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EX POST PAPER

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Radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison: Community and family acceptance

Many EU countries are increasingly confronted with radicalised individuals and prisoners convicted of terrorist offences being released from prison. The return of this group to society poses a series of challenges such as: assessing risks and needs, and preparing families and communities, whose support is vital for successful rehabilitation. This paper summarises and aims to disseminate existing findings, and adds to the literature by pinpointing and elaborating more in depth on specific issues and by establishing links to the broader literature on rehabilitation and reintegration. This paper is useful for experts from prison and probation services and exit programmes, community and family support workers, and local preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) coordinators who work with families of and communities around released radicalised and terrorist offenders.

Rehabilitating radicalised and extremist offenders versus other offenders

Rehabilitating radicalised and terrorist offenders poses some additional challenges in comparison to that of “regular” convicts, given the political and ideological features usually associated with membership in such groups. Extremists and terrorists ordinarily refer to alternative systems of norms and values that justify their actions, and in some cases leaving these mindsets behind is not easily achievable or even desired by them. Double stigmatisation also plays a role, in that one bears the burden of being both an ex-convict and a former terrorist. Rehabilitation can furthermore be politically more difficult to “sell” given the high impact created by a potential relapse of such individuals. At the same time, there are certain other types of offenders to whom parallels can be drawn with regard to some of these issues, and with whom there is more experience available, both in numbers of cases and in time span. Lessons learned and standardised practices from these areas could potentially be applied to radicalised and extremist offenders, too. Offenders who are additionally drug addicts also deal with double stigmatisation; selling the reintegration of paedophiles is also difficult; and gang members also operate in alternative systems of norms and values. The consequences of such a stigma are increased difficulty to find employment, mental health and family problems, problems in finding services and social isolation (van Olphen et al., 2009). Finally, with regard to the specific process of disengagement, known aspects relate to social networks and finding meaningful activities, and the basics around housing, education and employment play a crucial role.

Practising rehabilitation

In the work with radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison, various tools and approaches have been proposed and discussed in RAN meetings (see reading list). Beyond these, however, there are also considerations of context, as well as the practitioner’s personal experience and their broader knowledge of radicalisation and deradicalisation processes that are crucial. For example, when engaging individuals in rehabilitation interventions, timing is a crucial factor. We know from research on disengagement and deradicalisation processes that there are certain turning points that trigger doubts about current involvement or re-establish links to the outside world. These can be noticing ideological contradictions, double standards in particular with regard to leaders vs followers, and being betrayed by comrades; they can also be having a child, getting married or falling in love, suffering from burnout or getting old. All these are windows of opportunity that can be exploited to initiate the process. Naturally, such turning points can also be stimulated by asking the right questions or showing interest. Observing body language and being aware of one’s own is crucial in this process. Engaging the person is a nuanced exercise that involves professional distance, fair and transparent treatment, accepting the person’s language so that they can express themselves freely and, if appropriate, also using jokes.

Challenges and barriers in reintegrating offenders

Reintegrating terrorist and extremist offenders involves a series of challenges at the personal and structural levels and these are very much related to the pathways individuals have taken towards and within the extremist or terrorist group. In these cases, all social relations have often been reduced to the group and even personal identity has been subsumed to that of the group. Consequently, creating a new identity for oneself, changing worldviews (again), and reconnecting to previous social networks or finding new ones are serious challenges that radicalised

RETIRN refers to Re-Entry – back to family, friends, work, community, Therapy – need for professional ongoing help – at different times, Information – the importance of education including self-education to foster independence and growth, Referral Network – working with other professionals and people in the wider community to provide tailored support and care. This model addresses a series of challenges related to personal identity, stigma and prejudice, having to make decisions for oneself, finding resources for self-care, having to take more responsibility, reconnecting with people from the past and generally finding a new future. RETIRN employs a “cognitive existential needs therapy” with former members to address this challenge. This method is integrative and adaptive; emphasises individual differences and the uniqueness of their story; and uses psychoeducation to understand experiences of coercion, while acknowledging personal responsibility for acts of violence, abuse and criminal offences. The subsumed identity issue is addressed through identity “replacement” and reconstruction and by exploring alternate identity poles. Overall, the model is a “whole family” and “whole community” approach involving work with schools, health professionals, community leaders, government and other NGOs including in creative arts, and is geared towards community capacity building and social cohesion.

and terrorist offenders released from prison more often than not cannot deal with on their own. The RETIRN model in the United Kingdom illustrates some of the ways to deal with such challenges.

Assessing risks and needs

Carrying out assessments along the rehabilitation process is a must. A series of risk assessment tools have been developed for various purposes and uses in prison, probation, police and intelligence work. In terms of the overall approach to rehabilitation, a classic model is the risk-need-responsivity one.

The risk-need-responsivity model entails "1) the risk principle asserts that criminal behaviour can be reliably predicted and that treatment should focus on the higher risk offenders; 2) the need principle highlights the importance of criminogenic needs in the design and delivery of treatment; and 3) the responsivity principle describes how the treatment should be provided" (Bonta & Andrews, 2007, p. i).

Recently, a newer desistance model has emerged; here, the progression from primary to tertiary desistance refers to refraining from criminal acts, identity change and acceptance by society. A third model is focused on capacity building — building resilience of the community and of the individual, by identifying the goals and sense of purpose and identifying the risk factors that might hinder these. Research has confirmed that successful rehabilitation is dependent on individuals having a purpose in life (Hlavka et al., 2015), so the assessment of successful rehabilitation would need to look into this variable in particular. Individual assessments need to be tailor-made and consider the different types of offenders, including the non-violent ones. Additionally, longer sentences mean more difficult integration, while shorter sentences mean less time for rehabilitation in prison. Importantly, the offender should not be treated as the "object" of the assessment but should have co-ownership of the process; this means encouraging own solutions and ideas for education and employment.

Practitioners who work with risk assessment tools acknowledge their advantages, as well as their limitations. From practical experience, in order to properly evaluate someone, it is necessary to use a combination of assessment tools, relying on one's own perception of the person, take sufficient time to work with the person and observe their transformations, and understand that behaviour inside and outside prison is different. In other words, assessment is complex and cannot be reduced to the one-off use of an assessment tool or to ticking off boxes. A number of approaches need to be used. These include first of all psychological ones and in particular interviewing techniques, but also accessing intelligence information, using one's expertise based on previous cases, and "keeping one's eyes open", including for positive changes.

Assessing risks and needs in rehabilitation and reintegration involves among others balancing the interests and needs of the individual offender with those of the society. This can only be ensured through an individualised, comprehensive and multi-agency plan for rehabilitation and reintegration. The rehabilitation literature outlines the importance of pre-release planning, including in terms of housing, finding a job and family reunification. Such planning needs to be initiated already upon arrest, at the point of entry into the criminal justice system (van Olphen et al., 2009; see also Mowen & Boman, 2019). Furthermore, it is also recommended that a series of professionals work also with the families of incarcerated offenders and not just the offenders themselves (Dragomir, 2014).

For example, the **rehabilitation plan in Catalunya, Spain**, involves an assessment of risk and protective factors through the risk assessment tool RISCANVI, outlining future plans, enabling family support, working with the ideology to produce counter-narratives and assessing the social environment post-release. After release, a series of agencies and individuals are involved, such as family and friends, individuals associated with leisure time, mentors, employment agencies and previous practitioners, in order to strengthen social ties and promote disengagement from violence. Two important considerations come out of this practice: the importance of including the security sector through surveillance — if necessary — and the importance of being adaptable in terms of resources and methods, in case new issues arise.

From the practical work with assessment tools in the case of radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison, several recommendations can be mentioned:

- Gear risk assessment towards the things you are looking for. Not only are there a variety of tools, but they also tend to be rather complex and broad. It is therefore important to clarify the object and objectives of the assessment from the very beginning and adapt or select your methods accordingly.
- Insert in your assessment as many relevant details as possible. This is important not only from the perspective of teamwork and being able to share sufficient information with others, but also for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating interventions.
- Be aware of radicalisation in prison. It should not be assumed that individuals' behaviour and cognitions remain the same in spite of the prison experience. On the contrary, it is more advisable to work with the assumption that such radicalisation processes might occur.
- Invest in training for staff. Risk assessment is a complex and evolving process that requires ongoing updates, exchanges and collaboration with other professionals, not least social scientists.

From the perspective of multi-agency work, a series of lessons learned can be furthermore outlined. These should not be considered as comprehensive, but simply adding to the existing body of work (in particular, the RAN Multi-agency working paper, (Sarma, 2018)):

- When discussing ideology, a variety of professionals might be involved. Specifically, in many cases it is necessary to, for example, address broader conspiracy theories, as well as other widespread stereotypical ideas, and not just specific ideological content.
- Generally, working on ideology and religious work should be separate and should be carried out by different people.
- In a multi-agency team, while the availability of various kinds of expertise is important, so is being able to find a common language.
- Interviews and discussions are useful, however offering positive experiences to offenders will have a more long-lasting effect.
- In the case of young offenders, it is important to involve people who have an understanding for and are able to engage in dialogue with this generation.
- It is important to place individuals in situations where they can succeed; positive experiences motivate to continue on the way to rehabilitation.

Involving civil society, families and social networks in rehabilitation

The society's role in the rehabilitation process is crucial (see *Dealing with radicalisation*); according to theories of desistance from offending, desistance is co-produced with others, in particular the ones who stand in a relationship of authority (such as teachers), family members and mentors. Concretely, they help tackle problems and recognise strengths, find opportunities to participate in community and generally by providing positive feedback during the process of redefining one's identity. At the formal level, a series of institutions need to be involved: housing, employment, education, health, etc. A meaningful involvement of informal actors and of positive support networks is conditioned by their having clear goals and definitions of what needs to be achieved and by appropriate training.

In clarifying the question of how to involve civil society, families and social networks in rehabilitation, it is important first of all to have a baseline — an estimation of how and to which extent these actors are even open to or willing to engage, or whether they might in fact already harbour strong biases against the offender. A recent research project in Bremen (Germany) reached surprising results. Among many other things, the project found an important discrepancy between the offenders' expectations and the reality in their communities. Offenders generally expected to be looked down upon when exiting prison, while societies generally expressed positive attitudes, in the form of,

for example, giving them a second chance, or simply not being afraid of ex-prisoners. Another relevant finding was the importance of family, a stable home, having a job and friends as inhibitors for reoffending.

The MOBi project (<http://mobi-initiative.org>), Mobilizing Society Towards (ex) Offenders Reintegration, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, focused on three questions: How are we, civil society, contributing to be the turning point in each (ex)offender's life? What are society's perceptions of (ex)offenders and the CJS [criminal justice system]? And about its role in reintegration? It also aims to develop a training course on community awareness of (ex)offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration, to break the cycles of reoffending and social exclusion; and, to help the EU involve a large number of actors in this issue. During the project, questionnaires were distributed in prisons and within the broader public in four countries: Germany, Italy, Portugal and Romania. Prisoners generally expected negative reactions upon their return to society; for example, 71 % thought that people are afraid of ex-prisoners, 60 % that people will never accept that their debt has been fully paid and 64 % believed that people think prison is the only place for criminals. A large majority of the prisoners declared that they relied on family on release and more than half on employers and friends. The large majority also believed that finding a job is important to avoid reoffending. The general public generally showed positive attitudes towards released offenders. Sixty-seven per cent said that society is not afraid of ex-prisoners, 77 % accepted that ex-prisoners have paid their debt to society and 69 % that not all offenders should be punished with a prison sentence.

That said, we know that acceptance of terrorist offenders tends to be more limited than that of "regular" ones, so convincing society to get involved might consequently be more difficult. One method to work towards this goal is to show success stories, to show that rehabilitation works. An additional way is to show how alternatives to reintegration will not work, as well as the consequences of not acting at all. From a different perspective, given the potential negative influences families and communities might have played in the initial radicalisation, it needs to be assessed whether they should be involved at all.

Whilst dealing with families, there are a few rules of thumb — drawing on the experience of **Hayat in Germany** can be outlined:

- Identify the crucial figures in the family and be aware of power structures, dynamics in the family and amplifiers.
- Family dynamics change; prison affects this to a great extent and/or constellations can change by the time the individual returns.
- Identify certain people who are crucial for the process — be they members of the family or professionals. Find those people who can move things and are interested, for example from a job centre or employment agency.
- Find a middle way between being overly protective and a checklist risk assessment approach.

The contribution of civil society, families and social networks to rehabilitation

Existing experiences involving civil society, families and social networks revealed that we can expect a lot from these actors and that they need to be involved in the rehabilitation process, but this takes time. Regular meetings, coaching and mediation are important methods to use when engaging them. Besides the family, additional "safe havens" should be created. With regard to communities, it is important to find out *who* these communities are, and in which communities the (ex)offender is involved. Practitioners must therefore gain knowledge about the "social map" of the city. It cannot simply be assumed that certain communities exist; one should really engage with them. This can be done for example by identifying and involving important representatives of these communities.

The rehabilitation literature recommends capitalising on family support that already exists, while at the same time screening for individuals who should rather be protected from family influence, such as in cases of domestic violence; in such cases and ones without available family support, alternative methods of providing tangible and emotional support for released prisoners should be created (Naser & La Vigne, 2006). One of these methods is creating alternative networks whilst in prison, with co-workers, new friends, staff of church and civic organisations (Bui & Morash, 2010). Relatedly, family conflict was found to be the most significant and robust coercive force towards reoffending, even more so than peers (Mowen & Boman, 2019).

While important for rehabilitation, a positive relationship with members of the family should not be taken for granted; indeed, couples more often than not encounter setbacks. Both couple and child–parent relationships post-incarceration will depend among others on the intensity of contact during imprisonment (McKay et al., 2018). The same point can arguably be made for the case of brothers and sisters. Findings on how intimate relationships tend to deteriorate during re-entry up to couples separating have led researchers to recommend the provision of support in this area as well. Successful continuation of relationships was found to be influenced by the length of the relationship, children and the intensity of contact during incarceration (Comfort et al., 2018). Prison visits are a cornerstone of re-establishing functioning relationships with families; in this context, the regime and a positive and welcoming attitude of prison staff are crucial (Dixey & Woodall, 2012).

More broadly, drawing on the family therapy literature, successful family relationships require explicit, clear and realistic expectations. This translates to a necessity to increase families' capacities to define, communicate and negotiate expectations (Yocum & Nath, 2011).

PRACTICES OF WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Family Group Conferences for teenagers and young adults are carried out by **Neustart Austria** in order to allow the emergence of individual plans that involve support from a range of professionals and the family, and where there is individual ownership of the plan. The intervention is carried out based on a number of principles.

- It should involve family/community-based solutions;
- The clients create their own plan and makes important decisions for themselves;
- There is a shared responsibility between the client, the family and the social network, who are all empowered;
- Family bonds should be strengthened in this way;
- This instrument is meant to empower both the individuals and their families, for which reason the probation officer's role is support and supervision.

The Belgian Centre for assistance of people concerned by any radicalism or extremism leading to violence (CAPREV) provides social, psychological and legal assistance in a multidisciplinary team including the following disciplines: psychology, criminology, political science, law, anthropology, social work and education. Interventions are voluntary and they include listening, advising, supporting, by/from private individuals as well as professionals. CAPREV works towards the objectives of prevention, social inclusion, global re-integration and starting a path of desistance.

CEAPIRE (Centre of Expertise and Advice for Prevention and Intervention of Radicalism and Extremism) works with an approach to communities that involves trust, reputation and integrity. Important steps in reaching out to communities are: recruiting volunteers and individuals who have themselves large networks; identifying and establishing communication with key figures and strategic networks; using rational but also emotional arguments; identifying a PVE network of professionals with similar issues and objectives. Dealing with difficult cases where either the (ex)offender or the community is reluctant to engage involves addressing concerns and engaging in dialogue, as well as, if necessary, moving on to a different community.

Conclusion

Involving families and communities in rehabilitation work is crucial for its success. A series of practices in this area have been initiated in several European countries and important lessons learned have been disseminated as a result. This paper has illustrated some of these practices and set them against the broader context of rehabilitation work; additionally, connections have been established to the broader literature and practice of (ex)offender rehabilitation. Future work should be dedicated to the more in-depth exploration and evaluation of ways and means in which more general rehabilitation instruments can be adapted and used in the work with terrorists and radicalised individuals released from prison. On the reverse, it should also be explored how specific initiatives in this area might be of use in work with "regular" offenders, especially considering that recidivism rates in this latter group are significantly higher than for terrorists. In other words, knowledge gained in the counter- and deradicalisation niche area could be effectively put to use in order to reduce recidivism in other areas of criminal justice as well.

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