Knowing What to Do: Academic and Practitioner Understanding of How to Counter Violent Radicalization

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Abstract

In recent years, the number of counter-radicalization and deradicalization programs has steadily increased, and they belong now to the standard counterterrorism and conflict resolution repertoire of many countries. How is the personnel of these programs trained to perform its duties and what does this tell about the relationship between academic and practitioner understandings of countering radicalization and deradicalization? This article aims at answering these questions by comparing the state of the art in evidence-based radicalization and deradicalization research with a detailed analysis of primary data concerning twelve training courses for personnel in this field. It finds that training courses are significantly disconnected from research. On the other hand, training in this field indicates that the academic literature is not well-grounded in the practical realities of delivering interventions. Both findings reveal the need for a more mutually beneficial relationship that can help improve practitioner training and making (de)radicalization research more practitioner-oriented.

Keywords: Countering Violent Extremism; Personnel Training; Academic & Practitioner Understanding; Conflict Resolution; Deradicalization

Introduction

"Profiling" terrorists has "failed resoundingly".[1] Scholars studying violent radicalization processes agree that these processes are highly complex and individual, and connected to a range of drivers, influences, and pathways. [2] In the growing field of countering violent extremism (CVE), counter-radicalization and deradicalization initiatives and programs have recently managed to be included in the list of counterterrorism methods and ranked fourth among the top ten future revolutions by Time Magazine in 2008.[3] Some examples include: United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2178 (2014) which urges all member states to establish effective rehabilitation measures for returned fighters from Syria and Iraq [4]; the revised "European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy" 2014 which strongly emphasized on "disengagement and exit strategies" [5]; the "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism" presented by the UNSC to the UN General Assembly with more than seventy recommendations including a call to introduce "disengagement, rehabilitation and counseling programs for persons engaged in violent extremism" [6]; the European Commission's call for the implementation of "de-radicalization" programs under the overall goal to prevent and fight radicalization as an "absolute priority" [7]; and UNSC Resolution 2396 (2017), which continued to call for specific measures to counter terrorism, including CVE activities, such as counter-narrative campaigns and rehabilitation programs.[8]

It is fair to say that programs and strategies that could roughly be described as CVE-specific (i.e., counter-radicalization or deradicalization) or CVE-related (i.e., early prevention), even though vastly different in nature, have gained global significance in the fight against terrorism, recruitment into violent extremism and, by extension, as a key aspect of conflict resolution and peace-making. However, early preventative work is highly complex: "screening and identifying individuals at risk of radicalisation requires training and cannot be carried out as a simple task by teachers or locals without substantially increasing the incidence of false positives."[9] This holds even more for deradicalization programs. The policy initiatives mentioned above rely necessarily on practitioners capable of recognizing radicalization processes leading to involvement in violent extremism and terrorism (i.e., "violent radicalization") or the actual degree of radicalization, choosing the adequate intervention strategy and carrying it out effectively with the appropriate tools. However, if the original phenomenon—violent radicalization—is essentially a contested and elusive concept, how can program personnel be trained effectively to counter and reverse it? How deeply is the training rooted in evidence-based research? A comparison between the empirically-informed academic literature on radicalization

and deradicalization processes and detailed primary data on 12 training courses (e.g., course material and curricula) reveals a lack of connection between the two. Training courses are significantly disconnected from evidence-based academic literature and focused on contents that seem more relevant to practice although their effectiveness has never been evaluated scientifically.

On the other hand, current dedicated research does not focus on the contents of training courses. This indicates that the broader academic literature on this topic is not well-grounded in the practical realities of delivering interventions. Research with empirical support in this domain is usually based on interviews and case studies of individuals leaving extremist milieus, rather than on mechanisms and effects of intervention programs. Knowing more about the methods that are deemed necessary by intervention practitioners or training providers can offer policymakers and academics insights on the day-to-day operations and practical realities of this job. These insights can help identify directions for future research that are more relevant for practitioners and aimed at providing political support for counter-radicalization and deradicalization initiatives. Reducing the distance between academic and practitioner understanding of CVE can be mutually beneficial. It can improve and secure sustainable long-term conflict resolution strategies.

The article is structured as follows: first, a review of evidence-based literature in radicalization and deradicalization research will identify the recommended evidence-based components of CVE and deradicalization training courses. Second, after setting forth the methods and sources for data selection and analysis, the sample set of training courses will be presented. Third, both perspectives will be compared and the overlap and discrepancies will be discussed with recommendations to close the gap between the two.

The Academic Perspective: Literature Review and State of the Art

Terms and Definitions

CVE is "an approach intended to preclude individuals from engaging in, or materially supporting, ideologically motivated violence" [10] and comprises "non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism."[11] "CVE" is now widely used in international and national counterterrorism strategies and policies, although it was criticized as being a "catch-all category that lacks precision and focus."[12] One possible classification used for CVE activities is the "public health model" developed by Caplan [13], which is rooted in clinical psychiatry. "Primary prevention" in this model aims at preventing deviant behavior from occurring in a "non-infected" system. This includes activities aimed, for example, at raising awareness, resilience, or community coherence. It addresses societal issues and is directed to individuals before they get in contact with violent extremist groups and ideologies. "Secondary prevention" aims at averting the consolidation of risk factors (e.g., societal alienation, development of specific grievances, loss of personal significance) or radicalization processes in the early stages. "Tertiary prevention" aims at preventing recidivism to violent extremism or other risk factors in the future, implying that an initial desistance or disengagement has been achieved. Naturally, very different methods and programs fall under these three categories as working with long-term members of extremist groups to induce defection is a completely different task from instructing children about the risks posed by extremist groups.

Although there is no agreement on the inclusion of deradicalization or disengagement within the CVE framework, academics and practitioners have generally included within tertiary prevention activities aimed at achieving defection and avoiding recidivism of (highly) radicalized individuals.[14] Caution regarding this notion was raised, for example, by Koehler [15], who argued that preventing recidivism is just one necessary (and later) part of possible interventions, which should primarily reduce individual physical and psychological commitment to an extremist group and ideology.

Therefore, it would be accurate to see CVE as an umbrella category under which prevention-oriented initiatives (i.e., before a person radicalizes to the point of using violence) and intervention-oriented initiatives (i.e., deradicalization and disengagement of a person who is already radicalized to the point of using violence) are subsumed. Even though the interconnection between radicalization and violence has largely been disputed in the literature, the reference point of violent behavior is nevertheless important for (government funded) P/CVE programs. The first category of initiatives is commonly referred to as "preventing violent extremism"

(PVE) programs and the latter as intervention, counter-radicalization, deradicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, or reintegration programs. This article focuses on the second category, namely, training courses for personnel tasked with intervening on an existing and ongoing violent radicalization process ("counter-radicalization") and/or guiding the deradicalization and disengagement process of a radicalized person.

Looking at the term "deradicalization," the most important competing concept is "disengagement," and both are usually used in combination. Definitions by leading academics show that the main difference between deradicalization and disengagement is the focus on ideology, or more precisely, the psychological side of exiting a violent extremist milieu. Horgan and Braddock [16] define deradicalization as:

> the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity. De-radicalization may also refer to any initiative that tries to achieve a reduction of risk of re-offending through addressing the specific and relevant disengagement issues

and disengagement as:

> the process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation. It may not necessarily involve leaving the movement, but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change. Additionally, while disengagement may stem from role change, that role change may be influenced by psychological factors such as disillusionment, burnout or the failure to reach the expectations that influenced initial involvement. This can lead to a member seeking out a different role within the movement

Braddock [17] points out that deradicalization is a "psychological process through which an individual abandons his extremist ideology and is theoretically rendered a decreased threat for re-engaging in terrorism."

According to this view, the reduction of ideological commitment (deradicalization) as well as the change of role and consequent decrease in engagement in illegal behaviors (disengagement) are intertwined. However, Horgan [18] notes that even if the goal is reducing the psychological commitment to a violent extremist group, deradicalization does not have to be part of the process and might not even be a likely outcome. Complicating this further, there are two main approaches concerning ideology and its role in entering and leaving extremist milieus: a "narrow" and a "broad" school.[19] Whereas the former wants to achieve the rejection of ideologically-based violence, the latter wishes to dismantle also various other ideological aspects. Furthermore, while it has been argued that disengagement would be more feasible and realistic [20], some scholars have pointed out that in order to reduce recidivism of extremist offenders, it is necessary to address "beliefs and attitudes that drive violent behavior" (Braddock 2014, 60). Not addressing these underlying beliefs and attitudes, as well as the individual's psychological factors of attraction, might increase the chance of a failed exit process and the risk of re-radicalization.[21]

"Deradicalization" has been used widely to describe both the process of exiting an extremist environment and the wider practical activity conducted through programs or mentors. Prevention- and intervention-oriented tools are used to achieve effects on all levels: preventing further radicalization, decreasing physical and psychological commitment to the radical milieu and thought patterns or ideology, preventing a return to violence and extremism, increasing resilience to extremist ideologies or groups, and assisting in building a new self-sustained life and identity. Given that radicalization is a context-related phenomenon "par excellence" [22], countering it is context-related too, which means that "deradicalisation should not be considered a psychological return to some pre-radicalised state" [23] but as a development of a new identity in itself.

Existing Literature on CVE/Deradicalization Training

The academic literature on CVE and deradicalization has not treated the issue of personnel training in detail so far. Only one previous study briefly discusses the variety of different professions employed in CVE and deradicalization, as well as some of the key problems faced in training the staff for this highly complex task.[24]

Nevertheless, recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, such as "good practice guides," mention

the need to train CVE and deradicalization personnel in order to achieve the desired effects. In 2013, the "Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders" stated that the quality of any prison-based rehabilitation program for violent extremists is, among other factors, dependent on the level of training received by the personnel.[25] Furthermore, the European Union Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) has also focused on the question of training practitioners, which is seen as "invaluable in any effort to prevent and counter radicalisation."[26] A dedicated RAN conference on this issue resulted in the 2017 "RAN Handbook on CVE/PVE training programmes," based on "trainers' experience of what works and what doesn't."[27] It was noted that most of these training programs within the European Union are not evaluated.[28] This RAN handbook covers practical steps in delivering training programs, such as how to select trainers, how to make the program more engaging, or how to embed the training in national strategies. Informal internal and formal external evaluation as part of the quality assurance of these training programs are recommended.[29] The handbook, however, does not provide any recommendations for potential contents or a theoretical basis for designing a course. Instead, it recommends a "good needs assessment" [30] while setting up a new training program, implying that the training should serve to deliver what the target audience requests. The notion that the training contents should be primarily based on the practitioner's perspective is strengthened further by stating that the trainer should be an "experienced practitioner" (RAN 2017, 7). The handbook states that "multi-agency cooperation (…) is needed to deal with the multi-causal and multifaceted phenomenon of radicalisation."[31]

Training practitioners has also been considered integral to the quality of both rehabilitation programs for ordinary offenders [32] and deradicalization programs at large.[33] This is where the question of personnel's training is connected to the more significant and much more contested issue of evaluating the quality and outcomes of CVE and deradicalization programs. It is beyond the scope of this article to review that particular debate, which has been done elsewhere.[34] Here, it suffices to note that the discourse on evaluation, quality standards, conceptual clarity or even a widely shared understanding of goals and contents of CVE and deradicalization activities has only marginally progressed and the overwhelming majority of programs in this field have not been scientifically evaluated.[35] Consequently, this poses a severe problem for basing personnel training contents solely on the practitioners' perspectives (i.e., a mostly non-evaluated albeit often experience-based opinion) as suggested by the RAN handbook. This clearly shows the necessity of an evidence-based foundation for CVE and deradicalization program personnel training.

Furthermore, the lack of evaluation of practical CVE and deradicalization activities also creates additional problems since "the proposed mechanisms through which these programmes are supposed to work are often vague or rest on untested assumptions despite the fact that "getting it wrong" can have dramatic iatrogenic effects and possibly contribute to further radicalisation."[36] As more programs with an increasing number of staff members are financed and brought into contact with potentially high-risk subjects, this aspect might even constitute a new security risk on its own (i.e., poorly designed programs with inadequately trained personnel handling potentially dangerous recipients). This is especially true if these programs work without the necessary conceptual basis and quality standards. One particularly worrying aspect is that the demand for specialized personnel has likely outpaced the available pool of experienced practitioners, meaning that the training of CVE and deradicalization personnel has become a key priority and challenge to meet the increasing popularity of CVE and deradicalization programs in counterterrorism, conflict resolution, and peace-making.

Reviewing the State of the Art in Radicalization and Deradicalization Research

Terrorism research in general and studies looking at violent radicalization processes in particular have been criticized for the dearth of empirical evidence through primary data.[37] This situation appears to have changed drastically in the last decade. Schuurman [38] found that "the use of primary data has increased considerably and is continuing to do so." Echoing this notion, Gøtzsche-Astrup [39] states that "the field has matured to allow for a focus on evaluating theories on their empirical merits." However, this does not mean that all or even most of the research on violent radicalization processes is evidence-based or derived from solid primary data. Since most practical activities of CVE and deradicalization programs have never been evaluated for effectiveness, it is essential for the field to look for empirical evidence in the existing research literature to provide a solid foundation for those activities. Therefore, we selected meta-studies summarizing the state of

the art in the field based on empirical evidence or those publications based on accumulated primary data for our literature review.

Gøtzsche-Astrup's [40] meta-analysis focusing on internal and external validity of theoretical approaches has identified eight psychological mechanisms of radicalization with strong empirical evidence:

- Radicalization is based on normal psychological mechanisms rather than psychopathology

- Motivational processes rather than instrumental calculations of risk and reward

- Negative life experiences that cause the individual to search for meaning in life and answers to other fundamental questions

- Experience of fundamental uncertainty or loss of meaning or significance

- The shift in social identity toward a single social group rather than many

- Small group dynamics drive the process to behavioral extremes

- Heightened dispositional anxiety, aggression, and impulsivity

- "Sacred values" involved in later stages of radicalization

Gøtzsche-Astrup [41] recommended specific practices for micro-social intervention programs (i.e., CVE and deradicalization), in particular: motivation-focused approaches, mentoring methods to help the subject cope with negative life experiences and protecting against fundamental uncertainty, skill-building to handle fundamental life tasks (e.g., education, employment) to prevent a loss of personal significance, and approaches tailored to individual needs and personalities.

Additional recommendations for practitioner training can be made regarding the small group dynamics for radicalization processes. Detailed knowledge of the subcultural and ideological frameworks used in these extremist milieus and small group contexts is essential. Not only is it necessary to recognize visual signs (e.g., codes and symbols, clothing brands, specific language, activities) of adherence to extremist milieus and ideologies in order to assess the risk and radicalization level of the individual, it is also necessary to understand his/her specific relationship with the group and the collective dynamics involved.[42] Together with the specific ideology of the milieu or extremist group behind a person's radicalization, subcultural products and activities (e.g., rallies, concerts) form a dynamic "radical contrast society," which Koehler [43] defined as "the mechanisms involved in the interactions between a Radical Social Movement and its surrounding environment," which needs to be studied and understood by CVE and deradicalization personnel to hand-tailor, plan, and execute a sustainable exit from that social and ideological environment. A radical contrast society includes the physical recruitment infrastructure on the one hand (e.g., activities like concerts and rallies, clothing, music, codes and symbols) and the ideologically defined goals, methods, and enemies of the radical group on the other. Its relevance is based on the assumption that individual and collective identities can become "fused" in extremism and terrorism and are therefore interdependent.[44] Individual deradicalization counseling cannot be isolated from the group dynamics behind radicalization. Hence, it appears to be essential for CVE and deradicalization program personnel to be able to include in the counseling the social identity perspective of their users and their specific relationship with the group or milieu in question.

While these practical recommendations might be suited for CVE and deradicalization interventions (i.e., targeting a radicalization process while it is ongoing), they do not automatically hold for deradicalization interventions. Gøtzsche-Astrup [45] acknowledges this, saying that "although the two processes may be related, there is no necessary connection between the mechanisms leading to and from radicalisation." Although some studies have found that certain motives involved in the entry process are connected to the decision to leave an extremist environment [46], exiting is not just "reversing the radicalization".[47] The potential recipients for deradicalization interventions are remarkably diverse, and no well-defined profiles exist.[48] Consequently, leaving such milieus is also likely to be a unique mixture of individual factors. Unfortunately, no studies have evaluated the empirical validity of the deradicalization mechanisms on the lines of what Gøtzsche-Astrup [49]

has done for radicalization mechanisms. This shows that studies on radicalization are far more grounded in the empirical evidence than deradicalization studies and that exit processes are still "not well understood".[50]

Nevertheless, some reviews of empirical studies on deradicalization do exist. Dalgaard-Nielsen [51], for example, was able to identify sixteen academic articles and books published between 1990 and 2012, based on a total of 216 interviews with former members of various extremist or terrorist groups. Daalgard-Nielsen [52] identified three key themes in these studies: "ideological doubt, doubt related to group and leadership issues, and doubt related to personal and practical issues." Her specific practical recommendations for external intervention providers are that they:

> should stay close to the potential exiter's own doubt, make the influence attempt as subtle as possible, use narratives and self-affirmatory strategies to reduce resistance to persuasion, and consider the possibility to promote attitudinal change via behavioral change as an alternative to seek to influence beliefs directly.[53]

More specifically, this should be done through "humanization of the enemy, de-idealizing violence, leveraging internal strain in the extremist groups, leveraging bad leadership and/or personal and practical issues such as guilt feelings, longing for a normal life, and burnout," as well as through increased contact with the world outside.[54] These approaches have a correspondence in factors motivating individuals to exit terrorism, and this has been established by empirical research. Altier, Thoroughgood, and Horgan [55] for example identified unmet expectations, disillusionment with strategy or actions, disillusionment with personnel, difficulty with clandestine lifestyle, inability to cope with violence, loss of faith in the ideology, burnout, competing loyalties, employment/educational demands or opportunities, family demands/desires, positive interactions with moderates, financial incentives, and amnesty as the most commonly identified motivational factors in deradicalization research. In a later analysis of eighty-seven autobiographies of former terrorists [56], this list was narrowed down to "disillusionment with the group's strategy or actions, disagreements with group leaders or members, dissatisfaction with one's day-to-day tasks, and burnout" as those factors were cited more often by the former extremists. Again, these factors point to practical methods such as communication tools to induce self-awareness and reflection on the disillusionment, psychological counseling to cope with burnouts or other mental health issues and mentoring to provide alternative lifestyles and skills.

Direct confrontational communicative strategies in deradicalization are questionable and carry a high risk of backfiring.[57] Hence, the ability to adapt the counseling communication to the users' preferences should be a crucial part in the training of CVE and deradicalization program personnel, in order to identify the most effective ways of creating cognitive openings without appearing coercive.

Lessons Learned from Research on Deradicalization Program Activities

In addition to the academic literature focusing on individual entry and exit processes, some empirical evidence exists regarding practical activities of programs intended to counter violent radicalization and facilitate deradicalization. However, comparative studies are rare, also because of the notorious lack of transparency and data accessibility of most of such programs.[58] In one of the first comparative assessments of different approaches to deradicalization, Rabasa et al. [59] found that the programs perceived to be effective by their stakeholders were active on the pragmatic, ideological, and affective levels. While the pragmatic level refers to all physical reintegration methods (e.g., vocational training, trauma therapy, and drug therapy), the ideological level refers to the critical assessment of underlying worldviews or psychological commitment to extremist environments. Finally, the affective level aims to establish a new pro-social emotionally supportive environment around the individual. The notion that holistic approaches to CVE and deradicalization are more effective than single focus interventions has found some support in the literature [60] and is also reflected in the diversity of methods used in CVE and deradicalization work.[61] However, questions such as which methods are more useful in comparison to others, and why, when, and how they are used has not been assessed so far; there are only mostly descriptive accounts of "what is being done" and "what is considered successful by practitioners". [62] A first systematization of the methods typically used in CVE and deradicalization was done by Koehler. [63] According to his review of programs worldwide, the available methods usually include: 1) ideological/ theological deconstruction of extremist worldviews, 2) integration in social work, 3) psychological/psychiatric

counseling or treatment, 4) educational tools (e.g., vocational training or fostering critical thinking skills and background knowledge), and 5) creative arts and sports. The expected effect of each of the tools under these five categories and their purposes remain speculative in most cases.

A necessary precondition for the application of different methods and tools in CVE and deradicalization activities is that the selection of the appropriate method is based on an assessment of the specific needs and risks related to each subject in order to achieve a user-method-match.[64] This essentially mirrors the widely shared notion of the contextual and individual nature of violent radicalization and deradicalization processes, namely, that there is "no one size fits all" approach. Hence, an intake approach identifying individual needs and driving factors or risks for the success of the exit process seems inevitable for every new recipient.[65]

This directly points to the absolute relevance of risk-assessment tools for CVE and deradicalization personnel. By definition, the recipients of CVE and deradicalization activities include, among others, highly radicalized individuals with a previous history of violent crimes and terrorism. These individuals are often seen as high-risk persons for a country's national security and hence draw significant concern from law enforcement authorities, intelligence, the general public, and policymakers. Risk-assessment is a contested topic within the academia, and the lack of empirical support and evidence resulting in questionable predictive validity is usually and correctly pointed out.[66] A recent literature review of the risk factors associated with terrorism concluded that "there is insufficient evidence (…) that any of these variables are empirically supported risk factors" and that "some widely accepted "risk" factors have limited empirical support for their association with terrorism".[67] Nevertheless, structured professional judgment tools, such as the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA2-R) or the Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG 22+) have been introduced and used widely in counterterrorism and are making their way into CVE and deradicalization activities as well.[68] Independent of the accuracy and scientific support behind such tools, Sarma [69] suggested that

> One should not "value" risk assessment solely on its ability to correctly predict those who will and will not become involved in terrorism later. Rather, one should think more broadly about the opportunity to systematize the collection and processing of information.

Hence, the value of the application of risk-assessment tools for CVE and deradicalization programs might be the structured and comparable collection of case manager assessments of factors relevant to the successful rehabilitation during the intake process and monitoring of overall progress. These tools might also help develop better programs in light of scrutiny and fears of stakeholders regarding these high-risk users.

Another aspect identified in this regard is the ability of personnel to handle high-threat scenarios. Individuals (and their affective environment) who quit violent extremist or terrorist groups might become a target of punishment out of revenge or to protect the group's interests. In theory, this danger to personal safety might also stretch to the personnel of CVE and deradicalization activities. While very little research has been conducted to shed light on the process of social pressure (including punitive violence) toward defectors from terrorism and violent extremism [70], existing studies on the topic indicate the need for CVE and deradicalization personnel to be trained in assessing the specific threat associated with handling specific cases and how to manage those threats (e.g., designing safety protocols and an individual security framework).

This complex and individual nature of deradicalization and the subsequent plurality of methods used is also echoed in recent research portraying sustainable rehabilitation of former extremists as a process spanning multiple aspects of a person's identity and life. Barrelle [71] based her "pro-integration" model on five distinct change processes: social relations, coping, identity, ideology, and action orientation. Based on the individual preferences, goals and pre-exit background, every subject will, according to Barrelle, achieve different results in each field, creating a more or less unique integration recipe and framework.

Psychological and mental health counselling are also described as a standard part of CVE and deradicalization work.[72] Even though the role of mental health disorders and psychopathologies in violent radicalization processes is very much disputed, for example along the lines of group-based extremists [73] vs. lone actors [74], some studies have suggested specific dominant personality traits among violent extremists and terrorists.[75] It has also been found that membership in terrorist or violent extremist groups can also increase the likelihood of

developing mental health issues.[76] Hence, basic knowledge of recognizing and handling basic mental health problems (e.g., by referral to specialists) seems essential for CVE and deradicalization program personnel.

Finally, based on existing research on some practical aspects of CVE and deradicalization activities, detailed knowledge of the criminal justice system, judiciary processes, criminal procedure or probation system is recommended, in order to give adequate advice and counsel, as well as to be clear about personnel's roles and responsibilities.[77] The role of CVE and deradicalization staff must be differentiated from that of legal counsel. Nevertheless, awareness of the basic legal procedures is essential in CVE and deradicalization activities to ensure responsible collaboration with the criminal justice system wherever necessary.

Synthesis of the Literature Review

Based on the review presented above, it is possible to identify a list of key skills and tasks for practitioners of CVE and deradicalization activities which directly relate to the focus of this article. It is noteworthy that evidence-base and empirical foundations in radicalization and deradicalization research are overwhelmingly considered as comprising interviews with active and former violent extremists and terrorists to assess their trajectories in and out of radicalism. This is not a complete list, in any case.

Practitioners should be trained in:

- Basic legal knowledge (e.g., criminal justice system, criminal procedures, probation system);

- Knowledge regarding the ideological content and subcultural products of the forms of extremism to be targeted;

- Motivational factors in radicalization and deradicalization processes identified in research;

- Psychological processes of radicalization and deradicalization at the individual and collective levels;

- Collective/group psychology and dynamics, fused identities;

- Identifying and handling forms of mental health issues, such as trauma or personality disorders;

- Case management tools such as intake procedures, risk-need-assessment, and threat analysis;

- Communication strategies, argumentation techniques, de-escalation methods, rhetoric;

- Counselling methods, for example, systemic counselling addressing the multi-causality of entry and exit processes;

- Statutory and non-statutory social, educational, and psychological services;

- Knowledge of the potential impact of creative arts and sports;

- Assessment and delivery of pragmatic support (e.g., vocational education, addiction treatment);

- Methods helping increase the subject's sense of recognition, significance, and individual identity;

- Family and pro-social network support (affective environment stabilization).

The Practitioner's Perspective: CVE and Deradicalization Training Courses

Methods, Sources, and Data Sample

This part of the article is based on a collection of primary data from 12 training courses for CVE and deradicalization practitioners of various professions (e.g., law enforcement, prison staff, social workers, teachers, psychologists). The courses were identified through an open source search using relevant keywords (e.g., "training," "CVE," "deradicalization," and "countering extremism"), snowball sampling [78], and a widely disseminated call for recommendations from experienced practitioners and academics in the CVE and

deradicalization landscape (total number of persons contacted: n=44) about known training courses. For the purpose of the snowball sampling, experienced practitioners and academics were asked to refer to existing training courses and to provide other contacts, which then led to additional recommended courses and contacts. The sampling was conducted internationally. The criteria for identifying potentially relevant academics and practitioners focused on expertise in the practical aspects of CVE and deradicalization, as demonstrated by a track record of peer-reviewed journal articles or books on this topic published by an academic press, or by the individual's practical involvement in these activities for more than five years.

Only a few contacted practitioners and academics (n=13) knew any courses at all, indicating that either only very few training courses for practitioners exist in this field or those courses are largely unknown to the academic and practitioner community. It was also unknown whether their contents and concepts reflected the current state of the art in radicalization and terrorism research or if they were more or less based on widely held assumptions about what "everyone needs to know."

Naturally, the training course designs reflect original goals and aims of each institution behind them, ranging, for example, from "raising fundamental awareness" to "train fully capable case managers." The main requirement for the inclusion in the sample was that the target audience of each training course was expected to perform either CVE or deradicalization duties after the completion of the training, which can be described as 1) identifying cases of existing and ongoing violent radicalization, 2) assessing the situation according to responsibilities and potential risks, and 3) choosing the appropriate course of action (e.g., report, intervene, connect to a third party). This, in our view, formed the basis for comparability, even though the courses naturally differ greatly in scope, length and content. Using these criteria, 12 out of 17 identified training courses were selected for the analysis sample and five courses were excluded because they did not meet the selection criteria (e.g. focused on primary prevention or general awareness). These courses were not exclusively directed at a certain profession in terms of their audience. They were disconnected from particular types of intervention programs. Various professional audiences working on different types of programs (e.g., governmental prison-based, civil society-based exit programs handling self-referrals) as well as those practitioners who were tasked with handling potential radicalization cases within a larger statutory system (e.g., education, mental health, and probation) could attend these training courses.

The underlying training concepts are typically seen as specific skillsets and competitive advantages of certain organizations, some of which see such training programs as their main product and source of financial income. Hence, their detailed course contents are usually not available openly. To address this issue, the anonymity of the institutions carrying out the training was assured and no specific details of the coursework (e.g. names of training providers, list of modules, identification of specific theoretical approach or provider copy righted counseling models) are reported here in order to protect the programs' competitive advantages (e.g., in applying for governmental funding or in competing with other training providers) and to avoid conflicts of interest (e.g. to appear recommending or advertising for certain training courses).

Through that approach, it was possible for the authors to obtain relevant data on the courses such as the specific curricula, training material, evaluation questionnaires (if conducted), and specific module contents or underlying rationale (if existing). The sample included only one training course from each institution, although some were offering different courses for different audiences and with different foci. Even though the sample can, therefore, not be seen as representative of the CVE and deradicalization training landscape in general, we are confident that we were able to assess a sample of the most widely used and known courses in the field since both open search as well as practitioner and academic facilitation did not produce any other courses. Institutions offering more than one training course were asked to share information on their "flagship" or key programs.

For all identified and selected courses, information was collected on the type of program (i.e., governmental, non-governmental, multilateral network [i.e. an international network of governmental and/or non-governmental actors], public-private-partnership [i.e. cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors on a nation state level]), the duration of the course, if any external certification exists, if the program is evaluated (either through internal self-evaluation, by external evaluators, or not at all), if the program targets one specific

extremist ideology or multiple ones, about the delivery method (i.e., online or physical presence or both) and finally, the specific course content, as these factors were deemed essential to assess the characteristics of the training course sample as best as possible. The course material was then transferred into abstract categories (e.g., "specific extremist ideology," "institution-specific counseling model") in order to protect potentially sensitive material or concepts. A training module on the Salafi-Jihadist ideology, for example, was categorized as "specific extremist ideology."

The Data Basis

The 12 training courses in the sample (for an overview, see Table 1) consist of four governmental, three multilateral-network-based, two non-profit/non-governmental, two academic, and one public-private-partnership-based course. Nine of the 12 programs were based on in-class attendance, two were fully online courses, and one used a combination of in-class and online resources.

The duration of the courses ranged from 45 minutes for the entire course (online and self-paced) to 24 days (for those requiring in-class attendance). The average duration (this excluded the two online courses because the duration depended on the trainees themselves) was 8.2 days. Only two of the 12 courses were externally certified for quality control by an education specialist institution or service (e.g., a governmental education ministry or a national board of education providers). Nine out of 12 courses relied on internal self-evaluation. Two courses did not use any formal evaluation method and only one was evaluated by an external and independent organization. Although the majority of courses used some form of evaluation, the sample indicates a lack of high-quality external evaluations in the field of CVE and deradicalization, which mirrors the current situation in the practical field in general.[79] Five courses focused on Salafi-Jihadism as the target form of violent extremism, six included multiple forms of violent extremism with a comparative perspective, and one focused on the extreme right. No course provider outlined how the course contents were tailored to suit different attendees. The process of selecting the training contents remained unclear. It appears likely that contents selection was mainly driven by the providers' discretion.

Table 1: Overview of the Sample Training Courses

No.	Institution	Duration	Externally Certified	Evaluated (Self, External, None)	Target/Main Focus	Delivery
1	Multilateral Network	4 Days	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Physical
2	Multilateral Network	10 Days	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Physical
3	Multilateral Network	5 Days	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Online and Physical
4	Governmental	24 Days	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Physical
5	Governmental	4 Days	No	None	Extreme Right	Physical
6	Governmental	Self-Paced, 45 Minutes	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Online
7	Governmental	20 Days	No	Self	Salafi-Jihadism	Physical
8	Academic	Self-Paced, 4 Hours	No	Self	Multiple Extremist Milieus	Online
9	Academic	5 Days	Yes	Self	Salafi-Jihadism	Physical
10	Public Private Partnership	3 Days	Yes	None	Salafi-Jihadism	Physical
11	Non-Profit/NGO	9 Days	No	External	Salafi-Jihadism	Physical
12	Non-Profit/NGO	4 Days	No	Self	Salafi-Jihadism	Physical

The translation of the course material into abstract components resulted in the identification of thirty-three categories that can be interpreted as a collection of critical skills and knowledge for CVE and deradicalization personnel in the perspective of either the training providers or the practitioners themselves, who might have requested this specific content. Table 2 presents the thirty-three categories and their distribution across the sample courses. Five content categories appeared in at least half of the sample: the psychology of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism (e.g., motivational factors, entry processes); the psychology of CVE and deradicalization (e.g., motivational factors, exit processes); subcultures and lifestyles (e.g., visual and behavioral indicators, codes and symbols, clothing, music, specific activities); specific counselling methods; and specific extremist ideology (e.g., Salafi-Jihadism, or the extreme right). Focusing on one specific form of violent extremism, teaching about its subcultural environments and identifying its essential elements, explaining entry and exit processes, and then including specific counselling methods, appears to be a straightforward and efficient way to train practitioners in the minimum amount of time.

Except for one training course which entirely specialized on program development, all included a module on radicalization and/or recruitment into violent extremism. However, only eight courses included a module on exit processes, CVE, or deradicalization. In one case, it included a component on specific early prevention processes. Therefore, three CVE and deradicalization training courses were completely missing any specific content on CVE and deradicalization.

As six courses did not focus on a specific extremist ideology but rather included various types, it is also fair to say that a multi-phenomenological approach to CVE and deradicalization training might be quite common. Of the six courses focusing on a single extremist ideology, five targeted Salafi-Jihadism. This might indicate that this ideology represents the most significant security threat or that this is the context in which there is the greatest need to educate program personnel.

Seven courses included specific counseling methods and focused mainly on systemic counseling, which is often deemed essential by intervention practitioners. Other methods included "change talk" and "change psychology," which are communication methods that form a part of motivational interviewing by trying to capitalize on and strengthening the recipient's motivation for change.

Only four courses included an institution-specific, sometimes copyrighted, CVE and deradicalization model, which was advertised as a key competitive advantage over other concepts.

Another, albeit rarely used, component in the selected training courses consisted of case exercises or dummy cases to help practice approaches and methods. Only four training courses included this tool, which seems to be a logical way to enhance the educational value and effects of the training.

Table 2. Overview of Training Courses' Contents

Training Course No:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Psychology of Radicalization/Recruitment Processes (Push and Pull Factors)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prevention Basics	X		X								X	X
CVE/Deradicalization Processes/Psychology	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
Program Specific Model	X			X	X	X						
Good Practices	X											
Case Studies	X			X		X						
Role of Family	X			X								
Legal Basics	X			X	X	X	X					
Safety and Security	X			X								
Program Development		X							X			
Governance				X								
Risk Assessment				X								
Subcultures/Lifestyles (Visual and Behavioral Indicators)			X	X	X	X	X			X		
Social Media			X	X					X			
Case Management/Decision Making				X	X		X					X
Open Source Intelligence				X								
Specific Counseling Methods (e.g., Systemic Counseling, Motivational Interviewing, Change Talk)			X	X	X		X			X	X	X
Monitoring				X			X		X			
Racism					X							
Coping with Resistance					X							
Pluralizing Worldviews				X	X							
Mental Health						X						
Role of the Community/Local Partners				X			X	X	X		X	
Specific Extremist Ideology			X	X			X		X	X	X	X
Service Delivery									X			
Basics Islam				X			X			X	X	X
Case Exercise				X						X	X	X
Gender Specific Issues				X							X	
Argumentation/Rhetoric				X							X	
Foreign Terrorist Fighters				X								X
Groups vs. Lone Actors				X								X
Evaluation Techniques				X			X					
Children and Minors				X								

Comparing the Academic and Practical Perspectives

While comparing the categories used in CVE and deradicalization training programs with the list of recommended contents derived from the academic literature on the topic, it becomes clear that many components with a stiff backing in the academic literature have not been considered in the training courses. Especially, content about collective and group dynamics, creative arts and sports, pragmatic support structures and methods to increase the user's sense of significance are absent from the sample. Other components, which appeared to be significant in the literature were identified only once in the sample, for example, mental health, risk assessment, argumentation, and rhetoric skills. Even the role of the family of recipients only appeared twice in the sample. Nine out of the 14 training content components derived from the academic literature did not appear or only rarely (once or twice) appeared in the sample, indicating that counter-radicalization and deradicalization training courses are significantly disconnected from the knowledge base in research. One reason for this might be that the courses are more attuned to economic constraints and content requested by

the audiences. As pointed out before, such content comes from a mostly unverified field and thereby harbors the risk of including ineffective or even counter-productive practices. On the other hand, a large portion of the training components used in the field did not appear to a significant degree in the academic evidence-based literature, indicating that the wider academic literature is not well-grounded in the practical realities of delivering interventions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper tackled the issue of delivering adequate CVE and deradicalization program personnel training, and investigated the relationship between the academic literature on the topic and the contents of personnel training courses. When revisiting one of the core assumptions of this article—that identifying individuals at risk of radicalization and intervening appropriately is no simple task and requires significant expertise—the average training course duration of 8.2 days and the fact that many courses are limited to rather general knowledge make it hard to conclude that this kind of specialized knowledge (i.e., beyond rudimentary awareness) can be effectively gained within such trainings. Even the most extensive course (spanning 24 days) seems insufficient to acquire the skills and knowledge to effectively "deradicalize" a hard-core extremist. This directly points to a significant structural problem in the CVE and deradicalization field and underlines the need for more extensive and better structured training.

While comparing the 33 identified categories used in 12 training courses with the list of recommended contents derived from the evidence-based research literature, it becomes clear that many components recommended in the academic literature are not included in the training courses. Hence, it appears that existing courses are significantly disconnected from the academic state of the art but also that research in this area does not address the practical realities and needs of the intervention providers. This points to a shortcoming in this research field: empirical studies have mostly focused on personal narratives of active or former extremists and terrorists and have derived their findings and recommendations from this material. Recommended practices for intervening on violent radicalization do not, however, automatically follow from these accounts, since the focus lies on individual experiences and not the user-program relationship. The interaction between the intervention programs, their staff, and the final recipients represents an analytical level that is significantly different from what the majority of research in this field has considered thus far. Even if certain practices can be recommended based on individual accounts of former terrorists, this does not imply that the recommendations can be generalized. The background of the program (e.g., governmental), the personality and training of the mentor, even the way a specific approach is communicated toward the final users, might fundamentally alter the actual effects of the approach. If, for example, finding a new job would be advisable for a subject, the simple fact that this suggestion comes from a governmental intervention program might determine psychological reactance from that subject, who is used to an environment that is hostile to the government. In sum, the program-tool-recipient nexus with its logic and interactions must become the focus of CVE and deradicalization research to understand how exit processes from terrorism and violent extremism can be facilitated more effectively.

These findings, however, are subject to some limitations. First, the small data sample of 12 CVE and deradicalization training courses is only partly representative of the training landscape and does not allow for general conclusions. More detailed research on personnel's training in this field is needed. Even though the method used in this study to search for courses did not yield more than 17 courses, it is likely that there are, in fact, more courses. Furthermore, the present assessment is based on the information provided by the training institutions themselves. Feedback from the participants regarding the value of the training programs and the long-term applicability and practicability in CVE and deradicalization activities might prove very insightful to complement the findings from this article. A third limitation lies in the connection between the training courses and the academic literature. It is difficult to determine whether it is more beneficial for course providers to base the course contents on the state of the art in the academic literature or on the demands of the training participants, for example, simply out of economic reasons. As shown by the 33 identified components, which are largely absent from the relevant research literature, there is a gray zone constituted by what practitioners (or training providers) believe to be necessary for their work, and what the empirical research has identified as relevant. Nevertheless, as pointed out throughout this article, it is our firm stand that CVE and deradicalization activities (in fact, all CVE work) should be evidence-based to avoid counter-productive effects and to "do-no-

harm." Since most of the practical activities in this field have not been scientifically evaluated for their effects so far, we see no alternative than basing program personnel training on the components that have a strong empirical base.

This does not mean that there should be no room for the practical realities and demands of the intervention practitioners. On the contrary, this article has identified a range of components widely used in the training courses, providing an insight into what is considered essential practical knowledge in the field. Based on these insights, it is possible to formulate key recommendations for future research to become more relevant for practitioners.

An essential strategy to professionalize existing programs and make their practical experiences transferrable consists in encouraging a more in-depth exploration and assessment of specific methods and activities within CVE and deradicalization programs according to their type, target groups, and effects. Recent studies by Williams et al. [80] or Webber et al. [81] provide first still rare examples of how specific methods used in CVE and deradicalization activities can be experimentally tested and assessed. It would be worthwhile, for example, starting with the thirty-three identified training components from the existing sample and assess their roles and effects for CVE and deradicalization, in order to move the research closer to the practical field. Furthermore, the actual distribution of these training components in the field should be explored. It might be the case that those methods and components taught through the training courses do not have much application in the practical work, which would add another layer of investigation to the research question of what is being done by CVE and deradicalization activities and why.

This article's results directly contribute to filling the knowledge gap between academic and practitioner understandings of CVE and deradicalization and the day-to-day operations involved in it. By learning more about how program personnel are trained it is possible for academics to get a sense of the practical methods that are deemed essential. This identifies activities and methods that need empirical validation to make research more relevant for practitioners. Intervention providers on the other hand, learned about the academic state of the art in relation to their own practical field and whether their practices are based on the empirical evidence used in research literature. It is finally strongly recommended to make the research outputs in this domain more accessible for practitioners and to provide more evaluative and comparative research methods to test the actual value of the strategies introduced in the training courses and potentially used in the field.

The main practical implication of this article's findings is to ground program staff training in evidence-based content as far as possible without compromising on the practical relevance for the course audiences. The findings imply that practical recommendations derived from individual pathways out of violent extremism and terrorism do not necessarily hold much relevance for intervention providers as their activities appear to form a heretofore unexplored realm of mutual interactions between the program and the recipient. Finally, in order to effectively address the practical issues arising from the findings presented here, the creation of university level B.A. or M.A. degree-based courses focused on practical CVE and deradicalization seems highly advisable. This would allow for a sufficient time span to acquire the necessary knowledge, as well as include an adequate quality assurance mechanism (e.g., course content designed, conducted and supervised by senior academics and/or practitioners, written and oral examinations, research assignments and final theses). It would furthermore allow for the opportunity to gain field experiences—for example, through internships or fieldwork with P/CVE programs. In any case, the current situation in the CVE and deradicalization field regarding professionalization and quality assurance is inadequate and worrying, given the specific challenges and risks of the clientele.

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