

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Birmingham		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31: Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Transforming the Understanding of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Religious Extremism (P/CVRE) in UK Legal Judgements and International Guidelines		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1 January 2016–1 July 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Katherine Brown	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer Islamic Studies	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2016–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 February 2016–31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Brown has transformed policy, practice and understanding of the role of gender when it comes to understanding, preventing and countering violent religious extremism (P/CVRE). Specifically:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influencing policy-making and practice within international and regional organisations, as well as in nation states with regard to P/CVRE; 2. Transforming military and civil society practitioners' understanding and practice of P/CVRE; 3. Shaping legal practice and promoting access to justice in cases regarding violent religious extremism (VRE); 4. Shaping public discourse and awareness of VRE key cases and international events, such as that of Shamima Begum. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research Despite much research on radicalisation, little considers the role and impact of gender in violent religious extremism (VRE) and in approaches to countering and preventing it (P/CVRE). Brown's research addresses these gaps and identifies 2 critical research insights and 7 core findings.</p> <p>R1. <u>Gender is Essential to Understanding Violent Religious Extremism (VRE) [O1–O3]</u> Brown's research using primary and secondary sources illuminated the reasons why women join and participate in VRE, and it revealed gender as an organising logic of VRE:</p> <p>F1. Contrary to stereotypes, participation by Muslim women in VRE is part of their embodied post-secular agency, bringing together their religious beliefs with public goals. [O1, O2] F2. Gender shapes violent methodologies, strategies, ideology and objectives of VRE at the individual and group level, resulting in a new model of VRE and radicalisation, based on a gendered understanding of violent extreme belief, violent extreme belonging and violent extreme behaviours. [O2] F3. There are gendered myths about VRE and there are gendered myths of VRE. Gendered myths of VRE hold explanatory power for the extremist groups and public understanding. These myths revolve around ideas of what it means to be a 'good man' and a 'good woman' within the VRE group and in society. [O1, O2, O3]</p> <p>R2. <u>Substantiating lack of gender mainstreaming in responses to VRE (P/CVRE) [O4–6]</u> Derived from R1, Brown's work is the first to detail the gendered practices and effects of efforts to prevent and counter violent religious extremism (P/CVRE) worldwide. Through rigorous analysis of national and international policies and initiatives across the world, interviews with practitioners and stakeholders engaged with P/CVRE, and focus groups with communities affected by P/CVRE efforts in 8 countries, her original research revealed:</p>		

F4. P/CVRE policies and programmes **depend on gendered and secular stereotypes of radicalisation, religion and the state** that minimise women's involvement in VRE, seeing them as victims, and cast young Muslim men as hyper-masculine 'folk-devils', and practitioners as 'caring patriarchs'. [O5, O6]

F5. Public policy and practices in **P/CVRE contravene UN requirements and international legal human rights obligations** (as set out in the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Plan of Action Against Extremism) to operate in gender-sensitive ways. [O6]

F6. There are **negative gendered Islamophobic consequences** of P/CVRE policy and practice, including limited effectiveness by creating false dichotomies between ethno-religious groups, and in generating harms to women's rights worldwide. [O4, O6]

3. References to the research

O1. Brown K. E. (2018) "Violence and Gender Politics in the Proto-State "Islamic State" in Parashar, S., *et al.* (eds), *Revisiting Gendered States*. Oxford: OUP. Pp. 174–190. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190644031.003.0011.

O2. Brown, K. E. (2019) "The Role and Impact of Women's Influence in Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation" in A. Richards (ed.), *Jihadist Terror: New Threats, New Responses*. London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury. Pp. 111–124. DOI: 10.5040/9781788315579.ch-011.

O3. Brown, K. E., Toros, H., & Parashar, S. (2020) "[Extremist Myths and Extremist Masculinities: a two-country case study](#)" in K. E. Brown, D. Duriesmith, F. Rahman & J. True (eds), *Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia*. Bangkok: UNDP Asia Regional Office. Pp.31–52.

O4. Brown, K. E. (2019) "Gender, Governance and Countering Violent Extremism in the UK", *International Journal of Law Crime & Justice*. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijlcj.2019.100371.

O5. Brown, K. E. (2020) "Religious Violence and Post-Secular Counter Terrorism", *International Affairs*, 96:2. Pp. 279–303. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iaa010.

O6. Brown, K. E. (2020) *Gender, Religion, and Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalisation*. Oxford: OUP. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190075699.001.0001.

4. Details of the impact

Gender-sensitive understanding of preventing and countering of VRE (P/CVRE) has resulted in better safeguarding practices for vulnerable women and children in radicalised family networks. This has happened in 4 areas:

1. Influencing policy-making and practice within international and regional organisations.

UN Women policy development plans have changed ensuring that women are equal participants in P/CVRE activities and their security needs are taken into account. Women's participation is considered an essential component to long-term peace and stability across all UN peace and security operations, including peace-keeping and humanitarian interventions, but it has not been in the field of P/CVRE and counter-terrorism. This neglect was shown to harm the efficacy of UN and UN member states P/CVRE activities and operated to the detriment of women's security and safety worldwide [F5, F6; O6]. To correct this, Brown was invited to collaborate with UN Women between 2017 and 2019 **to produce and distribute their Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for P/CVRE (The Guidelines)** [E1, E2]. The Guidelines give policy-makers and national action plan advisors concrete steps, priorities and reasons to embed gender mainstreaming in their counter-terrorism and P/CVRE policies. This supports UN commitments to women's rights and women's equality [directly remedying **F4, F5 and F6** in policy and strategy]. That Brown did this is attested to by the Chief of Peace and Security at UN Women, who states that Brown's research formed "the baseline for identifying areas of need, and priority areas for gender mainstreaming approaches" [E2]. The Guidelines have subsequently been used **to directly guide the development of practice and thinking across the wider UN organisation, as well as in member states and regional organisations**. This is illustrated in the following examples [E2]:

- UN Member States use them for reporting to the UN office of counter-terrorism and in preparation for the forthcoming review of UN counter-terrorism strategy.
- In the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact meetings where member States use them as a foundational reference point to explain and benchmark their national activities in P/CVRE.
- UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Women directly use them to shape content and structure in the delivery of high-level in-country support packages (e.g. Uzbekistan, November 2020).
- The Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) uses The Guidelines as a foundational document for their practitioner and policy toolkit led by the Global Center for Cooperative Security (GCCS) – due for release in 2021. This is delayed owing to Covid, but The Guidelines were foundational to the GCTF design and stakeholder consultations, and, in November 2020, Brown gave evidence and testimony regarding The Guidelines’ findings and recommendations.

In line with the recommendations of Brown’s guidelines, the Western Balkans regional group of “National Prevent Coordinators” endorsed gender-sensitive and rehabilitative justice-based approaches for the return of women and children affiliated with the so-called Islamic State at their bi-annual working group meeting in Skopje in December 2019 [E4; F4–F6]. This establishes the wider reach and influence of The Guidelines.

2. Transforming military and civil society practitioners’ understanding and practice of P/CVRE.

In other areas of security provision, the Women Peace and Security Agenda (which makes the security case for gender equality) was already adopted, but not in P/CVRE [E5; O6]. This has changed so that **gender-sensitive approaches to VRE and P/CVRE are now embedded in civil, military and state practitioners’ understandings and practice worldwide**. This is overcoming flawed gender-blind models of radicalisation [identified as F2 in O2, O6] in the following ways:

- **Cultural and gender-sensitive approaches to P/CVRE are embedded across the European Commission’s** professional Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). As well as embedding gender and religious-sensitive best practice, RAN now states it is able to “adapt to changing cultural values and expectations regarding gender equality and human rights” [responding to F1, remedying F4 and F6]. For example, gender-specific sections on women and Islamic radicalisation in RAN’s publication, *Islamic Extremism Factbook* (2019) were changed “so that we [RAN] no longer drew on stereotypes about women as victims.” [remedying F4; E4] RAN supports over 6,000 practitioners in developing and implementing best practices within the EU on violent extremism and P/CVE. As the co-academic lead for RAN’s EXIT working group, the Director of RAN said Brown’s reports were “integral to our response to working group needs on issues of religion and gender” contributing reports that “were essential for us achieving our aims of effectively reaching practitioners with actionable guidance” [E3, E4].
- Civil society groups and leaders have improved their P/CVRE practises towards gender mainstreaming, because of Brown’s research and activities [F3]. Including, for example:
 - At UNDP in Asia and the Pacific webinar conferences in May and November 2020, leading NGO executive and UNDP national officers spoke of how they **amended their engagement and practices in P/CVRE** as a result of Brown’s research on violent extremist Muslim masculinities [F3; O3; E6]. At these conferences there were 350 and 150 attendees from UN agencies and civil society organisations from the region respectively. In a co-authored testimony, the Team Leader of Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Responsible Institutions in UNDP and Project Manager of PVE for UNDP Asia-Pacific reported that Brown’s research led to the following changes [E6]:
 - **A new and innovative UNDP programme to train male religious leaders on Non-Violent Communication** to help change community attitudes towards gender and power. UNDP reports, “Dr. Brown’s research was an essential source that UNDP used

to identify resource requirements and key community influencers, enabling us to think bigger and bolder in our plans to tackle this underappreciated aspect of PVE". The programme will be piloted in Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 2021.

- Asia Muslim Action Network-Indonesia now "**include men and changing men's perspectives on gender in their curriculum** as a direct consequence of Dr Brown's research." AMAN focuses on Islamic education reform to promote peace and equality and works with 25 schools for women in Indonesia.
- UNDP Philippines Senior Adviser on Peacebuilding reports that **social cohesion and social capital enhancement in the Philippines is now promoted** via a gender lens to support men and boys in preventing and countering violent extremism due to Brown's research.
- **Recommendations were created for other civil society organisations and national actors informed by The Guidelines** when 170 NGOs from across the world attended the UN Women's Dhakar conference (May 2020) [E2].
- **NATO military thinking and training on P/CVRE has changed to include gender mainstreaming approaches.** In 2019, for example, NATO committed to including women in P/CVRE activities in line with international expectations for gender equality in the field of peace and security. In 2019 and 2020, Brown's research was distributed as a foundational text by NATO to its personnel and partner countries involved with P/CVRE, predominantly in Muslim majority contexts, and it is used in their Centre of Excellence for Defence against Terrorism training provision [E5].

3. Shaping legal practice and promoting access to justice in VRE cases.

Cultural and gender-sensitive awareness in UK legal decisions and practices in Family Courts, and in the Special Immigration Appeals Commission have been enhanced, **safeguarding vulnerable women and children in radicalised family networks and improving their access to justice** [F2]:

- Courts are able to make better recommendations for the **safeguarding of vulnerable children** in radicalised family networks. Brown's report established **legal precedent** regarding gender-sensitive radicalisation assessments for women and children in VRE in UK family courts through the case *Tower Hamlets LBC v. B* [2016]. Brown's gender-sensitive radicalisation risk assessment based on F2 was accepted as essential to understanding the case and determining outcomes. The presiding judge, Justice Hayden, **reproduced the expert witness report in full within his judgement, because he determined that, "the information should be more widely available within the profession and beyond"** [E7]. Brown is the lead expert witness for 1/6th of all cases involving VRE in UK family courts since 2016. **Subsequently, three judges were able to identify dangers** (radicalised parents) as well as opportunities for rehabilitation (returning children to safe homes, thus reducing relapse into extremist politics). These judgements, which named Brown's research into community behaviours of radicalised groups directly, have led to the protection of approx. 10 children from violent extremism since 2016 [E8].
- **Improved women's deradicalisation and rehabilitation** in relation to P/CVRE [F2; remedying F5 and F6] has occurred from the implementation of Brown's recommendations to the courts in follow-up hearings and in the associated judgements. This followed recognition that without such interventions women's recidivism rates remain high and their rehabilitation compromised. Her contributions directly introduce religious and gender-sensitive obligations and duties upon families, local authorities and others responsible for implementing P/CVRE; for example, that young women's deradicalisation addresses their political agency as well as emotional wellbeing. VRE women's access to justice and improved rehabilitation services are also being addressed at the European level, where, in November and December 2020, Brown advised the Swedish Ministry of Justice and the Prevention of Radicalisation team in the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission on gender-sensitive management of the rehabilitation of women and children returning from Iraq

and Syria. Brown's position and recommendations are also outlined in the RAN Spotlight edition *Prisons, Rehabilitation and Reintegration* (December 2020) [E3].

4. Shaping public discourse and awareness of violent religious extremism.

Discussions of gender and religious stereotyping and VRE has broadened with UK policy-makers and the media. For example:

- The UK Commission to Counter Extremism's thinking on P/CVRE changed to **recognise that P/CVRE practices and policies in the UK are vaguely defined to the detriment of Muslim communities and to practitioners**. This is clear in the Commission's report "Challenging Hateful Extremism" (October 2019) which includes a direct citation from Brown's earlier report for the Commission "Embedding Human Rights in Countering Extremism" (July 2019). Brown's report, which details **F6**, was significant in shaping the Commission's overall recommendations to government [E8].
- **Gender in VRE is now acknowledged as a new area of concern for UK governmental stakeholders and civil society**. This was evident both in Tony Blair Faith Foundation's 6-paper series "Counterterrorism: Debunking Myths on Gender and Extremism" (September 2018) and The Royal United Service's Institute's (RUSI) "Radicalisation and Countering Violent Extremism" project (2019) with its new gender focus. Brown contributed the gender mainstreaming papers for the CVE projects of these UK NGOs [F2, F3; E9] and has spoken at Foreign and Commonwealth Office, DIFID and House of Lords in-house conferences, roundtables and workshops in February 2018, April 2018 and September 2018, and US state department with the African Union in September 2019 raising awareness and shaping the discourse regarding the importance of gender-sensitive P/CVRE approaches.
- Gender analysis in **media understanding of VRE is normalised** through its coverage of Brown's research. [F1, F5, F6] Brown has been interviewed over 50 times in print and broadcast national and international news media, contributed to 2 TV documentaries and published 9 online articles for public consumption. Brown's arguments have been cited in 230 media outlets and had an audience reach of 73,097,188 (2018–2020). Her expert perspective on the case of Shamima Begum alone had a media reach for 14–22 February 2019 of 23,103,664, and her analysis featured in 147 media outlets [E10]. Brown has **shaped the discourse and language around VRE through her multiple public engagements** [F1, F2, F3]. These have included speaking at 6 international public events, including the NYC 9/11 Memorial (2016), the EU Youth Parliament (2016) and the Hay Literary Festival (2018).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- E1.** ["Gender Mainstreaming, Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for PVE"](#), UN Women report.
- E2.** Testimony from the Chief of Peace and Security at UN Women. Received 14 Jan 2021.
- E3.** Radicalisation Awareness Network report pack of three reports, a newsletter, and a factbook.
- E4.** Testimony from the Director of Radicalisation Awareness Network. Received 5 Dec 2020.
- E5.** ["Women in Terrorism and Counter Terrorism"](#), NATO Centre of Excellence for Defence Against Terrorism report.
- E6.** Testimony co-authored by the Team Leader of Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Responsible Institutions in UNDP, and the Project Manager of PVE for UNDP in Asia and the Pacific. Received 12 Jan 2021.
- E7.** UK Family Court Reports pack (three cases: EWHC 1707, EWHC 2851, EWHC 2054).
- E8.** UK Commission for Violent Extremism pack of two reports: "Challenging Hateful Extremism" and "Embedding Human Rights in Countering Extremism: Reflections from the Field and Proposals for Change".
- E9.** UK NGO pack of two reports: "White Widows: The Myth of the Deadliest Jihadi Women", Tony Blair Faith Foundation, and "Once a Terrorist, Always a Terrorist?", Royal United Service's Institute.
- E10.** Media data report, sourced from Kantar Media Group.