Review of Violence Prevention Programming to Identify Best Practices Undertaken by Allies Abroad

Science and Technology

THREAT OF VIOLENCE

The threat of violence stemming from terrorism and targeted attacks is one of the most pressing issues facing the United States (U.S.). While the threat of terrorism is not a new phenomenon, the U.S., along with many of our allies, faces a heightened threat environment that requires a coordinated response from policy, operations, and research partners. As communities continue to develop and implement prevention programming, it is vital to understand what is working, what's not, and what's promising. Although there is limited research identifying evidence-based practices, decades of programming have identified lessons in the approaches, activities, and factors that may affect the success of prevention programming.

To close this knowledge gap, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) evaluated the state of prevention programs, domestic and international, to research best practices in interventions, re-integrations, and counter-recidivism.

STRATEGIC UNDERPINNING OF REVIEW

This effort is in support of the DHS *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* (October 2020). S&T will provide recommendations on prevention programming and determine best practices undertaken by our allies abroad.

METHODOLOGY

S&T conducted a study consisting of a literature review and engaging 46 global terrorism prevention experts who helped identify promising practices based on their experience across government, academic, and non- governmental organizations. This study was narrowed to three domains: 1) community engagement programs, 2) deradicalization and disengagement programs (DD) in criminal legal systems, and 3) DD programs in the community.

The research design included an iterative three-round Delphi study for each of the program domains to identify areas of consensus among terrorism prevention experts. DHS S&T conducted semi-structured interviews with a subset of experts to extract concrete and actionable recommendations that terrorism prevention program sponsors and practitioners can use to improve programming and measurement moving forward.

FINDINGS

1. **Preparation before implementation is crucial for success.** It is critical for programs to identify: 1) desired goals, 2) proposed approach for achieving these goals, and 3) how they will measure and evaluate whether their approach is successful. Building rapport with stakeholders and training and evaluating all program staff in domain knowledge, program approach, and data collection procedures is also critical.
2. **Changes in context should be responded to and adaptations should be recorded.** It is essential for programs to: 1) tailor programs across communities and individuals on an ongoing basis to increase client/community motivation, 2) establish and maintain client expectations, and 3) standardize referral processes.
3. **Disengagement from violence is a long-term process and requires long-term investment.** Programs require a network of community-based service providers to deliver services, and these networks also need to be maintained. Long-term data collection, including online and offline behavior, is also important.
4. **Ongoing resources and training for practitioners.** Access to training and support for the individualization of programming approaches is vital to their performance and success.
5. **Dissensus (widespread dissent) among terrorism prevention experts.** Over-generalizing terrorism prevention findings to produce a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided.

IMPACT

This study contributed to the growing evidence base by developing promising practices across specific program domains, along with concrete and actionable steps that terrorism prevention practitioners can take to refine, adjust, and improve prevention programming and measurement.

PERFORMERS AND PARTNERS

- RTI International, Research Triangle Park, NC
- Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships
- Five Country Research and Development Network
- State, local, tribal, and territorial partners, and the public