

# **Socio-psychological factors involved in measures of disengagement and deradicalization and evaluation challenges in Western Europe**

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## Introduction

In the past decade, approaches toward countering terrorism in the European Union have changed in some respects. For example, Rees and Aldrich noted that until 2005 there were no international, EU-wide counterterrorism measures and relatively little investment in international cooperation existed. The current trend, however, is toward increased international cooperation. This can be illustrated by the 2005 presentation of a unified EU counter-terrorism strategy that represented a more a global approach on the part of the EU toward combating terrorism while respecting human rights (European Commission, 2005). More recently the Radicalization Awareness Network (European Commission, 2011) was created in 2011; it is described as a "network of networks" pooling experience and knowledge between key actors involved in countering radicalization across the European Union. These actors include social workers, religious leaders, youth leaders, police officers, and researchers.

Following an increase in "home-grown" terrorists in the United States (American citizens joining terrorist groups or engaging in terrorist activities), voices have been raised in the United States calling for an approach to counterterrorism that includes a greater understanding of the radicalization process and focuses on cooperation with partners in vulnerable communities in its prevention efforts (Vidino 2009, 2010; Weine et al. 2009).

Despite the rich body of literature on radicalization processes, relatively little is known about deradicalization and disengagement (see also Horgan 2008; Feddes et al. 2014a). As will be outlined in this chapter, there are considerable difficulties in conceptualizing "deradicalization" and "disengagement." Also, programs that counter radicalization focus on different phases of the radicalization process, making direct comparison difficult. For example, prevention measures focus on the "entry" phase in which a person becomes interested in an extremist ideology or becomes a member of an extremist group. In contrast, disengagement measures focus on motivating an individual to leave an extremist group (behavioral change), the so-called "exit" phase. The question remains whether these interventions touch upon similar or different processes and whether they also result in actual deradicalization (change in beliefs). Meanwhile, there is a growing interest in the development of a structured evaluation method that allows for examination and testing of "what works" in countering radicalization.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an outline of approaches used in Western Europe to counter terrorism and to identify current issues in evaluating the effectiveness of these measures. Notably, the body of literature on deradicalization in both the United States and these European countries deals mainly with right-wing extremism and Islamic extremism, as will be evident in this chapter. One reason for this is that research on terrorism has increased since the Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade

Center and the Pentagon in the United States in 2001, the 2004 Atocha rail bombings in Madrid, the London subway attacks in 2005, the neo-Nazi NSU murders in Germany between 2000 and 2007, and more recently the 2011 attacks by Anders Breivik in Norway and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing by the Tsarnaev brothers.

Despite the focus on right-wing and Islamic extremism, certain factors and psychological processes involved in deradicalization and disengagement are similar across different ideologies (Feddes et al. 2013; 2014a). This chapter will first provide an overview of conceptual issues related to disengagement and deradicalization, followed by an overview of socio-psychological factors and underlying processes associated with disengagement and deradicalization and a presentation of the contemporary approaches to deradicalization in Western Europe. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion on the challenges of evaluating counter-radicalization interventions.

### Conceptual Issues

There is a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the issue of deradicalization (Bjørge and Horgan 2009). Some perceive deradicalization to include efforts to prevent radicalization from taking place, while others view it in the context of an individual becoming less radical in behavior and beliefs. Demant, Slootman, Buijs, and Tillie (2008, 13) define deradicalization as follows:

With regard to behavior, [deradicalization] primarily involves the cessation of violent actions. With regard to beliefs, this involves an increase in confidence in the systems, a desire to once more be a part of society, and the rejection of non-democratic beliefs.

This definition distinguishes between two aspects that are often separated in the literature and in interventions: behavior versus cognitive belief. This is in line with a recent distinction in interventions focusing on disengagement and/or deradicalization (Bjørge 2009a, 2009b; Horgan 2008; Horgan & Braddock 2010; Köhler 2013). Disengagement occurs when someone reduces or stops using methods that are considered to be extreme. Deradicalization, in contrast, occurs when the individual or group moves (on a continuum) from an extremist position toward a more moderate one. For example, if an individual is disengaged, he/she shows moderate behavior/action on a continuum of radicalization. However, this individual may still hold extreme beliefs, indicating that he/she has not been de-radicalized (which requires a change in beliefs).

In regard to this continuum, Sedgwick (2010) argues that before considering what is “moderate” and what is “extreme,” the continuum itself should first be determined. Using the example of right-wing extremist groups, there are many different right-wing groups that each have their own ideologies and sets of norms and behaviors. In order to determine whether these groups are “extreme,” one could use the likelihood that members will use violence as a way to determine whether they should be labeled as moderate or extreme. A distinction between “activism” and “radicalism” made by Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) sheds further light on what such a continuum might look like. These authors consider activism to be related to the readiness to engage in legal and non-violent political action. Activism is allowed by law and

therefore should not be a focus of deradicalization interventions. Radicalism, in contrast, is defined as the readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action. Activism and radicalism, in turn, differ from terrorism, which concerns the use of violence against civilian targets.

To conclude, disengagement, counter-radicalization, and deradicalization can be best understood as relative concepts (see also Schmid 2013) that can be studied at different levels, namely at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Analysis at the micro-level investigates deradicalization/disengagement at the level of the individual. Analysis at the meso-level focuses on social contexts, namely group dynamics. Macro-level analysis focus on large-scale issues, such as are the role of government, relations between minority and minority groups, and the radicalization of party politics. Just as the processes of radicalization can be analyzed at these levels, it can be assumed that processes of deradicalization and disengagement also interact between these levels of measurement (Feddes et al. 2014a). In an effort to better understand the complex interactions of factors and processes involved in disengagement, deradicalization, and social re-integration, the next section reviews contemporary literature dealing with these issues.

### Socio-psychological factors involved in disengagement and deradicalization

In the literature on disengagement, a distinction is made between *individual* and *collective* disengagement (Demant et al. 2008; Bjørgo 2009a; Köhler 2013). In this section, factors that influence individual engagement are discussed first, followed by factors associated with collective disengagement. The review below is mainly based on evidence from research on right-wing extremism and Islamic extremism, but it can be assumed that these factors also play a role in extremism based on other ideologies, such as left-wing extremism and animal-rights activism.

#### Factors influencing individual disengagement

As noted by a number of researchers, disengagement from an extremist group does not simply mirror the process of becoming engaged in an extremist group (Bjørgo 2011, Moghaddam 2009). With regard to disengagement, a distinction can be made between push and pull factors. Bjørgo defines “push factors” as negative social influences and conditions that make membership in a group unattractive and unpleasant. “Pull factors” are those elements that motivate a person to choose a certain option. Research conducted among (former) extremists has identified the following push factors that work on an individual level (Bjørgo 2009; Bjørgo & Carlsson 2005; Demant et al. 2008; Feddes et al. 2013; Feddes et al. 2014; Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010):

- **Group goals:** Disappointment in unattainable goals of the group;
- **Methods:** Disappointment in violence and methods used by group members;
- **Leadership:** Disappointment in leaders of the group;
- **Friendship:** Disappointment in social relations within the group (friendships);
- **Personal status:** Loss of personal status within the group;
- **Law enforcement:** Not being able to deal with the pressure of repression by law enforcement;

- **Stigmatization:** Threat of stigmatization (especially being stigmatized via social media);
- **Family:** Competitive loyalty between the group and the family;
- **Development:** Personal growth (individuals mention they want to start a family and build a future)

Van der Valk & Wagenaar (2010) and Feddes et al. (2013; 2014c) point out that social relationships play a particularly important role not only in the radicalization process, but also in the decision to leave extremist groups. Disappointment in the behavior of group members whom the individual also considers friends often plays a role when an individual leaves an extremist group. The use of violence rarely seems to play a role in the disengagement process.

Personal growth is also considered to be an important push factor. Here, developmental processes may play a role. Interview studies have pointed out that many individuals enter extremist groups during adolescence (12 to 15 years old; see for example Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010; Feddes et al. 2013, 2014c). In this developmental period, individuals feel a strong need to belong to social groups and to have friends. A review of the developmental literature on youth engaged in crime by Reyna and Farley (2006) shows, for example, that compared to adults, adolescents are more thrill-seeking and likely to try to maximize short-term pleasures. Also, in unfamiliar situations and under the influence of peers, adolescents are less capable of logical reasoning than adults.

Besides these push factors, experts (Bjørge 2009 and Van der Valk and Wagenaar 2010) have observed that important pull factors are involved, including the attraction of the outside world and the availability of alternatives. This is also sometimes referred to as the attraction to a "normal life." Often extremists run a sort of double life in which it is difficult to combine membership in the extremist group with work, education, and social relationships outside the group. The longing to maintain good relationships with family members, or to start one's own family, or to have friendships with members of out-groups (those with different political views or from different ethnicities) have all been observed to play an important role in the disengagement process.

#### Factors involved in collective disengagement

In addition to individual disengagement, groups can also collectively disengage. Based on previous research, the following factors can be identified to play an important role in collective disengagement (see also Demant et al. 2008; Bjørge 2009a, 2009b; Feddes et al. 2013; 2014a; 2014c):

- **Failing ideology:** the central ideology does not provide group members with sufficient purpose; there is no clear group goal; and/or there is no plan for how to make desired changes in society
- **Failing organizational means:** the group does not meet the needs of its members and fails to evolve. According to the literature on radicalization, there are three main motives of individuals joining radical groups: the group is acting against perceived injustice, it fulfills a need for identity (the need to feel

connected to a group), and/or it provides members with a sense of purpose (ideology)

- **Failing leadership:** Leaders are arrested or killed; leaders are no longer able to inspire members or do not adjust quickly enough to changes
- **Policy change:** The group decides to pursue its agenda through legitimate and legal political channels
- **Public support:** There is no public support for the group's existence
- **Suppression:** The group experiences continuous suppression from law enforcement.

#### Factors involved in deradicalization

As noted before, disengagement often occurs independently of deradicalization. That is, even though the individual may become moderate in his or her actions, the radical ideology and beliefs remain. Previous researchers have identified factors that are important to the process of deradicalization (Van der Valk and Wagenaar 2010):

- **Doubt about ideology:** Experiencing doubts about the components of the ideology (often meeting "good" out-group members seems to play a role);
- **Ideology is considered infeasible:** The lack of a sense of reality: individuals begin to question the feasibility of the ideas;
- **Hypocrisy of group members:** Hypocrisy concerning the confessed norms and values: individuals witness group leaders not behaving according to the norms and values that they preach.

#### Phases of disengagement and deradicalization

It is helpful to differentiate between the different phases of disengagement and deradicalization in order to understand the two concepts better. Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) distinguish between three different phases in which disengagement from radical extreme right groups occurs: the doubt phase, the decision-making and execution phase, and the normalization phase.

**The doubt phase:** The phase of doubt (in the group's ideology) may result not only in the individual leaving the group but also in de-radicalization at an ideological level. This practical and ideological rupture can take place at different moments in time.

**The decision-making and execution phase:** Doubting a group's ideology is often an insufficient reason for an individual to take steps toward disengagement or de-radicalization. Help from people outside of the group can catalyze the decision and is, in most cases, critical. This help may be from former group members who have themselves de-radicalized (to serve as role models), but family members, co-workers, fellow students, social workers, new friends, and fellow prisoners can also fulfill this role.

**The normalization phase:** In the phase of normalization, individuals disengage from the extremist scene and distance themselves from the ideology. By this phase, both disengagement and deradicalization have occurred and most individuals begin to carry on with their lives, find work, or pursue education. Some individuals remain in touch with members in the extremist group.

## Psychological processes involved at different phases

To date, relatively little is known about the underlying psychological processes involved in deradicalization and disengagement (see also Bjørge 2009a, 2009b; Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010). There are, however, some known key psychological processes that are considered to be involved just before or just after joining an extremist group (the entry phase) and when leaving the group (the exit phase).

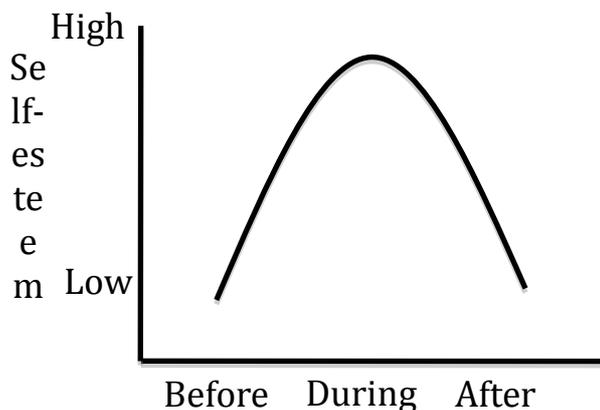
**Entry phase.** Using a metaphor of a staircase, Moghaddam (2009) distinguishes between different phases of radicalization that ultimately may lead to a terrorist act (the so-called top-level of the staircase of terrorism) that provide opportunities to intervene. He argues that in the *entry phase*, individuals are particularly concerned with opportunities for their group to reach a better position in society. He mentions the importance of perceptions of injustice and relative deprivation in the radicalization process. That is, many individuals who join radical groups do so because they have the feeling that they (or other group members) have not received the treatment they deserve. Also, individuals are likely to view non-group members involved in terms of "us against them."

In order to better deal with feelings of relative deprivation and injustice, experts suggest empowering individuals by helping to increase their perceptions of efficacy (agency) and self-esteem, and fostering the creation of a strong self-identity (see also Feddes et al. 2013; Feddes et al. 2014b; Lub 2013; Moghaddam 2009). However, caution must be used as research findings also suggest that improving the self-esteem of individuals with extreme ideologies may actually boost radicalization (Feddes et al. 2014b; see also Lub 2013). A recent evaluation of a resilience intervention by Feddes and colleagues suggests, however, that by increasing self-esteem in combination with increasing empathy, these interventions can be successful in deradicalization. Front-line workers (social workers, police) often mention that it is crucial to create trust when attempting to prevent individuals from joining groups or to motivate them to leave the group (see also Marret et al. 2013; RAN 2014).

**Exit phase.** In later phases of radicalization, different psychological processes play a role. At the so-called top levels of the staircase to terrorism, individuals are members of a tightly knit group with strong norms about how to behave (Moghaddam 2009). Psychological processes that play an important role at this level are cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) and self-perception (Bem 1967). Cognitive dissonance theory predicts that the individual is willing to use violence because this behavior is consistent with his beliefs and vows. Also, according to theories of self-perception, once the individual perceives himself or herself as a terrorist, he/she is therefore in a mindset to behave like a terrorist. These processes are difficult to counter. However, suppression by law enforcement (creating stress among group members), disturbing the group relations (creating distrust of the leader), or providing alternatives (lowering the threshold for leaving the group), may provide individuals with enough motivation to leave extremist groups.

Offering alternatives is critical in motivating people to disengage from the group. There is a rich body of literature on the importance of group membership to young adults and how it can motivate them to join extremist groups (e.g., Bjørge & Carlsson 2005; Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010; Feddes et al. 2014a). The group gives them

something to be proud of and provides a source of confidence. Indeed, when comparing the time before, during, and after membership in right-wing extremist groups, in-depth interviews with former right-wing extremists have shown that levels of self-esteem were low among most participants when entering the extremist group. During their time as a member, their self-esteem received a boost. After leaving the group, levels of self-esteem were once again low among most participants (Feddes et al. 2013; 2014c). This is depicted in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Level of self-esteem in individuals before, during, and after membership in an extremist group (Source: Feddes et al. 2013; 2014c).

Several former extremists noted that the group was "everything" to them. After leaving the group, they reported feeling like they were falling into a dark void because they had lost their friends and their meaning or purpose in life. Providing social support, as well as opportunities to rehabilitate (such as through work or education), is considered to be crucial when motivating people to disengage from extremist groups (Bjørge 2009; Demant et al. 2008; Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010; Feddes et al. 2013; 2014c).

#### An overview of counter-terrorism measures in Western Europe

In European countries, interest in programs focusing on deradicalization has recently increased. This can be illustrated by a 2014 report presented to the European Commission (January 15, 2014, 7):

[...] exit strategies must be designed and implemented in collaboration with a broad range of state and non-state stakeholders. This is known as the multi-agency approach. The efforts to promote exit strategies may draw on cross sector collaboration between relevant authorities such as police, prison and probation services, social service providers, schools, etc. They should take a long-term perspective, taking into account underlying socio-economic factors, and have dedicated resources at their disposal.

In a study comparing policies aimed at countering violent extremism, Vermeulen and Bovenkerk (2012) note that there are differences among European countries. For example, in France there is no counter-extremism policy. Violent extremism is officially targeted only by the French intelligence service and the police. Individuals

who are sentenced for terrorist activities are detained in the most secure jails in France where deradicalization is not a priority (see Marret 2009). This is in contrast to the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, where combating extremism is perceived to be a responsibility of the police and intelligence services. Some of these countries actually have policies that explicitly target specific social groups, such as the policies that deal with Islamic extremism. For example, in the United Kingdom there is a national program/policy called CONTEST that was established in 2003 (and revised in 2009 and 2011). Through CONTEST, the United Kingdom aims to reduce the risk of Islamic Extremism at both the national and international level. Other examples of European policies and programs delivered at the national level can be found in the Netherlands ("Polarization and Radicalization," program started in 2007) and Belgium ("Plan for Dealing with Radicalism," established in 2006).

Counter-extremist policies in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium have a less explicit focus on ethnicity and religion. For example, the Dutch take what is referred to as the broad approach as it covers many different domains, with a general focus on social issues; Belgium has a similar focus. Many programs that focus on increasing the resilience of vulnerable youth have been implemented (Feddes et al. 2013; Feddes et al. 2014b). In addition to this "soft" approach, a "hard" approach is applied in cases where extremist individuals or groups are identified. In that case local authorities intervene with the support of the national authorities (see Demant, Wagenaar, & Van Donselaar 2009).

Interestingly, there are often not only differences in counter-extremism policies *between* countries but also *within* countries. For example, Vermeulen and Bovenkerk (2012) note that in Amsterdam, the national Dutch policy and its focus on social issues and prevention are followed. Whereas the national approach does not explicitly mention religion or ethnicity in regard to Islamic extremism, at a local level almost all projects that are conducted in Amsterdam are related in some way or another to Muslims.

#### Approaches to counter extremism

The earlier mentioned Radicalization Awareness Network (European Commission, 2011) recently presented a report with an overview of different approaches aimed at radicalization prevention, disengagement, and deradicalization in various European countries. This report distinguishes eight different approaches (RAN 2014, 5), which are described below. These are listed starting with preventive approaches that focus on individuals and their environments during in the entry phase and ending with restorative approaches that focus on individuals in the exit phase.

**Educating youth:** This approach includes programs that aim to teach youth about topics such as citizenship, stereotyping, discrimination, extremism, and cultural diversity. The programs often take place in schools or at exhibition sites. The aim is to decrease prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination and to increase knowledge about democracy and the norms and values of the specific society. The means used include interactive exhibitions, workshops, and peer mediation.

**Raising awareness among first-line practitioners:** These programs focus on teachers, youth workers, police officers, child protection workers, and mental health-care providers who work with vulnerable individuals or groups at risk of radicalization. The training courses are often tailored to particular groups of practitioners (e.g., police officers vs. mental health care workers) and vary in length (30-minute DVDs to three-day courses). The courses often include information on terminology, different radical groups and movements, the radicalization process, indicators to identify individuals vulnerable to the risk of radicalization, and how to respond. In regard to the latter, individuals are taught which organizations are available to help when intervention is needed. These courses are often interactive and practical.

**Delivering counter-communication.** This approach involves delivering counter-narratives and messages that challenge extremist ideas. This can be done either through direct conversation or via social media. Following the different stages in the radicalization process (Moghaddam 2005), messages can be directed either at a broad audience or at individuals who are at risk of radicalizing; counter messages can directly challenge extremist rhetoric or be used in one-on-one communication in order to disengage/de-radicalize an individual. Governments, as well as representatives of the community (such as religious leaders), former extremists, parents, peers, and social workers, can deliver these counter-narratives. Often coaching and training are needed in delivering counter-narratives. As outlined in by RAN (2014), the message should be delivered in a professional manner, linking to existing narratives and touching on emotions, whether online or offline.

**Bridging gaps through conversation methods.** This approach focuses on individuals and groups. Conversation methods are used to engage with individuals who are considered at risk. Also, dialogue can be used to cross religious and cultural boundaries. Methods used include mentoring individuals, making individuals more resilient against radicalization, reducing prejudice and stereotyping, enhancing critical thinking, and setting positive goals. On a group level, the methods aim to increase tolerance, reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and to create mutual understanding.

**Community engagement and empowerment.** This approach aims to engage and empower at-risk communities in order to establish trust with authorities and to create resilience against radicalization within these communities. Like the previously discussed Dutch "broad approach" to radicalization, prevention works best when there is cooperation between authorities, practitioners, and the community. Key community figures are sought to mediate communication between at-risk community members and their social networks (family, friends, and school connections), authorities, and practitioners. Communities are also seen as important in communicating counter-narratives against extremist ideologies and messages, thereby providing alternatives and promoting a more critical standpoint. Communities also serve as a source of information and can play a role in the disengagement process by providing material and emotional support. As noted by Van San, Sieckelink, and De Winter (2010), individuals in the direct environment of young adults (teachers, parents, and representatives of religious communities) are often insecure in how to deal with what Van San et al. refer to as "extreme ideals." Training these members of social networks could, therefore, help to prevent radicalization towards violence in its early stages.

**Supporting and empowering families.** Another approach taken in the European Union focuses explicitly on supporting families in preventing radicalization and in deradicalization. As noted before, Van San and colleagues (2010) stress that many parents are uncertain of how to deal with signs of radicalization. Also, parents themselves can propagate messages of intolerance (Pels & De Ruyter 2011). The aim of these family-centered approaches is to support (mostly Muslim) parents who are raising their children in Western societies. The approaches also aim to raise awareness and to increase knowledge about the threat of radicalization and how to build resilience. NGOs and representatives of (Muslim) communities help parents to prevent alienation between them and their children and to engage in dialogue. The 2014 evaluation by RAN highlights that there are often different roles for the father and the mother in this process.

**Deradicalization and disengagement programs.** These programs aim to re-integrate radicals into society or to at least dissuade them from using violence based on their ideologies. These programs target individuals who are thinking of leaving their extremist group or who have finished their prison sentences. Examples of these are the so-called EXIT programs, which focus on changing behavior (dissuading participants from using violence to reach their ideals) as well as on cognitive changes (change in beliefs). These programs are offered by NGOs using methods that include individual mentoring, conversation techniques, social and economic support, family support, psychological support, and religious and ideological counseling.

Experiences with the EXIT programs have shown that trust plays a critical role in the early stages of radicalization, that programs should be tailored to the targeted group, should include material support (such as housing), and should focus on the development of social skills and emotional intelligence (e.g., empathy) and the use of role models (e.g., former extremists). It is important to note that deradicalization programs also aim to tackle extremist ideologies, though this is considered secondary to disengagement.

**Creating institutional infrastructure.** The final approach identified by RAN (2014) consists of creating an infrastructure inclusive of different agencies and networks, such as prisons, police, local authorities, social workers, schools, and local communities. The aim is to train and educate professionals, to equip communities to recognize vulnerable individuals who are at risk or are in the early stages of radicalization, and to stimulate disengagement and deradicalization. Once the nature of the risk is analyzed, appropriate support programs can be designed and implemented.

As will be outlined in the next section, one of the greatest challenges confronting researchers and policy makers is how to examine the effectiveness of these different interventions.

Challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures

Clearly, there is a need for a solid empirical foundation on which to build disengagement and deradicalization programs. The lack of data is due, in part, to the difficulty of accessing the contexts of field research (see Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010). It is difficult to gain access to extremists as well as to former extremists (“formers”). Also,

including scientific criteria, such as a control group or follow-up measurements, is often impossible when evaluating prevention programs (see Feddes et al. 2013; 2014a; 2014b). Fieldwork takes a lot of time and patience and is relatively costly. First-hand data is, however, not the only source for research. For example, people with direct experience with radicalization, such as practitioners (i.e., field workers, police), as well as family and peers could be contacted for conducting indirect assessment to evaluate effectiveness (see Feddes et al. 2014a). This final section points out some areas that pose significant challenges for future work on designing methods for effective measurement. First, however, I will present a case study of a deradicalization intervention that has been evaluated.

#### Effect measurement: A case study

In Winschoten, a city in the Northern, rural areas of the Netherlands, a small group (the target group included 22 members) of right-wing extremist youth were identified in 2006. Between 2007 and 2009 an intervention was conducted by local authorities and supported by national authorities, as described by Demant and colleagues (2009). Research institutes like FORUM (Institute for Multicultural Affairs, Utrecht) were involved as well as first-line workers including police, youth workers, school officials, and an unemployment office. This intervention was considered to be a pilot study on how to conduct such an intervention as there was not much experience conducting this type of work in the Netherlands. This case was particularly interesting because measurements of the intervention's effectiveness were conducted at all stages (preparation, implementation, evaluation), which is rarely done. The goal of the program was to de-radicalize the youth, with deradicalization being defined as a change in behavior (Demant et al. p. 33). For example, if an individual stopped wearing clothing associated with extreme-right groups and ideologies, did not communicate right-radical messages, and ceased contact with members of the right-wing extremist group, the intervention would be considered successful.

A tailored approach was chosen for the Winschoten case. First, the police individually approached youth and discussed the youth's right-wing extremist ideologies with him or her, as well as the possible consequences of pursuing these ideologies. Next, school officials, youth-workers, and representatives of the local municipality initiated conversations with the youth to discuss their ideologies. In addition, the youth were supported in finding accommodation, education, work, establishing a new social network, and dealing with debts if necessary. In some cases, parents were involved as well. The intensity of the intervention differed from person to person. Some individuals only engaged in one or two conversations, while others were closely supervised for months on end. As a result of the intervention, 15 of the 22 individuals involved in the pilot project stopped their extreme-right behaviors. Four individuals still showed extreme-right behaviors, and among the remaining three individuals, it could not be determined whether they were still showing extreme-right behavior.

#### The need for conceptualization

From an evaluation perspective, the Winschoten case study illustrates some of the difficulties that arise when evaluating intervention effectiveness. The first difficulty exists on a conceptual level. The stated goal of the intervention was to de-radicalize the youth. In a strict sense, this aim to change the behavior of the individuals was

more in line with disengagement; it could only be considered deradicalization if the youth also showed a change in beliefs. Demant et al. (2009, 52) note that a clear definition of deradicalization is important when designing the intervention, yet the previous sections in this paper have shown that disengagement and deradicalization are difficult to conceptualize. A first major challenge, therefore, is agreeing on a conceptualization that will also allow for an evaluation. There is general agreement that radicalization is not necessarily a bad thing. Schmid (2013), for example, notes that it is crucial that standards of determining what constitutes non-violent political action versus violent political action should be grounded in law. Nevertheless, preventive interventions often focus on individuals in early stages usually described as “vulnerable to radicalization.” Sedgwick (2010) suggests starting by determining the context in which the intervention will take place and then determining what is considered moderate versus extremist. Taking the Winschoten group as an example, there are many different right-wing extremist groups, each of which have their own issues that must be considered. In evaluating an intervention, it should first be determined what continuum is most relevant. In addition, once a continuum has been identified, the “moderate” versus “extremist” position on the respective continuum should be determined and made explicit.

#### Determine the level of measurement

Determining how to measure a program’s success also poses difficulty. For example, a review by Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010) on radicalization research shows that different explanatory factors emerge depending on the level and type of analysis. Sociologists, emphasize structural factors such as societal problems, globalization, and the weakening of communities. In contrast, empirical studies by social psychologists focus mainly on individual and group processes. In the Winschoten case, for example, researchers could focus on effects of social structures (national, local, community and providers) on the deradicalization of individuals, or researchers could examine the effect of the intervention on a small group level (change in group structure, etc.) and individual level (individual disengagement or cognitive deradicalization).

#### Theory-driven evaluation

A third challenge in evaluating interventions is determining whether they meet theoretical assumptions. In the case of the Winschoten intervention, it remains unclear what the assumptions of the interventions were and whether they were met. As noted by Lub (2013), evaluations are rarely conducted to measure less tangible concepts such as polarization and radicalization, and when they are conducted, they do not meet scientific standards. A practical first step could be to categorize interventions into different types. For example, Lub (2013, 3) divides interventions into the following four categories:

- *Social ecological interventions*: interventions that prevent or counter extremist behaviors by supporting an individual’s social “ecological” environment;
- *Peer mediation*: interventions that involve peers to counter radicalization;
- *Intergroup contact interventions*: interventions designed to increase tolerance between people of different social groups;

- *Self-esteem enhancement*: interventions that aim to make youth more resilient against radicalization by empowering them and improving their self-esteem.

The assessment method Lub (2013) uses is called a theory-driven evaluation (see Weiss 1995), which is often used when conducting social programs. One problem with this evaluation method is that it is often based on the first-hand experiences of program practitioners and therefore may have a weak theoretical foundation. In addition, the expected outcomes are often broadly defined or are given as a long list rather than being specified precisely (a “shotgun” approach). The challenge for researchers utilizing this method when investigating the effects of interventions is, therefore, to be explicit in identifying which outcomes or affects the intervention can have.

### The need for field studies

Theory-driven interventions have the advantage of being less costly and less time-consuming, but there is still great value to be gained from the so-called primary data that can be collected from field research such as in the Winschoten study. Field research that includes qualitative methods (interviews) provides a source of information on which hypothesis can be built for future research to improve existing interventions (see Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010). The fact that most studies on radicalization, including the Winschoten study, have been conducted with predominantly non-violent participants present a related challenge. As Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) note, while studies of nonviolent participants provide insight into activist groups (using legal and non-violent means) and radical groups (using illegal means) focusing on military or government targets, there is little knowledge available on the shift from radicalism to terrorism, in which the targets are not only military and government, but also civilian. This can also be said in regard to deradicalization. Even though there are now significant numbers of "formers" who disengaged from extremist groups or de-radicalized at an early stage, very little research has been conducted on these individuals. At the same time, studies that are done by, or in cooperation with, organizations that focus on prevention, disengagement, and deradicalization offer a promising solution to studying the effects of deradicalization. For example, EXIT Germany has a research department that works together with universities and knowledge institutes. These initiatives may help in gathering more primary data on processes involved in deradicalization and disengagement.

### Conclusion

This chapter has provided a conceptual overview of the concepts of deradicalization and disengagement. Based on this review, it can be concluded that one of the main challenges—on a conceptual level—is to determine the distinction between non-violent activism, violent radicalism, and terrorism. Agreement among researchers and practitioners on this conceptual level would benefit the development of counter-radicalization interventions and assessment procedures.

The second part of the chapter discussed the various factors that are associated with deradicalization and disengagement. It turns out that while static factors can be identified (such as disagreement within a group and disappointment in leaders),

knowledge on the underlying processes involved in disengagement and deradicalization is still quite limited. A promising area for future research would be to investigate parallels with the literature on criminal behavior and violent gangs (see Decker & Pyrooz 2011). Even though there may be differences between street gangs and extremist groups, there are also similarities. For example, the development of terrorist and extremist ideologies is multi-layered and involves processes at the micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (national) levels. As pointed out by Decker and Pyrooz (2011, 153), researchers of youth and street gangs have investigated these processes for nearly a century. The knowledge of this rich body of literature can inform the understanding of deradicalization and disengagement.

The third part of this chapter focused on counter-radicalization approaches in the European Union. It was noted that differences in policies exist not only between countries, but also within countries—usually between the national and local levels. A greater understanding of the different approaches at these levels is likely to benefit the development of effective counter-radicalization interventions. For example, to what extent can we determine whether the approach in France, where the official counter-radicalization strategy is mainly the concern of police and security services) is more or less effective than the policies in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium where official policies have developed with the involvement of a range of stakeholders and partners, including local communities, first-line workers, teachers, and parents.

Finally, in the fourth section of the chapter, the challenges on effect measurement were discussed. As mentioned at the start of this paper, there is a need for uniform methods for measuring the effectiveness of counter-radicalization interventions. The difficulty in establishing such methods stems from the fact that deradicalization and disengagement involve a range of social and individual contexts, and can be measured from a variety of approaches. Also, whereas with disengagement there are observable behavioral changes, indicators of deradicalization mostly involve psychological variables that are difficult to measure. A combination of theory-driven examinations of interventions and secondary data (e.g., expert ratings of effectiveness) could compliment the valuable primary data derived from field studies.

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