

# Jihadist Brides, Victims of the West

The Role of Women as Suggested by Extremist Online Propaganda



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## WHAT WE KNOW (Cook, 2005; Ness, 2005; van Knop 2007; Laster & Erez, 2015)

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- Digitalization offers terrorists new propaganda tools (social media, online propaganda)
- Increasing recruitment of women by Jihadist organisations (e.g. about 13% in the Islamic State, see Cook & Vale, 2018)

## WHAT WE KNOW: Female Terrorism (Laster & Erez, 2015; Martini, 2018; Nacos, 2005)

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- Stereotypes of female terrorists both by Western news media and Jihadist organizations' propaganda

 Under- and overvaluing women's agency

## WHAT WE KNOW: Female Terrorism (Laster & Erez, 2015; Martini, 2018; Nacos, 2005)

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- Exemplary stereotype by Western media: “Jihadi Brides”
- Other stereotypes by Western news media: “naive girls”, “black widows”, “victims of the west”, or “martyrs”

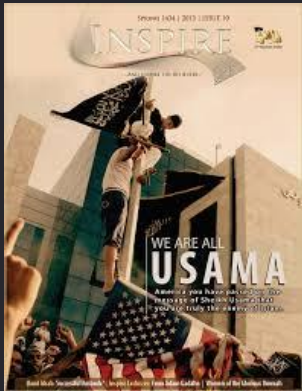
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**“How are women and their roles portrayed and described in online magazines of Jihadist organizations?”**

# METHODS

Quantitative content analysis of all articles (N=308) and subset of images (N = 82) of Inspire, Rumiayah and Sunnat Khawlah (Intercoder > 0.8)

## INSPIRE, 17 ISSUES



## RUMIYAH, 13 ISSUES



## SUNNAT KHAWLAH, 2 ISSUES

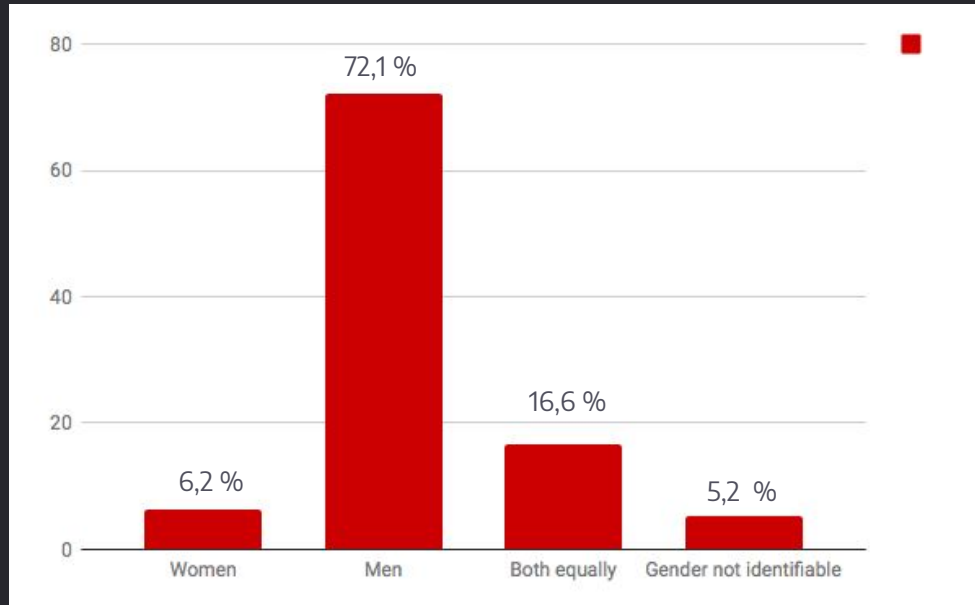


➤ Qualitative content analysis of a subset of articles (N=99)

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# FINDINGS

## How often and in which contexts are women mentioned ?



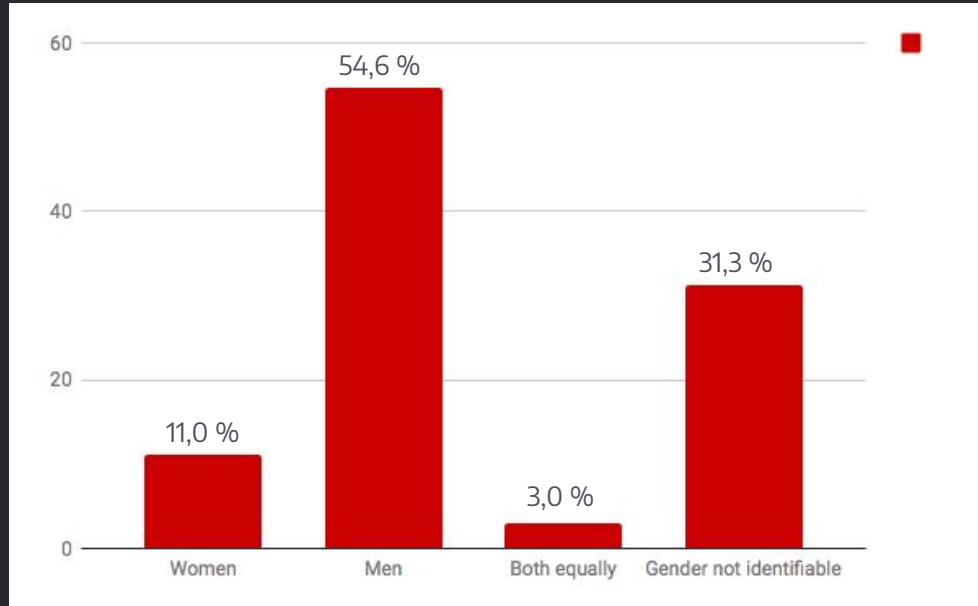
Women **rarely represented** in pictures and text

Significantly **different contextualization of gender roles**: Women mentioned in a religious and social but not political context (other than men)

N = 308



# Who talks about women and their roles?



**Men talk about women** rather than women about themselves

N = 99

# OVERVIEW: WOMEN'S KEY ROLES

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**VICTIM**

**TRADITIONAL**

**ACTIVE MEMBER**

**FIGHTER**

# THE VICTIM

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**Oppressed**  
**21.2%**

**Killed**  
**21.2%**

**Raped**  
**11.1%**

**Suffered loss**  
**11.1%**

- Depicted as **victims of Western soldiers** during attacks and war
- Forced to give up wearing niqab/veil and other traditions
- Often **vivid descriptions**: wounded, tortured, raped, dishonoured



## THE VICTIM

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*“**America is arrogantly corrupting** on earth and has **killed innocent women** and children in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen through their bombings.”*

- Inspire, Issue 2: 23

*“Muslim women around the world were **being abused, vilified, imprisoned , and violated** at the hands of the kuffar and their puppets”*

- Rumiya, Issue 51: 15

# THE TRADITIONAL ROLE

## Brides 36.4%

- *"The wife of..."*
- Respected and beautiful
- Sometimes as widow

## Mothers 28.3%

- *"Mother of believers"*
- Teaching children right way of Islam
- Protecting children

## Housekeeper 10.1%

- taking care of household
- cooking
- washing

## Sister 27.4%

## Daughter 18.2%



## THE TRADITIONAL ROLE

*“My **beloved sisters**, our roles and **responsibilities** have not to come to an end. Rather, they have increased and have become of greater importance. “*

- Rumiya, Issue 11: 13

*“O **mother of the upcoming Mujahideen**, the obligation and responsibility to teach and enlighten your children lies on your two shoulders.”*

- Inspire, Issue 12: 49

## THE ACTIVE MEMBER

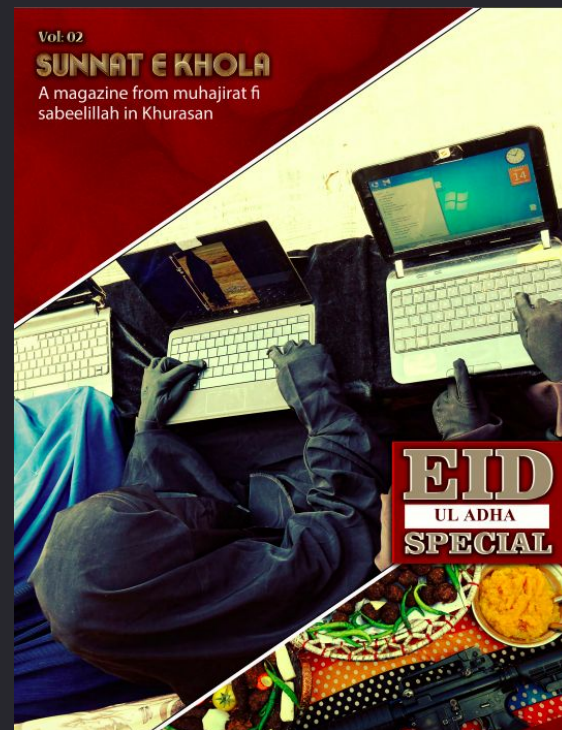
Logistical help  
5.1%

Propagandist  
2%

- mostly providing water and first aid on the battlefield

“ We already **washed and ironed eid clothes** for men. We washed all dishes and **sharpened knives**. We **filled all water containers** as in these mountains no one knows when water supply is cut off”

- Sunnat Khawlah, Issue 2: 6



## THE FIGHTER

**Martyr**  
**7.1%**

**Fighter**  
**3%**

- Mostly occurs in Sunnat Khawlah
- Often: *“First martyr in Islam was a woman”*
- In Sunnat Khawlah: **brave, heroized**
- In Rumiya and Inspire: a **peculiarity, shameful**





## THE FIGHTER

*“A **woman has shown to the ummah’s men the path** of jihad! A **woman my brothers!** Shame on all the men for sitting on their hands while one of our women has taken up the **individual jihad!** She felt the need to do simply because our men gave all too many excuses to refrain from it”*

- Inspire, Issue 4: 24

*“Mother of believers Hazrat Jawariyya **fought bravely.** Also, Asma bint e Yazid who was from the tribe of Ansar, she **killed nine Roman soldiers** from the iron nail used to fix tents”*

- Sunnat Khawlah, Issue 2: 22

# WOMEN'S ROLES: How often do they occur?

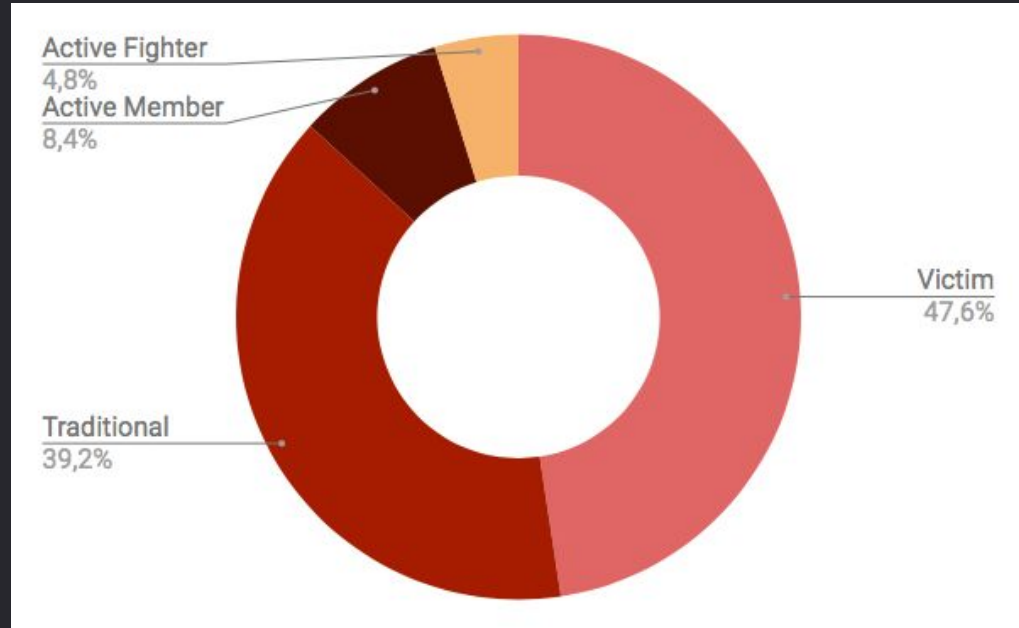
VICTIM

TRADITIONAL

ACTIVE MEMBER

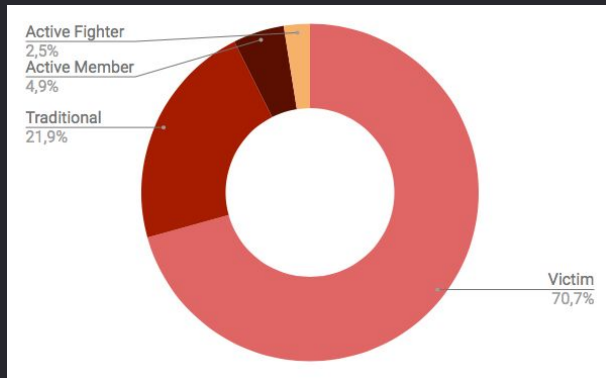
FIGHTER

Note: Only the occurrence of the most active role (in order: victim, traditional, member, fighter) was calculated, N = 99.

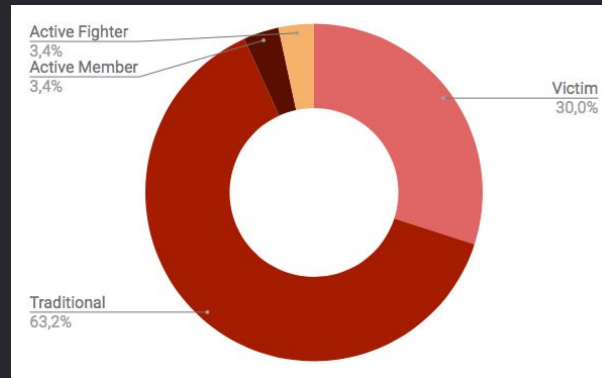


# WOMEN'S ROLES: Occurrence across magazines

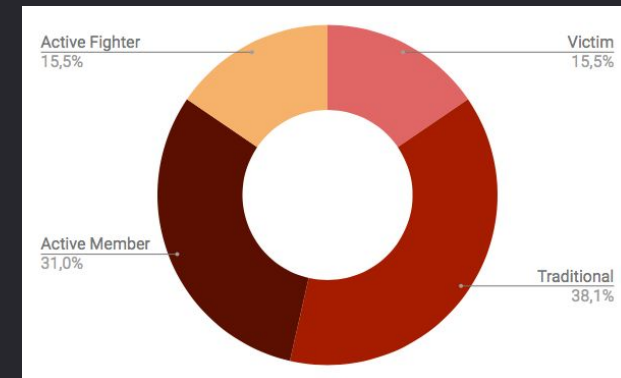
## INSPIRE



## RUMIYAH



## SUNNAT KHAWLAH



Mostly **social calling** (mother, wife, bride, sister) or **display as victim of the West**

# FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ONLINE MAGAZINES

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- Women are rarely visualized or mentioned
- Stereotypic roles:
  - victims of Western brutality
  - social calling/part of Jihadist community (bride, mother, sister)
- Associated with social and religious, but not political contexts
- No sign of emancipation/feminism

## LIMITATIONS

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- small sample and few occurrences of women's roles
- unequal number of issues, comparisons across different groups
- magazines one of many potentially powerful propaganda tools
- representation vs. actual realization of women's roles within terrorism

**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR ATTENTION!**

ANY QUESTIONS?

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