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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND RADICALIZATION IN JORDAN

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STUDY CONDUCTED AS PART OF THE PROJECT:

“STRENGTHENING YOUTH AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL
DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN 3 MENA COUNTRIES” (2015-2017),

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AWO

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AWO and ACTED in Jordan commissioned this study, as part of the EU-funded project entitled “Strengthening youth and female leadership in local and national decision-making processes in 3 MENA countries”, designed the tools and conducted the data collection via the Mosawa network. The Information and Research Center of the King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) and the Center for Women’s Studies at the University of Jordan (CWS) analyzed the data and wrote the final report.

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مركز دراسات المرأة
Center for Women's Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as on the international stage, have focused attention on radicalization and violent extremism, and in particular, the role of women who are often depicted as only victims or perpetrators. Pointing to unemployment, ineffective governance or socio-economic inequality may be insufficient to explain the increases in radicalization, while humanitarian and development practitioners are searching for practical approaches to tackling the trend in their program strategies and implementation. Addressing gender inequalities and gender mainstreaming has been promoted as a way to reduce risks of radicalization and prevent violent extremism, however there is a critical need for evidence-based data highlighting the relationship between radicalization¹ and women, in particular violence against women².

In this context, a study was commissioned in Jordan by the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) and ACTED, for which the data was analyzed by the Information and Research Center of the King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) and the Center for Women's Studies at the University of Jordan (CWS). The research was carried out at the grassroots level as a baseline assessment within the framework of the project "Strengthening youth and female leadership in local and national decision-making processes across 3 MENA countries", funded by the European Union (EU).

The contribution of the report to the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is consistent with the principles and objectives of the 2030 United Nations (UN) Agenda for Sustainable

Development and in particular Sustainable Development Goal no. 16, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies and the eradication of all forms of violence. The study also contributes to the objectives of UN Resolution 1325, which reaffirms the critical role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

The study is in line with the EU's strategy to support women's rights and gender equality, increase women's participation and promote gender sensitivity in development, as defined by the new EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020. Through this Plan, the European Union is fully committed to achieving gender equality, to the empowerment of women and girls, and to fostering the transformative potential of women by ensuring that they receive equal opportunities and access to resources and decision-making. The Plan also builds on the EU commitment to promote the role of women in peace building and to enhance the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in all external actions.

In Jordan, the Syrian refugee crisis has exacerbated endemic political, economic, and resource challenges, and radicalization has become a growing concern in a country which remains stable but is not immune to the risks of violent extremism. "Vision 2025," launched by the Jordanian Government in 2015 depicts a long-term strategy for Jordan's social and economic sustainable development. In particular, the ten-year blueprint stresses the need for sustained local development at both the community and governorate level and the bridging

¹ The report builds on the definition of radicalization provided by the EU Internal Security Strategy in Action, defining it as a complex phenomenon and process in which individuals and groups adopt radical ideologies, which may result in violent acts.

² The report uses the definition of GBV provided in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993): "Any act that results in physical, sexual, or mental harm, or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

of the gender gap in terms of access to the labor force. It also fosters the promotion of active citizenship, an essential component of the social fabric, along with family ties, and the extension of awareness programs targeting youth and addressing violence and extremism that threaten stability and civil peace in Jordan.

In addition the research addresses the principles of the 'Amman Message', and the 'Amman Youth Declaration' of 2015, which call for tolerance and mutual respect, and the promotion of youth and women's leadership and participation in decision making, the prevention of violence and the creation of sustainable peace

This study advocates for a community-based comprehensive approach to tackling radicalization, encouraging dialogue and synergies between local and national stakeholders from the public and private spheres and civil society.

Objectives of the Survey

The goal of this research was to explore the relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and radicalization in Jordan. In order to determine what links may exist between the two phenomena, the perceptions of women from the grassroots level were analyzed with the following five objectives:

1. Identify women's understanding of the concepts of gender-based violence and radicalization, including perceptions about their causes, forms and prevention methods;

2. Investigate how the socio-economic and political environment affect the phenomena of GBV and radicalization;
3. Understand the extent of women's legal awareness, including that of their own rights and responsibilities, and the means and resources to be used if exposed to GBV or radicalization;
4. Explore women's perceptions of the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the prevention of and reaction to the risks of gender-based violence and radicalization;
5. Contribute to informing the planned project activities, in particular the drafting of manuals and training materials for women beneficiaries on gender-based violence, women's rights and prevention of radicalization.

Methodology

The research relied on questionnaires supported by interviews with 238 women, and data analysis completed at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016. The women selected to participate were from three target groups: 12 were focal points of the Mosawa Network³; 73 were community leaders⁴, and 153 were women beneficiaries⁵, each representing a diverse range of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. The respondents were from 11 governorates: Ma'an, Zarqa, Jerash, Irbid, Balqa, Madaba, Karak, Ajloun, Mafraq, Tafilah and Aqaba. Within the governorates, a variety of different areas were targeted.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the design of the study. An initial survey was carried out by a research team through interviews with

individuals were including, for instance active leaders in CSOs, school principals, and public opinion leaders.

⁵ The women beneficiaries were either those who had previously received support from the Mosawa Network or women from local communities where the Network focal points were working and reached out to.

³ The Mosawa Network is a nationwide network of grassroots associations and civil society organizations, affiliated with AWO, working to support and promote women's rights. The Network uses focal points to coordinate their efforts in each governorate.

⁴ The community leaders were selected for their position of influence in their communities. A diverse group of

project beneficiaries, including women activists (Mosawa Network focal points), community leaders, and employees of civil society organizations in Mafraq, Tafilah, and Zarqa through interviews. This initial testing provided feedback from focal points on the questionnaire, insight into potential challenges they might face in using it, and provided recommendations on how to overcome any issues in order to proceed with the research in the remaining governorates.

Conclusions

Overall, the study revealed a strong relationship between GBV and radicalization: areas or communities exhibiting higher rates of gender-based violence were also more likely to be exposed to and affected by radicalization. The study also revealed that women perceived themselves as the most vulnerable group to the impact of radicalization. Radicalization was perceived to be increasing and encouraging violence, in particular against women, and contributing to an increase in the marginalization of women and the denial of their rights in all aspects of their lives.

Respondents identified the societal environment as one of the primary causes of both GBV and radicalization: poor social, cultural, political, and economic conditions in society were perceived to be major catalysts for violence against women, increasing radical thought and its potentially violent outcomes. Women believed that they lacked knowledge and awareness on the concepts of GBV and radicalization, as well as the legal support and other resources available for those at risk. Finally, the study highlighted that civil society organizations were considered relevant and effective actors to deal with the issues of GBV and radicalization, but that their roles had to be enhanced and their services more accessible to the population.

Based on the findings, recommendations were drafted with the objective of contributing to the

prevention of gender-based violence and violent extremism. These recommendations rely on the development of a bottom-up approach in response to these forms of violence, by working at the grassroots level to build women's leadership and promote the constructive role of local leaders in developing and transmitting relevant and culturally sensitive messages at the local and national levels.

Awareness-raising efforts must highlight the patterns and processes through which these forms of violence spread within communities, the detection of early warning signs, and the means and resources to mitigate and address these issues at the community level. Engagement and mobilization of women and leaders should be fostered within their communities, in order to develop capacities to work collectively in the prevention of GBV and violent extremism and create consensus and responsibility regarding prevention measures.

Women leaders should be empowered through capacity building training to advocate for the adoption, development and promotion of a positive gender and youth-sensitive rhetoric that contributes to combatting violent extremism and highlights the role of women and youth as agents of peace and positive change. In particular, institutions providing formal and non-formal education should enhance the skills and awareness of their students in these areas. Existing curricula should be enhanced to focus on strengthening self-confidence, leadership, and creative and critical thinking.

Finally, a review of legislation, national strategies and action plans should be conducted to ensure their compliance with international conventions and treaties that defend and support human rights, and to promote the active role and participation of women as agents of peace in the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. The completion of further research, analyzing the ways through which radicalization affects women, should contribute to provide further evidence-based information and inform legislative review.

MAIN FINDINGS

The research findings show a clear connection between GBV and radicalization, and elucidate understandings and experiences of these two concepts. Three central findings stand out:

1. A strong link exists between GBV and radicalization in that women who have experienced GBV are more likely to have also been exposed to the effects of radicalization;
2. Women are perceived to be among the most at-risk from the effects of radicalization;
3. Radicalization is thought to be increasing and, given its perceived effect on women, is a big concern for women across all governorates, ages and education levels in Jordan.

These findings and others are elaborated on below:

The relationship between GBV and radicalization

The research confirmed that a clear link exists between radicalization and gender-based violence. Strong correlation was found between instances of or exposure to radicalization and gender-based violence (0.65 Pearson correlation coefficient). Women who had been exposed to or experienced gender-based violence were more likely to also have been exposed to radicalization. This points to a linkage between the two phenomena, in that where GBV occurs radicalization is also more likely to exist.

The women respondents also clearly perceived radicalization as a contributing factor to GBV. Respondents reported that an increase in radicalization would lead to an increase in instances of GBV, specifically physical violence against women and children, early marriage, regression in women's education, mobility and ability to work, and reduced access to decision-making positions. Radicalization was perceived to compound the diversity of

challenges that women face by aggravating social problems, triggering family dysfunction and women's exclusion, marginalization, and the call for their return to the private sphere. Indeed women, alongside male and female youth, were seen to be one of the most at-risk groups from the effects of radicalization.

Respondents believed that the economic, social, and political environment had a direct impact on the level of all forms of violence and radicalization in society. An expansion of extremist thinking and violence was seen to occur in communities most affected by challenges of poverty, unemployment, and lower standards of living. In parallel, the regression of cultural systems responsible for enforcing and enhancing moral and value controls in society was perceived to be a strong factor contributing to the expansion of both radicalization and violence against women.

Understandings and experiences of GBV

The concept of GBV was clearly understood by most community leaders and focal points within the study sample. It was generally assumed that these practices reflect and are the result of an imbalance in power relations between women and men, manifested in various forms of physical, sexual, social and economic violence, the denial of women's rights related to education, inheritance, marriage, divorce, as well as marginalization and exploitation of women.

Women with only primary or secondary education or those with no work experience, either paid or voluntary, had less understanding of the concept of GBV, its causes and ways to respond to it.

Only 20% of women beneficiaries claimed to have experienced violence themselves while 70% knew women who had experienced GBV. Women most in need of support and assistance relating to GBV were perceived to be those in rural areas, housewives, and widowed or divorced women.

Understandings and experiences of radicalization

Community leaders and focal points from the sample group recognized radicalization as a phenomenon based on unilateral thinking and a lack of belief in plural political parties, ideas and cultures, in religious, political or social terms. Women beneficiaries, notably those who had only primary or secondary education or no work experience, were not all clear on what the concept encompassed. These women defined it in general terms as a deviation from the common values of their communities.

The causes of radicalization within communities were perceived primarily as, in order of importance, lack of awareness, misunderstanding of religious beliefs, and harmful customs and practices. Certain social, economic and political challenges were also highlighted as triggering factors, including: dysfunctional relationship patterns within families, weak social upbringing, lack of constructive activities and prospects for youth, poverty, unemployment, the impact of the Syrian conflict, sectarianism, and lack of social justice or participation in decision making.

Male and female youth were perceived to be at higher risk of exposure to radicalization, followed by women, in particular those from rural areas, migrants or refugees, and adolescent girls.

9% of women in the sample group claimed they had been exposed to radicalization themselves, while 85% reported that they had encountered victims of radicalization. These women tended to be younger, have a lower level of education and were primarily from the governorates of Balqa, Karak and Madaba.

89% of the women from the study sample stressed that the spread of radicalization was escalating at community level and was in turn leading to increased cases of violence against women.

35% of respondents in the study sample stressed that confronting and addressing radicalization could

be achieved by strengthening women and youth knowledge and legal awareness by organizing seminars, workshops and counseling sessions, targeting both the public at large as well as sub-groups with more specific needs. Respondents also highlighted the importance of promoting a cultural rhetoric of moderation focusing on the values of justice and tolerance, fostering sound religious upbringing, and activating the positive role of religious leaders in mosques and churches.

Legal awareness, the role of CSOs, & resources to tackle gender violence and radicalization

Awareness on laws, national strategies, institutions and processes that target radicalization and violent extremism was low compared to those that target to GBV.

CSOs and the Protection Units were consistently cited as the primary entities or services that women would turn to for support in the face of GBV or radicalization, as opposed to solving these issues in the domestic sphere. Facing GBV, 35% of women would turn to the Family Protection Unit and 20% to CSOs and institutions offering legal and psychosocial counseling services and awareness services. Only 15% would turn to family members or friends.

Facing radicalization, 28% would resort to public security or state systems, 24% to CSOs, and 17% to the Family Protection Unit. Notably, young women said they would resort to public security first, while older women would turn to CSOs.

Community leaders perceive that the cooperation and coordination between government institutions and CSOs regarding the development and implementation of policies is weak when it comes to combating GBV and radicalization.

The spread of radicalization and gender-based violence is perceived to constitute a real threat to citizenship, which in turn constitutes a threat to the rule of law and sovereignty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, recommendations were drafted with the objective of mitigating the risks of radicalization and GBV in Jordan. Three central recommendations are:

1. Women must be empowered as leaders in their communities through capacity building trainings and networking to ensure that participate meaningfully in the development of their society and peace building;
2. Unify efforts, coordination and strategy between civil society, government authorities and development practitioners to tackle radicalization;
3. Include radicalization prevention in donor strategies and allocate increased financial resources to support CSOs, development practitioners and women in communities working to promote peace.

For women leaders in communities

- Women have huge impact on their children, families, and communities in both the domestic and professional spheres. To tackle radicalization and violence, they must be engaged not just as daughters or mothers, but as activists, practitioners, leaders, and agents of peace.
- Women have huge transformative potential, and should build their skills through participation in trainings, networking, and advocacy initiatives to be able to promote peace and stability within communities.
- Women leaders should establish or join groups, organizations and networks to build skills, share views and experiences and express concerns. By allowing women to engage and reach out to community members, they can help families detect early warning signs and better monitor their children's behaviors and attitudes, provide guidance to individuals at risk of radicalization.

- Young women have a key role to play in the prevention of radicalization, as they are well educated and connected beyond the limits of their communities. Involvement in online and offline networks, events and initiatives in communities, universities and the work place will foster volunteering and active citizenship.

For CSOs and development practitioners

- Build competencies and skills of CSO staff, including those involved in GBV prevention, to engage in programs and trainings aimed at countering radicalization and violence in communities.
- Develop resources, tools, practices and initiatives aimed at combating radicalization at community level. Materials should facilitate knowledge sharing and understanding of the concept, allow for reflection and debate on case studies, and exchange experience and practices, as well as provide guidance for the detection of early warning signs and conflict resolution.
- Develop creative and interactive programs and methodologies for radicalization and violence prevention, adapted to context-specific challenges and promoting women's leadership through:
 - Active engagement and participation of women and established women's networks and organizations in program design and implementation;
 - Building of interpersonal, cognitive, communication and social skills of women through life-skills, strengthening their capacities to debate, negotiate, communicate and solve problems.
- Foster communication, networking and opportunities for dialogue between women, civil society, community leaders, private sector and local and national authorities through workshops, trainings, roundtables and other events and networking opportunities.

- Select project target groups strategically. Prioritize geographical areas that are experiencing violence. Target youth and young women and engage boys and men in awareness raising initiatives on the prevention of radicalization, including fathers, who often take the initiative to discuss on radicalization issues within the family sphere.
- Launch effective awareness-raising initiatives targeting women and adolescent girls by building knowledge and practices on women's rights, active citizenship and prevention of radicalization, including detection and early warning signs, the impact on women and youth, and conflict resolution.
- Develop relevant and tailored messages on the prevention of radicalization, stressing cultural, gender and youth sensitivity, and disseminate through channels such as CSO networks, community radios, and youth and women leaders.
- Provide women with support on radicalization. For instance establish and improve safe spaces for discussion, hotlines, psychosocial support, and referral mechanisms to counseling or legal advice, for those women exposed to risks of radicalization. Women's centers or health facilities could be strengthened to provide these services and outreach in communities.

The role of institutions and donors

- Allocate resources to CSOs, development practitioners, women groups and leaders for the prevention of radicalization, through project funding, small grants and participation in workshops and networking opportunities.
- Design and adopt funding strategies more inclusive of women and youth, which contribute to building their interpersonal and cognitive skills, capacities and leadership, while promoting a positive rhetoric on the role of women and

youth in social cohesion, resilience and peace building.

- Allocate resources to strengthen women's social and economic rights and self-sustainability through income awareness raising and training, income generation and livelihoods, access to the labor market and small entrepreneurship.
- Increase youth engagement and participation in schools and universities, particularly female students, in the prevention of radicalization, through awareness raising and training, networking, mobilization, youth and gender sensitive messages, and outreach to surrounding communities.
- Effectively improve education, targeting youth and women, by incorporating relevant values, concepts and practices related to active citizenship and civil society engagement, life skills, creative thinking, intellectual pluralism and debate, conflict resolution and prevention of all forms of violence. Raise teachers' awareness on youth participation and active citizenship, and on detection and prevention of radicalization in schools and universities.
- Support traditional and non-traditional media outlets, networks and institutions in the prevention of radicalization at the local and national level, through spreading positive messages on youth and women particularly amongst marginalized or at-risk groups.
- Enhance the role of religious institutions, including mosques and churches, and build their capacities to promote a rhetoric that tackles extremism and promotes values of social justice, gender equity and tolerance.
- Provide resources to increase evidence-based research on the prevention of radicalization, its linkages with other forms of violence including GBV, and its incorporation into everyday practices.

The role of authorities

- Unify efforts by the government and civil society to address GBV and radicalization in Jordan, and ensure that these challenges are not only tackled through security apparatus, but through empowering and providing resources to CSOs and practitioners, promoting gender equality, strengthening communities and grassroots actors, and relaying a positive narrative of women and youth as agents of peace.
- Economically empower women through increased employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and income generation to improve their standards of living, in particular in pockets of poverty and communities at risk.
- In collaboration with Jordanian women and youth, develop and enforce national policies, strategies and action plans for the prevention of

GBV and radicalization that comply with international conventions, including the UN Charter, CEDAW, UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, and Resolution 1325 on women's role in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building.

- Improve and effectively existing policies and action plans, including national strategies on women and youth, in line with the principles of tolerance and mutual respect shared by the 'Amman Message', and the 'Amman Youth Declaration' of 2015. These declarations advocate for better inclusion, leadership and participation of women and youth in civil society and decision making, thus unleashing their potential and capacities to act as agents of peace and positive change.

Arab Women Organisation of Jordan (AWO)

www.awo.org.jo
awo@nets.org.jo

ACTED – MENA Regional Office

www.acted.org
amman.civilsociety1@acted.org



ACTED



AWO