/women-arent-your-informants-evaluating-true-participation-for-women-in-cve/> accessed on July 18, 2022.

cohesion, women empowerment, and economic autonomy³⁶, women in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Kenya mobilize themselves under *Kijiji Cha Amani* and *Una Hakikan* to access, monitor, and counter misinformation through the different information-sharing networks that are traditionally accessible to them.³⁷ This is somewhat different from the work of the *mourchidates'* (women religious guides) in Morocco whose roles were traditionally exclusive to men.³⁸ Through their religious and political empowerment, they promote religious tolerance and challenge extremist interpretations of the Quran. These P/CVE efforts are often overlooked and undervalued; as an interviewee mentioned, “[They are] not marketable work, it's often not seen as really that valuable.”³⁹

While the interviewees were drawn from different contexts, the emphasis that many place on the importance of community networks to women is compelling. This is often a women-led space for women to explore their concerns and where and how to seek support. In this space, they could talk about issues that affect them the most without feeling compelled to prioritize state needs over theirs.⁴⁰ Thus, P/CVE measures are more likely to engage women meaningfully if they are developed with extensive consultation with women organizations and networks to identify local areas of priority, factors that enable violence and threaten their safety, what resources are needed, and what opportunities exist that can be further strengthened, rather than an approach that securitizes their children as potential threats or securitizes their practice of motherhood as a source of radicalization if not done ‘properly.’ Preventive initiatives often target communities with a high prevalence of attacks or communities from which ‘potential’ extremists may emerge. This is problematic as it is more reactive than preventive and is often racially constructed and gendered. The consultations and collaboration with women's networks and organizations from the design to implementation phase can help to avoid putting women's lives at risk and to respect their authority, agency, and rights.

Conclusion: Recommendations and Future Research

While the increased attention to the role of women in P/CVE is a positive development, the gender stereotypes, and patriarchal norms that many initiatives reinforce should not be ignored. Women's role in P/CVE is envisioned as “mother spies” and this restricts their voices and agency to the ‘home front’. A meaningful engagement of women means that women must be included

³⁶ UN Women (2020), “Peace Villages: Women Leading Peace in Indonesia”, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/01/peace-villages-women-leading-peace-in-indonesia>, accessed on July 19, 2022.

³⁷ The Sentinel Project, “Women at the Core of the Sentinel Project's Peacebuilding Activities”, <https://thesentinelproject.org/2022/03/31/women-at-the-core-of-the-sentinel-projects-peacebuilding-activities/> accessed on August 7, 2022.

³⁸ Kiriloi Ingram (2021), “Centralising Women in P/CVE and Peacebuilding Programme Design.” *Journal for Deradicalization* 28 (2021): 67-107. Innes, Alexandria.

³⁹ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (CP4).

⁴⁰ Interviews by author, Academic & P/CVE Practitioner (AP4), Researcher & P/CVE Analyst (CP3)

in all stages of P/CVE efforts. While this is not a new argument and one that has arguably been elevated to the policy level, it is yet to trickle down into practice. Against this backdrop, an interviewee frustratedly expressed that:

“You see it in the books, but when you go to the field, now I'm talking as someone who worked from the ground, you will see the state agencies sending their military and 80% or 90% are men, then everybody else who comes into the process of interventions are men, the Council of Elders, they are men. Religious leaders, they are men. Government representatives are also mostly men, so you realize that in actual practice again, women are excluded”.⁴¹

The family is one of the sites where radicalization can be interrupted early before it leads to violence.⁴² However, instead of mobilizing mothers as the ‘best positioned asset’, prevention efforts should include all actors of the family unit. The spotlight on mothers creates a gap, which is the consideration of the whole family as mothers are not the only caregivers, and in some cases (particularly in non-Western contexts), youth live or have close contact with multiple generations of a family.⁴³ Also, in many cultures, many women express motherhood through the ethics of welfare provision and not by maternal presence. By turning the gaze on mothers, especially those who are present at home, these initiatives exclude many women, including migrant mothers, trans people and same-sex parented families. Several initiatives, such as the Mothers School, are responding to the call not to overburden women with extra responsibilities and to include men, mainly the fathers. Hence, the organization launched the Fathers School.⁴⁴ Another example is Parents for Peace, a U.S based organization that empowers families to prevent radicalization and extremism through guidance, community education.⁴⁵ However, family-oriented measures must consider a gender-sensitive approach to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes. For instance, some initiatives are established in a gendered notion of parenting that engage the father as a “second pair of eyes” while the mother remains the primary resource and most interested parent in prevention⁴⁶. Also, they reinforce a traditional understanding of masculinity and femininity based on men being perpetrators of violence- ‘good’ men being the protectors of weak women from other [bad] men. In essence, women are either victims, relatives, or innocent bystanders, with little agency.

⁴¹ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP3).

⁴² Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP5).

⁴³ Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner/Security Analyst (CP6)

⁴⁴ For more information, <https://wwb.org/activity/fatherschools-austria/> access on October 23, 2022.

⁴⁵ For more information, <https://www.parents4peace.org/> accessed on October 23, 2022

⁴⁶ Global Counterterrorism Forum: The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, retrieved from <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Lifecycle%20Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Families-in-PCVE.pdf?ver=2016-09-13-141058-860> on August 10, 2022.

Effective measures to prevent and counter violent extremism need to integrate comprehensive gender analysis by paying significant attention to gendered power dynamics in societies and the gendered patterns of radicalization. As such, P/CVE initiatives should recognize women as individuals with agency and rights and not merely relatives. In addition, assistance programs should be attentive to individuals' diverse needs as many are often limited in scope due to its fixation on men as perpetrators and women with children as the beneficiaries. When women are reduced to their role as mothers, their involvement in violent extremism is trivialized by their association with male 'extremists, which in turn leads to the underappreciation of the multiple roles they can play in countering violent extremism.

Comprehensive gender analysis also calls for an increase in the capacity of security sector actors and law enforcement working in the P/CVE sector to apply a gender perspective. This includes training on understanding how perceptions of masculinity and femininity tie into violent extremism and accessing the skills to initiate gender-sensitive community engagement. Where these efforts are in place already, 'gender' is often conflated with 'women', causing many officers to view gender training as a woman's business and irrelevant to traditional security domain. As an interviewee mentioned, "when we schedule these training, the participants were more women than men, this is not to say that women officials can't benefit from these training, but a huge chunk of the intended audience is missing. However, if the training is on 'hard' security issues like border crime, and terrorism, more men would attend".⁴⁷ One way to counter this low turnout is to ensure that everyone, including female and male police officers and officers who are non-binary, as well as those in senior leadership positions, takes this training. Another strategy is inserting the completion of these types of training in the metrics for evaluating their performance and competencies.

Lastly, P/CVE-related community policing and engagement initiatives must be grounded in partnership, trust, and respect in their engagement with local communities. This can be achieved by communities taking the lead and by setting up active and consistent communication mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and feedback between security sector actors, policymakers, and community members at all stages of P/CVE efforts. As articulated by an interviewee, "If they keep rounding up young men on suspicion of terrorism, continuously stopping and searching or detaining them is not going to work. And if they continue to ignore women's legitimate concerns for their safety and security more broadly in society, it will not work. So, unless it is accompanied with a broader sense of why police forces or security agencies are involved in these communities, it's not going to work."⁴⁸ P/CVE efforts stand a better chance if they consider all these issues.

As earlier mentioned, this research brief should not be viewed as a comprehensive examination of women-centric P/CVE measures but as a step with limited scope and gaps, partly because it focuses on the maternalistic framing of women's role and because of the small size of interviews

⁴⁷ Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner/ Security Analyst (CP6).

⁴⁸ Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

conducted. To adequately understand the effects of the maternal logics, gender bias, and the degree to which mothers are securitized, the research can be further strengthened by engaging with specific P/CVE initiatives in a province in Canada through participant observation. This approach will allow a bottom-up investigation into how these initiatives envision the roles of gender and women, women's everyday experiences and needs; to observe how training activities are structured and prioritized, how participants interact with one another and how the trainer interacts with the participants. The aim is to investigate areas where the expectations and desires of the participants complement or contradict the expected outcomes of the P/CVE initiatives and what visions they seek to pursue. The findings will help generate deeper insights that can inform better P/CVE programming.

References

- Connolly, Deborah (2000), "Mythical Mothers and Dichotomies of Good and Evil: Homeless mothers in the United States." in Helena Ragone & France Winddance Twine (eds.) *Ideologies and Technologies of Motherhood: Race, Class, Sexuality, Nationalism*, Routledge, New York, p. 266-268.
- Cook, Joana (2020), "A woman's place: U.S. counterterrorism since 9/11." Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Daily Mail (2022), "Jihadi Bride Walks Free from German court", retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10833025/Jihadi-bride-accused-enslaving-Yazidi-woman-joining-ISIS-walks-FREE-German-court.html>
- Donnelly, Phoebe (2021), "Women Aren't Your Informants: Evaluating True Participation for Women in CVE", The Global Observatory, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/06/women-arent-your-informants-evaluating-true-participation-for-women-in-cve/> accessed on July 18, 2022.
- Global Counterterrorism Forum: The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, retrieved from <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Lifecycle%20Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Families-in-PCVE.pdf?ver=2016-09-13-141058-860> on August 10, 2022.
- Ingram, Kiriloi (2021), "Centralising Women in P/CVE and Peacebuilding Programme Design." *Journal for Deradicalization* 28 (2021): 67-107. Innes, Alexandria.
- Interview by author, Academic & P/CVE Practitioner (AP1).
- Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP2).

Interview by author, Academic Practitioner/Fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (AP3).

Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP4).

Interview by author, Academic Practitioner (AP5).

Interview by author, Fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (CP1).

Interview by author, CVE Practitioner (CP2).

Interview by author, fmr. P/CVE Practitioner (CP4).

Interview by author, fmr. Police (CT) Officer (LE1).

Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP3).

Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP5).

Interview by author, P/CVE Practitioner (CP6).

Interview with Edit Schlaffer, “Mothers: A powerful weapon against terrorism”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4e8rUyxumY> at the 2015 Women in the World Salon in Chicago. Video accessed on February 24, 2020.

Lorentzen, Jenny (2021), Women as ‘new security actors’ in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali, *International Affairs*, Volume 97, Issue 3, Pages 721–738, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab039>

Ni Aolain , Fionnuala (2015), Jihad, Counter-Terrorism and Mothers, retrieved from <https://www.justsecurity.org/20407/jihad-counter-terrorism-mothers/> on March 2, 2020.

Ruddick, Sara (1989), *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

Solomon, Bukola (2019). Mothers as the Missing Link: The ‘Failed Mother’ Narrative in Counterterrorism. Paper presented at WIIS Canada’s 12th Annual Workshop: “Security and Power in a Tumultuous World Order” at Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, Toronto, ON.

Telegraph Reporters (2017), Mother-of-five who encouraged terrorism on Facebook is spared jail so she can ‘get back to her children’,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/08/mother-of-five-encouraged-terrorism-facebook-spared-jail-can/>

The Atlantic (2018), “The Female Quran Experts Fighting Radical Islam in Morocco”, retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/the-female-quran-experts-fighting-radical-islam-in-morocco/551996/> on October 16, 2022.

The Sun (2017), “Outrageous Fury as mum who encouraged UK ISIS terror attacks on Facebook group is spared jail” retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4863614/isis-terror-attacks-facebook-mum-slammed-philip-davies/> on September 9, 2022.

The Sentinel Project (2022), “Women at the Core of the Sentinel Project’s Peacebuilding Activities”, <https://thesentinelproject.org/2022/03/31/women-at-the-core-of-the-sentinel-projects-peacebuilding-activities/> accessed on August 7, 2022.

UN Women (2020), “Peace Villages: Women Leading Peace in Indonesia”, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/01/peace-villages-women-leading-peace-in-indonesia>, accessed on July 19, 2022.