WOMEN'S REFUGE
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Introduction

The National Collective of Independent Womens Refuges (NCIWR) is a non-governmental organisation made up of 42 Refuges around Aotearoa New Zealand, aimed at delivering services to women and children affected by domestic violence. 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.

This brief sets out the link between intimate partner violence (IPV) and violent extremism. We highlight how both are gendered forms of violence, driven by misogyny, and merit greater consideration in strategies to combat extremism. The gendered nature of IPV and extremism is so obvious and omni-present that we often fail to recognise and respond to it as such.[i] Yet New Zealand's highest death toll for violent extremism is on the basis of gendered violence.[ii]

To truly have a gendered violence perspective when advancing strategies to end violent extremism, IPV cannot be addressed separately or with less importance. 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 and its intimate manifestations in Aotearoa.

Intimate partner violence in Aotearoa

Incorporating a gendered violence perspective in strategies to end violent extremism means addressing IPV alongside and as a form of violent extremism.

Intimate partner and sexual violence (IPV) is rife in Aotearoa and permeates many aspects of women's (and their children's) everyday lives.[iii] Aotearoa has one of the highest reported rates of IPV amongst OECD countries,[iv] with one third of New Zealand women subjected to physical violence and sexual violence in their adult lifetimes.[v] The following points make up the basis of a gendered understanding of IPV.

- The gendered nature of IPV is well-documented.[vi] Although IPV can be perpetrated by and against people of any gender, perpetrators are predominantly men and boys and victims are predominantly women and girls.[vii] Accordingly, in Aotearoa men have been identified as primary aggressors in 98 percent of the intimate partner homicides where there is documented family violence information. International global estimates suggest one in three women experience some form of family violence.[viii] In Aotearoa, 87% of physical or sexual assaults on women by intimate partners are not reported to police.[ix]
- Committing IPV is always a choice and is part of a patten of purposeful behaviour directed at victims.[x] Perpetrators may use a range of different coercive control tactics as part of their abuse, including physical, sexual, economic, reproductive, and digital tactics to coercively control and socially entrap victims. Tactics used by perpetrators may be overt and obvious to outsiders or involve more insidious coercive forms easily concealed – these often occur simultaneously.[xi]
- Certain IPV behaviours are considered strong markers of lethality – and include stalking, threats to kill, digital tactics, and coercive control amongst others.
- Victims of IPV have to put in a lot of work resisting and responding to the violence and they are always the experts in their own experiences.[xii]
- Victims of IPV are frequently spoken about using deficit language (e.g. language which blames, or sees them as helpless or complicit) which focuses on the trauma of their experiences, and the ongoing psychological impacts they may face. [xiii]There is much less focus on the ongoing violence and risks they face, and the role services play in mitigating risk and increasing their safety options. This is particularly the case in the context of young women and tamariki.[xiv]

Prevention of gendered violence at a service response level must focus on increasing safety for victims and improving our responses to violence throughout our engagement with them. Our recent Kids in the Middle, 2-year MSD funded pilot Kōkihi ngā Rito, and two research projects examining digital tactics of abuse, have highlighted for us how responses from others, including services, can either create greater safety of engender greater harm in victims' lives. Effective prevention therefore looks like:

- Changing our mindset, to start from a gendered violence-informed understanding. This includes seeing gendered violence as an issue of gender and power, knowing the types of tactics, understanding victims' experiences, and viewing it as coercive control.
- Preparing people to be able to see and appropriately respond to gendered violence. This should focus on making the right options and safety pathways possible and a corresponding focus on accountability, not on judging or upskilling victims.
- Preparing our services to see our role in the bigger picture of gendered violence prevention, including in holding ourselves, other services, and systems accountable.

Gendered violence: Intimate partner violence & violent extremism

IPV and violent extremism are connected. The gendered nature of violent extremism is documented across organised violent extremist groups, lone actor extremists, and male and female extremist perpetrators.[xv]

Gender-based violence and misogynist views underpin the motives, worldviews, and actions of most violent extremists,[xvi] and intimate partner violence is often associated with subsequent violent extremism despite being commonly overlooked in most preventive and response strategies.[xvii] Examples are detailed in our submission.[xviii]

The need for a gendered lens has been called for internationally by UNODC,[xix] UN Women,[xx] and leading academics in this field, yet, there is still an absence of gender in state prevention and response strategies. When a gendered lens is employed, it is frequently isolated to female extremists or attacks which are overtly aimed at women, despite the growing awareness of the link across diverse perpetrators in both their motivations, actions, and previous crimes.

Key points about violent extremism and intimate partner violence:

- Gendered violence is driven by the misogynistic beliefs and violent choices of perpetrators.[xxi]
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of violent misogyny. It is an act of violent extremism to assault or kill an intimate partner because of their gender.
- Both IPV and violent extremism are forms of gendered violence. IPV is gendered – IPV is mostly caused by men and women are mostly victims.[xxii] In every way we can measure it, IPV is worse and more lethal for women compared to men.[xxiii] Violent extremism is gendered – violent extremist perpetrators are mostly men, and women and children make up most of the casualties. Both mass extremist groups and lone actor terrorists are driven by, radicalised by, and act based on misogynistic beliefs.
- Violent extremists frequently commit IPV – they frequently have a history of IPV prior to their acts of violence against strangers, and their intimate partners/children are often included in their list of casualties (although frequently not identified as such).[xxiv]
- The public face of violent extremism is so obvious that we often fail to recognise the more "private" form of gendered violence – IPV. The public vs private identities of violent extremism and IPV are often false distinctions, as IPV frequently occurs in the public domain, and violent extremists may perpetrate and impact victims in domestic spaces not just public ones.
- Responses to gendered violence are often gender-blind and shaped by systems that deprioritise women's safety, both historically and currently.[xxv]
- Responses to IPV are inferior to those of violent extremism. Public attacks typically receive a higher threat assessment prioritisation and greater law enforcement response compared to private ones. Violent acts to members of the public are frequently treated with greater national importance even though the annual death toll is often comparatively lower than for IPV.[xxvi]

Stalking

Both stalking and digital tactics play a role in extremism including online forms.

Stalking is the pattern of unwanted communication and contact that elicits distress or fear in a victim. It can include actions such as repeatedly showing up, driving past, calling home, work, or mobile numbers, or sending messages, emails, mail, gifts; social media posts; creating or maintaining false internet or social media presences; contacting friends, family, or colleagues to ascertain the victim's whereabouts and activities; and maintaining a physical presence outside the victim's home, work, or school.[xxvii]

Most stalking actions, taken individually, do not appear to be overtly threatening or harmful, and this makes recognising and responding to the implicit threat posed by a sequence of such actions more difficult.

As expert understanding of stalking has drastically evolved, so too must our national response to it. While criminal law technically covers many aspects of partner harassment and stalking, this rarely translates to victims accessing safety or justice. In comparable jurisdictions, similar gaps have been identified following high-profile homicides that were preceded by reported but non-prosecuted stalking. Consequent law reform and police efforts in these jurisdictions led to a sustained rise in reporting and conviction rates.[xxviii]

Key points about stalking:

- Most perpetrators of stalking are the (ex) partners of victims.[xxix]
- Most perpetrators of stalking are men, and most victims are women.[xxx]
- Stalking is a known indicator of lethality (particularly partner stalking).[xxxi]
- Stalking takes many forms and can involve 'digital' and 'in-person' tactics simultaneously.[xxxii]
- Stalking may continue to take place long after separation for months or even decades – the average is almost two years.[xxxiii]
- It is a lot harder to get help or have it taken seriously when the stalker is as current or ex-partner.[xxxiv]

Digital tactics of abuse:

Digital tactics are almost never separate to in-person IPV – so we have to address them simultaneously.[xxxv]

Digital tactics are a powerful weapon in how abusive partners establish, maintain, and enforce their control over their victims' lives. Digital technology can enable perpetrators to scale up the reach and scope of harm to their victims and sabotage their prospects for safety. Their use of technology does not represent a 'new' type of abuse, but rather a new set of tools to perpetrate the same kind of abuse that their partners would otherwise be perpetrating in person.

Since the early 2000s, a growing awareness and body of research focusing on the digital tactics has emerged from gendered violence organisations and academic institutions across Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and Europe. In Australia, this has led to increased government recognition of the role of digital technology in the perpetration of family violence.[xxxvi]

Key points about digital tactics:

- Most digital tactics of abuse are caused by a known perpetrator, usually an (ex) partner.[xxxvii]
- Like other forms of IPV, most perpetrators of digital tactics are men, and most victims are women.[xxxviii]
- The presence of digital tactics of abuse in IPV is a known indicator of lethality.[xxxix]
- A woman might have the 'choice' to end the relationship, but she doesn't have the 'choice' to end the violence or stop engaging – including when its digital.[xl]
- In their digital tactics perpetrators use devices to coercively control and abuse their victims, using technology to expand their reach and impact.[xli]
- Digital tactics are not constrained to victim's private lives.[xlii] Digital tactics of abuse may involve public posting/sharing of content, which many be overtly abusive and misogynistic to an outsider or may be subtle and only understood as abusive in the context of the broader pattern of partner abuse.[xliii]

- Perpetrators of digital tactics may escalate their tactics, including publicly, to involve others in the perpetration of a victim and may broaden their abuse to target other primary or secondary victims.
- Digital tactics of abuse frequently go unnoticed by others and may be condoned because of the relationship status of victims (e.g. some abusive behaviours are often regarded as 'acceptable' if by a 'heartbroken ex').
- Victims of digital tactics of IPV are more likely to take action in response to online harassment,[xliv] representing a reporting mechanism that should be taken seriously.
- The legislation, specifically the Digital Harm and Communications Act 2015, is geared towards stranger-perpetrators not from partners.[xlv]

Concluding remarks

IPV is a form of violent extremism but rarely acknowledged as such. The potential for patterns of IPV behaviour to inform violent extremism strategy therefore remains unrealised. Strategies to prevent, address, and combat violent extremism, including online forms, must include IPV and its' victims. Realising this potential begins with a gendered violence informed analysis in all strategies targeting violent extremism.

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