



# WOMEN'S REFUGE

National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Inc  
*Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa*  
PO Box 27-078, Marion Square, Wellington 6141  
275 Cuba Street, Ground Floor

## Introduction

1. The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) is a non-governmental organisation delivering services to women and children affected by domestic violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. NCIWR receives nearly 30,000 crisis calls per year (nearly 80 per day), and provides support, advocacy, legal, and health services to nearly 50,000 clients annually.
2. We would like to thank the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) Policy Team at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for the opportunity to share feedback following the Extremism and Violence in the Context of Gender and Sexuality online hui in April. We strongly support the Department's initiative to develop a strategic framework for preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation across NZ. Finally, we commend both the acknowledgement of the relationship between gender and violent extremism and the invitation to the specialist sectors to contribute to this.
3. In giving our feedback we also remember and honour the women killed by violent extremists and those killed by IPV perpetrators. Their experiences must inform our purpose, methods, and vision for ending violent extremism.
4. In our feedback, we comment on the link between intimate partner violence (IPV) and violent extremism. We highlight that gender-based violence and misogynist views underpin the motives, worldviews, and actions of most violent extremists, and that intimate terrorism is often associated with subsequent violent extremism despite being commonly overlooked in most preventive and response strategies.
5. We also discuss the need for (and current lack of) a gendered violence perspective when advancing strategies to end violent extremism. Given the apparently bidirectional relationship between the two, countering violent extremism is unlikely to be successful without a corresponding focus on countering the growth of misogynist ideology in Aotearoa.
6. An emerging evidence base validates the links between IPV and violent extremism, concluding that:
  - a) Both are highly gendered forms of violence;
  - b) Violent extremists, including lone-actor extremists and extremists who are part of larger extremist movements, often have documented histories of violent offences against intimate partners and/or other women; and
  - c) Extremists' intimate partners/ex partners are in some cases amongst the casualties of their attacks.

We discuss each of these and the implications for a gender-responsive strategy to counter violent extremism.

## Overview of the association between gender, IPV, and violent extremism

7. The gendered nature of IPV is well-documented<sup>1</sup>. Although IPV can be perpetrated by and against people of any gender, perpetrators are predominantly men and victims are predominantly women<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, in Aotearoa, men are identified as primary aggressors in 98 percent of intimate partner homicides<sup>3</sup>.
8. New Zealand has an extraordinarily high rate of violence against women, with one in three women being subjected to physical or psychological violence by an intimate partner over the course of their lifetime<sup>4</sup>. Both child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault disproportionately affect women, with one in four girls being sexually abused by men before their 16th birthdays<sup>5</sup> and one in five women sexually assaulted by men in their adult lifetimes, with three quarters of these assaults perpetrated by somebody known to the victim<sup>6</sup>.
9. The gendered nature of violent extremism is increasingly documented and included in international extremist prevention strategy<sup>7</sup>. Most extremists are men, and women known to them are often amongst their victims. In addition, known violent extremist groups, such as Islamic State (IS), Boko Haram and others, use 'gender stereotypes and grievances'<sup>8</sup>, and gendered-based violence as strategic and deliberate drivers<sup>9</sup> to inform their recruitment and radicalisation of members<sup>10</sup>, funding, expansion, and control<sup>11</sup>.
10. The gendered violence of these groups encompasses sexual violence<sup>12</sup>, sexual slavery<sup>13</sup>, sex trafficking, challenging basic human rights<sup>14</sup> and targeting women's socio-economic development<sup>15</sup>. Other extremist groups, including alt-right, Christian fundamentalist, hate-based, anti-government, and male supremacist groups, validate recruits' misogynist views by providing a community which supports rigid gender roles<sup>16</sup>, traditionalist and misogynist views<sup>17</sup>, and at times endorsing their ideas and actions relating to violence against women.
11. Lone actor extremists, who differ from extremists primarily in their lack of regular formalised connection with a particular extremist group/movement<sup>18</sup>, likewise commit acts of violence which overwhelmingly target women. Many lone actors purposefully target places that women normally frequent in higher proportion in their mass attacks, such as shopping malls, gyms, and places of worship<sup>19</sup>. Their victims are disproportionately women; for instance, women and girls making up over twice the number of casualties in mass murders<sup>20</sup>.
12. Women's involvement as perpetrators or supporters of violent extremism is also considered to be gendered<sup>21</sup>, although the means by which gendered dynamics are oriented by gendered violence and patriarchal values is under-theorised<sup>22</sup>. However, examples include reports of women being radicalised/recruited or coerced into involvement after being victims/witnesses of gender-based violence including sexual violence<sup>23</sup>, or choosing involvement as a way to be liberated from oppressive patriarchal systems<sup>24</sup>— a driver mirroring women's active involvement in warfare, such as in the Rwandan genocide<sup>25</sup>.

## Misogyny as a driver of violent extremism

13. A growing body of research identifies misogyny as a major driver for violent extremism and associated radicalisation in the case of both groups and lone actor, with 98% of mass killings perpetrated by men<sup>26</sup>.
14. Concerningly, Aotearoa's 2019 Gender Attitudes Survey Report by the National Council of Women New Zealand found that 'outdated beliefs/or attitudes that keep the status quo in place' have not reduced significantly<sup>27</sup>, which points to the growth of violent and misogynist rhetoric, including gendered

disinformation and misogynist abuse online<sup>28</sup>. Authors underline that the impacts of this are ‘worse for women of colour and wāhine Māori, gender minorities and disabled women’<sup>29</sup>.

15. Misogynist ideology is increasingly considered to be both a significant driver and a gateway to violent extremism<sup>30</sup>. Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, states: ‘there is a troubling commonality in terrorist attacks, extremist ideologies, and brutal crimes: the violent misogyny of the perpetrators’<sup>31</sup>. Recent research from Monash University (2018-2019), which spanned four countries (Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Libya) found that misogyny was not only ‘integral to the ideology, political identity, and political economy of current violent extremist groups’ but that ‘hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism’<sup>32</sup> compared with religiosity, for instance, which was found not to be a primary driver<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, research by England and Wales found that individual extremists with histories of violent offending are more motivated by a quest for power than by the service of specific religious beliefs<sup>34</sup>.
16. Many recent high-profile extremists have been recorded as having established links to misogyny. Anders Breivik who killed 77 people in Oslo (2011)<sup>35</sup>, and Brendon Tarrant who killed 51 people in Christchurch (2019)<sup>36</sup>, have been described as “steeped in anti-woman ideology”<sup>37</sup>, with the latter actively seeking out misogynist groups during his radicalisation<sup>38</sup>. 22-year-old Elliot Rodger who killed 6 people and wounded 13 others in California (2014)<sup>39</sup>, and Alek Minassian, who killed 10 people in Toronto (2018)<sup>40</sup>, are proponents of the “incel” (involuntary celibate) culture who have been categorised as “angry white men” who are not motivated by religion but rather blame the women as the root cause of their problems<sup>41</sup>.
17. It is widely accepted that men make up the majority of perpetrators who commit extremist acts, and that there is an association between misogyny and extremist violence. However, sufficient exploration of this association and the implications for preventing work is conspicuously lacking in political forums, academic research, government reports, and international strategies<sup>42</sup>.

## **The significance of prior perpetration of violence against women**

18. Given the known links between IPV and violent extremism, perpetration histories represent risk propensity and, correspondingly, intervention potential. There is growing evidence which links IPV and violent extremism (including radicalisation to this)<sup>43</sup>. For example, a significant amount of known and suspected violent extremists have perpetrated IPV, with most ‘shar[ing] a history of assaulting wives, girlfriends, and other female relatives, sometimes involving a whole series of victims, long before [attacking] total strangers’<sup>44</sup>. Lone actor extremists have been discussed as ‘frequently hav[ing] one thing in common—their prior perpetration of violence against women’<sup>45</sup>. Yet a gendered violence analysis is rarely applied to their offending, either prior to or in the aftermath of their extremist attacks. As with IPV offences more generally, acts of violent extremism are often exceptionalised by the media and portrayed as mental health crises or as people ‘snapping’ under pressure or prone to anti-social behaviour. Their pattern-based and heavily gendered offending is rarely explicit or given due attention as a key lesson that could inform counter-extremism efforts.
19. Researchers and practitioners have spoken about the continuum between ‘intimate terrorism’<sup>46</sup>; i.e. IPV in which perpetrators induce extreme fear in their violence against their victims<sup>47</sup>, and ‘public terrorism’<sup>48</sup>. Academics and public respondents to violent extremism emphasise IPV as a high-risk risk indicator, but this needs greater theorisation. Nazir Afzal, a solicitor and former chief crown prosecutor for the north-west of England, points out that the intimate partners of extremists are often their first victims<sup>49</sup> saying, ‘You can’t monitor [all the] 25,000 [men, on the radar to police/security services as

potential terrorist threats]. But you shouldn't have to. You already know which ones to target by flagging up violence against women as a high-risk factor<sup>50</sup>.

20. Their sentiments are reinforced by the high-profile examples of extremist acts by perpetrators with histories of violence against their women partners. These include the Westminster Bridge attack with three killed<sup>51</sup>; California and Colorado shootings totalling seven dead<sup>52</sup>; the attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando leaving 49 dead and 53 injured<sup>53</sup>; the killing of 86 people in Nice<sup>54</sup> and 12 people in Paris<sup>55</sup>; the Boston bombing, the attack leaving 26 dead at Sandyhook, Connecticut, and the killing of 32 people in Virginia<sup>56</sup>.
21. Following the Lindt Café Siege in 2014, the inquest revealed that extremist Man Monis had his history of offending against women (which included being on bail for 40 sexual offences against women and being an accessory to the murder of his ex-wife<sup>57</sup>) been considered during the attempted intervention, the devastating outcome may have been avoided<sup>58</sup>.
22. The victims of violent extremists extend beyond the casualties of their attacks. They include women already harmed by the perpetrators. Further, in more than half of all mass shootings in the United States from 2009 to 2017, an intimate partner or family member of the perpetrator was among the victims<sup>59</sup>.

## Implications for countering terrorism

23. Misogynistic ideology in Aotearoa appears to be growing. The Government has expressed a commitment to countering violent extremism, and has expressed a similar commitment to ending intimate partner violence. These can only effectively be achieved if addressed in tandem. Attempts to define, understand, prevent, and counter violent extremism must be grounded in the robust analysis of gendered violence.
24. We suggest this has four key components. The first is to incorporate a specialist and evidence-led perspective of gendered violence from the inception of any initiative or strategy, and to use language that makes gendered violence within extremism visible and explicit. The second is to broaden the definition of extremism (and extremists) to better reflect and account for gendered violence and misogyny as an influential mechanism of violent extremism. The third is to invest in research that explores causal factors and explains the nature of the relationship between misogyny, IPV, and violent extremism. Finally, our fourth recommendation is to ensure that there is a bilateral approach to countering both IPV and violent extremism, involving the initiatives for each sharing common goals and outcomes.
25. Whole-of-system responses to IPV both impact and should be informed by strategies to counter violent extremism. We are open to supporting this work.

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