

Women/ girls/ gender in violent extremism – interventions and methodologies (WomEx)

The Neonazi terrorist murder gang which was uncovered in 2011 in Germany after having killed eleven foreigners in execution manner over thirteen years and produced hate videos, consisted of two men and one woman. They were part of a wider under-cover militant Neonazi social network encompassing approximately 20% females, with tendency to rise. Such girls and women have long proven capable of brutal physical attacks since their early teenage days and often moved on into various sorts of violent extremism throughout Europe. There, women appear to provide important strategic lead, criminal impetus, ideological legitimacy, and assistance in committing crimes. In addition they support the socio-emotional group cohesion and strategically move into key community functions.

And yet, we possess hardly any specific knowledge about women and girls in violent extremisms. Although EU strategies state that “full engagement of all populations” is required (Counter Terror. Strat. 14469/4/05), academia, national and EU policy makers, criminal justice bodies and the media seem largely unaware and/or hesitant to raise the issue. And the available “women's research” has thus far omitted issues of female perpetration.

Above all, we don't know much about what the female and gender factor means for approaches of prevention and intervention in prison, probation and community – both with women and men.

On the other hand there appear to be some pockets of specialized practitioners experience in working with violent and extremist girls/ women throughout Europe – even within Muslim populations. Plus, existing best practice research with men indicates the importance of issues of gender, family, biography, and social milieu.

Also, the first movie about a Neonazi girl in Feb 2012 (“Kriegerin”) has met a public eager to engage with the issue. Films or conferences about female extremists tend to be the best films/conferences about extremism at large.

The two-year national starter measure (WomEx) will

identify existing pockets of specialized knowledge about interventions with violent extremist girls/ women – throughout different sorts of extremism, e.g. right-wing, jihadist/ Grey Wolves, organized crime gangs, and others,

identify and interview practitioners, statutory or grass-roots organisations' practitioners, who work in women prisons, correction-, pre-arrest- and probation institutions, and in preventative community and NGO organisations,

interview female ex-offenders/ at-risk young people about the patterns of female radicalisation, the function of girls/ women in violent extremist milieus, and disengagement experiences,

produce case study materials about successful interventions, good practice and lessons learned,

describe the first-line practitioners' work-contexts, approaches, methods/tools, and levels of awareness, and identify issues/ criteria of quality control,

develop guidelines for deradicalisation work with girls/ women,

estimate to what extent women prisons are places of radicalisation, and formulate recommendations

compare existing research and identify added value from deradicalisation work with girls/ women – and pursue indications as to whether sustainable measures need to be 'inter-sectional' and 'systemic' in nature, i.e. incorporate issues of gender, biography, race, class, group dynamic and family history,

research intrinsic interrelations of “women as victims and perpetrators”,

probe assumptions about a 'female deradicalisation potential',

acquire female “counter narratives” from girls/ women who disengaged and cooperate with website tools of deradicalising narratives (EDNA),

cooperate with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the ENoD-project (ISEC), conducted by VPN and CI staff (since 2012),

liaise with university researchers and media and prepare application for additional academic funds [e.g. VW, DFG, EU-ERC],

identify possible partner organisations in some neighbour countries, meet for practitioner exchange, and prepare a strategy for transfer and network building.

Drawing on CI's and affiliates' previous EU best practice research and interventions' development, cooperating with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, EU Home Affairs), liaising with the OSCE-ODIHR, consulting with specialized academicians (Prof. Michaela Köttig's “Net of Researchers on Women in Neo-Nazism”) and practitioner experts (Inst. for Gender Conscious Violence Prevention, [Ifgg, Berlin] and Violence Prevention Network, [VPN, Berlin]), London Probation Trust, London [LPT]), the WomEx-project will use methodologies from qualitative-empirical social, biographical, and action research.

Stakeholders/ participants are: deradicalisation practitioners/ trainees, law enforcement, (public) policy planners, NGOs, legal practitioners, university researchers/ experts, the media/ civil society – and the primary target group: young females and males in vulnerable sectors of European societies.