RAN FC&S

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CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN Families, Communities & Social Care WG Meeting
13-14 September 2023, Online meeting

Evaluation of Family Support in P/CVE

Key outcomes

On 13 and 14 September, the RAN Families, Communities & Social Care Working Group convened a meeting among practitioners working in family support programmes as well as evaluation experts in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Together they explored challenges and insights regarding evaluation.

Evaluation can foster learning and innovation, but it can also pose challenges. The complex and constantly evolving nature of the phenomena and target groups and the multitude of variables can make it difficult to formulate what is a success and how the support has contributed to the success. Besides this, evaluation is not always part of the funding structure, which may lead to a lack of time and resources for practitioners to adequately prepare for evaluation and register data that is required for a qualitative evaluation. In addition, ensuring a productive relationship between the involved stakeholders can be a challenge, especially when stakeholders have different objectives and/or when funding is contingent on the evaluation advice.

Despite these obstacles, practitioners shared recent experiences during this meeting, as well as good practices and practical steps on where to start. They discussed the following topics, which will be further outlined in this paper:

- A theory of change outlines how and why a programme or intervention will lead to the expected outcome and impact. To create a theory of change, a clear formulation of the objectives of the interventions and programme is necessary.
- Agree on the type and objective of the evaluation. There are different considerations for an evidence-based (plan, process or effect) evaluation with an external evaluator or for carrying out a self-/peer review (which is not a formal evaluation).
- While involved stakeholders (practitioners, evaluators, commissioners) may have different motivations and objectives, it is important to involve all stakeholders — including the practitioners — from the start of this process. This may help in getting everyone's commitment to take an extra step. However, it requires good communication on all stakeholders' values, needs, fears, preferences and circumstances.
- It is important to reflect on what and how data is registered. This paper outlines some practical suggestions from practitioners and brings forward the importance of ethics and the protection of confidentiality.
- It is important to think about *who* can and should carry out the evaluation. Make sure the analysis is conducted by people who have relevant professional experience and expertise on evaluation and P/CVE.

This paper outlines the highlights of the discussions during this meeting, followed by key recommendations, relevant practices and suggestions for further reading.

Highlights of the discussion

Why evaluate?

Over the past years, experience with family support in the field of P/CVE has been accumulating. In certain countries, easily accessible support and counselling services have been well established and have been integrated into national support programmes or local collaborative frameworks ([1]). In other instances, services are still in early stages of development. Understanding what works (or doesn't) enables the refinement of these family support programmes and related interventions. Evaluation can help to build a stronger evidence base for P/CVE initiatives and it can help to put resources to even better use in the future. For practitioners involved in daily practice, evaluation can have benefits when organised as an opportunity for learning and innovating. It can then serve as an impulse to reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the programme and interventions. The identification of (potential) weaknesses enables improvement and further development of daily practice. On the other hand, the strengths are made visible in an evaluation and results can contribute to the external representation for the organisation as it enables practitioners to broadcast their initiative and its value for P/CVE. However, this requires a good working alliance between all stakeholders from the start (see more information in this paper).

Challenges

Implementing evaluation does not come without challenges. Difficulties that practitioners experience during the meeting are the following:

Determining what is a 'success' and why: First, determining what is this success or ending result can be challenging. Second, since there are always several stakeholders and contexts influencing the success, it is hard to determine what exactly has ensured this success. Practitioners also raise the opposite: when has the support failed?

Navigating motives and concerns of all stakeholders involved: Collaboration between the evaluator, the evaluated organisation and the funder is crucial for an evaluation to work. Motives for an evaluation can however differ for different stakeholders. There may be an interest in learning and improving (from the practitioners' point of view), in knowing whether the money is well spent and the goals have been reached (funder), or an interest in the scientific basis (researcher). This meeting mostly focused on the practitioners' point of view. More specifically, the questions they addressed were: how to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders, whether they would have a say in the evaluation planning and implementation from the start, whether they would have enough time to support the evaluation, whether their funding would not be contingent on the outcomes of the evaluation, whether the evaluators would be objective, whether the evaluators would have enough knowledge on the field to make the evaluation meaningful and whether the outcomes would be useful for the further development of their daily practice.

Knowledge on when and how to start: Evaluation requires preparation from the start. However, the required knowledge to be able to start is not always available. Questions relate to what should be in place, such as what is needed in terms of data registration, clear objectives, time investment and what should be the objective of an evaluation itself.

Taking into account ethical dilemmas: This regards questions in terms of anonymity, confidentiality and trauma-informed working. While measuring effectiveness requires sharing data with external evaluators for research

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([1]) Marko Juntunen (2021). When a Family Member Becomes Radicalised. Finn Church Aid.

purposes, practitioners also need to ensure confidentiality of and remain in a trust-built relationship with the individuals they support.

Lack of time and resources: Evaluation is not always integrated in the funding agreements from the start, which makes both preparing for an evaluation as well as carrying out an evaluation not always feasible. Preparing, monitoring, integrating surveys in daily practice and giving support during the evaluation often takes time, as does exchanging on results and implementing changes after the evaluation, which is not always available.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, possible ways forward and considerations around the above challenges will be brought forward.

Insights

Objectives and theory of change

Ideally, the starting phase of a programme or intervention already includes preparation for an evaluation: "*Preferably, evaluation is already part of the design of the intervention or programme before it is implemented. This will ensure you are able to create a theory-of-change, collect the relevant data, and carry out before and after measurements*" ([2]).

To be able to prepare for an evaluation, defining the objectives and a theory of change of your intervention/programme is necessary, since this helps you to clarify how and why you believe the programme or intervention will lead to the desired output, outcomes and impact, which can form the basis of your evaluation ([3]). This can form the basis of your intervention/programme. Below you can find an outline of the theory of change model, providing an overview of the different elements that are part of the theory of change.

Input → Activities → Output → Outcome → Impact
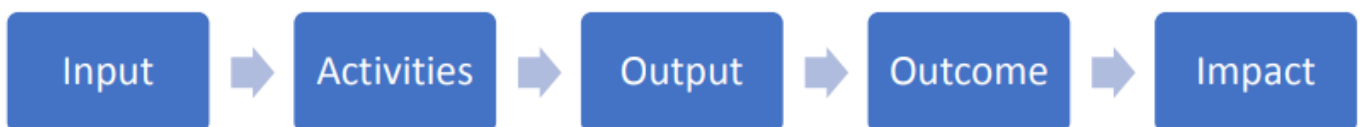
While setting up a theory of change, the above elements have to be explained and outlined. They can help to: 1) "build the theoretical basis of the programme/intervention"; and 2) "help build the evaluation design" ([4]).

To create a theory of change, a clear formulation of the objectives of your intervention or programme is necessary. What is the issue you are addressing with your intervention/programme and what do you want to achieve with your work? Formulating the objectives of your intervention/programme can form the basis for your theory of change and your evaluation.

([2]) Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) (2018). Guideline Evaluation of PCVE programmes and interventions. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/ms_workshops_guidelines_evaluation_of_pcve_programmes_and_interventions_july_2018_en.pdf (p. 5).
([3]) For more information about creating a theory of change, see p. 15 of the above RAN Ex Post Paper 'Guideline Evaluation of PCVE programmes and interventions'.
([4]) RAN (2018). Guideline Evaluation of PCVE programmes and interventions. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/ms_workshops_guidelines_evaluation_of_pcve_programmes_and_interventions_july_2018_en.pdf (p. 5).

Different types and objectives of evaluation

Considering different types and aims of evaluations: When considering an evaluation it is important to reflect on which interventions and programmes need to be evaluated and the objectives of the evaluation itself. This section builds further on different types of evaluations. The type of evaluation is based on the available data of the output of the intervention, the phase your intervention is in, and most importantly: the objective that should be achieved.

1. **Plan evaluation:** Looking into the underpinning of the plan, how current knowledge and context are taken into account, and how the plan can provide a solution to the problem.

2. **Process evaluation:** Looking at the process, by looking into whether the intervention or programme is going as it was planned (monitoring) and what needs to be done to optimise the intervention.

3. **Effect evaluation:** Does the intervention have the aimed effect?

When it comes to the aim of your evaluation, an additional consideration could be to make the evaluation as useful for daily practice as possible. As a separate goal, there have been examples where the model of indicators of the evaluation itself was used for the development of a dimension model of distancing for intervention planning and assessment that practitioners can use.

Considering a self- or peer review

As outlined under challenges, a lack of time and resources can make it hard to prepare for and carry out an evidence-based evaluation. When limited resources are available, the organisation can consider implementing a self- or peer review. It should be noted that "neither peer nor self-review are suitable for judging whether your approach is evidence-based" and they are also not really suitable for effectiveness measurement, or to use as a decision-making tool for whether to continue financing. However, they can contribute to reflecting on the objectives of the programme, "how the quality can be improved, how good elements can be made sustainable and how professional skills can be improved or used more effectively and/or more efficiently". In the case of a **peer review**, situation experts working in other family support facilities provide an outside-in perspective. For a **self-review**, practitioners from the same organisation take a step back and look at how their own facility is functioning. The process requires a systematic approach with preparation (such as appointing the responsible person and transparent goals and information for the staff), the review process (including an individual review, analysis and a joint session to formulate action points), and aftercare (with an implementation plan that takes into account the prioritised goals, actions, needed approval, implementors, other stakeholders, needed time and resources).

Inspiration for how to structure a self-review can be found in the RAN Peer and Self Review Manual. Please note that this manual has been written for the field of exit work in particular and might need adjustments to be fitting for family support work.

Practical tips for evidence-based evaluation

o **A cooperative and participatory approach from the start is recommended.** Different stakeholders (practitioners, evaluators, commissioners) may have different motivations and objectives at the start of the process, so it can be beneficial to discuss all stakeholders' values, needs, fears, preferences and circumstances in order to build a good working alliance. This approach also means that the evaluation design must be flexible enough to include the results of these discussions and to adapt survey designs to current circumstances (in a professionally justified way).

o **Try to reach a common understanding of the benefits and purpose of an evaluation, as it is a prerequisite for a meaningful result.** *Feeling* involved and knowing the benefits motivates to *stay* involved and show commitment. It may require a shift in mindset for all stakeholders: Negative results should be seen as a way to improve and not as a reason to stop the intervention or funding for the intervention.

o **Be aware of different points of attention for different stakeholders.** Evaluators should always maintain their objectivity as researchers and engage in expectation management regarding their role. Simultaneously, they should make an effort to gain a deeper understanding of and establish proximity to daily practices. For funders, it is useful to involve practitioners' learning interests in the design of the evaluation. When commissioning an evaluation it may be helpful to conceive it from the start of the funding cycle and carry it out in the middle of the funding cycle to avoid fears, thereby allowing improvement and separating it from the funding.

o **Make sure the analysis is conducted by people who have relevant professional experience and expertise.** A recommendation is to think about *who* can and should carry out the evaluation. With an external evaluator, it is recommended that the evaluator has an idea of the P/CVE field and type of initiative/programme (as well as expertise on evaluation in general). But as a practitioner, it is also important to be actively involved in the evaluation and know the basics of it. This way it is easier to work together.

Furthermore, practitioners discussed that the quality of the evaluation depends on the available data. Recommendations from recent experiences of the participants of this meeting are:

o **Agree on 'indicators of success'.** These indicators should be carefully selected and make sure they are measurable. The more specific, the more it says something about the effects. Additionally, create a comprehensive long list of interventions, along with their objectives. Create different categories for them.

o **Starting and preparing for evaluation from the onset of your intervention/programme ensures good preparation.** To track a 'change' over time, describe the starting point of the intervention/programme and score a situation periodically, according to a suitable time frame.

o **Make sure your data registration is uniform.** To achieve consistency in data registration, it is beneficial to implement standardised formats that can be filled. One approach is to employ a 'scale' that covers different life areas, such as the self-sufficiency matrix and the attitude insight-matrix-extremism.

o **Remain focused on safe and ethical data registration.** It is essential to protect confidentiality and anonymity in data registration, therefore it has to be a priority. Appointing someone who is responsible for data registration might be helpful. Also, communicating clearly with your client about this is a prerequisite. Use consent forms in which clients can approve or decline using their data for research and learning purposes. Create a unified and anonymous database so data can easily be integrated and analysed.

o **If possible, take into account long-term effects.** Evaluating the long-term impact of interventions can be challenging for practitioners. Whereas it is not always possible, a way to address this challenge is to maintain contact with clients even after the programme has ended. This approach allows for gathering data on sustained outcomes and helps practitioners better understand the lasting effects of their work.

Relevant practices

- **Evaluation of the Dutch National Support Center for Countering Extremism.** Its family support programme mainly focuses on providing support and social care to the family members of radicalised individuals and its goal is to combat radicalisation of other family members (such as brothers or sisters) and to help prevent the perpetration of criminal acts. The English summary of this evaluation outlines the most important findings and recommendations (read it through this link from p. 17 on).
- **Evaluation of Grüner Vogel.** Grüner Vogel's family support programme has been evaluated with two aims: to capture the underlying impact assumptions and to analyse them in an effectiveness-oriented concept, process and network evaluation. Second, based on the indicator models, a dimension model of distancing for intervention planning and assessment was developed that practitioners can use. This model will be incorporated as a key element in a larger *Goal Attainment and Progress Assessment Tool for P/CVE practitioners* to be published in 2024. The full evaluation can be found here (in German only).
- **INDEED.** The INDEED consortium under the Work Package leadership of the University of Helsinki developed a model for evidence-based evaluation of P/CVE initiatives. The model lies on the core of the INDEED tool for evidence-based evaluation of P/CVE initiatives (now available, but final version of the tool is expected in early 2024). The E-guidebooks are available in 10 languages and can be found here.
- **PrEval.** PrEval (Evaluation and Quality Management in Extremism Prevention, Democracy Promotion and Civic Education: Analysis, Monitoring, Dialogue) is a research and transfer project that further develops and redesigns formats and structures to strengthen evaluation and quality management in extremism prevention, democracy promotion and political education in Germany. In doing so, PrEval takes up the previous findings and needs of professional practice for support in evaluation projects.

Further reading

- Juntunen, M. (2021). When a Family Member Becomes Radicalised: Prevention of Violent Extremism and Family Support Activities in Six Western European Countries.
- Zych, I., & Nasaescu, E. (2022). Is radicalization a family issue? A systematic review of family-related risk and protective factors, consequences, and interventions against radicalization.
- Gielen, A. J. (2015). Supporting families of foreign fighters. A realistic approach for measuring the effectiveness. *Journal for Deradicalization,* (2), 21-48. https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/10
- Uhlmann, M. (2017). *Evaluation of the Advice Centre on Radicalisation – Final Report*. Research Report 31, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb31-evaluation-beratungsstelle-radikalisierung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=16 (p. 104).
- RAN YF&C Working Group (2016). Family support: what works? Meeting on the role of family support in preventing and dealing with radicalisation in a family context.
- RAN Small-scale expert meeting (2021). Effective and Realistic Quality Management and Evaluation of P/CVE.
- RAN (2023). Consolidated Overview on: Evaluation of secondary and tertiary level P/CVE programmes.