RAN ISSUE PAPER

Multi-agency working and preventing violent extremism I

The value of multi-agency working (MAW) in response to the threat of violent extremism has been widely debated among policy, law enforcement, security, prison, probation and education stakeholders (amongst others). However, more often than not, this debate has failed to take into account the complex nature of MAW, the heterogeneity of the terrorism phenomenon and the very real barriers to sharing information across agencies. Without an understanding of this complex issue, discussions will inevitably lack the level of specification required to formulate effective responses to violent extremism. Set against this backdrop, the Radicalisation Awareness Network's Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC) working group is preparing two papers on the topic of MAW.

This issue paper:
- Introduces different models of MAW (Section 2)
- Discusses the importance of threat and hazard specification (i.e. specifying the threat of concern (Section 3))
- Summarises key lessons gleaned from relevant meetings of the RAN H&SC working group (Section 4).

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A policy paper, to be issued in 2018, will present a series of case studies on MAW in the EU, and identify a set of good practice principles for those intending to establish MAW as a response to the threat of violent extremism.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the role of multi-agency working (MAW) in the prevention of, and response to, violent radicalisation.[*] As a RAN H&SC working group paper, the role of health workers within MAW is the focus. However, the paper is relevant to all who contribute to such systems, including social workers, community workers, police officers and educators.

Taken together, the two policy papers on the role of MAW in preventing violent radicalisation leading to terrorism will provide end users with conceptual clarity as well as recommend good practice principles for cross-agency collaboration. The papers build on past work by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) that has considered the issue of MAW, and including reports on setting-up structures (RAN, 2016a), working with children and youth (RAN, 2016b), and MAW approaches to preventing radicalisation into terrorism and violent extremism (2017a; 2017b).

The overarching objective of this first paper is to present information on MAW that can promote a more informed and nuanced discussion, and support a more insightful analysis of existing MAW approaches (covered in a second paper in this series).

The paper addresses the following three questions.

What is multi-agency working? While the concept of MAW may seem unambiguous, in reality, there are myriad multi-agency solutions, each of which offers different benefits in addressing diverse problems. For instance, some teams liaise remotely, operating more as liaison points rather than as an integrated team. Others are co-located. Certain teams come together to address a specific unfolding threat, while others have long-term strategic objectives.

Given this complexity, a central aim of this paper is to identify and distinguish the different types of MAW solutions (Section 2). This will ensure that our discussions of MAW approaches to preventing and responding to terrorism will be qualified by reference to specific approaches.

What risk or threat are we are trying to address? For example, is the objective to develop a strategic approach to preventing violent radicalisation before the process commences (i.e. a public health objective)? Is the objective to redirect individuals identified as going through the process of violent radicalisation (i.e. a targeted intervention), or is it to support those wishing to exit terrorist organisations?

Specifying the objective of MAW will result in greater clarity in discussions on responses to preventing violent radicalisation leading to terrorism (see Section 3).

What are the barriers to multi-agency working? These include legal and procedural barriers to information-sharing, an absence of clear practice guidelines, a lack of trust, cultural

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[*] For the purpose of this paper, violent radicalisation is defined a process of increasing commitment to becoming involved in political violence (McCormick, 2003).

barriers and a history of inter-agency competition. Such barriers need to be understood, and overcome, for MAW to work optimally (Section 4 of this paper).

These complexities should not deter us in our efforts to adopt multi-agency approaches to countering the threat of terrorism. Outside the area of counterterrorism, MAW is viewed as an essential 'flagship' element of any effort to tackle complex societal challenges, including in the areas of child health and welfare, child protection, emergency preparedness and response, crime prevention and detection and promotion of road safety (Carter, Cummings, & Cooper, 2007, p. 527). There is also growing evidence, in those jurisdictions that have implemented MAW, that they can prevent young people from transitioning into terrorism (these are reviewed in the 2018 policy paper). As such, despite some of the obvious difficulties with MAW in the counterterrorism arena, we should be confident that MAW approaches **can** work, and our task is to generate the knowledge to facilitate this, in a well-informed and evidence-based way.

2. What is multi-agency working and why is it important?

What is multi-agency working?

This is the initial question for those contemplating the use of MAW in the prevention of terrorism. While there is no commonly accepted definition of MAW, most health services' interpretations include the following aspects: 'working in collaboration across organisations' and 'enhancing services' in areas 'where problems are typically complex'. MAW, then, can be usefully conceptualised as **working in collaboration across organisations to enhance services in order to meet complex needs.**

However, this interpretation does not capture the range of different means of collaboration across agencies. These have been synthesised through MAW models (e.g. Atkinson, Doherty, & Kinder, 2005; Cameron, Lart, Harrison, MacDonald, & Smith, 2000; Watson, Townsley, Abbott, & Latham, 2000). Atkinson and colleagues, for example, identify a number of models of multi-agency activity, each of which can serve different purposes (to make decisions, to coordinate efforts, to deliver a comprehensive service, etc. (Atkinson et al., 2005)).

1. **Decision-making**. This approach is useful when professionals from different agencies must be brought together in order to **make a decision on specific action(s) required**. In the context of preventing violent radicalisation, for example, this might involve scheduled meetings of health, education and policing professionals, in order to consider how best to support a community from which a number of individuals are known to have become involved in terrorism. The focus of such groups' decision-making tends to be strategic (i.e. policy-based) rather than operational in nature.

2. **Service delivery**. This would occur, for example, when health, policing and education professionals are permanently seconded to a multi-agency team, where expertise is pooled and the team can coordinate the services in an integrated approach to service delivery (e.g. in the case of community-based approaches to building resilience to violent radicalisation). This approach could involve either co-location of the professionals (**centre-based delivery**) or their remote linking (**coordinated delivery**), and could entail both strategic and operational activities.

3. **Operational team delivery**. The operational team delivering MAW involves bringing agencies together for the purposes of providing services to a specific client group, and tends to be operational in nature. This model is synonymous with multidisciplinary team (MDT) working, common in the health services (e.g. the co-location of psychology, psychiatry, social work, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy in a community health service).

The importance of these distinctions for MAW in preventing violent extremism is that they illustrate that any contemplation of multi-agency collaboration involves clarifying the specific form of collaboration. It also involves recognising that groups which liaise to develop policies (i.e. focus on policymaking) are very different to those which are co-located and carry out work with individuals demonstrating an intention to become involved in terrorism (i.e. focus on practice).

What is the value of MAW?

It is commonly accepted that MAW offers multiple benefits when complex societal problems 'overlap agencies' spheres of work' (Cairns, 2015), although the evidence for MAW in the context of preventing violent radicalisation remains relatively poor. Looking at the broader evidence base, however, MAW has been hailed as a way of overcoming the fragmentation of services within and across jurisdictions, and the tendency for services to work in silos without optimally harnessing the knowledge, expertise and practices of other agencies.

When MAW does occur, it allows all team members and relevant agencies to access expertise and resources existing in participating agencies and emerging when allied professionals adopt a transdisciplinary perspective on problems. It can also create a shared language and common approach to assessment and formulation of risk, and result in consensus on the overarching objective or outcome (Greenhouse, 2013), thus enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of services (Kirkland & Baron, 2015), and allowing the MAW to bid for additional resources.

Finally, MAW is recognised as a valuable approach to tacking complex problems 'such as community safety or economic regeneration', child abuse and neglect, and emergency preparedness and response — the 'wicked issues' (Audit Commission for Local Authorities, & the National Health Service in England and Wales, 1998, p. 11). There is also evidence that both young people and their families are aware of MAW solutions being in place, and that where agencies are streamlined, they value the approach (Harris & Allen, 2011). However, the extent to which this holds true in the area of crime prevention has not been subject to research.

While the value of MAW is clear, in practice it is often quite difficult to implement. On one level, it has been argued that MAW requires adaptability at both individual and organisational level — and there is evidence that neither individuals nor organisations like challenges to their established practices, and that professional cultures can become defensive when change is forced upon them (Sloper, 2004). Related to this are challenges in the interoperability of systems, policies and procedures when working across agencies (Charman, 2014).

3. Risk specification

The current consideration of MAW in preventing violent extremism often lacks clarification on two aspects: a) the exact form of terrorism or violent extremism being addressed, and b) the stage in the life of an individual at which MAW will be used to intervene.

The importance of clarifying the type of terrorism or violent extremism has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Sarma, 2017); it suffices to note here that there is evidence that the risk factors for one form of problematic behaviour can differ from another, even when the behaviours themselves are highly correlated (e.g. Fernandes, Hatfield, & Soames Job, 2010; Fernandes, Job, & Hatfield, 2007; Sarma, Carey, Kervick, & Bimpeh, 2013). This is particularly relevant in the area of terrorism. Terrorism is heterogeneous in nature (Herrington & Roberts, 2012; Monahan, 2012; Roberts & Horgan, 2008): a study of 176 terrorist organisations identified more than 30 ideologies, as well as variations in size, structure, lethality and area of operation across organisations (Cook & Lounsbery, 2011). When risk factors for one form of terrorism vary, multi-agency services will necessarily have different concerns and adopt various approaches.

On a second level, it is also important to specify at what point, specifically, in the lives of individuals, the agencies will intervene. Horgan, for example, refers to three phases in the life of the terrorist (becoming involved, being involved and disengaging from terrorism), and notes that the risk factors for an individual entering one phase may differ from those of the individual transitioning into a later phase. Again, the task for the multi-agency service will be to identify and address those risk factors associated with the specific phase being targeted in their intervention. For example, the following three approaches, which capture much of the multi-agency work being conducted in preventing violent extremism, are useful.

1. **Prevention**. Prevent violent radicalisation at its earliest stages through community-based resilience-building initiatives (critical thinking, intergroup contact, social modelling, etc.). Such approaches could be described as dealing with the risk of violent radicalisation pre-emptively through **a public health- or community-based approach.** There have been numerous attempts at implementing community-based approaches, though few have been subject to evaluation (as an exception, see Garaigordobil, 2012).

2. **Redirection**. Support individuals who are currently believed to be going through the process of violent radicalisation and may be at risk of becoming involved in terrorism. A multi-agency service formed to work with such individuals could be described as offering **a targeted approach to violent radicalisation**.

3. **Supported exit**. Support individuals who wish to disengage from terrorism (commonly referred to as 'exit' initiatives). This may involve practical, medical, psychological and police involvement.

4. Challenges for multi-agency working

The challenges of MAW have been well documented, particularly in the area of health service delivery. However, they have also been discussed extensively by members of the RAN H&SC working group since the inception of RAN in September 2011 (first as the RAN Health working

group, and subsequently as the RAN H&SC working group). The working group identified two challenges, in particular: barriers to information-sharing, and the lack of established policies and procedures for MAW in counterterrorism. Additional challenges will be considered in 2018 policy paper, in the context of the initiatives reviewed in the case studies.

Information-sharing and confidentiality

The RAN H&SC working group identified specific barriers to information-sharing in MAW. The first is the **lack of knowledge about, and awareness of, (the process of) violent radicalisation**, among health workers, educators and other stakeholders in the EU. In particular, actors do not have enough information on the process of and risk factors for violent radicalisation, the roles and responsibilities of different agencies, the operational roles of specialist units, the identification of which information should be shared and ethical and legislative guidance on information-sharing. With the growth in number of multi-agency collaborations across Europe and the RAN CoE work, knowledge is improving. However, certainly in jurisdictions where MAW is not established, a prerequisite to effective collaboration will be building knowledge of violent radicalisation among the various end users involved in responding to radicalisation.

A second barrier to information-sharing is **trust** — health workers may not necessarily feel comfortable sharing information on their clients with external agencies. The problem here is twofold.

First, health workers are clear on two points: a) that radicalisation is not illegal, and b) that very few individuals transition from radicalisation (or 'violent radicalisation' for that matter) into terrorism or violent extremism. As such, health workers are concerned that they may be asked to share information about individuals who have not committed, and are unlikely to ever commit, an offence — particularly where this could lead to law enforcement or security agencies unnecessarily intervening in their clients' lives. Second, health workers note that where information **is** shared, they may have little control over the use of that information in the future (i.e. the extent to which the information is treated with sensitivity and is held in confidence). These concerns have been clearly articulated by health workers, and similar concerns have been reported to MAW by other parties including police officers and educators.

Lack of policies and procedures

Most EU jurisdictions have limited or no specific policies and procedures governing how professionals such as health workers, educators and prison staff engage with clients who may be at risk of violent radicalisation, have become involved in terrorism, or are trying to exit terrorist organisations. This is in contrast to security and law enforcement personnel, who may well have access to such policies and procedures.

One might argue that such agencies have access to established policies and procedures in other areas (child abuse, domestic violence and suicide risk, etc.) which could be used in preventing violent extremism. However, these other risks are very different to the risk of violent radicalisation.

First, the clinical and non-clinical risk indicators for child abuse, domestic violence and suicide are better established, and more sensitive and specific in identifying those at risk (and excluding those not at risk). Second, and particularly in the case of child abuse, the victims are very vulnerable and may be unable to take steps to report or end abuse, or seek support for the consequences of abuse-related experiences. Third, and as noted earlier, the reality is that radicalisation, even if present, may not be illegal unless it is manifest as violent intent, incitement to violence, or violence itself. As such, when professionals consider policies and procedures for intervening in the radicalisation process, they are also potentially considering intervening in the right to freedom of beliefs and expression.

While the lack of policies and procedures for dealing with the risk of violent radicalisation is a problem within agencies, it is compounded when agencies collaborate in MAW. This is because individual multi-agency teams need access to a set of policies and procedures governing how each agency intends to respond to violent radicalisation, **and** policies and procedures governing how agencies will collaborate in this endeavour.

Some recommendations

Having considered these challenges, the RAN H&SC working group has made a number of recommendations. They stressed the importance of building awareness, knowledge and skills in the area of **information-sharing within and across agencies** as well as improving the understanding **of violent radicalisation leading to terrorism**. This, it was felt, should be achieved through knowledge transfer between Member States, and training and awareness-building activities at national and EU level. Such work is currently under way through the RAN CoE.

As for trust, this can only be established through experience — by demonstrating that information can be shared and agencies can collaborate through MAW. Here, it is crucial that all agencies be aware that protocols for information-sharing and collaboration are in place to manage other risks, including child protection, suicide prevention and response, fraud detection and investigation and emergency preparedness. Their colleagues working in these areas have had to develop trust-based relationships with professionals from other agencies, in order to run an effective and efficient service in their fields. Similarly, it is key that professionals working in different agencies be aware that in some EU jurisdictions, established MAW counterterrorism solutions exist where trust issues have been surmounted and services are offered that appear to work — to some extent, at least.

As regards the dearth of policies and procedures, the working group has argued that there is a need to establish policies and procedures governing the way agencies respond to violent radicalisation, both within and across organisations. This, the group felt, is central to capacity-building at national and local levels.

5. Conclusions

The central objective of this paper is to contribute to a more nuanced debate on the potential value of MAW in preventing violent extremism. The principal argument is that any conversation around collaboration and cross-agency work in this area must specify the nature of MAW being considered, the form of terrorism being addressed, and the phase in the

process of violent radicalisation (or exit from terrorism) that will form the focus of MAW activities.

The discussion on barriers to MAW was not intended to dissuade readers from engaging in MAW per se, but rather to highlight the means of surmounting such challenges. There is good reason to be optimistic. We know from multi-agency responses to other problems, including child abuse and neglect, that MAW can indeed be effective, but this can only be achieved once the initial tensions and conflicts across agencies, and differences in working practices, are identified and overcome, and agencies develop integrated policies and practices (e.g. Greenhouse, 2013).

There is also evidence that professionals gain work satisfaction from MAW, particularly in terms of their enhanced understanding of different perspectives on and approaches to problems, as well as the benefit for their personal and professional development overall (Abbott, Townsley, & Watson, 2005).

Even more compelling is the growing number of MAW initiatives for preventing violent radicalisation that have been implemented in different EU jurisdictions. These are reviewed in detail in the 2018 policy paper, and they illustrate that while professionals involved in MAW may initially face challenges, with training, leadership and clear policies and procedures, these can be overcome and agencies can collaborate effectively to prevent violent extremism.

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