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### Introduction

One of the most severe problems faced by programmes designed to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism (PVE) is the question of how to show and ensure a positive impact according to the programmes' goals. Attempts to suggest comprehensive evaluation tools for deradicalisation programmes coming from academia (e.g., Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Romaniuk & Fink, 2012; Williams & Kleinman, 2013) have not found their way into wide-scale practical implementation so far.

Nevertheless, without the development of methods to evaluate PVE programmes and to standardise programme design,<sup>1</sup> the field is inevitably bound to remain fragmented, confronted with suspected inefficiencies, failure, or misconduct. Akin to any other complex social problem, terrorism and counter-radicalisation must be subjected to scrutiny to avoid backlash or waste of resources. Governments, practitioners and researchers need to be able to compare and differentiate programmes according to their type, goals and methods, but also their impact, proficiency and skills, in order to develop true "good practices", to design and build new programmes based on well-established principles, and to improve existing programmes regarding identified mistakes or insufficiencies.

Of course, it would be naïve to propose that a "one-size-fits-all" solution could be developed for every country, target group and context. Differences in political cultures, ideologies, structure of terrorist groups, legal frameworks, religion and available resources need to be incorporated into every programme design. Sometimes the transfer of one specific programme from one community to another in the same country can prove to be highly problematic. Depending on how context specific the programme design was made, it might even be entirely impossible to copy the approach elsewhere. In general, one needs to differentiate between the types of PVE programmes, the political context, and the goals of each initiative (Koehler, 2016).

This chapter will discuss several key questions related to evaluation, standards and impact assessment of PVE programmes and potential ways forward to help design high-quality programmes.

1. PVE programmes can be defined as programmes designed to prevent recruitment and radicalisation into violent extremism leading to terrorist actions. These programmes can address individuals or groups not at risk of violent radicalisation (primary or general prevention, resilience building), or those already considered to be at risk or in the early stages of a violent radicalisation process (secondary or specific prevention, early intervention). Deradicalisation programmes are usually not counted among PVE efforts, but rather belong to CVE (countering violent extremism) methods. For this chapter, however, deradicalisation and PVE are seen as closely connected and related activities.

## **Problem I: Defining impact and showing effect**

Defining impact for PVE programmes can be one of the most difficult and complex tasks involved in designing and conducting these activities. A key scientific problem is to prove the causality between an intervention and a non-event, i.e. the successful prevention of violent radicalisation. In this sense, the intervention provider presumes a) that the participant was at risk of violent radicalisation and b) would have radicalised without the intervention. Both assumptions are much contested and essentially impossible to scientifically verify.

In addition, if deradicalisation programmes are included in the PVE framework – in the sense that they prevent recidivism into violent extremism – we face equally difficult problems to define impact. In the narrow definition of the concept, deradicalisation focuses on an individual psychological or ideological change away from condoning violent extremism (Clubb, 2015; Horgan, 2008), a process that is essentially not measurable with the necessary accuracy to speak of a success.

Nevertheless, as a consequence of the difficulty assessing an individual's change of mind or the non-event prevented by an intervention, evaluators and designers of PVE programmes have tried to identify other effects that are more measurable and verifiable.

## **Problem II: Recidivism and quasi-experimental designs**

By far the most widely used metric to show the success of PVE and deradicalisation programmes is the rate of recidivism of graduates back into terrorism, violence, or criminal activity in general. Most programmes claim high success rates based on low percentages of recidivism (e.g., Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Most notably, the programmes in Saudi Arabia and Singapore have claimed 90%–100% rates of success (ibid.), although some high-level cases are known of programme graduates becoming active terrorists again. Practical questions regarding measuring recidivism, such as the validity of statistics, effective monitoring systems for programme graduates, as well as how to define recidivism, usually remain unanswered. More problematic, however, is the value of recidivism as a measurement of success. As the base rate of terrorist recidivism is unknown, it is hence questionable to use certain numbers as proof of success (Mullins, 2010: 174). Existing studies for example suggest much lower recidivism rates amongst imprisoned terrorists compared with “ordinary” criminals: “overall less than five percent of all released terrorist prisoners will be re-convicted for involvement in terrorist related activity” (Silke, 2014: 111). If so, these PVE and deradicalisation programmes might claim false positives (i.e., claims of an effect that does not actually exist) based on the naturally low recidivism rate of terrorists.

As a way to effectively evaluate PVE and deradicalisation programmes, the question of experimental and quasi-experimental research designs was discussed in the literature (e.g., Williams, 2016), as this approach is widely seen as the “gold standard” of evaluations. However, there are a number of reasons against applying experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation designs to PVE and deradicalisation programmes. First, and arguably most

importantly, it would be ethically impossible to consciously risk a control group of clients radicalising into terrorism and violent extremism. Even beyond the moral costs of such an approach, the potential economic costs (e.g., loss of life, damage to property) by someone who could have been deradicalised but was put in the control group and conducted a terrorist attack cannot and should not be factored in as “collateral damage”. Second, as deradicalisation processes are so individual and subject to various external and subjective influences, it might be argued that it is simply impossible to find a control group sharing all relevant characteristics of the treatment group in order to make a meaningful comparison. Third, control of the experiment for all relevant variables over a long period might be impossible to achieve, raising questions about the validity of the outcomes. As an alternative to experiments, the use of randomised treatment was suggested as a quasi-experimental evaluation design (e.g., Mastroe & Szmania, 2016), and indeed this approach was tested out in the field with encouraging results regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration programme for Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Gunaratna, & Hettiarachchi, 2014). It seems that this evaluation approach is only limited by the available resources, data access and – most importantly – the availability of equally structured treatment groups. In practice, however, it might prove difficult or even impossible to find such near perfect conditions for this kind of evaluation again outside of Sri Lanka.

## **Problems of measuring impact and potential solutions**

Nevertheless, the public perception of the “success” or “failure” of any PVE or deradicalisation programme will continue to be based mostly on the recidivism of its graduates. In addition, much higher expectation is placed on these programmes to achieve exceptionally low rates of recidivism than on rehabilitation programmes for “ordinary” offenders. This is because even small numbers of graduates out of thousands of those who are fully deradicalised and prevented from radicalising into violent extremism can inflict potentially devastating damage and be considered to prove the total failure of the respective programme in the eyes of the general public.

## **Formal evaluations**

In the field of PVE and deradicalisation, some experts have suggested specific methods and approaches to evaluating these initiatives. One of the first was published by Horgan and Braddock (2010) and applies “Multi-Attribute Utility Technology” (MAUT) to the field of terrorism risk reduction programmes. Recognising formal comparisons and systematic efforts to evaluate claimed successes despite different cultural and political characteristics, Horgan and Braddock chose MAUT as the most effective tool to facilitate the identifying and weighing of the goals and objectives held by the programme’s stakeholders, as well as the assessment of how far these goals are being met. MAUT operates basically by identifying the stakeholders of a PVE or deradicalisation programme and constructing a “value tree” after the object and functions of the evaluation have been set. Stakeholders will be included in the grading of the standardised “value tree”, which is a list of those objectives the programme should fulfil for

the respective stakeholders, whereby the assessment and grading of the values is conducted relative to the importance assigned (ration weighting: Horgan & Braddock, 2010: 282–284).

A second approach, designed by Williams and Kleinman (2013), focuses on already existing and fully functioning programmes. Pointing out severe problems involved in evaluating PVE and deradicalisation programmes, the authors also discussed another complication with the measurement of recidivism as a success factor: “[S]hould success be measured by an absolute value (e.g., ten incidents of post-detainment terrorism engagement per year), the percentage of such engagement for a given year, or change over time (e.g., a 10% reduction of post-detainment terrorism engagement compared to the previous year)?” (Williams & Kleinman, 2013: 104). Another question is if the programme should be assessed by its effects on the whole target group or only the participants. In conclusion, Williams and Kleinman also advocate for the stakeholders’ responsibility to decide which measures and characteristics of success are important to them. Hence, identifying and consulting the stakeholders, selection of the evaluation personnel, and defining the problem and evaluation goals are the first steps in their approach. Furthermore, especially relevant for the overall evaluation is the programme’s theory of change or, in other words, the theoretical foundations needed to understand its mechanisms and characteristics. After choosing the appropriate method, the authors suggest identifying benchmarks, comparison groups, and conducting quasi-experimental designs, such as randomised treatment.

A third approach was suggested by Romaniuk and Fink (2012) under the umbrella of multi-dimensional, vertical (specifically for deradicalisation programmes, assessing them from inception to outcome), and horizontal evaluations. They also stress the importance of stakeholder engagement and the collection of baseline data to conduct a before-and-after comparison.

Although these three models represent comparatively detailed and sophisticated approaches to evaluating (and designing) PVE and deradicalisation programmes, rarely has any attempt to implement them in practice been made. However, as long as no independent and widely recognised standards and definitions in this field exist, effective in-depth evaluations and structured designing of PVE programmes will remain very limited.

A first step to achieving that gold standard would be to assess the programme’s integrity through a checklist, as suggested by Koehler (2016, 2017), based on the Correctional Programme Checklist (Latessa, 2013).<sup>2</sup> Elements such as staff training, leadership, assessment protocols, risk-need-responsivity matching, and the quality of the programme manual are the basic elements on which any PVE or deradicalisation programme should be assessed and which should be considered in the programme design upfront. If these initiatives do not uphold the fundamental standards of integrity – including transparency – they cannot be expected to have a high chance of impact, however defined. A second step towards evaluation implementation is to raise awareness that ill-designed, flawed, and non-evaluated PVE and deradicalisation programmes are not only a waste of resources, but, more importantly,

a significant security risk for the communities and countries conducting them. Without proper evaluation, the identification of potential backfiring mechanisms might create even more violent radicalisation and harmful behaviour than without the programme. Failed PVE programmes will, in addition, not only create high security risks, but also damage populations' trust in non-kinetic soft approaches against radicalisation, fuelling public demand for a return to repression-only policies.

### **Organisational aspects: Structural integrity as a key assessment tool**

As a main alternative to such evaluation approaches focusing on metrics and effect measurement (impact evaluation) and those looking at internal process efficiency (process evaluation), a third evaluation technique might be more helpful in assessing a PVE or deradicalisation programme's "value" and fostering effective structured development of these programmes in the first place: structural integrity evaluation. Based on the premise that direct measurable impacts of a PVE or deradicalisation programme are either a) difficult to access (data collection problem, lack of control group, ethical issues), b) difficult to causally connect to the programme (causality problem), or c) difficult to interpret (e.g., recidivism without base rates) the best way to assess a programme's *chance of impact* might be through evaluating and validating the programme's structural integrity, which includes clearly defined elements that can easily be measured, verified and compared (e.g., level of staff training, programme's theory of change, methodological rigour, quality of programme procedures).

The first guide on structural integrity in CVE/PVE was designed in 2011 when experts from the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague developed the "Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders" for prison-based deradicalisation programmes. Consisting of 25 core principles of organisational and political integrity designed to ensure effectiveness – defined as low rates of recidivism (Stone, 2015) – the Rome Memorandum focuses on four core ideas: the importance of clearly defined goals and objectives; high prison standards regarding treatment, setting and observation of human rights; the inclusion of multiple different actors (e.g., experts from different fields, communities, families, law enforcement, civil society, former extremists); and comprehensive reintegration and after-care components. The Rome Memorandum was adopted by all 30 member states of the Global Counterterrorism Forum.

Several key points of the Rome Memorandum need to be highlighted separately here. First, it is recommended to develop and implement effective intake, assessment and classification systems, as well as continuous monitoring (Stone, 2015: 227). Due to the fact that most PVE and deradicalisation programmes do not possess or conduct adequate intake classification and risk assessments, it is difficult to later evaluate the programmes' effectiveness in reaching specific sub-populations, such as highly radicalised extremists. In addition, security-related aspects become especially relevant, as many programmes are not able to allocate specific resources or methods to those participants with the highest need and risk

of recidivism. Second, the Rome Memorandum recognises the importance of intelligence for counter-terrorism won through interrogating detainees undergoing rehabilitation. However, the memorandum stresses the importance of specialised training and caution for law enforcement officers to avoid interfering with the rehabilitation process. Third, the framework places great importance on the inclusion of multiple actors, as well as specific components, such as vocational training, cognitive skills, and protective measures against the retaliation of the former group. Based on its content, the Rome Memorandum is a milestone for establishing good practices and a comprehensive code of conduct in the field of prison-based rehabilitation. However, its implementation has not been a high priority for many states.

Furthermore, regarding the operational aspects of an effective PVE or deradicalisation programme, it is again necessary to borrow from criminology, where the so-called Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model is widely accepted as a core mechanism of organisational integrity (Mullins, 2010). This model suggests that curative or rehabilitative organisations and programmes should be able to focus their resources on those participants with the highest risk (Risk), designed to address the individual's motivations for offending or radicalising (Need), and maximise social learning (Responsivity). A long history of penological and criminological research has established these three basic organisational mechanisms as highly relevant for ensuring positive outcomes (Dean, 2014). In addition, it was suggested by Mullins (2010: 178) that cognitive-behavioural interventions (focus on rewarding appropriate behaviour, behavioural practice and role play, addressing pro-criminal attitudes, enhancing relevant cognitive skills) and interpersonally sensitive approaches would be most likely to have the desired positive effect.

Structural integrity evaluation has so far not been suggested to be used with deradicalisation programmes other than by the author (Koehler, 2017). In a handbook on quality standards for CVE programmes written for the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of the Interior, Digitisation and Migration the author identified 64 structural variables from six different fields (running and developing the programme; organisation; participant classification; care and advisory services; quality assurance; and transparency). Each variable can be easily measured and evaluated, given that the preferable minimum standards have been formulated by the stakeholders beforehand (Koehler, 2017). This evaluation design involves three parties: a) the standard setting party (usually the funder of the programme or other stakeholders), b) the standard implementing party (i.e. the PVE programme), and c) the standard evaluating party (typically an external academic institution tasked with conducting the structural evaluation based on the previously set quality standards). Again it must be stressed that this approach does not primarily look to find the measurable impacts of the programme as such – a longitudinal in-depth study would arguably take up significantly more resources and time and still struggle with the problems identified above.

## Conclusion

Summing up the above-detailed approaches and factors typically cited in the evaluation literature and those studies focusing on impact assessment for PVE and deradicalisation programmes, it must be concluded that both main types of evaluations, i.e., impact and process evaluation, are unlikely to produce valuable and usable results. With the

existing lack of access to programme data, ethical problems, resource restrictions and multiple methodological concerns, structural integrity evaluations present a much more efficient and feasible way to assess the organisational quality of PVE and deradicalisation programmes and provide practitioners and policymakers with guidelines to design high quality programmes.

Since it was argued that social programmes are highly likely to have “delayed, diffuse, and subtle effects” (Donaldson, 2003: 126) – and PVE as well as deradicalisation programmes are no exception – evaluation attempts to showcase how measurable and meaningful effects and impacts are equally likely to fail and produce confusion regarding the value and quality of certain programmes. In consequence, focusing on structural integrity seems to be the most adequate way to assess a PVE and deradicalisation programme’s quality and chance of impact. In addition, PVE programme design should – and in fact can – follow structured and systematic guidelines without constraining or contradicting the context-specific and individual nature of violent radicalisation and prevention work. Structural integrity approaches do not define the content – “how” to do it – but rather “what” needs to be included. Adaption to the context through qualitative content generation and definition of terms must still be done by the key stakeholders and practitioners. However, a guided and evidence-based systematic approach to designing PVE programmes allows every stakeholder to more effectively decide what the goals and mode of operation should be and which key practical questions must be answered upfront.

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