The Role of Families and Civil Society in Detecting Radicalisation and Promoting Disengagement from Violent Extremism

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The role of families and broader civil society networks and resources has increasingly been hailed as a cornerstone of efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE).[1] This approach is part of a broader conceptualisation of P/CVE as the strategic mobilisation of a range of "soft power" initiatives designed to pre-empt or complement more security-oriented counter-terrorism frameworks by policing and security agencies that aim to disrupt, interdict and destabilise terrorist networks and activities.

This in turn reflects the current emphasis in international CVE policy and thinking on not only of "whole of government" but also "whole of society" efforts,[2] both to identify and act on early warning signs of radicalisation to violence at the micro-level of families and social networks, and also to address pre-emptively some of the enabling conditions that erode social cohesion and community resilience, leaving people vulnerable to

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[1]   Global Counterterrorism Forum (2016) "The role of families in preventing and countering violent extremism: Strategic recommendations and programming options", https://www.thegctf. org/Portals/1/Documents/Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Familes-in-PCVE.pdf; The Commonwealth (2017) Supporting Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/ComSec%20CVE%20and%20 Families%20Presentation.pdf.

[2]   Rosand, E. (2017) "Fixing CVE in the United States requires more than just a name change", Brookings Institution ("Order from Chaos" Blog), https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/02/16/fixing-cve-in-the-united-states-requires-more-than-just-a-name-change/; Levitt, M. (2017) *Recent Trends in Terrorism and Counterterrorism: National Practices in Countering Violent Extremism,* Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), United Nations, https:// www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/8-Statement-as-delivered-by-Mr.-Matthew-Levitt-The-Washington-Institute.pdf.

terrorist appeal and recruitment strategies. It also reflects developing so-phistication in how we understand the dynamic processes of radicalisation to violence, which have successfully resisted efforts to uniformly profile terrorist pathways, throwing into sharp relief the importance of tailored, localised programmes for early identification and support of those at risk of violent radicalisation.

Finally, the focus on the role of families and civil society reflects a heightened understanding of the limits that inhere in more security-oriented logics and strategies for dealing with terrorist threats. It is not possible, as various commentators have pointed out, to arrest or censor our way out of terrorism;[3] a more holistic approach that builds resilience across the entire spectrum of radicalised violence, from prevention to dis-engagement from violent extremist ideologies, has the greatest chance of success.

The Youth Factor

Champions of P/CVE models that foreground the role of families and civil society in addressing the risks and impacts of violent extremism are right to highlight a number of contemporary issues and challenges in support of this approach.

One of these is the prominence of adolescent and young adult involve-ment in violent extremist groups, reinforcing the fact that violent extremist action has become a young person's game. This was a particularly pro-nounced feature of foreign fighters and supporters who, responding to the precipitous rise of Daesh in 2014, either travelled or tried to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the cause. The average age of Swedish foreign fighters, for example, was 26,[4] while the average age range of foreign fighters from

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3 Hewitt, S. (2015) "Canada should learn from UK: You can't arrest your way out of terrorism", *The Globe and Mail,* 29 January, updated 12 May 2018, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-critical-counterterror-tool-of-skepticism/article22710643/; Holt, T., Freilich, J. D., and Chermak, S. (2017) "Can taking down websites really stop terrorist and hate groups?", *The Conversation,* http://theconversation.com/can-taking-down-websites-really-stop-terrorists-and-hate-groups-84023.

4 Gustafsson, L. and Ranstorp, M. (2017) *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data,* Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies, Swedish Defence University, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf.

across Western countries was 18-29.[5] In Australia, the Director-General of Security testified in 2017 that approximately 40% of identified "persons of interest" in relation to Islamist-based terrorism in Australia were 15-24 years of age in 2015,[6] a point graphically illustrated by the 2015 terrorist-inspired "Parramatta Shooting" of New South Wales Police civilian employee Curtis Cheng by 15-year-old Farhad Jabar.[7]

The nature of both youth-based support for violent action and youth-based capacity to undertake such action (coupled with the hypothesis that aging correlates with a decline in violent extremist involvement),[8] has seen renewed emphasis on the role that families and peers can play in detecting early signs of radicalisation and on the importance of early intervention and diversion for young people who may be at risk. This has been accompanied by enhanced understanding of the life-stage vulnerabilities that young people in particular can experience, such as identity-negotiation, family relationships, experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, and precarious employment and study opportunities, combined with increasing exposure to digital networks and echo chambers that can enhance a sense of grievance and the need for remedial action.

Taken together, these issues suggest that P/CVE approaches are trending toward greater recognition of the inherently social nature of processes that support or enable radicalisation to violence. As a recent article by Day and Kleinmann (2017) notes, if radicalisation to violence is a social process, then so too is the process of preventing or countering that radicalisation, which needs to account more fully for the role of "affective bonds, social

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[5] Briggs, R. and Silverman, T. (2016) *Western Foreign Fighters: Innovations in responding to the threat,* Institute for Strategic Dialogue, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2784_Western_foreign_fighters_V7_WEB.pdf.

[6] Testimony by Duncan Lewis to Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Official Committee Hansard, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Estimates, 28 February 2017.

[7] Ralston, N. (2015) "Parramatta shooting: Curtis Cheng was on his way home when shot dead", *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 3 October, https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/parramatta-shooting-curtis-cheng-was-on-his-way-home-when-shot-dead-20151003-gk0ibk.html.

[8] LaFree, G., Jensen, M. A., James, P. A., and Safer-Lichtenstein, A. (2018) "Correlates of violent political extremism in the United States", *Criminology* 56(2): 233-268, https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12169.

practices and friendships" in either strengthening or weakening ties to violent extremist ideology and action.[9]

Assumptions About the Role of Families

Families and other civil society actors – such as the education, community service and health and wellbeing sectors – become especially critical in this context because they are seen as the people most likely to have day-to-day contact with young people and to notice small or incremental changes in behaviour, attitude or orientation that may signal heightened risks for young people's wellbeing. This model has given rise to a plethora of initiatives – ranging from the United Kingdom's (UK) legally mandated "Prevent Duty" for schools, higher education institutions, childcare providers, law enforcement and corrections officers and health practitioners[10], to information and resilience-building initiatives[11] – that seek to educate and promote greater awareness about early signs of radicalisation to violence. However, there have been a range of unintended consequences resulting from some of these initiatives, particularly in response to the UK's Prevent Duty, and it is timely now to ask whether we need to refine our understanding of the issues and challenges – and not merely the opportunities – that can arise when seeking to deploy family and civil society members in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Looking across a range of international efforts on the P/CVE front, three key underlying assumptions emerge in relation to engaging families and other civil society actors in C/PVE activities. These are:

First, that families and key civil society institutions play a vital role in influencing and shaping young people's attitudes and responses to the world as they explore independence and autonomy, but where they may

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[9] Day, J. and Kleinmann, S. (2017) "Combatting the cult of IS: A social approach to countering violent extremism", *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 15(3): 14-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2017.1354458.

[10] HM Government (2015) *Prevent Duty Guidance,* https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2015/9780111133309/pdfs/ukdsiod_9780111133309_en.pdf.

[11] A brief set of examples includes the UK NSPCC's information website on "protecting children from radicalisation", https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/report-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/; France's "Stop djihadisme" list of early warning signs, www.stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr; and Australia's "Community Awareness Training" programme (http://amf.net.au/entry/elearning), based on The Radicalisation Indicators Model developed by Monash University and supported by the Australian Government.

also encounter harmful influences through both online and offline violent extremist rhetoric and propaganda. Families and civil society influencers can provide guidance, support and context for young people's questioning of and seeking in the world around them that is crucial in shaping and sustaining the values by which youth interpret and respond to broader social and cultural influences. In particular cultural contexts, mothers are able to draw on key cultural, religious and social narratives that enshrine the importance of women's guidance and wisdom on issues of how to behave and what values are better or worse to live by.

Second, that families and civil society actors are essential building blocks in the key task of fostering community resilience to violent extremism, especially in the very early stages of prevention and resistance to the appeal of violent extremist ideology and rhetoric.

Third, that both families and civil society actors are a front line of defence in relation to detecting early signs of radicalisation, especially amongst young people – children, brothers, sisters, other close relatives, friends, teachers, doctors; and that those closest to someone are often the first to see very early or subtle changes in behaviour, attitude, social networks or emotional responses.

However, there are significant challenges and blind-spots, especially in relation to the first and third assumptions, that have been evidenced empirically by a series of recent research studies. Few people are likely to argue against the centrality of family in shaping young people's values and general orientation toward the world and their place in it. However, this narrative of "family influence" does not sufficiently account for young people's desire to individuate, to engage in risk-taking behaviours and attitudes, and to seek to demarcate themselves as autonomous individuals, particularly in adolescence.

Difficulties in Interpreting Early Warning Signs

More to the point, it assumes that families will, fairly unerringly, be able to pick up the signs when a young person is diverging from the values and behaviours that have been normalised in specific family- or culturally-based contexts. However, this assumption is not well supported by empirical evidence for three reasons: first, because it assumes that families themselves are unified, consensus-based sources of "influences", "values" and

"behaviours"; second, because many of the behaviours that are seen as indicative of rejecting pro-social values can be misconstrued or actually read as *conforming to* rather than rejecting those values; and third, because the "early warning signs" of radicalisation are (like the symptoms of some medical conditions) frustratingly vague and diffuse.

For example, guidelines from both the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and France's "Stop Djihadisme" (SJ) CVE web resources (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/re-port-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/; www.stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr) cite "warning signs" such as "isolating themselves from family and friends/sudden break with the family and long-standing friendships" (NSPCC/SJ); "changes in attitudes and behav-iour towards others" (SJ); "unwillingness or inability to discuss their views" (NSPCC); "antisocial comments, rejection of authority, refusal to interact socially, signs of withdrawal and isolation/sudden disrespectful attitude towards others" (SJ/NSPCC); "increased secretiveness, especially around internet use" (NSPCC).

These are such broad "warning signs", potentially indicative of so many different causes and challenges for young people undergoing developmental and life-stage transitions, as to be almost impossible to pinpoint in relation to specific risks for radicalisation to violence. Australia's "Community Awareness Training" resource for promoting awareness of radicalisation to violence acknowledges this problem, taking a broader approach in its e-module and "cyber-parent" apps by noting that many of these early warning signs can also connote other kinds of adjustment, developmental or social difficulties across a broad spectrum of challenges leading to anti-social or maladaptive behaviours for young people.

However, many of these "early warning signs" can be – and are – read in varied and uneven ways by actual families and civil society actors on the ground, and their accounts of what proved to be, in retrospect, early warning signs for their young people's radicalisation to violence can both overlap with and diverge from such checklists. For example, in recent re-search[12] with the families of young Australians who had become involved in either foreign violent extremist conflict or home-grown terrorist activities

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[12] Gerrand, V. and Grossman, M. (2017) *Interviewing the families of young people who have joined or attempted to join violent conflict.* With Victorian Arabic Social Services. Melbourne: Research Institute on Social Cohesion, State of Victoria.

in Australia, the most common "push factors" identified by families were *anger* about social injustice; *black and white or obsessive thinking*; and *media targeting and stereotyping leading to feelings of isolation and discrimination*.[13] Only the first factor tends to appear on "early warning" checklists for radicalisation, but the others were also seen as crucial signs by families who had experienced first-hand the shift toward violent extremism of their young people.

In addition, most families and civil society actors would not think that "anger about social injustice" – a feature shared by many people in many different societies – was a warning sign for radicalisation to violence; they would only become alarmed if there were other behavioural or attitudinal indicators that suggested that someone was moving toward support for violence as a solution to anger at injustice. This highlights the way in which such checklists isolate "symptoms" or "signs" of radicalisation to violence without sufficient attention to the importance of how a range of factors and influences must converge[14] to support migration toward violent action.

Moreover, extended family members (in-laws, uncles) were identified in two cases as being the *agents* of their young people's radicalisation to violence, rather than helping them desist from violent extremist pathways; similar findings have occurred in relation to the influence of siblings and other relatives on trajectories toward violent radicalisation in other studies around the world.[15] As Simon Copeland has noted, "The focus on parent-child transmission [of beliefs and ideologies] often mitigates the importance of other familial relations." He goes on to add that "families are often sites of ideological contestation" rather than the unified unit of values and norms that CVE theory currently posits them to be.[16]

Most compelling, however, was the evidence provided on how families actually "read" what they see when observing or picking up signs of change

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13   Ibid., 8-9.

14   Tahiri, H. and Grossman, M. (2013) *Community and Radicalisation: An examination of perceptions, ideas, beliefs and solutions throughout Australia.* Melbourne/Canberra: Victoria Police/ANZCTC.

15   See for example Harris-Hogan, S. (2014) "The importance of family: The key to understanding the evolution of jihadism in Australia", *Security Challenges* 10(1): 31-49; Hafez, M. (2016) "The ties that bind; How terrorists exploit family bonds", *CTC Sentinel* 9(2), https://ctc.usma.edu/the-ties-that-bind-how-terrorists-exploit-family-bonds.

16   Copeland, S. (2017) "Transmitting terrorism: A family affair?", CREST Comment, 22 March, https://crestresearch.ac.uk/comment/transmitting-terrorism-family-affair/.

in their young people. In our study, a range of contextual explanations were used to ascribe changes in behaviour and attitude, none of which included the possibility of radicalising to violence: for example, in one case, an uptick in "jumpy" behaviour was ascribed to problems at work, not to planning for foreign travel. In many cases, family members said they had no idea at an early point that their young person was radicalising until intervention by police and security agencies. In some instances, family members suspected something was "not right", but did not want to acknowledge the reality of what was occurring; others read the emergence of more religiously devout behaviours as a positive sign that a young person was maturing or coming out of a developmental or identity crisis. Most families did not become aware that their young family member had joined overseas conflict until after they had left Australia.

In fact, many families noted that there were no significant behavioural changes at all, catching families completely unaware until they were contacted by law enforcement or by the young person who had left the country. One male participant reported that the young family member who joined conflict appeared to be *"his normal self – he didn't isolate anyone from his life – a normal guy doing normal things…"* A female participant noted that her husband *"looked normal – nothing out of the ordinary."* And many participants focused on how difficult, ambiguous or open to interpretation some of the signs of change can be for young people, especially in relation to appearance, behaviour or orientation:

> With me, I'd see him a lot, he'd talk about his work, what he was up to. He did used to party a lot, and I thought, "Good", this is a good thing. He did start speaking to me about haaj *and the mosque. I had a cousin who changed like this too and it was all fine. I thought he was giving up his bad boy ways and becoming a bit more devout. I thought he was just maturing, coming out of a phase.* (Male participant)

Another participant, whose husband's religious piety had dramatically increased, continued to support her husband going to the mosque because she felt it would help fix his attitude towards marriage. She failed to connect his behaviours to radicalisation to violence.

These accounts from the families of people who have demonstrably radicalised to violence call into question some of the current uncritical assumptions being made about the role of families in early detection of radicalisation to violence. The research evidence across many

studies supports the idea that those closest to someone are often the first to spot signs of change that may indicate the need for intervention, diversion or support, and this is supported by our research. It thus is not a question of *whether or not families* (or indeed other civil society actors) *see early changes or warning signs,* but of *how they interpret* such changes, and the opportunities they have to contextualise or explain such shifts well outside awareness of, concerns with or links to violent extremist orientation.

Moving Beyond Stereotypes – the Influence of Mothers

A second challenge to these assumptions converges on the role of mothers in influencing their children away from violent extremism. In our recent Australian study on the roles of women in both supporting and opposing violent extremism,[17] the literature we reviewed suggests there is a strong international evidence base for identifying positive aspects of the role that mothers can play in P/CVE efforts.[18] Indeed, the role of women as agents of prevention is seen as so important by some P/CVE practitioners that a specific counter-terrorism campaign, the "Syria Awareness Campaign", was launched a few years ago in the UK, focussing on women as preventers of young people travelling to join Daesh or being radicalised.[19]

Schlaffer and Kropiunigg[20] also report on the crucial role mothers can play in countering violent extremism in their children. They discuss related research showing that mothers' willingness to hinder their children's involvement in violent extremism was matched only by their lack of confidence and skill in the area. A notable feature of their study, which involved more than 1,000 women in several different countries, is the issue

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[17] Grossman, M., Carland, S., Tahiri, H. and Zammit, A. (2017) *The roles of women in supporting and opposing violent extremism: Understanding gender and terrorism in contemporary Australia.* Canberra: Australian Government.

[18] See for instance Briggs, R. and T. Silverman (2014) *Western foreign fighters: innovations in responding to the threat* (Research Report). London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue; Saltman, E. M. and R. Frenett (2016) "Female radicalisation to ISIS and the role of women in CVE" and Safi, M. (2016) "Afghan women and CVE: What are their roles, challenges and opportunities in CVE?", in N. Chowdury Fink, S. Zeiger and R. Bhulai (eds.) A *man's world? Exploring the roles of women in counter terrorism and violent extremism*. Abu Dhabi: Hedayah/Global Center on Cooperative Security.

[19] Briggs and Silverman, op. cit.

[20] Schlaffer, E. and Kropiunigg, U. (2015) *Mothers Against Terror.* Vienna: Women without Borders.

of whom mothers of children involved in violent extremism feel they trust most when looking to source help and support for diverting their children from this path. Revealingly, 94% of women responded that other mothers were those they trusted most in this context. Fathers were next at 91%, followed by other relatives at 81%. In a crisis situation, the family circle is clearly seen as the first port of call and primary source of support, and women's first choice is other women whom they feel can identify with their situation and concerns.

Given the crucial family "insider" role that mothers play, coupled with their strong desire to prevent their children being involved in violent extremism, the question of whom mothers do and do not trust is especially relevant when planning and implementing policies and programmes and policies on this issue. If CVE programmes rely solely on government-led programmes, for example, there may be serious obstacles around trust, even for a group of women who are otherwise very willing to take up the services being offered. However, by the same token, if mothers are uncritically vaunted or idealised as the key to addressing early signs of radicalisation they may then, as a logical consequence of this, be blamed for failure to prevent their children from radicalising should this occur. Such finger-pointing will almost inevitably have a chilling effect on the willingness of other women to act, since they are unlikely to want to risk shame, censure or disapproval for their efforts if they are ultimately unsuccessful.

As a result, caution needs to be exercised when making assumptions about the role of mothers (and indeed of families more generally) in countering violent extremism. Families can and do have a powerful role to play in shaping their children's resilience and sense of social wellbeing, factors shown to be protective against the uptake of violent extremism.[21] However, in relation to women, it is as important to move beyond the stereotype of the all-nurturing, all-influential and all-powerful mother as it is to move beyond that of the jihadi bride or fan girl when thinking about women's roles in violent extremist movements. All of these stereotypes, regardless of which end of the social spectrum they fall on, dismiss or downplay the complexity of women's influence and experience by either trivialising or romanticising their status and their impacts.

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[21] See Grossman, M., Ungar, M., Brisson, J., Gerrand, V., Hadfield, K. and Jefferies, P. (2017) *Understanding youth resilience to violent extremism: A standardised research measure.* Canberra: Australian Government.

In fact, our Australian study suggests that while many Australian mothers have become concerned about the potential radicalisation of children and youth since the emergence of Daesh, and the precipitous drop in the age of those participating both online and through foreign travel, they are still comparatively isolated, uninformed and lacking the social or technical resources with which to intervene with confidence and knowledge. There is urgent work to be done to skill up and better resource women in communities to be able to engage, in safe and meaningful ways, with the complex challenges and issues they face around countering violent extremism in families and in communities.

However, there is also an urgent need to recognise the important work that is already being done by many women, in many communities and in many different countries, in the CVE space. In Australia, our data suggest that much of this work is being done outside of the public gaze, whether through fear of community backlash, resistance to negativity, or simply based on personal or cultural styles and preferences. Many of our study participants felt that a key task in prevention terms is strengthening awareness and the voices of such women in ways that allow them to continue their efforts while minimising any existing or potential sense of embattlement. However, the tensions between public and private action in CVE contexts remains a vexed area for women in Australia, as does the issue of women's marginalisation by men and by government within some community settings. More needs to be done to explore, in close consultation with women community members and activists on the ground, how some of these tensions and barriers might be resolved.

Stigmatisation of CVE Efforts

And indeed, the problem is not limited to issues of gender. Many of the agencies and community groups that constitute strong entry-points for civil society activism on countering violent extremism – including networks focused on youth work, social work, community development, health and wellbeing and community education – are fearful of either being stigmatised or of losing existing clients and funding support if they are overtly identified as providing intervention and support services, as a recent study mapping the willingness and capacity of Australian ser-

vice providers to become active in this space suggests.[22] Eliminating the stigma of CVE activities means tackling complex and difficult issues around uncertain or compromised trust flows, the integrity and viability of government-community partnerships to address violent extremism,[23] and the capacity to conduct safe, open and meaningful dialogue around the issues and how they can be addressed. These remain ongoing challenges not only in Australia but in many other national and regional settings. In particular, the issue of understanding and improving trust flows between government and communities is crucial. Lack of trust in institutions designed to keep us safe and well is an identifiable social harm[24] that creates risks and vulnerabilities for communities and for the institutions charged with community wellbeing. Trust is a hallmark of social resilience in times of disaster and crisis, including terrorism risks and events.[25] However, lack of trust and confidence between communities and law enforcement personnel and institutions persists and therefore impedes the resilience needed to develop meaningful, sustainable partnerships to identify and prevent violent extremism and other social harms from taking hold. While substantial research exists on trust and legitimacy gaps in how communities perceive police in CVE contexts,[26] for example, little attention has been given to the reverse question of the grounds and dynamics for mistrust by law enforcement when working with communities. Understanding the social ecology of trust as a process of interdependent dynamic flows between communities and law enforcement is a current knowledge gap that impedes innovation in developing CVE policies, tools and frameworks through civil society-government partnerships and cooperation.

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[22]   Cherney, A., Sweid, R., Grossman, M., Derbas, A., Dunn, K., Jones, C., Hartley, J. and Barton, G. (2017). "Local service provision to counter violent extremism: perspectives, capabilities and challenges arising from an Australian service mapping project", *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 10(3):1-20, https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2017.1350735.

[23]   Ellis, B. H. and Abdi, S. (2017) "Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships", *American Psychologist* 72(3): 289-300, http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000065.

[24]   Pemberton, S.A. (2015) *Harmful societies: understanding social harm.* London: The Policy Press.

[25]   Longstaff, P.H. and Yang, S.U. (2008) "Communication management and trust: their role in building resilience to 'surprises' such as natural disasters, pandemic flu, and terrorism", *Ecology and Society* 13(1): 3. http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss1/art3/.

[26]   Cherney, A. and Hartley, J. (2015) "Community engagement to tackle terrorism and violent extremism: challenges, tensions and pitfalls", P*olicing and Society* 27(7): 750-763.

Dilemmas of Early Detection and Reporting for Families and Communities

A final challenge presented by Australian and UK research to the governing assumptions around family and civil society actor P/CVE engagement focuses on what people actually do in cases where they serve as "early detectors" of violent radicalisation for someone within their family or community circle. Two separate studies using the same research design and methods in Australia[27] and the UK[28] investigated the thresholds for community reporting to authorities by "intimates" such as family members, spouses and partners, or close friends in cases of suspected or known violent extremism. The findings from these studies showed just how far the empirical evidence can travel from the assumptions held by policy makers and system designers when it comes to human behaviour in P/CVE contexts. While the UK has a well established policy and programme architecture through its Prevent, Channel and Safeguarding initiatives, including the controversial Prevent Duty, Australia does not mandate reporting, nor does it have a clear set of mechanisms and guidelines for sharing concerns about someone at early potential risk of radicalised violence outside the National Security Hotline (mirrored in the UK by the Anti-Terrorism Hotline). While there is a well-developed Australian policy and practice framework for intervention, diversion and support for people at various stages of the radicalised violence spectrum, including disengagement programmes in several Australian states, these policies and mechanisms are not familiar to the majority of ordinary community members.

When we investigated reporting issues, concerns and behaviours amongst both community members and counter-terrorism practitioners in each country, we found that, unsurprisingly, reporting to authorities is a last resort. Almost all of the 99 respondents across both studies suggested that they would mobilise a range of other options, such as direct intervention, seeking support from other family members or friends, local

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[27] Grossman, M. (2015) *Community Reporting Thresholds: sharing Information with Authorities Concerning Violent Extremist Activity and Involvement in Foreign Conflict*, Canberra: Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee.

[28] Thomas, P, Grossman, M., Miah, S. and Chistmann, K. (2017) *Community Reporting Thresholds: Sharing Information with Authorities Concerning Violent Extremist Activity and Involvement in Foreign Conflict – A UK Replication Study.* Lancaster, UK: Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (UK Economic and Social Research Council Award ES/N009614/1).

community or religious leaders, or local service providers before going to police. More surprising was the clear preference in both countries for face to face reporting that was confidential but not anonymous. This was associated with the desire for increased accountability, relatability, and a persistent lack of trust in online or phone-based reporting mechanisms, including the anti-terror hotlines in each country. Also concerning was the lack of knowledge and awareness of where to turn to for help, advice and support when trying to "read" or interpret behaviour or attitude changes that were causing concern. While people suggested they wanted to locate and utilise "known faces in known places" to help guide them in seeking information or confirmation about someone's potential radicalisation to violence, there was little awareness of who those places or faces might be, and very little structural support outside law enforcement or government-sponsored agencies for providing such assistance.

Our research suggests that reporting is a process, rather than an event, in which people make a series of non-linear decisions and choices against the backdrop of often severely conflicting emotions, loyalties, anxieties and concerns. This returns us to the question of what it is that families and civil society actors actually *do* when they are confronted with suspicions or concerns about someone who may be radicalising to violence – rather than what we want or expect them to do. If we do not provide clear information and support pathways, mechanisms and opportunities for families and civil society actors, then we are asking them to respond in ways that have little grounding in reality, arguably create a series of risks for those who come forward, and provide little in the way of support and guidance for those who do. Family members in particular face significant obstacles in coming forward to authorities because they do not want to cause further trouble for a loved one, or do not want to accept that their concerns are grounded in fact. The result is often delayed reporting, beyond the point at which early intervention or diversion would be an option. This damages not only efforts to counter or prevent terrorism and its impacts, but also family and civil society willingness to come forward in future because of the trauma they experience when things have reached crisis point for someone they know.

Improving the Environment for Family and Civil Society Involvement

So, what do these challenges to some of the assumptions we make about the role of families and civil society actors suggest as a way forward?

First, they suggest that our efforts to engage families and civil society actors must be grounded in empirically based *evidence from families and civil society participants* themselves. The human terrain of CVE is more complex, and more conflicted, than many current engagement models would suggest. They do not take sufficient account of the stigma, sense of uneasiness or discomfort, anxiety and lack of confidence that many families and civil society actors experience when thinking about how they might become involved in helping prevent or counter violent extremism.

Second, and following on from this, we have yet to overcome the social stigmas attached to confronting radicalisation to violence at family and community level. There remains little prospect of doing so without creative solutions for making spaces in which *meaningful and open dialogue* on the risks and impacts of violent extremism can occur. Currently, families and many civil society actors are being asked to assume a series of social and sometimes material risks themselves in order to prevent risks to others or to society at large. This calculus needs to shift if we are to make headway in meaningful family and civil society engagement.

Third, there is very little genuine engagement of families and civil society actors at the *disengagement and desistance end* of the violent extremism spectrum. Involving families and civil society has been conceptualised internationally as almost entirely in terms of prevention and early intervention. By contrast, disengagement and desistance has become institutionalised by law enforcement and clinical practitioners, at least in Australia, although in other countries, such as Singapore, there is far greater emphasis on mobilising community-based resources to facilitate successful reintegration of former extremists. To date, this has meant that former violent extremists are largely denied the very forms of support and social engagement that could help re-build their sense of social connection, and that families and communities in turn have been left without the resources to understand, cope with, support and defend reintegration processes.

This final point speaks to the importance not only of building resilience in families and communities to help prevent violent extremism – which

is indeed a "whole of community" undertaking – but also of *re-building resilience* for violent extremists, their families and their communities, all of whom need guidance and understanding throughout the process. As we enter a new phase of developing policies and models for dealing with returned foreign fighters and their families from conflict zones at unprecedented levels, involving families and civil society actors in meaningful and effective disengagement and reintegration processes, as well as prevention and intervention efforts, is the next vital frontier. Our success in this, and in engaging families and civil society more generally on P/CVE matters, will depend on how well we listen to what they have to say, and how well we validate and support their needs and capacities in response.

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