

### PLIGHT OF FOREIGN FIGHTER FAMILIES

In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued the Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence Strategic Implementation Plan, which specifically identified the need to develop and disseminate best practices for reintegrating returning spouses and children of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF). As hundreds continue to travel from the United States (U.S.) to join the ranks of violent extremist organizations active internationally, many of these foreign fighters tend to bring spouses and children with them.

Spouses and children of foreign fighters may endure intense psychological and physical trauma requiring a sensitive and tailored approach to reintegration back into U.S. society once they return. Research and programming related to violent extremism increasingly acknowledges the important role of trauma. Trauma has been implicated as a risk factor contributing to violent radicalization, noted as a common experience within extremist organizations, and more recently, has been identified as a critical framework for informing intervention and rehabilitation programming.

With the growing practice of including trauma as part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing violent extremism, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) aims to conduct multidisciplinary research to promote evidence-based models on trauma-informed care to meaningfully contribute to research and practices in the field.

### PRACTITIONER FRAMEWORK OF BEST PRACTICES

This activity has two objectives:

1. Comprehensively evaluate the existing knowledge and practice of the reintegration of spouses and children associated with FTFs
2. Promote evidence-based models for the reintegration of vulnerable individuals

Research activities will seek to gather information on capable domestic and international protocols highlighting trauma-informed care models for the reintegration and rehabilitation of vulnerable individuals, with the goal of developing protocols and tools to fill gaps in either practice or research and translating research findings into actionable and operational documents for dissemination to state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners and practitioners. S&T research in this space will build upon the FTF guidance to develop new

measures for addressing domestic violent extremism (DVE), while growing research on public health approaches to school health and safety. These activities will aim to:

- Develop new outcome measures for male DVE by conducting qualitative research with practitioners and service providers to inform adaptation of existing measures. Grant recipients shall work with groups that provide treatment and support for rehabilitation and reintegration from DVE.
- Integrate trauma-informed best practices from diverse disciplines, such as school health and safety, into trauma-informed guidance for practitioners. Develop new guidance for promoting school safety through enhancing protective factors across the school ecology while examining barriers and opportunities to establish school-based threat assessment teams.

### IMPACT

To date, these two studies provide a framework of principles for guiding the policy and practice of FTF reintegration while providing resources for a trauma-informed guidance manual for reintegration and rehabilitation practitioners. These tools are being implemented domestically and internationally and piloted to test for their validity and reliability with programs aimed at helping individuals disengage from violent extremism.

### MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES

- **FY23 Q3:** Publish practitioner framework of best practices for reintegration programming
- **FY23 Q4:** Develop a set of curricula and training materials pertaining to the reintegration of foreign fighter spouses and children
- **FY23 Q4:** Expert panel event with National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE)
- **FY24:** Data collection with SLTT partners
- **FY25 Q2:** Integrate best practices into trauma-informed guidance for practitioners

### RESEARCH TEAM

- NCITE – University of Nebraska at Omaha
- University of Illinois, Chicago
- Five Research and Development Countering Violent Extremism Network
- SLTT, interagency, international partners