



Building Resilience to Violent Extremism Among Somali-Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul

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3300 Symons Hall • College Park, MD 20742 • 301.405.6600 • www.start.umd.edu

About This Report

The authors of this report are Stevan Weine, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Osman Ahmed of Minneapolis-St. Paul. Questions about this report should be directed to Stevan Weine at smweine@uic.edu.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study asked members of the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul to describe the challenges of living in a refugee community, how violent extremists try to exploit their condition for recruitment purposes, and what resources and strategies are needed to minimize their vulnerability. Using ethnographic methods, this study looked at the everyday lives of Somali-American adolescent boys and young men in the context of their families and communities. It found opportunities for entering violent extremism as well as capacities for diminishing those opportunities. Based on empirical data and informed by relevant theory, it identified themes and built a model, Diminishing Opportunities for Violent Extremism (DOVE), which can help to inform prevention strategies for building community resilience to violent extremism in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

No one risk factor explained involvement in violent extremism. Rather it was the interaction of multiple risk factors at the peer, family, community, global, state, and societal levels. These **risk factors** combined to create an opportunity structure for violent extremism with three levels of opportunity: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) contact with recruiters or associates. Involvement in violent extremism depended on the presence of all three, with decreasing proportions of adolescent boys and young men exposed to the latter two.

Efforts to increase **resilience** should involve strengthening protective resources or what are called opportunity-reducing capacities. Furthermore, family and youth, community, and government can help to strengthen protective resources at each of the three levels of opportunity. Priorities include diminishing: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) the potential for contacts with terrorist recruiters or associates.

Building community resilience to violent extremism should be approached through **community collaboration and capacity building**. Interventions may involve government, community, and families working collaboratively to improve each other's capacities. Shared goals could be to: 1) collaboratively strengthen families; 2) develop community support for families and youth; and 3) adopt new governmental strategies for community support and protection.

One way to determine priority areas for **prevention** might include identifying protective resources with the greatest potential for addressing multiple risk factors. Collaborations between government, community, and families and youth can then be built to enhance these capacities. Based on the current study, promising preventive interventions in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul might include: 1) building a web-based resource that includes information and training about risks and safeguards for use by youth, parents, and community service providers; 2) providing Somali youth and young adults with opportunities for service in their community and humanitarian and peace work, thus creating alternative ways for youth to channel their passion for Somalia; and 3) providing logistical support and training to elders and critical voices in the community and on the web.

Additional **research** is needed in communities under threat to show which acts of building resilience work with whom under what circumstances and why. One way to do this would be to collaborate with the community to develop, pilot, and evaluate a multilevel community resilience-based prevention strategy in Minneapolis-St. Paul based on the DOVE model. Another would be to use the DOVE model as a basis for assessing other communities targeted by violent extremists, in the United States and abroad, so as to refine the model and approaches that can reliably assess communities at risk and help to inform and prioritize prevention strategies.

INTRODUCTION

On March 6, 2011 Dennis McDonough, Deputy National Security Advisor to President Obama, spoke at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society in Sterling, Virginia and made the following statement: “We know, as the President said, that the best defense against terrorist ideologies is strong and resilient individuals and communities” (McDonough, 2011). McDonough was voicing what the Obama Administration had already articulated in its 2010 National Security Strategy, in which the word “resilience” appeared multiple times (The White House, 2010). Several European countries have also acknowledged the key role of civil society in countering violent extremism through, for example, ameliorating the underlying economic, social, and political drivers of violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment (Archik, 2011; Briggs, 2006).

Emphasizing resilience highlights the positive attributes of communities and persons that have often been highly stigmatized in public discourses and could help to open doors to community-government collaboration. But what exactly is resilience? Can building it really prevent violent extremism? And if so, how can we develop programs and policies to support communities under threat?

The Obama administration’s December 2011 *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* offered preliminary answers to these questions. For example, in a section focused on the importance of enhancing federal engagement with and support of local communities targeted by violent extremists, one sub-objective (1.2) highlighted the need to:

- 1) Foster community-led partnerships and preventative programming to build resilience against violent extremist radicalization by expanding community-based solutions;
- 2) Leverage existing models of community problem-solving and public safety;
- 3) Enhance Federal Government collaboration with local governments and law enforcement; and
- 4) Provide communities with information and training, access to resources and grants, and connections with the philanthropic and private sectors (White House, 2011, p. 10).

In order for these efforts to succeed, what are also needed are models and interventions that are well supported by theory and empirical evidence, and that are feasible, acceptable, and appropriate to communities and their members. To this end, the authors conducted ethnographic research in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul in order to: 1) characterize how social experiences impact involvement in violent extremism for diaspora youth and young adults; 2) understand how resilience might prevent violent extremism in communities under threat; and 3) inform the development of prevention strategies that incorporate both security and psychosocial dimensions and are based on theory, evidence, and community collaboration.

Between late 2007 and Autumn 2008, at least 17 Somali-American adolescent boys and young men living in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area secretly left their homes and flew to Somalia to join training camps run by the Al Shabaab organization (Elliot, 2009, Weine, et al., 2010). These activities produced the first U.S. citizen suicide bomber, Shirwa Ahmed, who on October 29, 2008 killed at least 30 people, including U.N. aid workers, in Hargeisa-Bosaso, Somalia (Elliot, 2009). These adolescent boys and young men left in two waves, with the second wave being a little younger and more academic than the first. This second wave included Burhan Hassan, a 17-year-old A-student and senior at Roosevelt High School, as well as other high school and university students, thus once again dispelling the assumption that only unsuccessful or mentally ill persons become involved in terrorism.

To understand how some persons get involved in violent extremism, expert analyses have developed theories of “pathways” with push and pull factors influencing individual trajectories (Atran, 2010; Horgan, 2008a, 2008b, & 2009; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; Sageman, 2008). Taking this perspective, factors that may have pushed these Somali-American adolescent boys and young men toward violent radicalization were widespread and include: exposure to war in their home country and forced migration prior to coming to the United States; poverty; broken families due to the refugee experience (especially the absence of fathers); or racial or religious discrimination. Factors that may have pulled them toward violent radicalization were more discrete in time and space and include: exposure to violent extremism on the Internet; the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and rise of Al Shabaab; culturally-inscribed coping mechanisms, such as the Somali warrior tradition; or affiliation with charismatic male recruiters who could speak to adolescent boys and young men about these issues with authority given the lack of fathers or powerful men in some of their lives. An emerging discourse on homegrown terrorism has gone beyond a “pathway” approach to consider multiple levels of risk factors, including those at the community and family levels, as part of a broader “ecological” view (Briggs, 2006; Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2011; Weine et al, 2009; Weine, 2011). This study addressed the above factors but from an ecological perspective.

In this research, there was no presumption that whatever knowledge was built regarding Somali-Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul would necessarily apply to other Somali-American communities, or to other Muslim diaspora communities targeted by violent extremists. Although Islam is one world religion, there are many different Muslim religious beliefs and practices, and there are distinct immigrant and refugee communities of Muslims in the U.S. (Ramadan, 2009). That being said, there could be useful continuities across communities and groups, but these are in need of thoughtful reflection utilizing cross-cultural and site-based approaches that could help to identify possible similarities and differences between communities.

BACKGROUND

Thirty years of war in Somalia has led to an estimated 1 million Somalis being forcibly displaced, large numbers of whom were resettled in European Union countries, Australia, Canada, and the United States (Kusow & Bjork, 2007; Horst, 2006; Farah, Muchie, & Gundel, 2007). Prior research conducted in these resettlement countries has focused on understanding and addressing the psychosocial needs of Somalis in the diaspora.

For example, research has shown that Somalis in the UK and Denmark struggled with issues of identity and belonging and that secondhand narratives of identity from family and community members played an important role in overcoming these issues (Valentine, 2009). Sporton described how problems with social exclusion and discrimination against Somalis in the UK could have contributed to some young Somalis participating in the July 11 London bombings (2006). In a study comparing Vietnamese, Iranian, and Somali youth and families in the United States, Somali mothers were the only group to state a preference for still living in their homeland (McBrien, 2011). Post-resettlement stressors, acculturative stress, and especially perceived discrimination have been found to be associated with greater PTSD (Ellis, 2008). Experiencing discrimination was common and associated with worse mental health for Somali boys in the United States, whereas participation in American culture was associated with better mental health (Ellis, 2010).

Several reports have focused on the Somali family, which is not only a nuclear but an extended family. The cultural saying “unity is power” underlies the strong sense of family loyalty in the Somali community. Parents tend to conceive of their parenting as being “guardians” of their children and emphasize providing education and training, more than emotional support (Heitritter, 1999). In resettlement countries, Somali families have experienced difficulties associated with the prevalence of single-parent families, isolation, feelings of disloyalty, missing family members, children’s disrespect for generational boundaries, and the over-intrusion of authorities or providers (Heitritter, 1999). At the same time, several protective factors have been identified including family attachment and stability; strong social skills; pro-social relationships; religion; academic achievement; access to community resources (BRCYS, 2009); and sense of belonging in school (Ellis et al, 2007).

When Somali adolescents seek help, they tend to first approach friends, family, teachers, and religious leaders (so called “gateway providers”), but they have a strong tendency to hide their problems because they do “not want to burden parents with their own worries” (Ellis, 2011, p. 804). Somali youth and families see many barriers to seeking care including their distrust of authority, the stigma associated with mental illness, and linguistic and cultural barriers. In Somalia, as in many other African countries, there is little precedent for parents being highly involved with teachers or school officials, which can set them up for challenges in U.S. resettlement (BRYCS, 2009).

There are believed to be 60,000 Somalis in Minnesota, the largest population outside of East Africa. Many live in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood in a low-income housing development known as the Towers. Most Minnesota Somalis arrived via secondary migration, choosing to move to Minnesota after living for a time in their initial refugee placement locale, which means that they are not eligible for federal dollars for housing, education, job development, and social services (Weine, et al., 2011; Weine, Levin, Hakizimana, Danweigh, 2011). In 2008 among Somali-Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul the unemployment rate was 17%, the median income \$14,367, and the poverty level 42% (Kasper et al., 2009; City of Minneapolis, 2009).

Somali-American youth in Minneapolis are often referred to as “Generation 1.5.” Most were born in a war-torn country, raised in refugee camps in Kenya, and then settled in impoverished and ghettoized U.S. communities, where they watched the war in Somalia on YouTube. Though they were too young to directly experience the war, most have lost family members and heard talk about the war from others.

The emerging discourse in academia on Somali-Americans has typically focused on their vulnerabilities (Weine, et al., 2010). Vulnerabilities cited include prior exposure to personal trauma, living in poverty, being raised in broken families and/or with single mothers, exposure to an excess of war images, and experiencing discrimination. A large epidemiological survey conducted in Minneapolis-St. Paul in 2004 found that 37% of Somali women and 25% of Somali men had been tortured and that torture survivors reported significantly more symptoms of PTSD and more physical and psychological problems (Jaranson et al., 2004). Another study in Minneapolis-St. Paul found that nearly half of Somali mothers were torture survivors; more than a quarter had no formal education; and 70% were single parents (Robertson et al. 2006).

Other research conducted in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul has described unsafe neighborhoods (Hirsi, 2009a) and problems with civic engagement (Dickson, 2011). The latter reported that, “the deepest problem among Somali communities in Minnesota might be ‘the hollowing out of their civic spirit’” (Dickinson, p. 114). Nderu (2005) described a pattern of “peripheral support” of Somali children by their parents, which included fathers not being as involved as mothers, and called for better efforts to bridge the cultural gap between families and schools. Ailitolppa-Nitamo (2004) reported on the challenges faced by parents who were illiterate, uneducated, and unemployed, which led them to be more isolated from mainstream society. Robillos (2001, p. 18) reported on the particular needs of male adolescents who, “especially expressed the desire for a place to socialize, play sports, or have fun after school.” Somali mothers expressed concern about their youth getting into conflict with others after school reporting that: “taunting and fights occur ‘when they come home. That’s when they tease them.’” (McBrien, 2010, p. 82) However, these mothers didn’t necessarily understand English well enough to know what the conflicts were about.

In addition to the family and community vulnerabilities or risk factors described above, studies have described the strengths of the Somali-American community. These include: a strong sense of community identity; the establishment of Somali Schools or *dugsis*; resistance to American racism; and support for children and their education (Kapteigns and Arman, 2008).

Finally, this research built upon prior and ongoing research with refugee and immigrant families from other African countries, which has indicated the importance of examining factors such as the transnational family, family solidarity, parent-child communication, parental monitoring and supervision, parental school involvement, and racial/ethnic socialization (Berns-McGown, 2008; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009; Weine, 2008; Weine and Siddiqui, 2009; Weine et al, 2008; Weine et al, 2009; Weine et al, 2011). These are areas in which parents often face great difficulties, and often lack support from the community at large and from community-based services. In that sense, the focus on families is necessarily connected with the focus on communities, because families need the support of communities in order to be strong and protective of their children (Ungar, 2008).

KEY CONCEPTS

This section describes the key concepts that informed this study on building community resilience to counter violent extremism. These include resilience; protective resources; opportunity structures; and preventive interventions. These concepts are briefly defined and elaborated with some relevant research.

Resilience

Resilience is a term borrowed from engineering, where it refers to, “the capacity of a material or system to return to equilibrium after a displacement” (Bodin & Wiman, 2004). Community psychologists use resilience to refer to a process shaped by resources – such as economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence – that may lead to adaptation after a disturbance or adversity (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, R.L., 2008).

Though resilience has been increasingly cited by terrorism experts and policymakers as an essential consideration when developing programs to counter violent extremism, research on resilience has not yet been systematically applied to this context. Over the past ten years there has been an explosion of interest in resilience in the clinical, community, and family sciences concerning a broad range of adversities. What does this emerging knowledge of resilience tell us that is potentially relevant to countering violent extremism?

- ***Resilience is neither entirely individual nor entirely social but an interactive combination*** (Luthar and Zigler, 1991). To understand resilience, it is necessary to look beyond individual characteristics, and also examine family, community, societal, state, and global characteristics.
- ***Youth can be resilient to some risks but not to others*** (Luthar and Zigler, 1991).
- ***When youth face risks from socio-economic and sociocultural adversities, their family is often the strongest buffer against the associated risks*** (Weine and Siddiqui, 2009).
- ***For diaspora communities, perceptions of the characteristics of resilience are shaped as much by the home country and refugee camp internment as by American values and institutions*** (Weine et al, 2011). In diaspora communities, higher resilience doesn’t necessarily mean greater alignment with American society and its values.

Protective Resources

Protective resources are social and psychosocial factors that can stop, delay, or diminish negative outcomes (Weine et al., 2011). Protective resources encompass not only resilience (e.g., bouncing back) but also resistance (e.g., preventing). Protective resources can reside in families, communities, and institutions. Thus, family protective resources are family capacities that promote positive youth psychosocial wellbeing. Community protective resources work either by building family protective resources or by working directly upon the youth to promote psychosocial wellbeing. A range of different kinds of actors in a community can provide protective resources, such as teachers, clergy, coaches, and elders.

Opportunity Structures

Studies of migration have described the key role of “opportunity structures” in relation to such outcomes as involvement in terrorism and sexual risk among migrants (Clarke & Newman, 2006; Hirsch et al.,

2010). Theories of opportunity structure hold that, “the probability of social relations depends on opportunities for contact.” (Blau, 1994, 29) This concept focuses not just on individual characteristics but on opportunities for behavior that are provided by a given social context. It also follows that an opportunity structure’s influence on youth and young adults can be countered by “opportunity-reducing capacities” which may also be thought of as a type of protective resource that contributes to resilience.

Preventive Interventions

Preventive interventions aim to enhance protective resources at population, community, and family levels so as to stop, lessen, or delay possible negative individual mental health and behavioral outcomes. Preventive interventions often use multilevel strategies that simultaneously address family, social, and structural issues (Schenschul et al, 2009; O’Connell et al, 2009).

These key concepts provided the basis for the research questions that were starting points for the ethnographic study.

METHOD

In the past several decades, scholars working in the psychosocial arena have become more interested in applying ethnographic methods.¹ Ethnographic methods include data collection through interviews where participants are encouraged to speak openly and freely and through participant observation. Data collection and analysis are guided by an iterative process, whereby initial data collection leads to refinement of questions and new theoretical interpretations, leading to further data collection and interpretation, and culminating in new empirically-based models or findings.

These methods in particular have helped the public health and psychosocial fields to better understand an array of important issues, such as local patterns of distress, the role of culture, local processes of change, the insider's perspective, and the culture of service organizations. For example, ethnographic methods have been applied in the realms of survivors' testimonies of political violence, refugee mental health, mental health reform in post-conflict countries, and HIV/AIDS prevention and labor migration (Weine, 2006; Weine, Agani, Cintron, 2003; Weine et al., 2008; Weine, Bahromov, Mirzoev, 2008; Weine 2009; Weine, under review).

The role of this ethnographic study was to generate a model for preventing violent extremism through building community resilience that was informed by local voices and an understanding of the context in Minneapolis-St. Paul in order to support the development of policy and programs.

Sample and Recruitment

We interviewed 57 persons who lived or worked in Minneapolis-St. Paul and who were either: 1) Somali-American young adult males (ages 16 to 30) (n=18); 2) Somali-American parents or adult family members (n=19); or 3) service providers who work with the Somali community (n=20). In this report, the term "Somali-American" is not being used only to refer to U.S. citizens. Potential subjects were initially identified by members of our research team, who were either members of or familiar with the Somali-American community and relevant groups and organizations. Potential subjects were chosen both because the researchers thought that they may have valuable perspectives on the research questions and to try to represent some diversity of experience within the Somali-American community. Before participating in any research activities, participants were asked to give informed consent in accordance with the research procedures approved by the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board.

Interviews

The principal investigator provided training in ethnographic interviewing to the research team, which included relevant readings and hands-on experience to practice skills and techniques. Training focused on: 1) approaches to developing, sustaining, and ending relations with subjects; 2) procedures for the protection of human subjects; 3) ways of dealing with emergencies and ethical problems, including threats to the safety of researchers; 4) practice in conducting minimally structured interviews (e.g., asking open-ended questions, learning how and when to probe, learning to listen); 5) an introduction to Atlas/ti analysis software; and 6) intensive introductions to the topics of violent extremism, refugee youth and families, language, and culture. During data collection, ongoing supervision was provided through telephone and face-to-face meetings.

¹ The psychosocial arena encompasses mental health, health and social service providers and organizations who are engaged in understanding and helping individuals, families, and communities with problems of a psychological dimension that occur in the context of complex social situations. This includes such issues as mental and physical illness, violence, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and migration-related problems.

Data collection consisted of one-time minimally structured interviews lasting between one and two hours. The interviewers were three Somali-Americans who lived and worked in the Somali community in Minneapolis-St. Paul and two American psychiatrists. During these interviews, participants were encouraged to talk openly about topics and issues that fit within the overall concerns of the research. At the beginning of the interviews the researchers stated the overall project aims. Participants were then asked to speak about whatever they wished in the order that they wished. Recognizing that different people can speak to different issues, depending on their age and situation, the interviewers left it up to the participants to determine how much detail they wanted to go into, and generally responded with prompts to encourage them to say more (as culturally Somalis tend not to be very forthcoming in interviews). The interviewers had a list of topics for the person to speak to, and if they did not speak to these topics, they were asked about them. These topics were: 1) family and community protective processes with respect to violent extremism; 2) community knowledge and attitudes towards violent extremism; 3) the individual, family, and community processes underlying risks of violent extremism; 4) the potential role of lack of social integration in violent extremism; and 5) community knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors towards law enforcement. The majority of interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed into English. In those cases in which the person did not permit recording, detailed field notes were taken by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

This study utilized a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The grounded theory approach is designed for the development of theory within the context of intensive field research with qualitative data. Specifically, this research used an iterative analysis strategy that coded patterns in qualitative data to describe categories, typologies, and processes, leading to the creation of models. The researchers utilized Atlas/ti computer software, which is designed for managing large amounts of qualitative data and applying grounded theory methods (Muh, 2004). Transcripts of the interviews, translated into English, were entered into Atlas/ti.

The researchers also decided to enter into the Atlas/ti database open source materials from the media or government concerning Somali-Americans in Minneapolis. These included information on Somali-Americans, violent radicalization, and violent extremism, as well as direct quotations from family and community members.²

The analysis began with a reading of the entire dataset of interview transcripts by the research team members. The initial reading yielded a set of categories that corresponded with the initial conceptual framework. Example categories were individual risk factors for violent extremism, family risk factors for violent extremism, community risk factors for violent extremism, family protective resources against violent extremism, community protective resources against violent extremism, and law enforcement and cultural issues. The complete set of categories then contributed to developing a coding scheme with a total of 146 codes. The readers also kept track of other demographic, contextual, and experiential items that were important in understanding Somali-Americans, which in addition to being coded were recorded through writing memos. Some examples included the impact of poverty, community violence, involvement with Internet, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and gender roles in Somali families. These too informed the coding.

² These quotations were labeled and categorized differently in the database so that we could determine whether a particular quotation came from an interviewee or an alternate source.

The researchers first established intercoder reliability with a selected subset of the code list by calculating percent agreement between reviewers, resolving differences by making consensus changes in the coding approach, and rechecking percent agreement until all coders achieved at least 80% agreement. Next all transcripts were coded by three coders using the initial coding scheme agreed upon by the entire research team. The coders met regularly to discuss emerging issues in the coding approach and to refine coding strategies by consensus. Then, through pattern coding and creating memos, the analysis formed typologies (e.g., of different types of family protective resources) and delineated processes that became components of the models developed in this study. The findings were reviewed by the entire team to enable checking for contrary evidence and to lay the groundwork for reporting.

RESULTS

Based on empirical data and informed by theory, this study built a model, Diminishing Opportunities for Violent Extremism (DOVE), which can help to inform strategies for building community resilience to violent extremism in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Overall the research demonstrated that multiple risk factors combined to create an opportunity structure for violent extremism, and that building resilience involves strengthening protective resources or opportunity-reducing capacities.

The DOVE model consists of three levels of opportunity related to: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) contact with recruiters or associates. It indicates the need for strengthening opportunity-reducing capacities at each of the three levels through collaboration and capacity building involving family and youth, community, and government.

In the following sections each of the themes that comprise the DOVE model are identified, briefly described, and illustrated with a selected quotation from the ethnographic study. The selected quotations come from a particular youth, parent, or community service provider, but each theme was supported by data from multiple participants. First, this report shares findings related to risk factors and then protective resources that support resilience to violent extremism.

RISK FACTORS

The findings indicated that no one risk factor explained involvement in violent extremism. Rather, it was the interaction of multiple risk factors at multiple levels that accounted for involvement in violent extremism. Figure 1 and Table 1 depict that risk factors combined to create an opportunity structure for violent extremism with three levels of opportunity: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) contact with recruiters or associates.

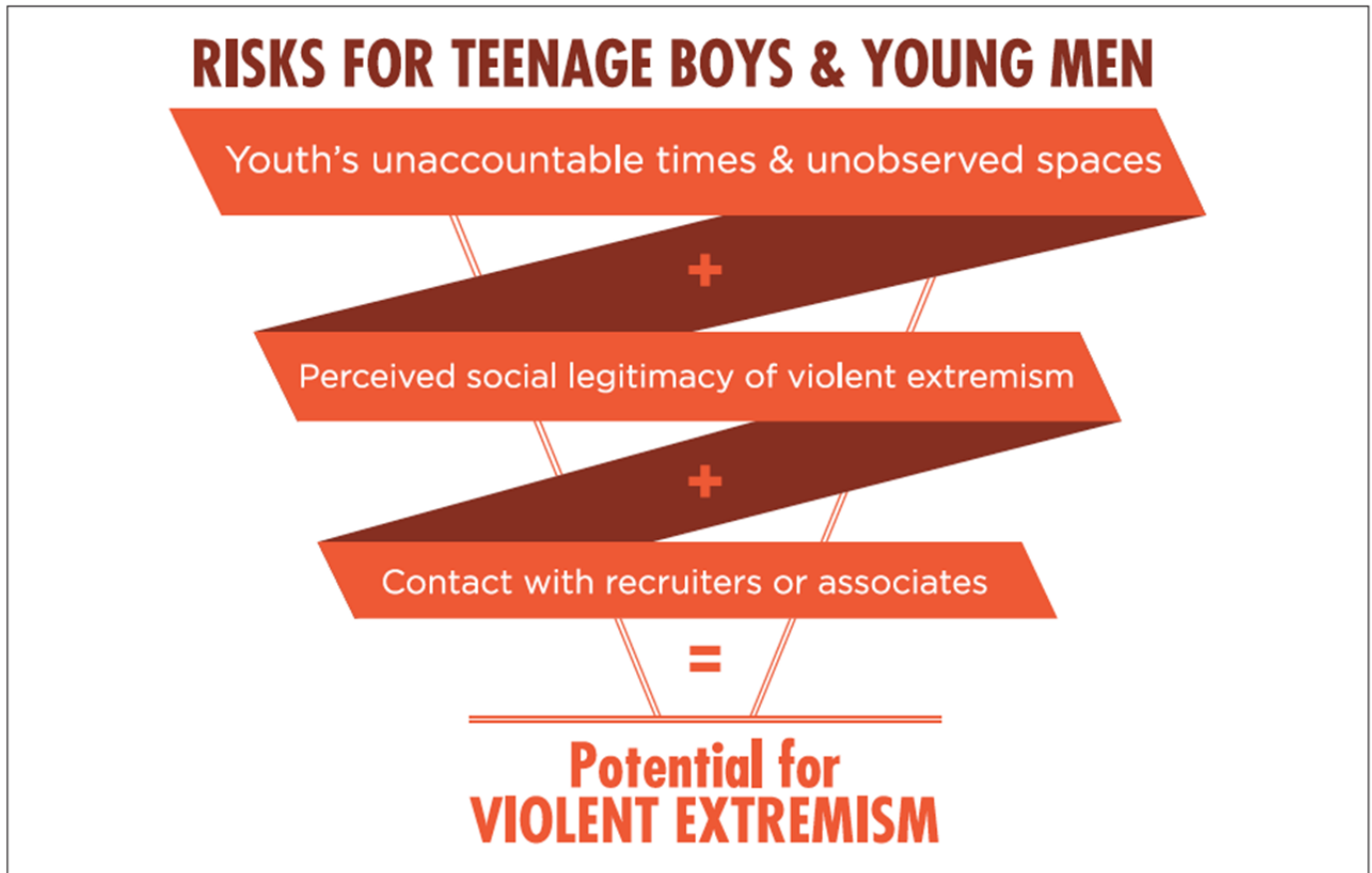


Figure 1

Youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces refer to the times when adolescent boys are not answerable to parents or other adults and are in spaces where they are out of their sight. The perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism refers to perceptions of the appropriateness and necessity of violent extremist ideology and actions. Contact with recruiters or associates refers to adolescent boys and young men interacting directly with either recruiters or companions who facilitate their increased involvement in violent extremism.

Figure 1 illustrates that potential involvement in violent extremism depended on the presence of all three opportunities. Decreasing proportions of adolescent boys and young men were exposed to the middle and lower opportunities. Table 1 below further depicts the risk factors related to opportunities for entry into violent extremism that were provided by the social context and its norms.

RISK FACTORS COMBINED TO CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM

LEVELS	RISK FACTORS	OPPORTUNITIES
Global, State & Societal Community Family and Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary migration • Being an underserved U.S. refugee community • Lack of support for youth • Unsafe neighborhoods • Social exclusion • Unmonitored spaces in community forums • Family separation or loss • Weak parental support • Absolute trust in everyone who attends mosque • Mistrust of law enforcement • Overemphasis on government power • LACK OF AWARENESS OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT • Lack of accurate info on violent radicalization and recruitment • Little parental involvement in education • Lack of opportunities • Lack of warning signs 	Youth's Unaccountable Times & Unobserved Spaces
Global, State & Societal Community Family and Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing Somalia as a failed state • Violent extremism on the Internet • PERCEPTION OF A NEW THREAT TO SOMALIA • Objections to U.S. government foreign policy • COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR AL SHABAAB • Hearing bad news about Somalia • Social exclusion • Being a divided community • Remittance sending • Having a nomadic heritage • Interaction with migration brokers • Little family talk about war • Identity issues among members of Generation 1.5 • Being passionate about Somalia • Being uninformed about Islam • Being uninformed about Somalia • Social identity challenges • Indirect and direct traumas 	Perceived Social Legitimacy Of Violent Extremism
Global, State & Societal Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrorist organization's recruitment • Violent extremism on the Internet • Sources of radical ideology 	Presence Of Recruiters Or Associates

CAPS = Transient risk

Table 1

Many of the risk factors were regarded as persistent, whereas a subset of them were regarded as transient (and capitalized in Table 1). Transient risk factors were those that became more significant following the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia that began in 2006. These transient risk factors included: 1) Perception of a Threat to Somalia; 2) Terrorist Organizations' Recruitment; 3) Community Support for Al Shabaab; 4) Lack of Awareness of Violent Radicalization and Recruitment. These transient risk factors diminished in response both to Al Shabaab losing support in the Somali diaspora (#1, #2, #3) and to U.S. law enforcement actions (#3, #4). However, at the time of writing, community members still regarded Al Shabaab as present in their community, though more dormant.

The following sections identify and describe each of the risk factors associated with the three levels of opportunity and give one illustrative quotation from a youth, parent, or community service provider for each risk factor.

LEVEL 1: YOUTH'S UNACCOUNTABLE TIMES AND UNOBSERVED SPACES

Global, State, and Societal Risk Factors

Secondary Migration. Most Somali-Americans in Minnesota arrived via secondary migration, choosing to move there after living for a time in their initial U.S. resettlement site, which in effect meant that they were not eligible for federal dollars for housing, education, job development, and social services. A parent stated, "I lived in Michigan for about a year, a year and a half. For economic reasons we couldn't really live out there because we were living off of food stamps. And then we moved to Minnesota and we lived there ever since." Secondary migration resulted in a lack of adequate services for Somali-Americans.

Being an Underserved U.S. Refugee Community. Somali-Americans reported that their community did not get enough services and investment from the U.S. Government. A community service provider said, "When they come here, all the parents are taught about is how the government works and how they can get SSI [Supplemental Security Income] and money, but really I don't see people taking initiative to actually build programs that help parents understand teenagers and how their lives are different because then the parents won't have to expect us to do everything the way we did back home."

Community Risk Factors

Lack of Support for Youth. Somali-Americans reported that government, organizations, and groups did not provide adequate fiscal or social resources or social spaces for youth. A community service provider said, "You get out of school at 3:00 and you have almost 4 or 5 hours of nothing to do. The community center we have can only serve maybe 200 people during the day. So what happens to the rest of the youth that are out here? They have nothing to do. They're just standing around."

Unsafe Neighborhoods. Somali-Americans spoke of the devastating impact of gang- and drug-related violence in their neighborhoods. A community service provider said, "The gangs have shown that they will kill without any kind of rhyme or reason. And they will kill especially if they think you're a snitch."

Social Exclusion. Somali-Americans reported feeling disadvantaged due to their facing multiple social adversities related to extreme poverty, overcrowded housing, and being refugees, ethnic minorities, and Muslim. A youth said, "I was wearing Hijab, and they thought maybe I was bald-headed or that I had lice. I told them that I wore Hijab for my religion for a reason, and I remember this one girl she took my Hijab to see if I had hair, and it turns out that I have more hair than her. So to my understanding people discriminate toward religion and discriminate against the color of my skin. Since 9/11 more people are

starting to be aware of Muslims and Islam, and they may think we are terrorists even though we are not.”

Unmonitored Spaces in Community Forums. Somali-Americans described Minneapolis-St. Paul as the largest Somali community in the U.S. with a large mosque and community centers where activities could be conducted out of the light, knowingly or unknowingly. A parent said, “But as far as I know, when I used to attend the mosque, I don’t think somebody can pick up the microphone and say hey, do this, do that. Approaching the kid by himself, talking to him in the corner somewhere, that’s something I could see happening, but I don’t think it was done in public.”

Family and Youth Risk Factors

Family Separation or Loss. Somali-Americans reported many families with missing members, including many families led by single mothers, which made for difficulties raising adolescent boys and young men. A parent said, “The reason I think most of them went back [to Somalia] is they are missing a father figure at home. Most were raised by single mothers, and the children didn’t know right from wrong.” In single parent families, when the parent has to work, there is even less opportunity for parenting.

Weak Parental Support. Somali-Americans reported that traditionally parents were emotionally distant from their children. A community service provider said, “This is America, it’s not the same as just milking a goat. There’s a lot more. There’s peer pressure, there’s trying to fit in to a group at school, trying to impress.... And parents don’t understand.” Parenting was further compromised by parental emotional difficulties due to trauma, loss, and resettlement difficulties.

Absolute Trust in Everyone Who Attends Mosque. Somali-American parents regarded their mosques as the most trustworthy institutions around for helping and protecting their children. A parent said, “Same culture, same language, same religion. Our religion doesn’t allow you to deceive. The place I trusted was the mosque.” Another parent said, “When we fled from our country, the only hope was that we have the mosque to trust. That is the only way we can keep our religion, our community and our culture.” This trust created an opportunity for recruiters to act with fewer constraints than they may have faced in other settings.

Mistrust of Law Enforcement. Somali-Americans shared memories of mistrustful, dangerous, and corrupt law enforcement from Somalia and as a consequence reported that they tended to be unfamiliar with and fearful and mistrusting of law enforcement in the United States. A parent said, “We cannot work with the police. You cannot trust them because you don’t know who is bad and who is good....You don’t talk to them and tell them anything. So that is it – there’s no relationship there.” Some respondents expressed more mistrust towards federal agents than towards local law enforcement.

Overemphasis on Government Power. Somali-Americans expressed that the government should be able to solve their social problems and that families had little to no capacity to do so. A parent said, “The government is powerful and knows more than we do in the Somali community, so how can the government help us, how can the government stop this? We need the government to step in and stop this.” Another said, “The government has all eyes. Parents only have two.”

Lack of Awareness of Violent Radicalization and Recruitment. Somali-American parents had been unaware of the risks for youth involvement in violent extremism and had been more aware of the risks for crime, drugs, and gangs. A parent said, “I don’t think [the parents] knew. If they knew they would have stopped, talked with their children and do whatever is necessary to prevent that. It was something that was done in the dark, under the table.”

Lack of Accurate Information on Violent Radicalization and Recruitment. Somali-Americans reported that they mostly got their news by word of mouth, from local Somali websites, or from Somali news agencies. A parent said, “We have an oral tradition.” Several beliefs were present in the community regarding what caused radicalization and recruitment. Community members believed that radicalization and recruitment could be explained by some clearly identifiable youth or family vulnerability. They commonly cited absent fathers and single mothers, uneducated parents, youth criminality, low intelligence, or a crisis related to becoming an adult man. They believed that these factors rendered the youth vulnerable to “brainwashing.”

Little Parental Involvement in Education. Talking with teachers was difficult for many Somali-American parents, and they cited multiple reasons including differing cultural meanings, little prior experience doing so, language barriers, work barriers, and feeling intimidated. A youth said, “They don’t know the schools, they don’t know the system set for us because there’s a system set for us as teenagers, because they keep thinking we’re always going to do something crazy. So they always have something built for us. So the parents don’t know that.”

Lack of Opportunities. Somali-Americans reported that there were not enough quality educational and career opportunities available to them, which they in part attributed to discrimination. A youth said, “You realize that everyone else in the class has been attending school since the kindergarten, but you have no idea what’s going on in the class, the first thing you will feel is isolated. You don’t belong in that particular environment, and everyone else is right for the class, but you are not, and pretty soon you start looking for another environment, and the other environment outside the classroom is the other kids who have also realized that they don’t belong there, and now they are standing on the street, so they end up being street kids.”

Lack of Warning Signs. Somali-Americans and others reported no clear overt ways to identify whether someone has been radicalized to violence or recruited or is planning to mobilize. A youth, referring to someone who joined Al Shabaab, said, “Before he was regular guy, may Allah bless him, but lately he was very religious guy.” As this is not unlike ordinary religious conversions commonly seen in Somali young adult men, there was no overt indication of a connection to Al Shabaab.

LEVEL 2: PERCEIVED SOCIAL LEGITMACY OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Global, State, and Societal Risk Factors

Viewing Somalia as a Failed State. Somali-Americans reported that Somalia had no functioning central government and that the international community had no political or military solutions, leading some to feel frustrated, helpless, and open to violent extremism. A youth said, “Sometimes I say I hate Somalia, but I really don’t, that’s where I’m from. But sometimes I say it because I see a lot of people getting killed, nothing gets resolved.”

Violent Extremism on the Internet. Somali-Americans reported that there was a proliferation of extremist teachings on the internet easily accessible to youth. A parent said, “The children are not safe at home because ... they go to You Tube and they [violent extremists] have their own websites. Most of these children were exposed by this guy from Yemen [Anwar al-Awlaki].”

Perception of a New Threat to Somalia. For Somali-Americans, the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006-9 was a shot that rang out throughout the Somali Diaspora along with an urgent call for action. A

youth said, “That’s all we kept hearing - the Ethiopians are coming in with HIV and AIDS, they’re raping little girls, they’re mercilessly killing men and women.”

Objections to U.S. Government Foreign Policy. Somali-Americans reported strong disagreement with the U.S. sanctioning of the Ethiopian and Kenyan government invasions of Somalia. A community service provider said, “The government could have explained its foreign policy activities. The U.S. involvement with Ethiopia was counterproductive.”

Community Risk Factors

Community Support for Al Shabaab. Somali-Americans reported that Al Shabaab enjoyed fairly widespread community support for several years, especially after the 2006 Ethiopian invasion. A community service provider said, “Before they were good and gained the trust of everyone, because they were defenders of the freedom, but now I don’t think people see that way for them, everybody sees them blood-thirsty monsters.”

Hearing Bad News about Somalia. Somali-Americans expressed concerns that the mainstream U.S. media painted a negative picture of Somalis and Muslims in their reporting on the Minneapolis story of the mobilized youth, leading some youth to feel misunderstood and open to explanations that portrayed the U.S. government or American society as the enemy. A youth said, “You are always hearing bad things about Somalia, Somalis. So that affects people.”

Being a Divided Community. Somali-Americans described their community as divided by clans and subclans, ideology, religious practice, and political affiliation. A community service provider said, “Somali community organizations have no tangible leader, and there is division among Somali Community organizations because tribes divide them.” Part of the appeal of Al Shabaab may have been its transcendence of clan and sub-clan affiliations.

Remittance Sending. Somali-Americans regularly send money to family members in Somalia and in other countries of refuge, and this keeps them tied in with life in Somalia. A parent said, “So I help them, send some money, help them to come here, so that we can get families, so my children can have some older kind of brothers that he can play with and stuff like that.” For youth and parents, this can normalize the extremist’s call to send money to Somalia.

Having a Nomadic Heritage. Somali-Americans, like all Somalis, are a highly mobile population, even in resettlement. A parent said, “Then they came here, some of them had never been in a city, and they came from small villages and had lived as nomads. They never have seen a light, and they get here and they just wanted to save their children and their culture.” For youth and parents, this can normalize the extremist’s call to move back to Somalia.

Interaction with Migration Brokers. When Somalis sought to move from refugee camps to the United States, they often sought the services of Somalis to help them arrange the move, and when in the United States, to provide assistance with adjustment. One parent said, “So they helped us settle here, and we were just twenty people at the time in 1992. So we used to help people come here and translate [for] them and look for them house, before one organization was ever set up here.” For youth and parents, this can normalize the recruiter’s efforts to assist them in moving back to Somalia.

Social Exclusion. See above.

Family and Youth Risk Factors

Little Family Talk about War. Somali-American parents did not like to talk about the war in Somalia with their children because they wanted them to start a new and better life. A parent said, “It’s unlikely a parent would talk even about the war with their kids. Usually adults would come to a home and visit with the parents, and they [the children] would hear them talking or even the father and mother talking about it [at home]. But they could hear that a lot. But it’s not directed at them.” Despite this silence in families, youth were aware of the war and when recruiters or associates talked with them about violent extremism, they did not generally discuss this with family members.

Identity Issues among Members of Generation 1.5. Those Somali-American youth born in Somalia or in a country of refuge who then came to the United States in childhood or adolescence reported more difficulties adjusting, feeling not quite American and not quite Somali. A parent said, “They want to belong, but who do they belong to?” These struggles over identity could be exploited by recruiters in their efforts to encourage youth to see their parents as non-Muslim and direct their filial loyalty towards Al Shabaab.

Being Passionate about Somalia. Somali-American youth reported caring deeply about Somalia and wanting to help make it better in their lifetimes. A youth said, “We were the generation that was going to help Somalia become a better country.” This attitude predisposed some youth to solutions proposed by violent extremists to restore Somalia.

Being Uninformed about Islam. Somali-Americans reported that youth did not know enough about Islam to question or resist extremist views and some parents did not know enough to talk to their children about these issues. A community service provider said, “Life is written in the book...how you should value things, respect others, and appreciate others. If people followed it, then I believe there wouldn’t be a big problem as there is now.”

Being Uninformed about Somalia. Somali-Americans reported youth knowing very little about Somalia or living conditions during wartime. A parent said, “Those boys went there to fight for their country, and they were not told the real story.”

Social Identity Challenges. Somali-American youth reported having difficulties finding a local group or social niche where they could fit in and feel good about themselves. A parent said, “There’s peer pressure, there’s trying to fit into a group at school, trying to impress...teenagers want everyone to like them and if they don’t, then I have a problem. And parents don’t understand.” Not fitting in to a social group could contribute to youth’s attraction towards a recruiter or a group of associates.

Indirect and Direct Traumas. Somali-Americans reported youth having been indirectly exposed to traumatic events that their family and community experienced during the civil war and also to community violence in the United States. A youth said, “I believe it indirectly affects me and my family, even though not directly but indirectly. Because this still happens where I live, I see it.” Trauma’s emotional and cognitive consequences could possibly contribute to youth’s attraction towards the justifying narratives of violent extremism.

LEVEL 3: PRESENCE OF RECRUITERS OR ASSOCIATES

Global, State, and Societal Risk Factors

Terrorist Organization's Recruitment. Somali-Americans reported that Al Shabaab made deliberate efforts to build and utilize networks in the diaspora using social media and former fighters to recruit youth from the diaspora. A youth said, "They'll say, 'Hey, do you love your country? Do you want to do something for your people, they're dying.'"

Violent Extremism on the Internet. See above.

Community Risk Factors

Sources of Radical Ideology. Somali-Americans reported that in the community there were some teachers who exposed youth to Salafi ideology, which was different from the Sufi Islam traditionally practiced in Somalia, and often perceived as a foreign ideology. "The mosque is not problem. It's people using the mosque for twisted ideology but we ended up serving crazy ideology." Some community members regarded this as an underlying preparation for violent extremism, because Al Shabaab self-identifies as Salafi, even if they believed that mosques and Imams were not directly involved in terrorist recruitment.

PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

Efforts to increase resilience should focus on strengthening protective resources or opportunity-reducing capacities. Furthermore, family and youth, community, and government can help to strengthen opportunity-reducing capacities at each level of opportunity. This is shown in Figure 2 and Table 2. Based on the risk factors described above, priorities should include diminishing: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) the potential for contact with terrorist recruiters or associates.

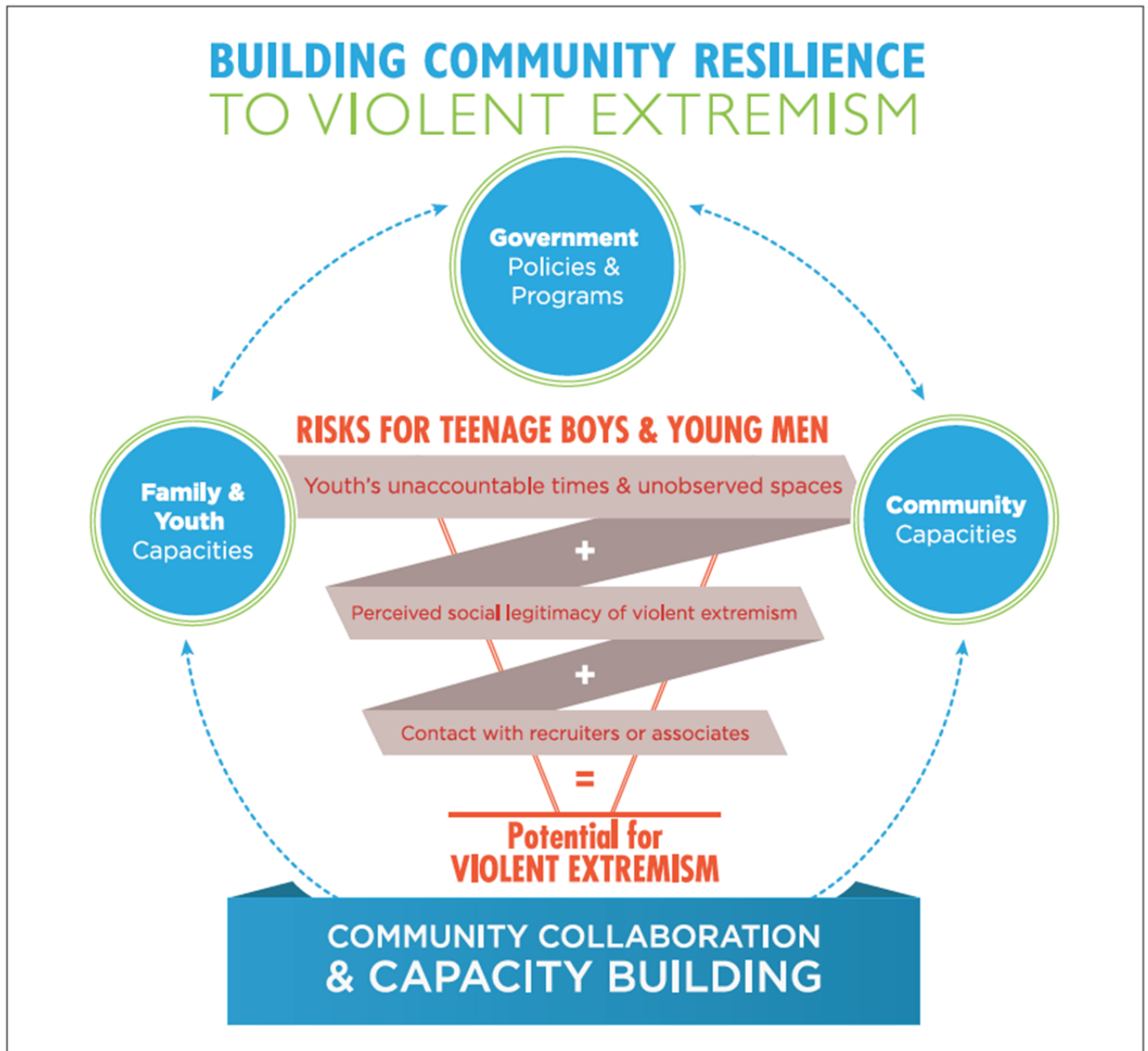


Figure 2

Figure 2 illustrates that building community resilience to violent extremism should be approached through community collaboration and capacity building. Shared goals could be to: 1) collaboratively strengthen families; 2) develop community support for families and youth; 3) adopt new governmental strategies for community support and protection.

RESILIENCE MEANS STRENGTHENING PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

SECTOR	AIMS	PROTECTIVE RESOURCES
Family and Youth	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of risks and safeguards • Parental monitoring and supervision • Family confidants • Family social support • Family involvement in education • Access to services and helpers • Parental and youth help-seeking • Parental involvement in mosques & religious education
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on youth's future in the U.S. • Parental support for youth socialization • Rejecting tribalism and war • Parental talk with youth regarding threats • Youth civic engagement • Youth political dialogue
	Diminish Recruiters and Associates Presenting Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents informing law enforcement • Parental messaging in community re youth protection
Community	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted accurate information sources • Increased activities in supervised community spaces • Mentoring of youth • Increased civilian liaisons to law enforcement • Interactions with community police • Social entrepreneurship • Interfaith dialogue • Social support networks
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islamic education & Imam network • Community support for youth socialization • Understanding of Islam as a peaceful religion • Youth civic engagement • Youth political dialogue • Youth opportunities for peace activism • Messaging to challenge legitimacy of violent extremism
	Diminish the Potential for Contacts with Recruiters and Associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with law enforcement • Monitoring by community members • Messaging to warn off recruiters • Bloggers and websites against violent extremism • Critical voices in the community
Government (in part through supporting community-based NGOs)	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted accurate information sources • Community policing • Support for parenting and parent education • Support for after-school programs and mentoring • Support for youth and family social services
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering critical voices • Support for youth community services • Support for youth leadership training • Support for parenting and parent education
	Diminish Recruiters and Associates Presenting Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community policing • Training for community leaders and providers • Support for community messaging • Support for bloggers and websites

Table 2

This table and the following section depict the protective resources that can reduce the opportunities for entry into violent extremism that were provided by the social context and its norms. The table was organized by sector so as to emphasize the differing protective resources associated with family and youth, community, and government. Some protective resources already existed within the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St Paul. One family protective resource, ***awareness of risks and safeguards for youth***, appears to have been enhanced due to increased parenting activities in reaction to news of the missing youth, and also due to law enforcement activities. One, community protective resource, ***cooperation with law enforcement***, appears to have been enhanced due to new community outreach programs developed by the FBI, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Minnesota, and the Department of Homeland Security. Other capacities could be enhanced or developed through new initiatives, as indicated below.

The following sections identify and describe each of the protective resources associated with the same three sectors depicted in Table 2 and for each resource give one illustrative quotation from a youth, parent, or community service provider.

FAMILY AND YOUTH PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces

Awareness of Risks and Safeguards. Some Somali-American parents reported now having information about the potential risks of violent radicalization and recruitment and the proper steps for handling these concerns. A parent told their children, "If you see somebody outside trying to tell you something whether the person be Somali, black, white, other than in school, don't listen to them and come to me and tell me what they are telling you. Don't just believe what people are telling you unless you are in school and it's your teachers teaching you something."

Parental Monitoring and Supervision. Some Somali-American parents reported now more actively and consistently looking after their teenage children. A parent said, "I show them we are friends. I try to have direct contacts all the time. I don't act that only I am a parent but also that I am their friend. At home, at school, and outside. Let me give you an example. When my kids want to hang around sports activities, I try to offer a time to go with them and know their friends, what they like, and stay most of the time, unless they are in class "

Family Confidants. Some Somali-Americans reported that children went to their parents or siblings to talk about hard-to-discuss issues or to help solve difficult problems. A parent said, "Weekends we take time together. Now they are with me in the mosque. They take me for weekend classes. I pick them up and drive them to mosque, and then I take them back to home. In the evening I either come back here or to some other program. So I try to stay with them. To have a conversation. So in that way they tell me everything."

Family Social Support. Some Somali parents reported that they regularly tried to provide their children with comfort and assistance. A youth said, "My aunt is also my mentor, and she helps me out. She gets me tutors. She bought me a laptop to write essays because I'm applying to colleges. She helps me write the essays and the best way to write...And also my mother - my number one role model and mentor as you might say. She's been there throughout everything."

Family Involvement in Education. Some Somali parents reported valuing education and talking with their children about the importance of school. A parent said, “You have to guide kids. You have to guide them to school. If they graduate, they will have a different perspective on life. He will think differently. He will know what is good and what is bad.”

Access to Services and Helpers. Some Somali-American parents reported being able to get support from helpers including teachers, health or mental health care providers, social service providers, and law enforcement. A youth said, “My teacher, she was really good. One time my friend translated from her to me, and I told her I wanted to learn English so bad so that I wouldn't need any translator, and she said she'd stay after school and she'd teach me English words every day. And I said okay, and I stayed with her every day after school, and I learned some basic English. She gave me three or four vocabularies every day, and that really helped me to learn English, and it was really good.”

Parental and Youth Help-Seeking. Some Somali-American parents and youth said that if they had a problem, they were able to reach out for help to community elders, law enforcement, social service providers, or health care workers. A youth said, “Some elders have encouraged me to pursue my graduate education, get my master's degree. I am taking my GRE now. Always I'm looking for advice, I want to be successful, so I don't fail. I always like advice.”

Parental Involvement in Mosques and Religious Education. Some Somali-American parents were now more actively involved in knowing what their children were doing in the mosques and in religious school. A parent said, “I think if people, especially parents, were a lot closer together and knew who their kids' teachers were both in public school and religious school that it would be a whole different ball game. If you don't know where your kid goes after school or you just know your kid goes to the mosque, that is not enough information. People need to go into more detail into their kids lives more now than ever.”

Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism

Focus on Youth's Future in the U.S. Somali-American parents and community providers emphasized with youth that their purpose for being in the United States is to seek education, opportunities, a career, and a new life. A youth said, “Now is the time to think about their future and not going back to wars and stuff like that. If you have a chance to build up your life, you have to take advantage of that. Not go back to Somalia.”

Parental Support for Youth Socialization. Some Somali-American parents talked with their children about race and religion so as to make them proud and able to deal with daily challenges to their identity. A community service provider said, “In order to differentiate good things and bad things you have to have an idea for both sides. Good Muslims and bad Muslims. If they don't know who they are, the ideology of extremism and the ideology their father grew up, then they will never understand. If I don't explain that to them, then somebody else will give a different speech.”

Rejecting Tribalism and War. Some Somali youth reported redefining a new modern Somali identity that was opposed to tribalism, violence, and war. A youth said, “Somalis need to discard tribalism in order to move forward.”

Parental Talk with Youth Regarding Threats. Some Somali-American parents actively spoke with their youth regarding the threat of violent extremism in their community. A parent said to their teenage child after hearing about a possible recruitment contact, “This is a load of crap. These people are fighting for

tribal reasons, and they're not fighting for the national security of Somalia, and you shouldn't bother yourself with it. Focus on school."

Youth Civic Engagement. Some Somali-American youth have become active in addressing issues of public concern, such as child protection, youth development, crime prevention, and electoral politics. A youth said, "They actually train us to become leaders. And they give us lessons. And we go from one community to others, and we have campaigns against violence, and so the whole deal is poverty and justice, we have to do all these things to go against poverty."

Youth Political Dialogue. Some Somali-American youth have found ways to join in political dialogues concerning Somalia, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and/or Muslims. A youth said, "I got involved in high school. A couple of my friends and I created the Student Association on campus. We got a prayer room for us. Different awareness, we collected money every week. Awareness about Islam on campus, with that it teaches us to see the leadership qualities you have and with that, there's a lot of resources involved."

Diminish the Potential for Contacts with Recruiters and Associates

Parents Informing Law Enforcement. Some Somali-American parents have become more active in terms of telling law enforcement if they have concerns about their youth or their friends. A parent said, "You know, you see papers down there that say, 'If you're interested in this meeting, come there,' and every mom who heard there was a shooting going on, she would go there. They would talk to the police officers face-to-face. They talk about how they can help the community and how to help change things."

Parental Messaging in Community Regarding Youth Protection. Somali-American parents reported that they could play a larger role in talking to community service providers such as Imams, teachers, and coaches about their concerns regarding youth protection. One community service provider said, "We discuss that issue whenever we meet. Couple years ago we never discussed that. Whenever we gather wherever we gather we remember raising kids, telling good stories, having good relation with kids, and avoiding bad things. We triple our efforts to reach the community and explain that ideology. I think a lot of people are aware more than before."

COMMUNITY PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces

Trusted Accurate Information Sources. Somali-American youth, parents, and community service providers reported that they sought more accurate, up-to-date, understandable, personalized knowledge about violent radicalization and recruitment and what to do. A parent said, "Somali elders can take a role to educate the Somali community. Elders should organize meetings in the community and explain the consequences if we don't build communication with our kids and explain our culture and true religion. Nobody can take our kids advantage if all community are well alerted about the radicalization."

Increased Activities in Supervised Community Spaces. Somali-Americans reported that youth needed more places to be after school where they can engage in youth activities while under the supervision of responsible adults. A youth said, "These kids need a sports place where they can entertain themselves. All these street kids need to have a neighborhood sports facility, also the youth need to have mentors."

Mentoring of Youth. Some Somali-American youth and parents served as mentors to younger Somalis, but many more are needed. A youth said, "So I tell them, I'm like a big sister, you can come talk to me. I'm like a mentor. I help with college, I tell them things I hear about that are interesting. They're doing

better, and I see the progress. We write down goals, things we want to accomplish every month as we see if we made it up to that.”

Increased Civilian Liaisons to Law Enforcement. Somali-Americans reported that local and federal law enforcement organizations had established formal and informal community liaisons. A community service provider said, “One officer who is a liaison to the community, and one civilian, come, and bring us kids who have issues. A staff member speaks with the family and sees the kid. And we help them with the police.”

Interactions with Community Police. Community members recognized that local law enforcement had improved the frequency and quality of community police officers’ relationship with community members. A community service provider said, “The police and Somali community come together but as far as trust, that is something I cannot say or see. But we just talk about how we can work together.” Trust increased with the introduction of Somali community liaisons and Somali police officers.

Social Entrepreneurship. Individual community members with language, education, and technical skills have attempted to develop their skills and get hired by governmental or non-governmental organizations involved in countering violent extremism, as they had for other community social and health issues. A community service provider said, “I also have a small part-time business, very small. I develop business plans for small businesses and also train nonprofits. I did my graduate school in public administration. So I trained them in how to develop their organization, develop a strategic plan, board training, those kinds of things, how to get grants and stuff, resources they need. It’s very part-time. But it’s something I hope to give more time sometime in the future. And also I take some classes related to this because I want to focus on training and development, so I’m doing online classes on human resources.”

Interfaith Dialogue. Somali-Americans and others were concerned that Somali religious leaders were sometimes isolated and old-fashioned and that participation in dialogue with clerics from other faiths could be helpful to them. A community service provider said, “You could blame the Imams for being oblivious or clueless or out of touch.”

Social Support Networks. Some Somalis reported that they were well-connected with others in the community who could offer social, emotional, informational, and tangible support. A parent said, “What makes the Somali community strong is even though it doesn’t seem that way most of the time, because we’re closely knit, we network with each other, and at the end of the day I think we have a good heart and we help each other.”

Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism

Islamic Education and Imam Network. Somali-Americans were thankful that most Somali youth have been involved in some kind of formal religious education, but they thought it could be stronger and that Imams could better work with one another to strengthen Islamic education, including through emphasizing the Islamic principles of peace and harmonious coexistence. A youth said, “I think the Imams are good; they just need to reach out more that’s all. They are trained perfectly fine, but they need to speak out to the kids and not be quiet, and they need to help more.”

Community Support for Youth Socialization. The Somali-American community reported that there were several groups and organizations that were committed to helping youth with social development and integration. A community service provider reported, “That’s what a community is for. You’re supposed to mentor the youth, you’re supposed to work with the youth. You’re supposed to see them

through their difficulties. It's supposed to be a center, a hub that takes care of them basically. Provide after school help, everything that parents can't provide."

Understanding of Islam as a Peaceful Religion. Somali youth and adults have been put in a position of having to explain to others that Islam is a peaceful religion, and need better preparation to do so. A parent said, "If you don't defend your religion and say this is wrong and this is why it's wrong, then there are a lot of people who are going to take advantage of the situation and betray Islam as a very violent and totalitarian religion."

Youth Opportunities for Peace Activism. Some youth reported having found opportunities to be involved in civic activities, but others wished there were more opportunities. A youth said, "They have a youth council, and I'm interested in trying to find out why everything is going wrong. Like why things that are happening around here have been, why there are shootings, and why can't we live a peaceful life here."

Messaging to Challenge Legitimacy of Violent Extremism. Some Somalis have been actively speaking out against the rationale for returning to Somalia to fight for Al Shabaab. A parent said, "Their parents probably yelled at them I'm sure and explained to them, with reasoning, that yes, we understand your intention. Yes, you want to protect from Ethiopia, but this is not the way it is. What can you do? Are you going to register in the Somali army? No, it was not a war against Ethiopia. It was a different war. So you shouldn't participate until you know why."

Youth Civic Engagement; Youth Political Dialogue. See above.

Diminish the Potential for Contacts with Recruiters and Associates

Cooperation with Law Enforcement. Community members and groups reported that they were striving to build working relationships with law enforcement so as to fight terrorism and other crimes. A parent stated, "The community should not be scared working with authorities. They are here to safeguard. And we are also safeguarding our lives. Therefore we should work together. I wish they would be more involved in community. Come into community. And keep lines of communication open."

Monitoring by Community Members. Some community members reported informally having been more actively observing youth in social spaces for signs of radicalization to violence and recruitment. A community service provider said, "Where ever these kids go, the community must do a lot of follow-up and become aggressive investigators, the community should know what these kids been taught."

Messaging to Warn off Recruiters. In public spaces in Minneapolis-St. Paul, there were few messages to warn off recruiters, according to community members, though privately many parents have expressed such sentiments. A parent said, "I think all the Imams and community leaders, they became very clear and assertive that this is civil war, this is called *fitna* in Islam or calamity. It's very dangerous when you see people killing each other for no reason. So it's really prohibited in Islam, and it's not acceptable. I see more educating, campaigns, and conversations right now, but the community should continue doing that."

Bloggers and Websites against Violent Extremism. Somali-Americans reported that websites and bloggers who oppose Al Shabaab and violent extremism existed but were not highly active. A community service provider said, "Of course, anything with resources would help the community. Because they will say listen, let's watch, the more they learn the better...who has the time to record and upload. I commit

four hours every Friday, and we never get paid. So if we try to add that and more recording, then we forget about our other jobs. But if we help, we're willing to do that. We have cameras, the community, we can do that."

Critical Voices in the Community. In the Somali-American community there were many outspoken individuals who publically challenged leaders, institutions, and the status quo, but they were not necessarily trained and supported to do so. A community service provider said, "I think it's more community responsibility kind of, because the government has no role to teach you the right Islam or what the correct Islam is. So I think it's more community responsibility and the responsibility of the Imams and the Islamic scholars."

GOVERNMENT PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces

Community Policing. Somali-Americans reported that new community policing activities had improved the relationship between the community and local law enforcement. A parent stated, "The community needs Somali police officers, so they understand the culture and the language and everything."

Support for Parenting and Parent Education. Somali-Americans recognized a major need for the community and organizations to help support parents and improve parenting especially regarding the risks for violent extremism posed to youth. A parent stated, "We should also create programs for parents - cultural awareness programs. They're very oblivious to what's going on in America. Educate them. Have the youth tell them stuff that goes on in schools. Problems that they face. Bring back the community, collectivism that we had in Somalia."

Support for After-school Programs and Mentoring. Somali-Americans reported that after-school and mentoring programs were very helpful, and more were needed to meet the needs of youth. A youth said, "I think the thing is that we don't have community activities or after school programs that encourage the kids to stay, you know like - let's say you come from school so all you can do is go home or go to the Mosque. So it's different. So if you have community activities like sports, soccer, basketball, something, that makes you go there."

Support for Youth and Family Social Services. Family and community members reported that some services were available but not enough to meet the needs of family and youth. A community service provider said, "We didn't have enough places or enough social services that can mentor those kids, or when they come out to jail, instead of going just to probation officer, they want someone to guide them."

Trusted Accurate Information Sources. See above.

Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism

Empowering Critical Voices. Somali-Americans recognized that some people in their community were able to speak out against violent extremism, but they needed logistical support, knowledge, and skills to do so more effectively. A youth said, "I'm not going to wait until I'm doctor, I'm going to encourage people to march with me on this. I'm going to be part of the community and make a difference in someone's life by mentoring or get youth interested, raise awareness...those are the things I can do."

Support for Youth Community Services. Some Somali-American youth have had the opportunity to get involved in community service, but many more would like to do so if opportunities were made available.

A youth said, “During school years we had a Somali school association so all the young adults and youth that were going to the school would get together, that’s where we did community work... We had about 150 to 200 students that we held a conference for...They did a little skit and a play that was in a sense humorous that talked about how when you come to this country you can easily be overtaken...It didn’t last a while, we just did it once, I wish we continued to do it.”

Support for Youth Leadership Training. Some Somali-American youth have benefited from training in leadership on community, social, and political issues, but many more could be trained including in ways to be community advocates and voices that oppose violent extremism . A community service provider said, “I have myself been involved with youth and community and leadership programs. A year or two years ago, I was involved in a youth empowerment program, where they trained us on how to understand the youth and how youth cooperate with adults.”

Support for Parenting and Parent Education. See above.

Diminish the Potential for Contacts with Recruiters and Associates

Training for Community Leaders and Providers. Very few community leaders or service providers have participated in any training related to countering violent extremism, though more would like to. A community service provider said, “Let’s have a training for even the people who are working in the mosque. And let’s say okay, we are living here, we want to be in peace, we don’t want any problems like that. Let’s tell our kids, ‘Oh, you guys are U.S. citizens, American is a good place, it’s a nice place to live.’”

Support for Community Messaging. Somalis viewed elders as the most respected advisors and leaders in the community, and some have been speaking out about violent radicalization and recruitment, but they could be doing more. A youth said, “We wanted to do something about it, and we wanted to show our community and our elders that a young group of people can come together and do something. And somehow we were hoping they would take the torch and run with it too, I mean we were not an organization. They knew it, that was made clear. I guess it just didn’t happen.”

Community Policing; Bloggers and Websites Against Violent Extremism. See above.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on empirical data that comes from listening to those in the community and informed by relevant theory, this study identified themes and built a model, Diminishing Opportunities for Violent Extremism (DOVE). This model can help to inform prevention strategies for building community resilience to violent extremism in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul. It found that multiple risk factors combined to create an opportunity structure for violent extremism, and that building resilience requires strengthening protective resources. The DOVE model consists of three levels of opportunities related to: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) contact with recruiters or associates. Involvement in violent extremism depended on the presence of all three opportunities, with decreasing proportions of adolescent boys and young men exposed to the latter two. The study's findings indicate the need for strengthening protective resources (or opportunity-reducing capacities) at each of the levels of opportunity through collaboration and capacity building involving family and youth, community, and government.

Risk and Protection. This research underlined the need to acknowledge community members' concerns that violent extremism will not disappear from U.S. Somali-American communities anytime soon, though over time it will likely change in form and intensity. It also demonstrated the necessity of shifting from analyses overly focused on individual-level factors leading to violent radicalization to multilevel analyses that include structural, social, political, economic, community, and family-level risk factors and protective resources that might mitigate involvement in violent extremism. Based on these, some communities may be more at risk than others due to the presence of more opportunities for transformative contact with recruiters and violent extremists in their everyday lives. This calls for further research.

Resilience. This study also demonstrated the centrality of resilience to countering violent extremism but also that resilience is complex and not limited to individual resilience. It functions on multiple levels, including the individual, family, community, and institutional. It is necessary to ensure that resilience-focused programs and policies are well supported by theory, empirical evidence, and community collaboration. Family resilience should be included as an important component of community resilience, and the family should be acknowledged as a key source of both risk factors and protective resources. When focusing on resilience, it is also important to appreciate that government, communities, and families also face adversities and limitations regarding their potential activities, which can impact resilience. For all of these reasons, resilience cannot simply be dialed up. Building resilience to violent extremism will be at least as complicated as was building resilience to gang violence, HIV/AIDS risks, and domestic violence. It is achievable, but not straightforward or easy.

Prevention. There is no magic bullet for prevention. Primary prevention in an immigrant and refugee community should be conceptualized as more than better cooperation with law enforcement. Prevention efforts should be targeted towards the most vulnerable people and places. A capacity building approach can be utilized to enhance government, community, and family capacities to reduce opportunities for involvement in violent extremism. Priorities could include diminishing: 1) youth's unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) the potential for contacts with terrorist recruiters or associates.

Partnerships. The study highlighted the importance of collaborative partnerships between government and community groups, organizations and leaders in countering violent extremism. To identify and support resilience in a community, partnerships can facilitate learning about community members' history, culture, social structure, values, needs, resources, and daily experiences, in order to determine

precisely what resilience means for them. For refugee and immigrant communities, it is important to pay attention to such key community issues as immigration, refugee status, ethnic and racial minority status, discrimination, language barriers, housing, and financial and educational opportunities. Building prevention through partnership is a long-term process. It requires a comprehensive approach with key contributions from law enforcement, immigration agencies, public health officials, and individuals involved in social services, education and media. It also calls for balanced, fair and transparent approaches to partnerships not limited by the biases of particular gatekeepers.

Interventions. Based on the findings from this research, interventions should be targeted at all three opportunity levels, not just one, and sustained over time. One way to determine priority areas for intervention might include identifying protective resources with the greatest potential for addressing multiple risk factors. Collaborations between government, community, and families and youth can then be built to enhance these capacities. Based on the current study, promising interventions in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis-St. Paul might include: 1) building a web-based resource including information and training about violent extremism risks and safeguards for practical use by youth, parents, and community service providers; 2) providing Somali youth and young adults with opportunities for service in their community and humanitarian and peace work, thus creating alternative ways for youth to channel their passion for Somalia; and 3) providing logistical support and training to elders and critical voices in the community and on the web.

Training Implications. Providing communities with training is one key component of enhancing federal engagement with and support for local communities targeted by violent extremists. Trainings could be seen as one key way to initiate, strengthen, and sustain protective resources against violent extremism and could be informed by the theories and scientific evidence regarding community resilience including the DOVE model. Specific training implications based on this study's findings are as follows. One, community service providers and parents expressed the need for in-person and/or web-based trainings that were geared towards strengthening protective resources. Two, community-based providers, leaders, and experts would likely be more receptive to trainings if they were conducted with their collaborative input. Three, community members expressed the need for training to build awareness and understanding of cultural and contextual differences concerning risks, resilience, and key issues related to youth, family, community, and citizenship.

Research Needs. This study was a first step. Additional research is needed in communities under threat to examine which acts of building community resilience work with whom under what circumstances and why. One way to do this would be collaboratively to develop, pilot, and evaluate a multilevel community resilience-based prevention strategy in Minneapolis-St. Paul based on the DOVE model. Another would be to use the DOVE model as a basis for assessing other communities targeted by violent extremists in the United States and abroad, so as to refine the model and approaches that can reliably assess communities at risk and help to inform and prioritize intervention strategies. Other research needs could be addressed by: 1) bringing together prevention experts and counterterrorism experts to incorporate lessons learned from prevention research into initiatives to counter violent extremism; 2) identifying reliable short-term indicators of violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment as well as community and family protective resources; 3) conducting assessments of prospective interventions to demonstrate whether they are acceptable, appropriate, and practically achievable; 4) performing efficacy studies of interventions to examine if they work as intended; and 5) investigating how to adapt and apply effective interventions that have worked under one set of circumstances to new circumstances.

Study Limitations. This study had multiple limitations. First, because it used purposive sampling it is not necessarily representative of Somali-Americans in Minnesota, let alone in the United States or global Somali diaspora, or of course, other Muslim Americans. Second, because of language and cultural issues, it is always possible that some terms and meanings were misunderstood by study participants or the researchers. Third, due to persistent divisions, fears, mistrust, and intimidation in the community, it is possible that participants were not always forthcoming and honest in the interviews. Mindful of these limitations, further policy-oriented research that uses community collaboration and rigorous qualitative and mixed methodologies to understand communities under the threat of violent extremism is needed.

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