Gender "Men-Streaming" CVE: Countering Violence Extremism by Addressing Masculinities Issues

Jossif Ezekilov, George Washington University

Abstract:

Violent extremist groups differ in many aspects – ideology, operations, and geography – but almost all seek and recruit disillusioned young men as fighters on their front lines. The ubiquity of this strategy means that young men are drawn to such groups less because of the groups' specific beliefs and more out of an inherent need to fulfill their identities as men. Policies and analysis to counter violent extremism must therefore incorporate gender analysis– thus "men-stream" their efforts – in order to identify factors that make men vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

Keywords: violent extremism, terrorism, gender equality, gender justice, masculinity, men's health, security, international development, gender studies

Contact: Jossif Ezekilov, ezekilov@gmail.com

The multifaceted ways violent terrorist groups come to exist, operate, and flourish are rooted in complex geopolitical trends, which are continuously researched and debated by national security experts, policymakers, and development practitioners alike. However, whether ISIS in the Middle East, Boko Haram in West Africa, or hate groups in the West, one major commonality among extremist groups is that they actively identify and recruit young, disillusioned men as fighters on their front lines. The ubiquity of this strategy suggests there is an inherent lure for young men to join such groups, one that goes beyond the groups' respective ideologies.

This policy brief argues young men are more likely drawn into joining extremist groups when they are struggling to fulfill their perceived needs and identities as men, rather than through an inherent hatred of specific groups or radical ideologies. Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) analyses and approaches must therefore incorporate considerations of masculinities - gender "men-stream" their efforts - if anti-terrorism policies are to truly address the root causes of the prevalence of violent extremism. "Men-streaming", a term derived by scholars– most notably popularized by Chant and Gutman (2002)– from the development and public policy concept of gender mainstreaming, is a process of assessing and developing policy with particular attention to, and emphasis on, its impact on men and young boys. In the context of CVE, this requires an understanding of the role that dominant societal constructs of masculinity play in influencing individuals' choice of participating in violent activities.

"Men-Streaming": Considering Men as Gendered Beings

Masculinities, that is, the study of cross-cultural social constructs that define what it means to be a man, has traditionally received scant attention from activists and policy makers. This is because most programs aimed at promoting gender equality have traditionally focused primarily on promoting women's rights. When men were included in the discourse, it was mostly in the role of the "problematic male": the obstacle in the way of women's empowerment (Cornwall, 2000). Some feminists have justified this omission on the grounds that resources devoted to gender should be going to women to redress existing and longstanding gender inequalities (Peretz, 2016.)

Though international agreements, such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration, have highlighted the need to involve men in the promotion of gender equality (Ruxton, 2004), engaging with men on gender issues has only been pursued recently. This shift in thinking came about due to the realization that the success of gender equality efforts was limited in their focus solely on women (Wanner & Wedham, 2015.) Development practitioners and gender equality advocates came to see including the male side of gender as necessary for two reasons. First, achieving transformational change on gender equality is not possible without engaging men. Second, men also experience issues related to their gender that have a significant impact on their well-being and life choices (Wanner & Wedham, 2015, Bannon & Correia, 2006; Chant & Gutman, 2002).

While masculinities differ across cultural, geographical, and political contexts, there is usually a dominant and normative form of masculinity that is upheld by a society as the standard by which all men are judged (Bannon & Correia, 2006). Known as hegemonic masculinity, it encompasses a normative set of behaviors, actions, values, and practices that men are conditioned to adhere to in order to be seen as proper men in their community. Certain capabilities are valued over others, including: being able to secure work and provide for one's family; the ability to be sexually active, marry, and have children; and the ability to enjoy a sense of belonging and respect among one's peers and community. The pursuit of these

capabilities dictates many men's actions and the way they live their lives. Men who deviate away from these established norms often face ridicule and social exclusion by their peers and other members of their community (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). They are also often confronted with a divide between the role society expects of them and their own realities. Men who are poor, socioeconomically marginalized, disabled, or affected by conflict, are least likely to be able to fulfill the aforementioned capabilities deemed favorable by their society (Bannon & Correia, 2006).

When men are unable to fulfill these expectations, they may turn to destructive and illicit means to do so. This happens because men do not see an alternative other than living up to the expectations set upon them by their environment and those around them (Bannon & Correia, 2006). Men may resort to illicit behavior to achieve a sense of dominance over their surroundings, as well as vent their frustrations with the status quo. Studies have shown that men who uphold such hegemonic views of masculinity are more likely to engage in actions such as criminal activity, drug use, violence against others, and unsafe sexual practices (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Barker, Heilman, & Harrison, 2017; Robb, Featherstone, Ruxton, & Ward, 2015).

The Role of Masculinities in Violent Extremism

Organizations involved in CVE have long supported the notion that young men fuel the rise of extremist groups. The presence of a "youth bulge" in a population has been documented as a predictor of societal unrest. For example, Urdal (2011) has found that the probability of armed conflict is 150% greater when 15-24-year-olds make up 35% of a country's population, as is the case in many developing countries. However, the gendered nuances regarding the way men are involved in such conflicts are not well examined. When gender is considered, it is again usually in the context of women and the way they are targeted as instruments of war, as seen with the example of Boko Haram's use of rape and abduction of women in Nigeria (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Even donor strategies on CVE without an articulated gender strategy still only see half the story. USAID (2016) calls for gender considerations in their CVE strategy, but only in the context of increased attention to "women's perceptions of violence and security" (p.10), while also engaging women as stakeholders as certainly necessary endeavors.

Given that men are more likely to choose violent action if they face challenges to fulfilling their societal roles as men, one can expect the presence of such barriers to be indicative of a greater vulnerability to radicalization. Mapping out these barriers in the context of "push" and "pull" factors towards extremism would thus present a useful analysis of the conditions needed for men to be radicalized. Hasan (2012) provides useful definitions of push and pull factors in this context: push factors are the negative factors in one's "societal environment" that aid in "pushing" them toward violent extremism, while "pull" factors are the perceived positive features of extremist groups that pull men towards joining. The following are examples of both types of factors that may act as determinants for joining a violent extremist group.

Push Factors

Lack of economic opportunities. Poverty and unemployment are some of the biggest risk factors for men's radicalization. The inability to work and provide for oneself and family represents the ultimate emasculation in many societies, and it has been shown to have a negative impact on men's health, self-image, and general well-being (Barker, 2005). This can be exacerbated if men are dependent on others for support. Joining an extremist group can

therefore be a primarily financial endeavor. For example, former al-Shabab fighters in Somalia cited the ability to provide for themselves and not be reliant on relatives as a key motivator for joining (Hassan, 2012).

Social marginalization. Men who face sociocultural barriers within their communities are more likely to be disengaged from them, and so are more vulnerable to radicalization (Jasko, LaFree, & Kruglanski, 2017). Such barriers can relate to race, age, religion, ethnicity, or any other social identity. Men can feel marginalized, even in contexts where the opportunities to fulfill their roles as men are present, if they do not enjoy equal access to those opportunities based on their social identities. Extremists who were born in the West provide an ideal example of this. It was long believed that societies with fairly robust human rights and freedoms, like those of many Western countries, would make an unlikely breeding ground for potential terrorists (Gelfand, LaFee, Fahey, & Feinberg, 2013). This theory was contradicted by terrorist events in the West, and the fact that many of the perpetrators were citizens or residents of the same countries they attacked. However, just because those freedoms were present does not mean the individuals in question had real access to them, as the aforementioned barriers are still present for many individuals, even in many Western countries. This discrimination furthers social disengagement, which in turn makes individuals more vulnerable to radicalization (OSCE, 2014).

Lack of marriage prospects. In many societies, one is not fully a man until he is a husband and father. Unmarried men are often relegated to a lower status in many societies, and often have lower rates of employment (Moffitt, 2012), income (Pollman-Schult, 2011; Ashwin & Isupova, 2014), educational attainment (Fry et al., 2010), and land ownership (Koopman, 2009). They may even be perceived as being homosexual, causing further tensions (Bannon and Correia, 2006). At the same time, men also face increasing difficulties in finding spouses. The phenomenon of "missing females" due to offspring selection in many parts of the world has led to a dearth of potential brides ("The worldwide war," 2010.) Migration and increased education and employment opportunities for women are other contributing factors that exacerbate the marriage disparity. The resulting imbalance in the marriage market has been shown to create a surplus of males that are more prone to violent actions (Hudson & Den Boer, 2002). Extremist groups have keyed in on this phenomenon and use marriage as a recruitment tool. Groups like IS and Boko Haram actively recruit and/or kidnap women and girls to be married off to their fighters.

Pull Factors

A sense of belonging. Being a part of a group and forming interpersonal relationships are essential human interactions. These experiences may not be made available to men who are ostracized by their community for their inability to fulfill their roles as men, and/or are socially marginalized based on their social identities. This may cause men to seek acceptance and social connection from groups elsewhere. There is psychological evidence to suggest that the need for belonging is strong enough for individuals to accept the goals of others as their own (Khader et al.). Groups like IS have exploited this in their messaging, calling for the unison of all Muslims, regardless of race or ethnicity (Khader et al.). In doing so, they appeal to men who do not experience such acceptance in their own communities.

Defense of one's identity. All extremist groups call for war as a means of defense against the destruction of shared values, calling on men to be defenders of religion, country, ethnicity, or way of life. Global terrorism is thus not so much a traditional contest of territory and

resources, but rather a radical defense of one's identity (Bannon & Correia, 2006). It has even been argued that the call to jihad is borne less out of orthodox religiosity, and more as a means of redressing the past wrongs enacted on Muslims by the West (Aslam, 2012).

The search for respect. A soldier is generally seen as a being in a position of power and honor in many societies. Joining an extremist group can therefore be a way to achieve elevated prominence in one's society. Former fighters of al-Shabab cited honor as the biggest draw to joining the group, as membership ensured fear, respect, and attention from women (Hassan, 2012). Being a fighter therefore allowed these men to bypass the traditional limitations of age and wealth in achieving a swift fulfillment of the hegemonic male status.

Recommendations

Curbing the appeal of violent extremist groups will require addressing the discussed "push" and "pull" factors at all levels. More research is needed on the application of men's gender perspectives in conflict and post-conflict settings. Such analysis is difficult, not least because most men have never been engaged in discussion about their experiences as men (Barker, 2005). There are three general approaches that can be undertaken to "men stream" CVE policies:

Learning from existing men's programs. Methodologies from men's programs addressing violence against women may provide valuable tools and lessons to crafting effective CVE policies. Some successful examples include the White Ribbon Campaign (Kaufman, 2001) and men's clubs against violence (Tu-Anh, Trang, & Tam, 2013). Such efforts are effective because they provide a sense of belonging, a space for men to deconstruct their preconceptions of masculinity, and/or an opportunity for men to evaluate their harmful behaviors without judgement, all of which are needed to foster true behavior change. Social media campaigns should also be pursued to promote positive masculinity, gender equality, and expressions of one's identity (Helmus, York, & Chalk, 2013).

Engagement of local stakeholders. Countering CVE requires the inclusion of local actors such as NGOs, religious groups, community youth organizations, women's groups, recreation and sports clubs, and other civil society groups, working at the grassroots level, as well as young people themselves. Previous policies on CVE have too often created stigma and further resentment, as evidenced by "counter radicalization" interventions in Europe (Chin, Gharaibeh, Woodham, & Deeb, 2016). Incorporating community actors into the design and implementation of CVE efforts will go a long way to correcting this, as well as ensuring such efforts will be effective, sustainable, and embraced at the local level. An inclusive and participatory planning process will also help to identify specific factors that contribute to the marginalization of young men and to develop the best means for addressing them.

Addressing structural barriers. On the national level, structural barriers that lead to social marginalization must be eradicated, particularly in developing countries with large youth populations. The most effective ways to pursue this goal is to expand education and employment programs. Providing school and vocational programs that support young people to develop employable skills, while at the same time expanding employment opportunities for youth as they graduate, will reduce socioeconomic incentives for joining an extremist group. Investing in youth entrepreneurship in both the formal and informal sector has been identified as an area of importance, especially for CVE efforts in East Africa (ACSS, 2012). Such efforts

will also unlock a vital source of growth and poverty reduction for many countries, further reducing the draw extremist groups have for young men.

References

Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2012). Preventing youth radicalization in East Africa. Program summary of preventing youth radicalization in East Africa work shop, Kigali, Rwanda. Retrieved from http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Preventing-Youth-Radicalization-in-East-Africa-Program-Summary-ACSS.pdf

Ashwin, S., & Isupova, O. (2014). "Behind every great man . . . ": The male marriage wage premium examined qualitatively. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 76*(1), 37-55. Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12082/full Aslam, M. (2012). Gender-based explosions: The nexus between Muslim masculinities, jihadist Islamism, and terrorism. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

Bannon, I., & Correia, M. (2006). The other half of gender: Men's issues in development. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006.

Barker, G. [Gary Thomas]. (2005). Dying to be men: Youth, masculinity and social exclusion. New York; London: Routledge.

Barker, G. and Ricardo, C. (2005). Young men and the construction of masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/23/000012009_20050623134235/Rendered/PDF/327120rev0PAPER0AFR0young0men0WP26.pdf

Barker, G., Heilman, B., & Harrison, A. (2017). The man box: A study on being a young man in the US, UK, and Mexico. Washington, DC and London: Promundo-US and Unilever. Retrieved from http://promundoglobal.org/resources/man-box-study-young-man-us-uk-mexico/

Chant, S., & Gutmann, M. C. (2002). 'Men-streaming' gender? questions for gender and development policy in the twenty-first century. Progress in Development Studies, 2(4), 269-282. doi:10.1191/1464993402ps041ra

Cancel

Chin, M., Gharaibeh, S., Woodham, J. & Deeb, G. (2016). A national strategic framework for countering violent extremism in Jordan. *Journal of International Affairs, 69*(2, Spring), 115-XIII. Retrieved from https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/national-strategic-framework-countering-violent-extremism-jordan

Cornwall, A. (2000). Missing men? Reflections on men, masculinities and gender in GAD. *Institute for Development Studies Bulletin* 31(2), 18–27. Retrieved from http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/10629/

Fry, R., & Cohn, D. (2010). Women, men, and the new economics of marriage. *Pew Research Center Social Demographics Trend Report*. Retrieved from http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/11/new-economics-of-marriage.pdf

Gelfand, M. J., LaFee, G., Fahey, S., & Feinberg, E. (2013). Culture and extremism. *Journal of Social Issues, 69*(3), 495-517. Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.12026/epdf.

Hassan, M. (2012). Understanding drivers of violent extremism: The case of Al-Shabab and Somali youth. *CTC Sentinel*, 5(8). West Point: Combating Terrorism Center. Retrieved from https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/CTCSentinel-Vol5Iss84.pdf

Helmus, T., York, E., and Chalk, P. (2013). Promoting online voices for countering violent extremism. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR130.html.

Hudson, V. M., and Den Boer, A. (2002). A surplus of men, a deficit of peace: Security and sex ratios in Asia's largest states. *International Security, 26*(4), 5-38. Retrieved from http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/016228802753696753

Jasko, K., LaFree, G. and Kruglanski, A. (2017), Quest for Significance and Violent Extremism: The Case of Domestic Radicalization. *Political Psychology, 38:* 815–831. doi:10.1111/pops.12376

Kaufman, M. (2001). Strategic planning to end men's violence: The White Ribbon Campaign. *Aggressive Behavior*, 27(3), 158-158.

Khader, M., Neo, L. S., Ong, G., Mingyi, E. T., & Chin, J. (2016). Combating violent extremism and radicalization in the digital era. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Koopman, J. (2009). Globalization, gender, and poverty in the Senegal River Valley. *Feminist Economics, 15*(3) 253-285, Inequality, Development, and Growth. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13545700902920370

Moffitt, R. A. (2012). The Reversal of the employment-population ratio in the 2000s: Facts and explanations. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 201-264. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/bpea-articles/the-reversal-of-the-employment-population-ratio-in-the-2000s-facts-and-explanations/ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). (2014). Youth engagement to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. Vienna, Austria: *Report on the findings and recommendations stemming from the Expert*

Roundtable on "Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism". Retrieved from https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/668/youth-engagement-to-counter-violent-extremism-and-radicalization-that-lead-to-terrorism.

Peretz, T. (2016). Why study men and masculinities? A theorized research review. *Men, Masculinities, and Violence, 12*(3), 32-33. Retrieved from: http://gjss.org/sites/default/files/issues/full/GJSS%20Vol%2012-3.pdf

Pollmann-Schult, M. (2011). Marriage and earnings: Why do married men earn more than single men? *European Sociological Review, 27*(2), 147-163. DOI: http://doi:10.1093/esr/jcp065

Robb, M., Featherstone, B., Ruxton, S., & Ward, M. (2015). Beyond male role models: Gender identities and work with young men. Open University. Retrieved from http://www.open.ac.uk/health-and-social-care/research/beyond-male-role-models/sites/www.open.ac.uk.health-and-social-care.research.beyond-male-role-models/files/files/BMRM_report.pdf

Ruxton, S. (Ed.). (2004). Gender equality and men: Learning from practice. Oxford: Oxfam GB. Retrieved from http://www.xyonline.net/sites/default/files/Ruxton,%20Gender%20equality%20and%20men.pdf

The worldwide war on baby girls. (2010, March 6th). *The Economist.* Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/node/15636231

Tu-Anh H., Trang T. Q. & Tam T. T. (2013). "Because I am a Man, I should be more gentle to my wife and children": Positive masculinity to stop gender-based violence in a coastal district in Vietnam. *Gender & Development, 21*(1), 81-96.

United States Department of State. (2016). *Department of State & USAID joint strategy on countering violent extremism.* Retrieved from https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/FINAL%20--%20State%20and%20USAID%20Joint%20Strategy%20on%20Countering%20Violent%20Extremism%20%28May%202016%29.pdf

Urdal, H. (2011). A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence. New York, NY: *UN Expert Group Meeting on Adolescents, Youth, and Development.* Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/egm-adolescents/p10_urdal.pdf

Wanner, T. and Wadham, B. (2015), Men and Masculinities in International Development: 'Men-streaming' Gender and Development?. Development Policy Review, 33: 15–32. doi:10.1111/dpr.12090

Zenn, J. & Pearson, E., (2014). Women, gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram. *Journal of Terrorism Research, 5*(1). DOI: http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.828