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FINAL REPORT

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TITLE: Applying a Developmental Evaluation Approach to Address Community Safety and Health Challenges of Reintegration Programs in the USA.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 9/11, 982 individuals have been prosecuted for terrorism-related crimes (The Intercept, 2022), and more than “500 violent extremists who have been imprisoned” have been released (Aaronson, 2017). “While these numbers alone are concerning, they do not capture the full range of violent extremists who have been prosecuted, imprisoned, and released since 9/11; they include only those prosecuted for crimes related” to international terrorist groups (Aaronson, 2017). Most domestic violent extremists (DVEs) are not included. Although no comprehensive database of imprisoned and released DVEs exists, the number of DVEs is increasing (Stern, 2023). Despite the likely resulting increase of extremists in prison and on probation, there is little conclusive research on the most effective programs or methods with which to reintegrate this population. In our literature review of reintegration program evaluation methods, we found few solid conclusions regarding which programs are truly effective due to the heterogeneity of research methods, types of programs, and contexts, as well as a lack of consensus on definitions of program objectives and measures of success. Given these issues, we conclude that future evaluations need to include a clear definition of success by the program being evaluated, a baseline set of data describing the type of intervention used and context of the program, and the methods used to evaluate such programs. To inform the development and evaluation of reintegration processes, we conducted interviews with 39 probation/parole officers (POs) and 17 former extremists who had been imprisoned or on probation. The research team also implemented a survey of 206 federal probation officers and conducted a literature review of the existing evaluations of reintegration programs. Many of the issues that emerged in interviews with probation and parole officers were corroborated by the former extremists. Both sets of respondents highlighted the need to engage mental health practitioners in reintegration programs who are equipped to deal with this unique population. Formers and officers alike emphasized

that building rapport and establishing a positive relationship between officers and clients was critical in facilitating a successful probation or parole process. POs also remarked on the lack of specialized risk assessment tools, noting that the standard risk assessment (the Post-Conviction Risk Assessment) was inadequate for overseeing their extremist clients. In our interviews with officers, we noted that officers believed that recidivism for extremist offenders was higher than the general recidivism rate. While definitive data on recidivism do not exist, recidivism rates for violent extremists, mentioned in the literature thus far, are significantly lower than the rates for ordinary criminals. Additional training for officers handling extremism-related cases may be helpful in assuaging anxiety and promoting a positive relationship between officers and clients. Several themes also emerged in our interviews with formers.

Some of the respondents likened their involvement in extremism and the subsequent deradicalization process to being similar to addiction metaphor that we believe has potential utility in understanding individuals' involvement in extremism. Several interviewees also shared their experiences with solitary confinement—which lasted as long as eight years—and the adverse mental health effects caused by this practice.

Finally, formers also noted issues with job placement following their release, even with job training, and the difficulties of counterproductive probation conditions. In addressing the issues raised in the interviews, we highly recommend expanding access to mental health practitioners who are willing and trained to work with extremist populations.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

OBJECTIVES, METHODS AND RESULTS

The overall goal of the project was to optimize the design and implementation of reintegration programs using 1 evaluation methods. We selected developmental evaluation as the most appropriate approach for this field of work because it is used to provide a close-to-real-time assessment while a policy change is still under development. Unlike summative evaluation, which measures inputs and outcomes over a specified period of time, developmental evaluation can be used to assess policy improvement and reform that is taking place in a complex environment. Michael Quinn Patton, describes it as appropriate to situations in which key stakeholders are uncertain about how to design interventions to solve social problems. In this particular case in absence of a specific program for criminal extremists in the United States, we focused on the very first step of the developmental evaluation framework mapping what type of interventions exist and type of organizations and professionals are involved in the case management process of these cases to understand potential areas for development and innovation.

- **Objective 1:** To conduct a stakeholders' analysis and establish a stakeholders' engagement strategy for the design and evaluation of reintegration programs.
- **Objective 2:** To conduct a systematic review of existing reintegration programs *(including gang and general-offender reintegration programs)* to generate a list of essential services.
- **Objective 3:** To achieve consensus on essential services of reintegration programs specific to terrorism-related cases.

- **Objective 4:** To conduct an evaluability assessment and preliminary outcome evaluation of the newly designed reintegration program on the health and behaviors of a group of released prisoners.

Objective 1: To conduct a stakeholders’ analysis and establish a stakeholders’ engagement strategy for the design and evaluation of reintegration programs.

METHODS

To understand the probation officers’ and their clients’ experience with the reintegration process, the services available to them, and which services they deemed useful, the research team interviewed both probation/parole officers and former extremists who had been released from prison or served probation. Interviews were conducted on Zoom using the convergent interviewing technique, an interviewing method that includes both general and specific questions. Participants were recruited through initial referrals from several collaborating organizations and using a snowball sampling technique.

OUTCOMES

Interviewees: We interviewed 39 federal probation officers across 27 districts who had experience working with extremists. The team also conducted interviews with 17 former extremists with a history of engagement in various types of extremist groups and ideologies. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded in Nvivo (Version 12) qualitative analysis statistical software by two members of the research team. The results of this analysis led to a description of 1) services and practices that probation officers —working at the federal and state levels—utilize when managing individuals with a history of engagement in criminal extremism;

2) promising practices for reintegration of such individuals; and 3) parole and probation officers' needs for specific trainings and access to services to be integrated in the case management process.

Key findings from the interviews with the probation officers:

- Nearly 80% of interviews highlighted the absence of reintegration programs for extremist offenders. Below we describe key findings in terms of practices and related challenges as well as reintegration strategies supported by the officers.

Risk Assessment and Release Conditions

- Traditional tools, such as PCRA do not adequately assess extremist risks, leading to frequent discretionary overrides due to perceived inadequacies.

- There's a recognized need for assessment tools tailored specifically for extremist offenders.

- Variations in release conditions within and across districts pose challenges to effective monitoring and support for extremist offenders, highlighting the need for greater uniformity and the creation of centralized and specialized support systems.

- The absence of institutional guidance and programming specific to criminal extremist individuals complicates the case management process, leaving the officers navigating complex situations without adequate resources or support.

Training and guidance for the officers

- Lack of training, support, and collaboration related to managing extremist offenders.

- Insufficient time, resources, and familiarity with extremist cultures and ideologies

- Cultural differences and language barriers may impede effective communication with clients and their families.

Rapport Building

- Every interview discussed establishing rapport and holding clients accountable.
- Respect and trust were highlighted as crucial elements.
- Treating clients with respect often resulted in reciprocal respect.

Monitoring Techniques

- The officers supported the use of monitoring techniques.
- Different types of monitoring of means of communication were discussed, including internet use, phone, social media, and general computer monitoring.
- Challenges with social media monitoring, especially in foreign languages, were highlighted.
- Social media monitoring was rated most useful, followed by home searches and drug testing.

Collaborations

- Collaboration with organizations outside the federal probation system was deemed important.
- Federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) were mentioned as partners.
- Collaboration with the FBI, particularly through Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs), was highlighted for its usefulness in gathering information.
- Challenges in collaboration included lack of information sharing and differing priorities.
- Information sharing with state and local law enforcement was crucial, especially before an offender's release from prison.
- Collaboration with mental health professionals was desired but limited due to lack of trained professionals.

- Substance abuse rehabilitation, primarily through government-based programs or external contractors, was the most discussed service.

- Housing assistance was less prominent, while government financial assistance, especially Second Chance Funds, was mentioned for covering various client needs.

- Job training was highlighted as crucial for client reintegration, while education was rarely mentioned.

Mental Health Care

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) were the main mental health treatments discussed.

- CBT was widely supported for its effectiveness in improving decision-making and curbing criminal thinking styles.

- MRT received mixed reviews, with concerns about its time-consuming nature and finding qualified providers.

- Challenges included finding qualified mental health providers and access to psychotropic medications.

Barriers to Reintegration and Protective Factors

- Barriers to reintegration included employment difficulties, substance use disorder, continued involvement with extremist networks and ideologies, and mental health issues.

- Pro-social relationships were seen as crucial for successful reintegration, providing a safety net and reducing the risk of returning to old behaviors.

Important Barriers to Reintegration

- Officers rated a history of violent behaviors or family/friends associated with criminal activities as the most important barriers.

- Lack of social support, substance use disorder, lack of education/job skills, difficulty finding employment, housing insecurity, and limited access to mental health services were also considered significant barriers.

Defining Success

- Success was defined as “termination of probation without revocation or rearrest” (Stern 2023), but opinions varied on whether abandoning the ideology was necessary.

- Indicators of success included not associating with negative influences, abstaining from substance abuse, attending appointments, and cooperating with law enforcement.

- Some officers emphasized the “importance of the officer-client relationship as an indicator of success”. (Stern 2023)

Source: Details on the results of this work can be found in the following publication: Stern, J.E., McBride, M.K., Baker, A., Carroll, M., Savoia, E. (2023, January 15). “Practices and Needs in Reintegration Programs for Violent Extremist Offenders in the United States: The Probation Officer Perspective,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2163460>

Key Findings from the interviews with former extremists:

Importance of Trusting Relationships: Former extremists emphasized the significance of establishing trusting relationships or rapport with government officials, as integral to their successful reintegration process.

Challenges in Accessing Psychotherapy: While some former extremists credited their successful reintegration to psychotherapy received in prison or post-release, many encountered

difficulties in accessing this service. Therapists' fear and moralistic judgments were cited as barriers to treatment, highlighting a significant gap in mental health support for this population.

Perception of Extremism as Addictive: Several formers described hate and radicalization as addictive, likening their involvement in extremism to a craving or compulsion. This perspective offers insight into the nature of the challenge and suggests a potential therapeutic framework for understanding and addressing violent extremism.

Impact of Solitary Confinement: The prevalence of solitary confinement among former extremists raised concerns about its detrimental effects on long-term mental health. Despite potential short-term benefits, such as reducing in-prison violence, the psychological side effects of solitary confinement may impede successful reintegration, highlighting the need for comprehensive mental health support.

Challenges with Job Placement: Many former extremists faced difficulties in job placement despite receiving job training during imprisonment or probation. Limited opportunities and employer fear to hire someone with a criminal record hindered their ability to secure stable employment, underscoring the importance of addressing systemic barriers to successful reintegration.

Source: Stern, J. E., McBride, M. K., Mellea, J. L., & Savoia, E. (2023). Practices and Needs in Reintegration Programs for Violent Extremist Offenders in the United States: The Extremist Perspective. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–30.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2204668>

Objective 2: To conduct a systematic review of existing reintegration programs (*including gang and general-offender reintegration programs*) to generate a list of essential services.

METHODS

We conducted a systematic review of the literature focusing on existing reintegration programs. The literature review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology (Page, 2021). The literature review used a Boolean string to search seven databases and over 50 other websites to collect gray literature.

OUTCOMES

We identified and screened “2,464 articles, from which we retrieved 271 articles (231 peer-reviewed articles, 30 articles derived from the gray literature, and 10 articles found independently) related to the deradicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, or reintegration of terrorists or extremists”. (McBride 2022) The literature we examined indicates a lack of clarity regarding the effectiveness of programs aimed at reintegrating terrorists or extremists, primarily due to various factors contributing to the difficulty in evaluating them. These factors include the diverse nature of program approaches, interventions, contexts, and data collection methods, which hinder efforts to aggregate findings on effective practices. One obstacle to evaluation is the rarity of terrorist violence compared to other criminal activities, resulting in a limited pool of individuals suitable for participation in reintegration programs. Additionally, accessing program data presents challenges for researchers and external groups, as outcome data and intervention observations are often inaccessible. Furthermore, evaluators face the complexity of differing program objectives, with no consensus within the field on defining criteria for success. Each

program employs its own set of metrics for assessing success, complicating efforts to synthesize evaluation findings.

Source: McBride, M.K., Carroll, M., Mellea, J., Hughes, D., Savoia, E. (Fall 2022). “Evaluating Terrorist and Extremist Reintegration Programming: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Journal for Deradicalization*. <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/643>.

Objective 3: To achieve consensus on essential services of reintegration programs specific to terrorism-related cases.

METHODS

Based on the initial results of the interviews, the research team developed a survey to distribute to a broader sample of federal probation officers to provide final input on the results of the coding of the interviews and gather consensus on the essential services identified as part of objective 1 and 2.

OUTCOMES

The survey was administered online between April and June 2021 and gathered responses from 206 POs, 73 percent of whom had experience managing violent extremists. Job training, substance use disorder treatment and CBT were ranked as the most helpful interventions provided to their clients.

Source: Details on the results of this work can be found in the following publication: Stern, J.E., McBride, M.K., Baker, A., Carroll, M., Savoia, E. (2023, January 15). “Practices and Needs in

Reintegration Programs for Violent Extremist Offenders in the United States: The Probation Officer Perspective,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2163460>

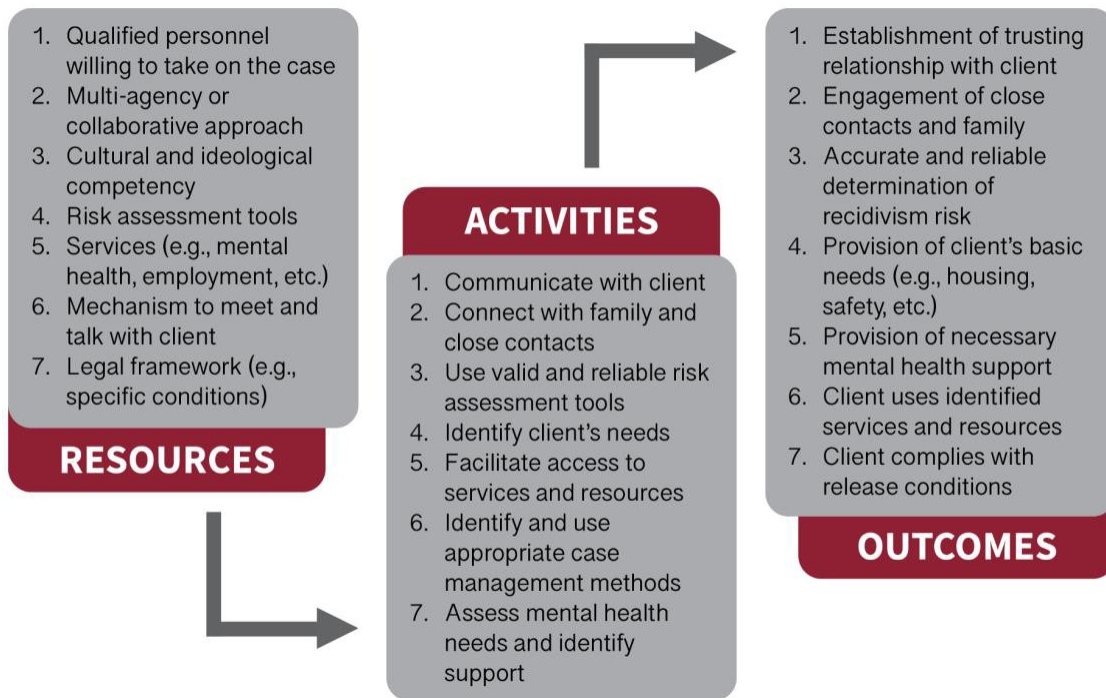
Objective 4: To conduct an evaluability assessment and preliminary outcome evaluation of the newly designed reintegration program on the health and behaviors of a group of released prisoners.

METHODS

We conducted an evaluability assessment which involved creating a logic model to guide the development of a case management monitoring tool and related metrics that were presented to a group of 30 probation officers during an in-person meeting organized by APPA in Chicago on August 28-31, 2022. The officers provided feedback during a group discussion facilitated by the Harvard team. The officer’s feedback was analyzed qualitatively by analyzed the themes and creating relational pathway between resources, activities and pathways that described the progression of the sequency of occurrence using a logic model.

OUTCOMES

The results of the qualitative analysis and the logic model constructions are shown in the figure below.



CONCLUSION

The project aimed to enhance the design and delivery of reintegration programs for individuals engaged in criminal extremism by applying developmental evaluation. As part of this project, in absence of a defined reintegration program for this type of criminals in the United States, we applied the first step of any developmental evaluation approach consisting in mapping current activities and identifying strategies and interventions suitable for evaluation. Results from the analysis of the interviews and survey data gave us an overview of what interventions are currently used in the reintegration of extremist individuals in the United States in absence of a well-defined program, and insights on the psychoterapeutic approaches that could be leveraged to strengthen future reintegration activities.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge several constraints in our findings. Firstly, our interviews with probation officers were based on data obtained through snowball sampling, rather than a representative sample of federal probation officers. Therefore, the experiences shared may not fully represent the perspectives of all probation officers, as those who participated may have been more interested or experienced compared to those who declined. Secondly, the officers we interviewed managed a diverse range of extremists in terms of severity of the crimes committed. Consequently, the results cannot be generalized to any specific category of extremist. Thirdly, the interviewing technique utilized does not permit conclusions regarding the frequency of specific interventions, posing a limitation on result aggregation.

Similarly, our interviews with former extremists have limitations. The small sample size of 17 participants is insufficient for drawing generalizable conclusions about the extremist population, although several consistent themes emerged warranting further examination. While autobiographical data offer unique insights into recidivist events, concerns arise regarding potential bias in self-reporting. We addressed these concerns by incorporating insights from the literature on interviewing extremists into our methodology, considering possibilities of deception, exaggeration, and under- or over-reporting of extremist activities. To mitigate these risks, we established rapport with interviewees, maintained transparency about our objectives, and cross-referenced information from other sources. However, our inability to conduct a random sample of violent extremists released from prison may have introduced bias, as individuals referred to us may have been more successfully reintegrated cases.

Lastly, our literature review on reintegration evaluations had limitations: we lacked access to evaluation reports for government agencies, excluded non-English literature, and may have missed unpublished evaluations with negative results.

PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

To recruit participants for the interview process, the research team collaborated with several organizations working in the field of violent extremist reintegration. Parallel Networks and Parents For Peace, organizations that work with former extremists and their families, arranged interviews with former extremists and the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) connected the research team to parole and probation officers. APPA also aided in recruiting respondents for the survey by disseminating it to the members of the organization and hosted a session focused on the evaluability assessment and newly developed case management monitoring tool.

CHANGES IN APPROACH FROM ORIGINAL DESIGN AND REASON FOR CHANGE

Due to social distancing restrictions imposed by COVID-19, we were unable to implement a Nominal Group Technique originally planned for objective 3. We substituted this technique with a survey, which allowed us to reach a greater number of participants. The survey, which was launched in April 2021 was implemented to further validate the results of the interviews.

EXPECTED APPLICABILITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Three crucial recommendations emerge from our interviews with and survey of probation and parole officers:

1. Telehealth for Mental Health Care:

- Making telehealth accommodations permanent can improve access to mental health practitioners, especially in rural areas.
- Training probation officers and NGO-based interventionists in aspects of behavioral therapy could supplement mental health care when access is limited.

2. Use of ERG 22+:

- Recommends using ERG 22+ or similar tools alongside PCRA and PTRR.
- Suggests training specialists who can travel to districts or conducting evaluations remotely to address training and resource limitations.

3. Training for Probation Officers:

- Offer training to probation officers in nuanced understanding of recidivism rates among different categories of extremists.
- Offer training to probation officers in extremist ideologies to enhance their knowledge when managing violent extremists.

The interviews of formers and the conclusions that emerged from the data led us to reiterate some of our recommendations from our research with POs and add additional ones:

1. Enhance Access to Mental Health Practitioners:

- Supports programs to increase the number of mental health practitioners with appropriate training to be able to work with violent extremists.

- Advocates for policies like continued telehealth therapy options, which enhance access to mental health resources for former extremists.

2. Addressing Addiction to Hate:

- Raises the concept that hate or a desire for revenge may elicit cravings similar to addiction in some individuals.

- Advocates for further study on adopting approaches akin to Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous for disengagement and deradicalization.

- Emphasizes the need for clear expectations and support for peer mentors involved in this space to mitigate potential stressors.

PRODUCTS DERIVED FROM THIS PROJECT

Webinars

- Title: Radicalization Processes Among Jihadis and RMVE Extremists
Speakers: McBride, Megan, Stern, Jessica,
Audience: Probation Officers
Date: September 24, 2020.
- Title: Preliminary Findings of Reintegration Programs for Radicalized Supervisees
Speakers: McBride, M., Stern, J.
Date: September 29, 2020
Audience: Washington Institute for Near East Studies series on CVE.
- Title: Preliminary Findings of Reintegration Programs for Radicalized Supervisees

Speakers: Hughes, D., LaBrique, L.

Date: November, 2021

Audience invited by the Federal Judicial Center.

- Title: Extremism: Ask the Experts

Speaker: Stern, J.

Date February 8, 2022

Audience invited by the Federal Judicial Center.

Thesis

- Hughes, Diána R., “Calculating and Managing Risk: Risk Assessment Tools for Violent and Non-Violent Extremist Offenders,” submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Affairs with a Specialization in Security Studies, Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University, Defended April 2021.

Conference oral presentations

- Hughes, D., LaBrique, L. (2021, August 24). *Preliminary Findings of Reintegration Programs for Radicalized Supervisees* [Conference Presentation]. American Probation and Parole Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, United States.

Articles in newspapers

- Stern, J. (2022, January 9). What I Learned from Reformed Extremists About Preventing Violence. *The Boston Globe*. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/04/magazine/what-reformed-extremists-taught-me-about-preventing-another-capitol-insurrection/>.
- Stern, J., McBride, M.K. (2022, May 19). Three Factors Drive Rightwing Violence. We Can't Solve the Problem Without Addressing All of Them. *Time*. <https://time.com/6178689/violence-extremism-how-to-stop/>.

Scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals

- McBride, M.K., Carroll, M., Mellea, J., Hughes, D., Savoia, E. (Fall 2022). Evaluating Terrorist and Extremist Reintegration Programming: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal for Deradicalization*. <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/643>.
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Patton's lecture on formative vs. developmental evaluation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg3IL-XjmuM>

Stern, J. E., McBride, M. K., Mellea, J. L., & Savoia, E. (2023). Practices and Needs in Reintegration Programs for Violent Extremist Offenders in the United States: The Probation Officer Perspective. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–22.

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