



Hedayah

CVE RESEARCH BRIEF 2

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Contributing
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Education and Countering Violent Extremism

About Hedayah

Hedayah is the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, established in Abu Dhabi through the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). Hedayah was established to serve as the premier international institution for training and capacity building, dialogue and collaboration, and research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations, in support of long-term, global efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.

Introduction

The contents of this brief are based on the discussions that occurred from 3-4 November at an expert workshop on Research Trends in Countering Violent Extremism hosted by Hedayah in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The purpose of this 2-day expert roundtable was to bring together 20-25 researchers, policymakers and practitioners in a closed discussion of the current trends in CVE research. The goals at the meeting were to 1) address the current research outcomes in countering violent extremism; 2) determine the critical gaps in research on CVE; 3) identify the new and emerging threats of violent extremism; and 4) establish a recommended research agenda for Hedayah and CVE researchers in the coming 2 years.

This Research Brief is a quick-reference guide for researchers, practitioners and policymakers interested in learning more about the current research and future needs and gaps in the field of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) on the topic of Education. This report reflects the discussions of the participants at the expert workshop, and does not represent the opinion of Hedayah.

In preparation for the meeting, Hedayah worked with Curtin University to map the existing CVE literature and assess the CVE research landscape across four themes: 1) social media and CVE, 2) education and CVE, 3) narratives of victims, survivors and formers for CVE, and 4) Disengagement and De-radicalization.¹ Meeting attendees utilized this literature review as a baseline for the discussions. Participants were also invited to prepare short research proposals prior to the meeting for review and discussion by other participants.

In addition to the discussions that occurred at the expert workshop on *Research Trends in Countering Violent Extremism*, this brief also draws from findings of the literature review conducted by Hedayah and Curtin University, the research proposals that were submitted by the participants, and independent research conducted by the author.²

¹ For an electronic version of the mapping activity, please visit www.hedayah.ae.

² The author of this brief was also involved in the drafting and development of the Global Counter-terrorism Forum (GCTF) framework document, the Abu Dhabi Memorandum for Good Practices on Education and Countering Violent Extremism. Some of the observations in this report draw from the discussions that took place at the meetings and conferences leading up to the adoption of this document in September 2014. For a copy of the Abu Dhabi Memorandum, see: https://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/140201/14Sept19_GCTF+Abu+Dhabi+Memorandum.pdf.

Current Status of Literature

Both the Literature Review and the discussions at the Expert Workshop on Research Trends in CVE concluded that the available literature supporting the link between education and countering violent extremism is underdeveloped. However, several overall conclusions did emerge from the existing literature. The research suggests that the presence or lack of education in society in and of itself is not necessarily a driver of radicalization and recruitment. Rather, the link between education and violent extremism varies significantly across local contexts and cultures. The literature, both in terms of academic research and in terms of policy research, also over-emphasizes the role of ideology, particularly religious ideology, as a driver of radicalization and recruitment in an educational setting, and misses other potential push and pull factors that could be related to education. Some protective factors related to education that were mentioned by participants included critical thinking skills and coursework on multiculturalism and tolerance.

Participants at the meeting suggested that the CVE community should draw more from existing research in areas such as on moral engagement, juvenile risk and resilience, law enforcement and crime, and educational curriculum development in order to further establish an evidence-base for CVE programs and interventions related to education. Participants also noted that in many societies, education is a socializing agent which is reflective of that country's broader culture. As such, education programs naturally reflect a country's or region's values and beliefs. Participants noted that more research should be done on how emphasizing cultural values and beliefs can build resilience to violent extremism.

Participants also made the conceptual distinction between two distinct categories: education for CVE and education about CVE. Education for CVE refers to interventions in which formal or informal education could be utilized as a tool to limit the push and pull factors leading to radicalization and recruitment. Education about CVE refers to educating the public on the risks of violent extremism and efforts to counter it.

Participants also discussed the significant role of victims' voices and the narratives of former extremists in education about CVE. For example, there have been some successes in Northern Ireland, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines where victims' and formers' narratives are part of school curricula that warns students of the dangers of violent extremism and attempts to persuade students not to be involved with extremist groups.

Gaps and Needs

With the current status of the literature being significantly underdeveloped, there are many research gaps that can be addressed to better support developing effective approaches to education and countering violent extremism:

1. Investigating the impact of education on violent extremism and efforts to counter it.

Participants emphasized that there is a need to further research the relationship between education and violent extremism, including how education can potentially affect the push and pull factors related to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. This would also include more quantitative and qualitative data

on how access to education may increase or decrease radicalization and recruitment in different local contexts.

2. Identifying what type of curriculum has the most impact on radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism.

For example, there is contradicting evidence on the role of Islamic schools in radicalization and recruitment. In some cases such as Indonesia, students with a background in Islamic education are less vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment. However, there is no empirical evidence to show how integrating private schools (such as Islamic schools) into broader education systems varies across different contexts and the impacts of this measure.

3. Investigating how pedagogy affects radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism.

Participants mentioned that it is not only what is taught in the classroom or at home, but also the teaching methods that could have an impact on violent extremism. There was also the suggestion that the perspectives of students should be included in these sorts of research projects.

4. Determining how extracurricular activities conducted in an educational setting (such as sports, clubs, theatre, music etc.) assist in preventing violent extremism.

Participants suggested that extracurricular activities may have more of an impact on the lives of youth than the formal classroom setting. Others suggested that these extracurricular activities can also be effective if they reinforce the formal education content and are part of a broader educational program related to countering violent extremism. However, participants also noted that there is very little research in this regard.

5. Establishing better research on the broader effectiveness of public awareness campaigns in an educational setting before determining how effective public awareness campaigns are with regards to CVE.

Participants noted that there is a general lack of knowledge about how public awareness campaigns against drugs, alcohol and bullying (for example) relate to the behavior of youth. In particular, participants pointed out that there tends to be challenges with how students apply the knowledge gained after they 'leave the door' of the school. More research should be conducted on how the information absorbed in public awareness campaigns in a school setting is retained outside a school setting, as well as how this information is applied when students are faced with tough decisions or peer pressure.

6. Establishing the role of the family and community in different local contexts.

More research is needed on how informal education impacts a students' development in a formal setting. Moreover, more research is needed on how a students' informal education is translated into action related to radicalization and recruitment. Participants also noted that social roots and cultural traditions in a local context may have an impact on education, both in a formal and informal setting, and that these may have implications for radicalization and recruitment.

Challenges to Research Related to Education and CVE

There are several main challenges to research and programming related to education and countering violent extremism:

- 1. Convincing educators that CVE interventions are both necessary and useful, not only for the security sector, but also for the education sector.**

Participants suggested that it is important to relate CVE to what teachers and educators already do, in order to avoid over-securitizing the education sector or adding additional burdens to teachers. In other words, it is important to emphasize an alignment of values and mutual goals, rather than conflicting objectives. For example, one suggestion would be to incorporate discussions of violent extremism into campaigns against other issues such as gangs, drugs, smoking or alcohol.

- 2. Providing appropriate tools and guidance to “gatekeepers” on what to do about violent extremism if they encounter it.**

“Gatekeepers” are the individuals that have direct access to individuals at risk for radicalization and recruitment, and often have strong bonds with those individuals. However, “gatekeepers,” which include teachers, families and coaches, are not always aware of the early indicators and appropriate methods and strategies for how to deal with violent extremism in its early stages or how to direct this to the appropriate experts. This challenge also relates to the first point; in convincing educators of their role in CVE, it is also important that the appropriate tools and toolkits are developed and made available to support teachers and educators in identifying and addressing push and pull factors that lead to radicalization and recruitment.

- 3. Overcoming the risk of potential reverse effects from education and CVE.**

The participants noted that discussions of violent extremism in schools could have negative or reverse effects and lead more individuals to be radicalized or recruited rather than less. Participants referenced some drug and gang prevention programs in which drawing attention to these issues in schools actually increased drug use or gang violence. Participants warned that education about CVE programs in schools could have a similar effect, and more research should be conducted on the risks related to reverse effects of education about CVE programming.

Ongoing and Future Programs and Projects

Participants at the Expert Workshop debated a number of research programs and projects that were both ongoing and proposed. One potential follow-up project related to Education and CVE is listed below. The below descriptions are paraphrased from project proposals submitted to Hedayah, so please respect the intellectual property rights of those conducting the research. If you would like more information, or if you have a partnership or funding opportunity available, please contact info@hedayah.ae.

1. Between the public and private space: developing an integrated narrative to prevent violent extremism

Research Question: To what extent are educational institutions truly embedded within a community? If they are embedded, what is their impact in terms of their ability to influence the community?

Description: Educational institutions such as schools and colleges are viewed as being embedded into a city and its communities. They are also regulated by government and may give the impression that they are a 'safe space'. This project will interrogate the community space between the regulated public space of the school, and the unregulated private space of the home. Working across three different research sites the project will seek to highlight examples of good practice and help institutions to build local compacts in their neighborhood with community organizations.