Key Points

✓ Having one or more risk factors does **not** mean an individual will engage in targeted violence or terrorism.

✓ Addressing/mitigating risk factors is not always the primary focus of targeted violence and terrorism prevention programs; however, as known risk factors are related to numerous social issues, working to address/mitigate risk factors for violence is sound public policy that may catalyze broader societal benefits.

Overview

"Risk factor" and "indicator" are often used interchangeably; however, these terms refer to different things. We have learned that effective violence prevention looks at a person's risk factors and attempts to put in place effective protective factors to stop violence. We have also learned that certain indicators can alert a bystander to the need for intervention.

A **risk factor** is a characteristic that may make an individual *more susceptible* to recruitment by violent extremist organizations and movements and may be addressed through prevention activities.

An **indicator** is a behavior that suggests an individual has likely already radicalized to violent extremism and may require more timely intervention (e.g., from law enforcement).

Having one or more risk factors does not mean an individual will use violence.

For example, An individual may **have a criminal history**, be **socially isolated**, or **be distant from one's family** (three identified risk factors for engaging in violent extremism) and never adopt a violent extremist ideology.

On the other hand, if an individual **verbalizes their intent to harm others** to family, friends, or on social media (an identified indicator of violent extremism), that person is likely in need of an immediate intervention.[1]
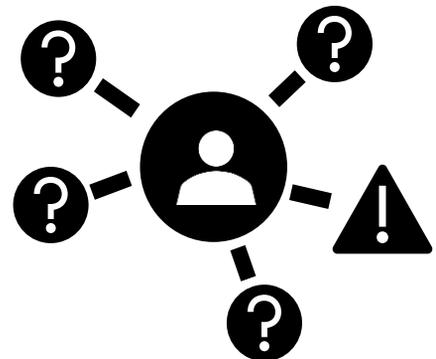
! Addressing risk factors among individuals is a key component of prevention programs, but communities should not confuse risk factors with indicators when designing their prevention architecture.

1. Smith, Allison G. (June 2018). "Risk Factors and Indicators Associated with Radicalization to Terrorism in the United States: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. NCJ 251789.

The National Institute for Justice[2] has identified risk factors and indicators associated with terrorism. Understanding risk factors and indicators in connection with targeted violence has been more complicated, however, as studies have typically focused on violence broadly, not on specific types of targeted violence.

For example, the International Society for Research on Aggression[3] has issued a report on risk factors for youth violence. In that report, the authors separate risk factors for school shootings vs. "street" shootings. The U.S. Department of Labor[4] provides a compilation of studies from other governmental agencies on risk factors for workplace violence. There are also numerous academic and other scholarly articles that examine risk factors and, in some cases, indicators of targeted violence.

In developing a targeted violence and terrorism prevention architecture, communities may find it useful to consider a "***continuum of intervention***" to address both risk factors and indicators. For example:

Address risk factors ***prior*** to an individual experiencing them	Address individuals ***with*** risk factors to prevent the development of indicators	Address ***indicators*** by developing a referral and intervention program

Example of Continuum of Intervention: One identified risk factor for terrorism is "having a sporadic work history." Developing a Continuum of Intervention could include:

Prior: A community may focus on a variety of skills and training programs that ensure their community members are able to gain—and keep—reliable employment.

With: Individuals with a sporadic work history may benefit from more in-depth counseling to identify the specific factors associated with that sporadic work history and provide counseling or training tailored to that individual.

Indicators: Develop a bystander awareness, referral, and intervention program

While the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention focuses on preventing radicalization to violence, sporadic work history is a risk factor for many other social issues (e.g., sexual harassment,[5] negative health outcomes,[6] and early mortality[7]). Consequently, developing a prevention framework that addresses known risk factors for targeted violence and terrorism will likely contribute to addressing other social issues within the community.

The **Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention** works to:	**Communities**, however, are best positioned to understand:
1) Raise awareness of the threat and risk factors 2) Help states and communities build prevention frameworks 3) Propel local efforts that amplify a prevention culture and support for referrals and interventions 4) Perform analysis and share information with stakeholders 5) Institutionalize coordination	1) Which risk factors are prevalent in their community 2) What resources are available to address those risk factors (both governmental and nongovernmental) 3) How to organize those resources to address those risk factors

2. Ibid.
3. Bushman, B.J. et. al. (July 2018). "Risk factors for youth violence: Youth violence commission, International Society For Research On Aggression (ISRA)." *Aggressive Behavior 44*(4): 331-336.
4. United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). "Workplace Violence."
5. LaMontagne , A.D., Smith, P.M., Louie, A.M., Quinlan, M., Shoveller, J. and A. Ostry. (2009). "Unwanted Sexual advances at Work: Variations by Employment Arrangement in a Sample of Working Australians." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. *33*(2):173-179.
6. Waynforth, David. (March 27, 2018). "Unstable Employment and Health in Middle Age in the Longitudinal 1970 British Birth Cohort Study." *Evolution, Medicine, and Public Health. 2018*(1): 92-99.
7. Perlman, Francesca and Martin Bobak. (August 30, 2011). "Assessing the Contribution of Unstable Employment on Mortality in Post-transition Russia: Prospective Individual-Level Analyses from Russian Longtitudinal Monitoring Survey." *American Journal of Public Health. 99*: 1818-1825.