POLICY BRIEF III

The Relationship between Violence against Women and Violent Extremism

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief is a summary of a paper authored by Slim Kallel, Assistant Professor and Director of Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science of Tunis (FSHST). The paper is the third in a series of three on women and violent extremism in Tunisia. The research and papers were commissioned by UN Women, as part of a project between UN Women, the Tunisian Centre of Research, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF) and Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre. The views are those of the author alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of UN Women and Monash GPS.

This policy brief examines the relationship between violence against women and violent extremism in Tunisia. There is a robust debate on the relationship between violence against women and women's role violent extremism (VE). Research suggests that gender inequality and violence against women have been major factors enabling women to resist extremism and violent extremism. Secondary research from the North Africa region suggests that violence against women drives some women and men to join violent extremist groups. However, further research is required to better understand this relationship and its implications. These findings may be a potential resource for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies and programs in Tunisia.

Violence against women in Tunisia is high. According to a 2010 survey by the National Family and Population Office (ONFP), 48% of women aged between 18 and 64 have experienced at least one form of violence during their lifetime. A substantial proportion of women reported physical violence (32%), psychological violence (29%), sexual violence (16%) and economic violence (7%).[1] Social constructions of femininity and masculinity affect gender roles and the socio-economic and political status of men and women.[2] In Tunisia, femininity is a subordinate social status associated with the private sphere whereas masculinity is associated with socially valued roles in the public realm. Violence against women in Tunisia must be seen in the context of these gendered social structures within which conservative ideologies are easily established and may become extreme ideologies justifying the use of violence.

The main findings are:

- There is a clear relationship between protecting women's rights and deterring violent extremism.[3]

- A better understanding of the relationship between violence against women in public and privates spheres – including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces, and violence directed towards women leaders and activists – and violent extremism would be able to feed into policies and programs to prevent and combat violent extremism.

- Violence against women is high in Tunisia and exacerbated by ultra-conservative ideologies which justify such violence. This is regardless of recent legal reforms on combatting violence against women and supporting greater gender equality.

- Increasing inequality and frustration at unmet expectations following the Jasmine Revolution has led to heightened feelings of exclusion by men and women.

- Cultural, ideological, political, psychosocial and individual factors—many with a basis in gender inequality— effect violence against women and women's radicalisation.

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[1] National Office of Family and Population, "Enquête nationale sur la violence à l'égard des femmes en Tunisie'' [National survey on violence against women in Tunisia] (Tunis: Ministry of Health, 2010), http://www.medcities.org/documents/10192/54940/Enqu%C3%AAte+Nationale+Violence+envers+les+femmes-+Tunisie+2010.pdf, 39.

[2] Françoise Héritier, Masculin, Féminin, la pensée de la difference [Male, Female, the thought of difference] (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996).

[3] Maro Youssef and Hamza Mighri, "Women's Groups Take on Radicalization in Tunisia,'' (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 26 March 2019), https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78685

Summary of key analysis and findings

a) Laws on violence against women

Former President Ben Ali expanded women's rights in the early 2000s as a way to demonstrate Tunisian embracing of modernity. However, women had an important role in the toppling of Ben Ali's regime in the 2011 Jasmine Revolution.

The government adopted a law to combat violence against women in July 2017, which espouses a broad definition of violence, including physical, economic, sexual, political and psychological violence. The law offers protection mechanism for victims, such as legal and psychological assistance. Significantly, the law amended the criminal code to remove a provision that pardoned a perpetrator of sexual violence against a minor if the perpetrator married the victim.

The fall of the Ben Ali government and the passage of the new constitution in 2014 lifted restrictions on the freedom of expression and opened up press freedom. In combination this has enabled the rise to a more vocal radical discourse and the emergence of violent extremist groups. During the 2014 constitution-making process, the provision on women's rights in the draft version caused controversy that led to public protests. However, the outcome of the protests was the adoption of a more robust gender provision in the final Constitution.[4]

There are some groups that have also called for the abrogation of the Code of Personal Status that, inter alia, allows divorce, which they believe to be in contravention of Islam. For these groups, the Code of Personal Status, passed in 1956, is a symbol of Bourguiba's liberal state that emancipated women and destroyed the traditional family unit.

One proposed output of the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security to raise awareness to obtain support and advocacy to implement the plan is the Community Awareness and Change of Minds Campaign to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls that intends, inter alia, to produce a communication plan to fight all forms of violent extremism. This is in addition to the NAP outlining frameworks to protect women and girls against violent extremism. A proposed output is to establish early warning systems that report women and children that are members of violent extremist groups, and to integrate a gender perspective into early warning systems to prevent violence against women.[5]

b) The intersection of politics and violence against women

Existent evidence emphasises the relationship between political contestation in the name of liberation, progress or religion, and the enactment of violence against women and control over their behaviour.

In line with violent extremists' groups in Tunisia have pushed against the liberalisation of the state, they have attempted to return marriage to 'tradition' by removing it from the authority of the state. For instance, there has been the (re)appearance of the 'Orfi' marriage, a traditional unregistered marriage practice, especially among young Salafists,[6] with no written contract or legal status. These traditional marriages can be ended by the man, at any time and offer no guarantee of recognition for either the woman or children. There are also been a push based on economic and religious arguments to recognise polygamous marriage.

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[4] Nanako Tamaru, Olivia Holt-Ivry, and Marie O'Reilly, "Beyond Revolution: How Women Influenced Constitution Making in Tunisia,'' (New York: UN Women and Inclusive Security, 2018).

[5] Republic of Tunisia Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, "National Action Plan 2018-2020 for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and its Complementary Resolutions,'' (Tunis: Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly and UN Women, 2018).

[6] B. Cherif, "Le mariage coutumier gagne du terrain chez les salafistes tunisiens'' [Customary marriage is gaining ground among Tunisian Salafists], Mr. Kapitalis. 30 January 2013, http://www.kapitalis.com/societe/14191-le-mariage-orfi-coutumier-gagne-du-terrain-chez-les-salafistes-tunisiens.html.

Extremist groups in Tunisia challenge gender diversity, and promote gender segregation in schools (kindergarten and primary), workplaces, in certain administration buildings and political party meetings. Extremist groups have also challenged the presence of women in public spaces.

The control over women's dress has been a touchstone for extremist propaganda, spread via social media and public threats. Campaigns have targeted women by advocating for the wearing of the hijab or niqab.

c) Power, violence against women and violent extremism

Gender inequality, violence against women and violent extremism interact in diffuse and reinforcing ways. Violent extremist groups benefit from social climate 'conducive' to radicalisation, as well as women's socio-economic and political marginalisation.

Women are also radicalized into violent extremist groups by social and familial pressures and inequality. For example, a rejection of a patriarchal society, family breakdowns, violence in the household and/or community, the social expectations to marry, and the search for a community that promises security.

Violent extremism among women can be the direct or indirect consequence of gendered violence. Boutih describes in his research on the topic a profile of women "having experienced difficult childhoods, linked to the absence of their father, sometimes linked to abuse".[7] Certain individuals may be suicidal or have severe mental health problems. Duhamel reports that many radicalized women have a history of self-harm or attempted suicide. This violence, initially turned against oneself, seems to be externalized and instrumentalized by radicalization, turning towards other dehumanized and objectified persons.[8]

RECOMMENDATIONS
For the government:

1. The government should support **marriage law reform** to prevent **intimate partner violence against women**.

2. The government should develop and implement **gender-sensitive programmes** for **de-radicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists**.

3. The government, civil society and international partners should support **programs** and **services** for **women survivors of violence**, and to **address backlash** associated with women's empowerment, through:

    a. The promotion of **gender equality messaging** in communities and in different public spaces, such as in schools, universities, religious spaces, and in media reports;

    b. Increased **gender-sensitive effectiveness of first responders** to report and bring to justice cases of VAW, on the basis of best practices and in collaboration with women civil society organizations already responding;

    c. Increased number of **women** on the **frontlines of police and trainings** to detect and respond to cases of VAW;

    d. Special measures and support by the government to **increase women's participation in policy decision-making processes**;

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[7] Cited by Thierry Toutin, "Quête identitaire et repli Communautaire'' [Searching for identity and Community Withdrawal], Criminalistique 1 (2018): 26-30, https://www.cairn.info/revue-criminalistique-2018-1-page-26.htm, 27.

[8] Cindy Duhamel and Alexandre Ledrait, "Djihad au féminin: promesse d'une solution aux éprouvés pubertaires'' [Feminine Jihad: promise of a solution to the proven pubertal] Adolescence 35, 2 (2017): 413-432. https://www.cairn.info/revue-adolescence-2017-2-page-413.htm

e. Consultations with **women civil society organizations** to better understand the **practical challenges of implementing law** on women's protection at the national and local/municipal levels.

f. Increased numbers and statistics on the extent of VAW in Tunisia.

4. The government should fund psychosocial services and socio-economic programs for vulnerable women and survivors of violence who may have experienced violent extremist-related violence, who may have had a member of the family join or who are targeted by extremist groups for recruitment.

5. The government and other stakeholders should support further **research** into the **connections between violence against women and violent extremism** in order to **develop programs and strategies to prevent both types of violence.**

6. Special **monitoring mechanisms** should be established at the local, regional and national level to ensure the **implementation of the law** on violence against women. **Training on gender-specific dimensions of violence and responses** should be required for all law enforcement officers.

7. Civil society, including women, youth groups and other relevant experts should be invited by government and legal bodies to share knowledge and ideas on best practices in encouraging social cohesion and gender equality.

For civil society, the UN and other stakeholders, including research-based organizations

1. **Gender equality is key to prevent and combat violent extremism.** Initiatives to promote gender equality should be developed and implemented with diverse stakeholders at the national and local levels.

2. Civil society organizations should **encourage egalitarian attitudes** to women through **sponsored and visible participation of women in the public sphere** (police, military, sports, media, etc.) and decision-making processes at the political level.

3. Civil society organizations should **support and put forward women leaders and associations** to provide advice to the government in the **design of prevention and countering violent extremist programmes.**

4. **UN agencies** and **international NGOs** should contribute and advocate for **gender specific approaches in P/CVE policies and programmes.** They should also **promote gender equality and avoid gender stereotyping** in their advocacy and engagement with the government and community.

5. The **United Nations**, particularly **UN Women**, relevant civil **society organizations**, and **donor organizations**, should assist the Government of Tunisia to develop **gender-sensitive early warning systems for the prevention of violent extremism** and **violence against women and girls**, in accordance with the **National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325**.

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