
Youth work as a means of strengthening resilience against radicalization

Some 20 years ago, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center resulted in a large-scale campaign known under the banner of the *'Global War on Terror'*. Today, there is broad consensus among experts that this heavy-handed approach involving military intervention, attempts of nation building and efforts to reshape the politics of the Middle East and Asia has overall failed to achieve its goal of weeding out terrorism (Thrall & Goepner 2017). Transnational terror organizations including ISIS and Al-Qaeda have shown remarkable resilience in the face of massive military pressure, re-establishing themselves and metastasizing across new areas whenever defeated someplace else. Paradoxically, the War on Terror likely played into the hands of terror groups, whose narrative of the West as the enemy of Muslims worldwide was reinforced by the widespread human rights violations and chaos entailing the US' military incursions into the Middle East and Afghanistan. In the words of leading counterterrorism expert Ali Soufan, *"Bullets don't kill narratives, messages, thoughts, or beliefs. What we need is a new strategy that moves away from the myopic obsession with tactical gains and ad-hoc counterterrorism responses"* (Soufan 2019).

The insufficiency or even counterproductivity of military counter-terrorism approaches has precipitated the emergence of a new policy paradigm: The PVE (Prevention of Violent Extremism) approach emphasizes prevention rather than intervention, empowerment rather than protection, and work upon the vulnerable rather than the victims, thereby shifting the focus away from a battle against terrorists toward a battle against ideas (Chandler 2012). PVE measures are intended to address structural causes and aggravating factors that create grievances and thereby support radicalization, seeking to mitigate risk thereof through engagement, education and counter-narratives (Desta 2016).

An effect of PVE is the decentralization of counter-terrorism efforts, entailing the transferal of responsibility from the national to the local level. As radicalization is a phenomenon mainly affecting young adults in their teens and twenties, frontline practitioners working with youth are key players in securing the success of such community-based approaches. The present Paper is intended to give guidance to social and youth workers as well as teachers and civil society actors or any other individual wanting to take action against youth radicalization. Its structure consists of three sections: The first aims at providing an understanding of the causes and processes assumed to underlie radicalization; the second section will propose types of action by which frontline practitioners may contribute to PVE; and the third will provide guidance on how to successfully implement such projects.

Section I: Understanding Radicalization

Concepts and definitions

Radicalization is a concept not only difficult to define but also to explain and, consequently, to address. For our present purpose, radicalization may be understood as a *“phased and complex process in which an individual or group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose”* (European Commission 2020). Breaking this definition apart, the insertion of the notions *ideology* and *belief* entails that radicalization is to be demarcated from affiliation with criminal groups. Furthermore, it clarifies that radicalization does not necessarily lead to acts of terrorism; in this regard, theoretical frameworks usually distinguish between *cognitive radicalization*, i.e. endorsement of radical attitudes and beliefs; and *behavioral radicalization*, referring to actual engagement in terrorism-related activities such as travelling to training camps or violent acts in order to reach sociopolitical goals (Nilsson 2018) – we will come back to this distinction later on in this section. Defining terrorism is similarly difficult; presently, a relatively straightforward interpretation of this phenomenon as *“the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, for the pursuit of political aims”* (ICCT 2017) will suffice. It shall be noted, however, that the present Paper deals only with the special case of Salafi-jihadi radicalization. Writ large, the ideology of Salafi-jihadism is a strand of militant Sunni Islamism defined by the desire to return to *“pure”* Islam practiced by the Salaf, or pious ancestors, and the belief in violent jihad as a personal duty (Clarke 2019). In the forthcoming, the terms terrorism, radicalism and extremism will hence be used with reference to this type of ideology.

First, it ought to be stressed that theories as to how and why people radicalize diverge in critical points. The roots of this issue are empirical, since pathways to radicalization have been shown to take different shapes depending on variables such as gender, political and social contexts, but also on the individual level (Jacobsen 2017; Viejo & Boye 2016). Equally importantly, it is rarely a mono-causal phenomenon but appears to involve a combination of conditions and triggers. Let us evaluate the contemporarily most relevant theories and findings radicalization research has produced.

A terrorist ‘profile’?

Before the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the idea that terrorists share certain psycho-pathological anomalies was widespread; in the 1950s, doctors claimed that they found *‘hard scientific evidence’* that the Mau Mau uprising was *‘not political but psycho-pathological’* by dissecting rebels’ brains (Kundnani 2012). This assumption was disproven relatively quickly once researchers could show that extremists are neuropathologically no different from any other person. The idea that it was possible to identify some profile by reference to which proneness to extremism could be predicted, is still present in public (and to a lesser extent academic) discourses on radicalization. Typically, such approaches take two

distinct forms: on one hand, psychoanalytic approaches attempt to describe a psychological profile common to terrorists; and on the other hand, socio-economic approaches focus on environmental factors such as income, education and marginalization. As we will see, however, neither of these explanations have yielded overly useful results.

Psychoanalytic profiling of terrorists often involves assumptions about a posited frustration of some basic psychological needs. Indeed, psychologists have been able to show that people have fundamental psychological needs, which may be summarized here as the need for *autonomy* (the experience of volition and willingness), *relatedness* (experience of warmth, bonding and care) and *competence* (the experience of effectiveness and mastery) (Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Soenens 2020). Fulfillment of those needs is essential for various developmental outcomes, including pro-social tendencies, identity consolidation, emotion regulation and political engagement, and frustration thereof, especially at a young age, has been related to maladaptive and anti-social behavior (ibid). It may be true that extremists often come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, that they have involved in petty crime prior to their radicalization and that they tend to have depressive tendencies (Campelo et al 2018). Yet, it has been proven repeatedly that such '*terrorist personality*' firstly is not consistently applicable (Borum 2004), and secondly, psychoanalytic profiling does little to help us understand why only a fraction of those with troubled backgrounds radicalize.

With regard the question of socio-economic factors triggering radicalization, the most commonly used rationale in this regard leans on the economic theory of opportunity costs, which in essence argues that individuals with low income, social standing and few career prospects are more likely to join terrorist organizations simply because they have less to lose from such a decision than someone with a stable job and income. Application of this theory has received some empirical backing (Freytag et al 2009). And although poverty and a lack of education are oftentimes presented as self-evident root causes of terrorism by scholars and politicians alike (e.g. Gurr 1993, Aoun 2017), the relevance of such factors should not be overstated. Scholars studying socio-economic causes of radicalization across national contexts including Pakistan (Abbas 2007), Britain (Bhui, Warfa & Jones 2014) and Kenya (Rink & Sharma 2018) have found that in fact, religious extremists in fact often have above-average educational and vocational levels as compared to other members of their community of origin. In the words of Abraham Jager from the International Institute for Counterterrorism, "*terrorism is not, as it is often perceived to be, the outcome of total oppression or desperation. Rather, it is a luxury of those who have enough freedom to hope, enough education to plan, and enough money to devote themselves to preoccupation beyond basic subsistence*" (Jager 2018).

In short, approaches proffering a '*terrorist profile*' lack a sound empirical foundation. It is also worth mentioning that profiling the poor, marginalized or troubled as potential terror threats leads to a vicious circle reinforcing their marginalization, making such undertaking socially undesirable. Most importantly, however, the above-described approaches have low explanatory strength; after all, poverty and psychological problems are widespread, while terrorists are rare. Why, then, do some people radicalize, while others with similar backgrounds do not? As a result of the failure to answer this question by reference to static

factors, recent scholarship has moved towards more dynamic concepts, that is, the study of *mechanisms* underpinning radicalization. The field of social psychology has thereby produced particularly interesting insights.

Social psychology

Broadly speaking, social psychology (SP) studies the impact of social context on individual behavior and is well-suited to explain the mechanisms compelling individuals to identify with some social group. A salient concept within this discipline is that of *identity*, whereby *personal identity* and *social identity* should be viewed as distinct but interdependent categories by which individuals define themselves and their place in the '*scheme of things*'. Personal identity refers to self-categories which define the individual as a unique person in terms of their individual differences from others (distinctiveness, e.g., though character traits), while social identity means the categorization of oneself in terms of membership to some group (inclusion, e.g., as part of an ethnic or religious group) (Turner et al 1992). Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer 1991) posits that individuals typically strive for a self-conception that balances their desire for individual distinctiveness and their need for inclusion and belonging to one or more social group. From this perspective, the question to be asked concerns the processes by which this balance tips in favor of one's social identity – in other words, what drives people to align their personal goals and interests with those of a particular group to such absolute extent that – in the most extreme of cases – one is willing to sacrifice their own life in the name of group interests?

Based on the presumption that individuals strive toward attainment of a stable self-conception which group-belonging is capable of providing, many scholars of social psychology agree that at the point of departure of radicalization lies some personal crisis. Hogg (2007), for example, stresses the notion of *identity-uncertainty*, arguing that group identification very effectively reduces self-related insecurities – which may be produced by social upheaval, experiences of humiliation and discrimination, loss of a loved one, failure to meet the expectations of society and so on - since it allows for self-categorization, attribution of characteristics to oneself and '*outsiders*' and prescribes a worldview, attitudes and goals, hence conveying a sense of ontological security. Hogg, Meehan and Farquharson have indeed been able to prove experimentally that when students were exposed to high self-uncertainty, they were more likely to advocate radical ideas (Hogg et al 2010). Social psychologists have termed the process by which some personal frustration, fear or loss opens individuals up to new influences and ideas *unfreezing* (McCauley & Moskaleiko 2017).

A theory within SP that has gained considerable traction is Kruglanski's (2014) conceptualization of radicalization as a '*significance quest*'. We as humans, so it goes, constantly seek for acknowledgement of our existence and importance by others. Hence, one's perceived loss of or threat to significance, or the opportunity to gain significance, are proposed to provide strong incentives for engagement with terror groups promising a sense of belonging and friendship, participation in a fight for a perceived just objective, and the possibility of becoming a hero. In a similar vein, Terror Management Theory (TMT) proposes

fear of death – the most absolute significance loss - as a particularly motivating factor for group identification; this applies especially to religious groups promising immortality to their abiding members (Pyszczynski et al 2009).

Placing identity at the heart of radicalization may explain why young adolescents, who are generally more uncertain of their role in society, are more vulnerable to terrorist recruitment than adults. Also, the fact that with respect to the phenomenon of ‘*homegrown*’ or ‘*self-radicalized*’ terrorists in the context of Western countries it is often highlighted that identity crisis, resulting from the challenge of reconciling mainstream Western culture with heritage identities and leading to a failure to arrive at some internalized and coherent identity, facilitates radicalization (King & Taylor 2011). The fact that the majority of homegrown terrorist plots since 2002 have involved mostly second and third generation immigrants and converts to Islam (ibid) may corroborate this reasoning.

Social Movement Theory

While SP stresses individual rewards of group membership, Social Movement Theory (SMT) – an approach cutting through various disciplines within the social sciences – embeds radicalization within a broader societal and political context. After all, jihadi movements aim for socio-political renewal along Islamic principles, a fact necessitating an appreciation of the political rationales underpinning radicalization. More specifically, SMT views radicalization as an escalation of political activism which may become totalizing as the result of inter- and intra-group dynamics. Della Porta, for example, outlines four mechanisms by which this may occur. Conflict escalation as a result of inter-group relations may take place through *escalating policing*, referring to a movements’ radicalization when the State is perceived to have overreacted to an emergent protest, and *competitive escalation* occurs when groups adopt increasingly violent behavior in order to prove commitment within the context of competition with other movements for the same support base. Intra-group relationships, on the other hand, promote radicalization of the group’s members through *activation of militant networks*, when friendship and political commitment mutually reinforce each other, and *implosion* as the result of clandestine organizations’ going underground, which isolates them from the outside world to the effect that members become hostages to their ideological ‘*bubble*’ (Della Porta 2013).

A particular merit of SMT is that it includes a concept SP pays little attention to, namely that of *grievances*, which are expressed through and magnified by social networks. Indeed, if there exists a common denominator defining Islamist extremists, it is their outrage against the identified enemies of Islam. Maskaliunaite (2015), for example, argues that ‘*perceived injustice is one of the strongest motivators*’ for radicalization, and similarly, Christmann claims that grievances, especially with regard to Western foreign policy, are ‘*key explanatory factors driving radicalization*’ (Christmann 2012).

That said, SMT insists on the *constructed* character of grievances, meaning that jointly held beliefs with regard to Muslim victimhood, Western dominance and so forth are the product of a discursive construction of political conditions. This conception is reflected in the notion of *relative deprivation*, i.e., the ‘*perception that oneself or one’s group does not receive valued resources, goals, ways or standards of living, which others possess, and one feels rightfully entitled to*’ (Kunst, Obaidi 2020), whereby ‘*subjective feelings of relative deprivation do not necessarily mirror objective conditions, although they are likely informed by the latter*’ (ibid). This understanding of reality construction is important because it forgoes a reductionist conceptualization of poverty or low income *per se* as triggers of radicalization. The way in which groups create a reality in which perceived injustice becomes so central that it justifies the barbaric killing of civilians is explained through discourse theory.

Discursive approaches to radicalization

Discursive approaches to radicalization typically do not contradict but rather complement aforementioned theories by elaborating on the cognitive mechanisms by which language functions socialize individuals into an extremist worldview through a process colloquially referred to as ‘*brainwashing*’. It has in the past been stressed that personal socialization into the world of Salafi Islam through kin, friends or a local religious leader could be the most likely scenario drawing youth into extreme environments, however, the growing phenomenon of the ‘*self-radicalized terrorist*’ demonstrates that socialization can well occur over large distances via the internet. Irrespective of the *modus operandi* by which socialization occurs, all respectable theories on extremism acknowledge – tacitly or explicitly – that radicalization does not take place in a vacuum, yet discourse theory is particularly apt in explaining how radical groups draw individuals into their magic spell.

Discourse, for present purposes, may be defined as ‘*ways of representing aspects of the world*’ (Fairclough 2003). This implies that many such ‘*aspects*’, especially intangible social and political ones, do not have inherent meaning but are assigned such through discursive processes, whereby different discourses on the same topic often compete with one another. A discourse on the USA as an imperialistic power eager to subdue Muslims worldwide, for example, competes with a discourse on the USA as a liberating force bringing democracy and freedom, and depending on the discursive community one belongs to one may believe one or the other to be true. Discourses can influence how people perceive reality by highlighting aspects of complex phenomena selectively or by employing rhetorical devices evoking strong emotions, to name but two of many such manipulative tactics.

A first discursive function of jihadi propaganda aims at attracting the attention of potential recruits by presenting jihadism in a way supposed to be appealing to youth. Thereby, terrorist actors often use discursive tactics capitalizing on the psycho-social needs of potential recruits. Jihadi propaganda typically features texts and symbols communicating friendship and comradeship, heroism and adventure, and thereby cater to people’s need to attain a sense of significance. The Islamic State (IS) in particular is known for its highly sophisticated media strategies and its ‘jihadi cool’ branding by which it attempts to attract young Muslims

worldwide. Giving a detailed accounts of recruitment strategies by different jihadi groups is beyond the scope of the present publication; a previously published paper by EFSAS can be accessed for additional information (see EFSAS study paper: [Social Media Strategies and Online Narratives of Terrorist Organizations; Case studies of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba](#)).

Secondly, discursive manipulation serves Ideological indoctrination. Ideology has the function of explaining to the *'in-group'* why social, political and economic conditions are as they are; of attributing blame for the present predicament of the in-group upon some *'out-group'*, of creating a group identity and proposing a course of action. Thereby, they work to provide a *'cognitive map'* that filters the way social realities are perceived, rendering that particular reality easier to grasp, more coherent and thus more meaningful (Moghadam 2008). In the case of jihadi indoctrination, this invariably involves the painting of a black-and-white worldview building on Islamic concepts and identifying a grossly vilified enemy (*'Zionists'*, *'apostates'*, *'crusaders'*), whose destruction through violent jihad is framed as honorable and necessary. Magnifying popular grievances within their target audiences and channeling them into concrete narratives and *'plans for action'*, such a clear-cut description of the world has a strong potential of reducing ontological insecurity. As inter- and intra-group dynamics take effect – such as the increasing isolation of the group and ever-closer relationships between their members – these discourses as well as the anger and rage they evoke become increasingly more salient to the point that any other objective other than that of ending Muslim subjugation becomes irrelevant. The effectiveness of such discursive processes in evoking strong emotive reactions motivating people to engage in extreme acts of violence has repeatedly been stressed with respect to the most horrendous of crimes, including genocide and terrorist attacks.

The reference to ideology brings us to debate on the role of religion in radicalization. While most frameworks modeling radicalization posit that individuals firstly internalize extreme ideas, attitudes, political preferences and worldviews (cognitive radicalization) and subsequently adopt violent behavior (behavioral radicalization), other scholars argue that such linear conception of the radicalization process is untenable. This brings us to the last point of the present section, namely the ongoing academic debate on the sequencing of the radicalization process.

Sequencing radicalization

Taking a somewhat different angle, some scholars analyze the *process* of radicalization rather than the mechanisms underpinning it. The products of such research typically take the form of *'stage models'* suggesting a linear, phased conceptualization of radicalization. Moghaddam (2005), for example, conceives of radicalization as an ever-narrowing staircase starting with perception injustice and relative deprivation (ground floor), the search for options to address them (first floor), an emotive reaction in the form of anger at the injustice (second floor), justification of violence to address injustice (third floor), joining a terrorist group (fourth floor), and finally, dehumanization of enemy civilians, making them legitimate targets of

violence (fifth floor). Wiktorowicz (2005), in analyzing the al-Muhajiroun movement, similarly conceives of radicalization as phased but reduces his model to four stages and, as opposed to Moghaddam, emphasizes cognitive over emotive drivers. Wiktorowicz hence views cognitive opening, i.e., *'unfreezing'*, as the result of discrimination or personal disconnection, as the first step towards radicalization, after which the affected individual starts seeking to connect with activists (second stage). Thirdly, the seeker comes to accept the leader of the terror group (Omar Bakri, in this case) as the one legitimate authority for interpreting Islam, and the fourth and last step involves support for violent jihad as a means to attain salvation. There are various other models, and although they differ in some respects, most share the presupposition that ideational radicalization as the result of some sort of grievance precedes behavioral radicalization.

A growing number of scholars, however, question the usefulness of these stage models, advocating either to reverse the traditional *'from mind to action'* model, or to discard the idea of radicalization as a sequenced process altogether. The former view is reflected in a quote by French sociologist Oliver Roy, who reminds us that the problem is not the *"radicalization of Islam but the Islamization of radicalism"* (Roy 2017). Many of ISIS' foreign recruits, for instance, are known to have criminal pasts, and it has been shown that 70% of ISIS recruits had only a very basic knowledge of the Quran and required extensive ideological indoctrination at training sites (Clarke 2019). Hence, a large portion of ISIS' recruits seem to be drawn to the group not by real ideological conviction, but rather by the extreme violence and sense of camaraderie in terms of which ISIS likes to fashion itself.

Among those who propose an entirely different approach toward understanding radicalization are Hafez and Mullins (2015), who argue that radicalization does not progress linearly but *emerges* from a number of factors, which they call *'pieces of the puzzle'*: grievances with regard to Muslims' standing in world affairs, mobilization through kin and friends, ideology as a means to justify violence, and an enabling environment (such as an internet connection). In the words of the authors, *'just as similarly structured jigsaw puzzles can reveal different images once their pieces are interconnected, cases of radicalization can exhibit tremendous diversity even when the variables of radicalization are reoccurring'* (ibid).

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) build their argument from a similar assumption. Instead of drawing up a theory or model, they proffer an extensive list of micro-, meso- and macro-level factors which may all, in context-dependent combinations, play a role in radicalization without adhering to a particular order. Although this list is rather descriptive and does not necessarily add new insights, their effort deserves mention because it provides the perhaps most comprehensive overview over the many drivers of radicalization. The list is based on sound empirical research involving the collation of terrorist histories ranging from 19th century anti-tsarist terrorism to Al-Qaeda today. In line with this list, the individual factors driving radicalization are:

- *Personal grievances*, i.e., anger and revenge for harm or loved ones;
- *Group grievances*, i.e., outrage for injustice to a larger group or cause the individual cares about;

- *Slippery slope*, i.e., participation in progressively more radical acts that culminate in terrorism;
- *Love*, i.e., helping a friend or loved one already radicalized;
- *Escape*, i.e., escape from personal problems;
- *Unfreezing* is a mechanism acting as a multiplier of the above drivers.

Group-level factors are:

- *Group polarization*, when group-level mechanisms of radicalization to action include extremity shift in likeminded groups;
- *Condensation*, when less committed members of the group fall away as the result of competition with state power;
- *Outbidding*, i.e., competition for the same support base;
- *Fissioning*, i.e., within-group competition;
- *Group isolation* acts as a multiplier of the above group-level drivers.

Lastly, the mass-level drivers of radicalization are:

- *Hate*, i.e., broad public acceptance of a view of the enemy as inherently bad and threatening;
- *Martyrdom*, i.e., mobilization of opinion and action by a martyr's sacrifice;
- *Jujitsu politics*, i.e., mobilization of new support for terrorism by state over-reaction to a terrorist attack.

Thought vs action

A last conceptual distinction shall be noted before we move on to less theoretical parts of this toolkit. It concerns a strand of radicalization research that explicitly rejects a 'stage' conceptualization, proposing instead to theoretically separate the processes of radicalization of thought from radicalization of action altogether. McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017), for example, point to the fact that people may engage in radical behavior without ever holding radical thoughts but because of personal motives, such as personal revenge, status, escape, or love (see individual drivers in the list above). At the same time, the authors remind us that the often-held assumption that ideological radicalization automatically leads to perpetration of violence is deeply flawed: in fact, radical attitudes very seldomly translate into radical behavior.

Hence, McCauley and Moskaleiko propose not one but two models – one representing radicalization of opinion and one radicalization of action – which are meant to provide an alternative to traditional 'staircase models' which, according to the authors, lack empirical foundation. On one hand, there is the 'opinion pyramid'. The bottom represents those who do not care about a political cause (neutral), followed by those who believe in the cause but

do not justify violence (sympathizers) and those who justify violence in defense of the cause (justifiers). Those who feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the cause only take up a tiny space at the apex of the pyramid. Importantly, individuals do not need to run through each layer to arrive at the top; one can move from the bottom directly to the top.

Second, the action pyramid places those who are politically inactive with regard to a cause at the bottom (inert), followed by those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (activists), then those who are engaged in illegal action for the cause (radicals) and those who engage in illegal action that targets civilians at the top (terrorists). Again, this model is not meant to suggest that one has to move from bottom to top.



Figure 1. Opinion radicalization pyramid.

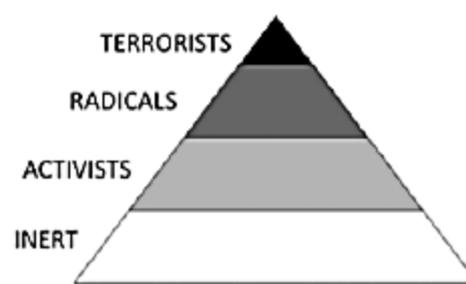


Figure 2. Action radicalization pyramid.

Section II: Engaging youth – improving community resilience

As we have seen, radicalization can be explained by reference to different ‘levels’. Individual drivers, escalation resulting from group interactions, and environmental factors relating to discursive and political developments may link up in different ways so as to create a variety of context-dependent radicalization patterns. The complexity that is the result of this condition makes addressing the phenomenon difficult. In response, a policy paradigm with the notion of ‘*resilience-building*’ at its core has gained traction within security circles. Although criticized for its vagueness and purported lack of ambition, this term represents a more pragmatic, long-term oriented and flexible approach which acknowledges that no ‘*silver bullet*’ against terrorism exists. In its general meaning, resilience denotes the ‘*ability to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks*’ (European Commission 2016); in a more constricted sense as related to PVE, it refers to the policy of building communities whose members possess the capabilities to resist the appeal of extremist groups and ideologies.

We propose that by building resilience at the smallest level – the individual – we may be able to trigger bottom-up dynamics by which resilient individuals proliferate pro-social attitudes, discourses and behaviors, and thereby act as the building blocks of resilient societies. People, and easy to influence youth in particular, constitute the most valuable resource for terror organizations. Your contribution as a frontline practitioner will consist in drying out this

resource by equipping youth with the mental strength as well as cognitive and social abilities to resist the appeal of terrorism, thereby draining terror groups' strength by eroding their potential support base.

Your role as a frontline practitioner

How can this be achieved? Since we focus on building individual resilience, we need to preempt individual drivers of radicalization. This translates into providing youth with alternative options of attaining a sense of personal significance, with means to address perceived (or real) injustices constructively and by raising their awareness to the deceptiveness and dangers of Jihadi-Salafi ideologies. A thoroughly planned and soundly implemented project can provide youth with a sense of belonging, purpose, fulfillment and achievement and therefore reduce their need of searching elsewhere for those benefits. Some activities are furthermore well-suited to develop critical thinking skills required to grasp the deceptiveness of a worldview painted in black and white. This will help reducing young people's desire to resort to both radical ideas and behaviors.

As a trusted guardian working with young people on a regular basis, you are much better equipped to influence their thinking and acting than distant policy-makers or strategists. You can do so by implementing resilience-building projects. Below, we have sketched some activities intended to provide guidance and inspiration, however, you are encouraged to design your project in a way that appears most feasible and impactful for your target community. The following factors should inform your approach:

- **Availability of resources** – most of the activities suggested below do not require substantial financial or material resources for their implementation; nonetheless, you should inform yourself about funding possibilities and draw up a budget plan for your project in order to determine your options.
- **Needs of your target community** – where do you see most potential for action within your target community? Where do you see demand for youth engagement, and which types of action are perhaps already being covered by governmental or non-governmental actors? A good strategy to find out about the types of activities that might be most impactful is to partner up with other civil society or governmental organizations as well as local schools and consult with them.
- **Your own expertise** – you need not be a professional instrumentalist in order to lead a music ensemble or choir – but some knowledge of music certainly will have an impact on your credibility and the success of the project. If you want to implement a project in a field you are less knowledgeable about, you might consider recruiting volunteers or paid staff with specialized expertise.
- **Expected size and composition of your group** – none of the activities described below have an explicit limit in terms of membership; on the contrary, you should make sure no one with an interest in participating is excluded. However, a debate club or a

theatre group may require a different design whether it has 5 versus 30 members. Furthermore, for obvious reasons, the concrete contents of your project should be adapted to the average age and mix of gender and religious orientation among your participants.

- **Legal framework** – restrictions on the right to assembly, the right to association or freedom of speech may restrict your options. Ascertain that you do not act outside of what is legal so as to not put yourself or your proteges at risk.

- **Team Sports**

Purpose

Sporting activities such as football, volleyball or hockey are an easy and uncostly way of socially engaging young people, thereby developing their sense for teamwork and collaboration, enhancing their self-confidence and personal satisfaction and conveying values such as fairness and tolerance. Especially for women and girls, *“women in sport defy the misconception that they are weak or incapable. Every time they hurdle or kick a ball, demonstrating not only physical strength but also leadership and strategic thinking, they take a step toward gender equality”* (Puri 2016). Such empowerment challenges the Salafi understanding of women as subservient to men and provides a counternarrative to fundamentalist propaganda.

Requirements

While specialized knowledge or skills are generally not necessary in order to organize and supervise sporting activities, practitioners should self-evidently have some understanding of the rules and practices of the game. Additionally, practitioners should have basic medical training and be capable to perform first aid if needed. Organizing sporting activities does not require substantial resources either; proximity of athletic facilities or recreational areas are an advantage, but a makeshift football field can work just as well.

Implementation

Not much effort is needed for the implementation of team sports activities; make sure everyone knows the rules of the game and establish resolution mechanisms in case rules are violated. In order to foster the team spirit of your proteges, you may organize social events for your sports team such as common dinners or excursions. This enables you to establish bonds with the team members, increase the cohesiveness of the group and will give you an avenue to learn about them and their problems.

- **Outdoor activities**

Purpose

Resilience-building through outdoor activities, such as running, hiking, kayaking, cycling or camping can be an especially enticing if your community is located close by a nature reserve

or mountains. Outdoor activities can empower, allow youth to connect with nature as well as with each other, and provide a sense of adventure and thrill.

Requirements

As outdoor activities may come with a risk of injury to you and your proteges, you should be able to provide basic medical assistance. You should furthermore be familiar with the area in which you organize your activity, and ideally with the activity itself. Depending on the choice of activity, you should ensure that required resources (tents, bicycles, running shoes, transportation etcetera) are available to all participants.

Implementation

The way you execute the project depends on the activity you choose; inform yourself about outdoor activities in your area and consult with your proteges when designing a program.

- **Musical activities**

Purpose

The therapeutic effect of music in overcoming trauma and giving value and meaning to life is well established (Forgeard 2013). Listening to and making music, for example, provenly yields neurological gains such as improvement of one's cognitive abilities as well as decreased depression and stress levels (Harvard Medical School 2011). Moreover, being part of collaborative musical arrangement has been shown to bolster social skills such as patience, cooperation and empathy (Parziani 2011).

Requirements

The resources required for a music-based project will depend on the type of musical collaboration envisioned, which in turn depends on the cultural context in which you operate. At a minimum, you will need a space where you can practice with your group at least an hour a week, and a venue to publicly perform your pieces. Classical instruments are usually not only expensive, but also require substantial time and commitment to learn; traditional instruments or vocal ensembles might present more viable options. Depending on the average age of your group, you will furthermore need at least a basic musical training in order to lead your music group.

Implementation

In order to ensure that your musical project is successful, it is important to formulate realistic goals. You may encourage your group to at least take part in the decision of what to train and perform, however, make sure that their decision is in line with their skill level. Otherwise, failure to achieve desired results may lead to frustration.

- **Literary Club**

Purpose

A literary club may involve reading and discussing various literary texts as well as composing and reading out own poems or stories. Literature is a means of expressing feelings and communicating across cultural boundaries and can deliver positive messages such as love, solidarity and mutual respect and train critical thinking skills.

Requirements

Apart from a place where youth can feel safe to express their feelings and ideas and some books or printouts, no specific resources or expertise are needed.

Implementation

Decide on literary texts beforehand and familiarize yourself with them in order to be able to guide and structure the discussion. You may propose texts from different cultural traditions in order to broaden the horizon of your proteges and open their minds. Respect each of your member's interpretation of literary texts and encourage them to debate different ideas. You may also organize 'open mic' evenings, where your proteges can recite poems or tell stories in public. Furthermore, you can invite guests, for example writers, poets or literature students, to educate your group about literary theory and practice.

- **Theatre Group**

Purpose

Theatrical performance is an age-old medium for communicating not only emotional contents, but also discussing social and political ills. Therefore, apart from the general benefits of being part of a team with a shared goal, the special value of performative arts is that it gives young adults a voice to address injustices artistically and thereby convey a sense of agency.

Requirements

Although the availability of props, costumes and a proper stage may increase the quality of theatrical performance, a theatre group can easily subsist on low-budget basis. You will merely need to organize a space for weekly practice and a venue to perform your pieces, as well as drama resource books and play scripts. Be aware that for some productions, you will have to get a license. Some knowledge in drama theory and performative arts will furthermore help you with your project implementation; if you lack training in the performative arts, you might want to look out for a local drama teacher to assist you.

Implementation

Depending on the age and interests of your theatre members, you may draw up a syllabus that suits you best. For example, improvisation and games could be combined with choreography and performance. If you plan to eventually perform on stage, source out age-

appropriate material that fits the size of your group and your budget. Lazy Bee Scripts, for example, has a large free collection of scripts for youth theatres.

▪ Religious Activities

Purpose

Being part of a healthy religious community is a highly effective way of bolstering resilience against radicalization in youth. Religion conveys meaning and purpose to life and provides children and adults with a caring and trusting environment where they can express their feelings safely. Furthermore, the religious community can provide youngsters with a positive interpretation of Islam that emphasizes forgiveness, peace and solidarity. Getting to know Islam as a religion of love rather than one of hate and revenge – as preached by jihadi hardliners – can strengthen young people’s resilience against the message of terrorists. If you host an inter-faith group, you allow youth to discover different faiths and develop tolerance and respect for each other’s religions.

Requirements

The program of a spiritual meeting group can be put to practice without a large budget but may be more diverse if you have access to financial resources. At a minimum, you will need a space for weekly meetings; if your budget is larger, you may make purchases such as catering and renting a venue for celebrations, transportation for excursions or hiring of guest speakers.

Implementation

The concrete contents of your program depends on budget and time constraints but also on the composition of your group. What is the average age of your participants? Do you host an inter-faith group, or only Muslim youth?

Activities with religiously oriented groups may include common praying and celebration of festivities as well as educational sessions. However, also non-religious activities such as community service, visiting landmarks or sites, sports or musical activities may be incorporated into the program.

▪ Debate Club

Purpose

Within the framework of a debate club, youngsters can train their oratory skills, develop their critical thinking capabilities and educate themselves on socio-political issues. Furthermore, debating as an integral part of civic education inculcates tolerance and respect for others who think differently.

Requirements

Apart from a space for weekly meetings, pencils, paper and a timer, no resources or expertise are required.

Implementation

There are various possible formats for debate clubs; you should consider the age of your participants and the size of the group when deciding on a design. Csun.com, for example, provides a list of debating formats from which you can conveniently choose the most suitable one for your purposes. If you want to increase the educational dimension of the project, you may include theoretical modules in civic education into the program, especially when politics courses are not provided for by the official schooling system.

In many countries, debating competitions for young people are staged on local and national levels, which may provide your group with additional ambition and motivation.

- **Community Service**

Purpose

Community service, or voluntarism, means non-obligatory, unpaid work that is carried out for the benefit of others. Voluntarism unites people from different backgrounds behind a common goal and is based on trustworthiness and reciprocity, therefore serving to foster social solidarity within communities as a whole. The individual benefits of voluntary community service include the training of leadership skills and conveyance a sense of agency to addressing injustices and help the community.

Requirements

Apart from a space where you can meet up with the group in order to plan their activities and discuss their experiences and transportation if necessary, no substantial resources are required. Different objectives may require funds, for example to buy paint or flowers. If your budget allows, you may furthermore provide small rewards such as shared dinners, t-shirts or other gifts for your proteges.

Implementation

First and foremost an objective worth pursuing has to be decided on. There are vast possibilities usually concerning ecological (environmental clean-ups and trash collection, care for street animals, planting, renovating or painting public areas) or social topics (helping the old or handicapped with everyday chores, taking care of the homeless, assisting refugees). In order to choose a worthwhile objective, the organizer of a volunteering group should inquire what the needs of a community are and if those needs are already (and sufficiently) addressed by public bodies. Also, the age of your proteges should be considered; younger participants should not be given tasks placing too much responsibility on them, and activities should be carried out in such way that youth are under constant supervision.

Once an objective is decided on, you will need to secure the approval and support of the local administration and coordinate with those institutions already engaged in the sector in which you want to invest your efforts. This will also help you to investigate potential liabilities and complications that may arise.

Before you launch the project, draw up a plan on what your goal, strategy and distribution of roles is. Plan a briefing and de-briefing before and after each meeting allow your proteges to reflect on their achievements and motivate them.

Good Planning and Implementation Practices

The ‘grassroots’ approach presently proposed transfers considerable responsibilities on the frontline practitioner. You are not only responsible for drafting and implementing a project; it also has to be drafted and implemented in such way that its potential benefits can materialize. A poorly executed project that fails to achieve its objectives because, for example, some participants feel excluded or efforts fail to yield expected results may aggravate young peoples’ social or personal stress. Your responsibilities therefore also include management of social interactions within a group, serving as a role model, and actively monitoring participants, developing their skills and providing individual guidance.

The following tips are intended to help frontline practitioners plan and implement their projects in the most effective way possible.

Enhancing visibility of your project

A first step towards implementing a successful youth project is to ensure that young people find out about your project (visibility). There are numerous ways of increasing the visibility of your project, for example:

- Create **flyers** specifying the content, meeting time & place of your project as well as a contact number. The flyers should be visually appealing and be overly wordy and should be designed in such way that they invoke the same psycho-social factors your project aims at supporting. Slogans such as ‘take your destiny into your own hands!’ or ‘be a hero – help your community’, depictions of groups of young people interacting as a team or cheering at an achievement could all be examples of ways in which you might appeal to young peoples’ need for belonging, achievement and fulfillment. Flyers may be posted in online fora, but also printed and displayed and distributed in public areas that are frequented by young people and/or parents.
- **Introduce your project personally.** If you already mentor youth groups (for example as a teacher or youth worker) you may take a few minutes at the beginning or end of a class or session in order to advertise your project and motivate young people to join. Similarly, to the above point, advertise your project in terms of its underlying benefits such as the possibility to make friends, to help the community and to develop knowledge and skills rather than on its merits related as a radicalization prevention tool.
- Additionally, you might want to **ask other frontline practitioners to assist you** in the distribution of materials relating to your project. You may ask teachers at local schools,

social workers in youth centers, civil society organizations or municipal government actors to hand out communicate with your audiences on your behalf.

Interacting with your group

As a youth worker, you not only provide services to a passive client; you act as a role model to young, impressionable individuals from potentially dysfunctional social and family environments. Your way of interacting with your participants, as well as your guidance regarding their interactions as a group, may have a lasting impression and determine the success of your project in terms of its potential of providing youth with a place where they can feel safe and grow.

There are numerous tools intended to guide youth workers' attitudes and behaviors. The list below is a synthesis of a separate publications by social scientist Kate Sapin (2008) and RAN researcher Werner Prinzjakowitsch (2018).

- The highest value in youth work is **respect**, entailing open and honest dialogue with young people, valuing different perspectives and addressing expressed needs and interests.
- **Have your own (political) position and express it** in order to establish yourself as authentic. Acceptance toward young people does not mean keeping your own opinion private.
- **Be positive** – rather than seeing young people as problems, victims or individuals in need of help, recognize their strengths and encourage them to undertake activities that make a positive difference. A positive approach to youth work also entails acknowledging your group members' need for fun, warmth and nurture, as well as your own enjoyment of your work.
- Encourage **participation** – encourage your group to make their own choices and find their own solutions whenever possible. This will allow them to develop greater control over their lives whilst learning new skills, taking responsibility and finding out about new opportunities. You should also make sure, however, that their plans and goals remain within a scope that is realistic and feasible. Furthermore, participation should always be voluntary and never coerced.
- Take an **anti-oppressive approach** – take positive steps to address oppressive language, attitudes, practices and structures, and challenge negative discrimination.
- **Judge behavior, not the person** in order to maintain a permanent professional relationship with the people involved. In the case of verbal or physical offence, the misbehavior of the person must be the focus of criticism and not the person him or herself.
- **Set clear boundaries** and explain them coherently. For youngsters searching for orientation, clear boundaries are all the more important.

Spotting & counteracting radicalization

Apart from acting as a role model for your group, establishing individual bonds with each of your proteges is a key component of youth work based PVE strategies. Learn about their family and social backgrounds, and try to judge their emotional and social intelligence, strengths and weaknesses and give them reassurance and encouragement. This not only creates trust between you and your proteges but will also allow you to spot signs that might indicate radicalization.

Spotting early signs of radicalization

As has been shown in Section I there is no single profile that fits all radicalized individuals. Consequently, signs of radicalization may materialize differently in different people, and spotting them is particularly difficult in teenagers and young adults who are in a phase of transformation anyway. There is no established methodology or technique of spotting radicalization; youth workers typically use their intuition (Van de Weert & Eijkman 2019). The more it becomes important for youth workers acting as the antennae of society to build relationships with your proteges, enabling you to spot changes in their attitude, values or behavior and take steps to intercept the process of radicalization.

That said, there are '*warning signals*' which can often be observed in youth adopting radical Islamic worldviews. First signs that someone is starting to subscribe to radical ideas may include:

- Increasingly isolating themselves from friends and family
- Expressing a sense of rejection and/or victimization by the community
- Showing intolerance to people who disagree with their view
- Increased levels of anger
- Sudden and noticeable change in habits and clothing
- Increasing secretiveness, especially regarding internet use
- Denouncing authority figures

What to do when a youth shows signs of radicalization?

There is no '*standard reaction*' to a radicalizing teenager or young adult. Reacting prematurely may lead to stigmatization and reinforce radicalization; reacting too late may amount to you losing them to radical networks. It is therefore key to take a sensitive approach that balances recognition of the threat of extremism with the dignity and of the person concerned. Especially if you are uncertain whether radical ideologies are the cause of behavioral changes, it is important to maintain discretion and firstly address the individual concerned personally or through his/her community rather than reporting them to the official security chain.

A first step you may take once you notice that one or more of your proteges show worrisome behavioral changes is to initiate education activities for the entire group with the aim of providing counternarratives and/or demonstrating the dangers of religious extremism. You may, for instance, invite a religious actor or cleric to hold a lecture about radicalism, propose religious extremism as a topic for a debating session, or initiate an informal group discussion about the topic.

If you are confident that your protegee trusts you, you may engage them in a one-on-one discussion to try and understand underlying reasons for potential ideological changes. Furthermore, inform yourself about the individual's social environment and family dynamics in order to determine who might be in the most suitable position to steer your protegee away from harmful influences. Typically, the concerned individual's family takes a central role in preventing and countering violent extremism and should be the first to be contacted. Yet, family members can also be part of the problem, especially when the parent-child relationship does not exist or is difficult. In such circumstances, a credible community figure, who has the respect of the concerned individual, could provide the supportive role and necessary intervention (Global Counterterrorism Forum 2015). Police or other security actors should be contacted only upon the consultation with the concerned person's parents or guardians.

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