Working with VEO: what we know and what it is missing.
A practitioner’s perspective
Aim and structure

• To take stock of what we know and outline what is missing from the research and practice

• Take a practitioner’s perspective

• Structure:
  – What is out there?
  – What is missing?
Practitioner’s perspective

- Preparation
- Assessment
- Intervention
- Planning
- Review and Evaluate
Preparation

- Basically relationship work.

Pressman (2016) – difference between offenders and VEO:

- Action for glorification- not personal gain+ mixed motives
- Selective empathy, not absence of empathy
- Education or employment failure not notable
- Childrearing- abuse not usually relevant
- Stable family frequently
- Less mental illness
- Psychopathy not typical
- Impulse control problems minimal
- Attitudes ideological, moralistic
- Strategic lying; not pathological lying
- Purposeful, planned- not impulsive
- Accepts responsibility

Worldviews, mindsets or psychological propensities:

- Authoritarianism - rigid, dual cognitive style, intolerance to ambiguity – submission to authority, staunch conventionalism and aggression towards out-groups
- Dogmatism – closed cognitive system of beliefs about reality, intolerance towards others.
- Apocalypticism – they think death will come and they know how and when.
- Fundamentalist mindset – dualistic thinking, paranoid ideas and focus on a charismatic leader
Preparation

We know it is important

Use of mentors / professional ex / imams – create some ‘power balance’ and legitimacy

Why they become – ‘avalanche of publications’ (Schmidb, 2013):
Pathways (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008)
Stages (Sageman, 2004, 2008)
Staircase (Moghaddam, 2005)
Narrative (van Leyenhorst and Andreas, 2017)

More is not better – confusion, undifferentiated conclusions etc.
Preparation

Conclusions

- Little empirical support
- Based on one kind of VEO – in Europe more focus on identity issues
- Weak links with the treatment programs
- Does not integrate all possible factors – e.g. in-group narcissism, anti-social or violent cognitions, etc.
- Not much in concrete terms: how to create reciprocity, how to deal with the lack of legitimacy, how to engage with their narratives, how to deal with resistance and confrontation
Assessment

- Basically – risk assessment
- Should be - standardized and reliable
- Many local ones – mostly structured professional judgment (SPJ)
- Mostly known ERG 22 and VERA 2
### VERA 2 & ERG 22+

**ERG-22+ Record Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Presence of Factor</th>
<th>Omit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Need to redress injustice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Need to defend against threats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identity, meaning &amp; belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Need for status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Excitement, comradeship &amp; adventure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Need to dominate others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Susceptibility to indoctrination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Political, moral motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Opportunistic involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Family and/or friends support extremism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Transitional periods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Group influence and control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Mental health issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Factor Specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall rating for Engagement</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Over-identification with group, cause</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Us &amp; Them thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Dehumanisation of the enemy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Attitudes that justify offending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Harmful means to an end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Harmful end objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Factor Specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall rating for Intent</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Personal knowledge, skills, competencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Access to networks, funding, equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Criminal history</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall rating for Capability</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Omit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### VERA

**VIOLENT EXTREMISM RISK ASSESSMENT**

For the Summer School Barcelona

**Working Rating Form**

Pressman and Flockton

2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA.1</td>
<td>Commitment to ideology justifying violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA.2</td>
<td>Victim of injustice and grievances (personal or group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA.3</td>
<td>Dehumanization/demonization of identified targets of injustice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA.4</td>
<td>Rejection of democratic society and values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA.5</td>
<td>Feelings of hate, frustration, persecution and/or alienation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Main tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>VERA 2</th>
<th>ERG 22+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiators</td>
<td>Pressman and Flockton (Canada)</td>
<td>Lloyd and Dean (NOMS UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
<td>In 2009 as a guide together with experts and clinicians based on previous literature – many versions</td>
<td>In 2014 – based on the literature, casework but also interviews with real offenders (50) and feedback from PO (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>In English and French – for sale</td>
<td>English (tested only in Minnesota outside UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure (almost similar)</td>
<td>5 parts: ideology (attitudes), context-intent, commitment and motivation, history and capability and protective items.</td>
<td>3 dimensions: engagement, intent and capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested</td>
<td>Mostly clinically on 5 terrorists</td>
<td>Clinically if easy to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>To evaluate risk, inform treatment and support disengagement – mostly high risk</td>
<td>To manage risk – also low risk offenders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Main tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>VERA 2</th>
<th>ERG 22+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who could use it?</td>
<td>Previous training advised</td>
<td>Forensic psychologists of experienced POs – in pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>Contain also situational factors</td>
<td>Such as network, ties ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contain also items regarding grievance of injustice</td>
<td>Such as hyper-masculinity, sensation seeking etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both include items such as antisocial traits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main differences</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes protective factors – 6</td>
<td>Clinical – case formulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Almost actuarial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing in both</td>
<td>Cognitive inflexibility</td>
<td>E.g. authoritarian thoughts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other tools & New developments

- **IR46** – used in The Netherlands by Haaglanden Regional Safety House – two columns (ideologies and social context) – 46 items – multi-agency risk assessment

- **TRAP-18** – combines proximal warning behaviors (identification, fixation) and 10 longer term distal characteristics (grievance, ideology), especially useful for lone-actors.

- Ministry of Justice in The Netherlands is creating an European databases with terrorists to create an European VERA
Assessment conclusions

- Poor empirical bases
- Not tested in other jurisdictions for validation
- Mostly Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ) – to direct the intervention
- Only ERG 22 is followed by an intervention - HII
Interventions / Treatment

Many interventions / models

Mostly one-to-one

Significant exceptions (complex, explicit theoretical background, EBP):
- ENTRE
- Healthy Identity Interventions
- RIVE

Some focusing on disengagement / some on deradicalisation
Entre

- Developed by Swedish Prison and Probation Service
- One to one
- Cognitive behavioral program and problem solving designed to help VEO to leave terrorist networks
- Does not challenge the radicalised views but the use of violence and other criminal acts
- The client is his personal expert – targeting high risk offenders
- The role of the therapist is to show how the client’s thoughts and behaviors have resulted in problems
- Also to provide perspectives and alternatives for a constructive life.
Entre – Structure

• Based on themes and treatment strategies
• Based on RNR
• Flexible format and administration – depending on the client’s needs, risks and conditions.
• Assessment, Case Formulation, Treatment and Maintenance
• 50 sessions, twice per week, 60-90 minutes each.
• Five themes:
  – History of aggression – functional analysis
  – Interpersonal relations and associates
  – Attitudes and values
  – Identity and self-image
  – Problem solving
Table 2: General description of the three phases in Entré.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Central component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase 1 – assessment | • Establish rapport  
• Strengthen/maintaining client’s engagement in treatment  
• Set rules and restrictions for treatment  
• Increase the client’s personal and sanctional circumstances to complete the programme  
• Assessment  
• Hypotheses of learning history and maintenance of antisocial behaviours, and how these should be addressed in treatment  
• Goal formulation  
• Treatment planning | • The client is interested, hopeful and engaged in treatment  
• A cooperative working alliance is established  
• Goals, opportunities and barriers are identified  
• A goal directed, guiding, theoretically sound, client specific & applicable case formulation and treatment plan have been written and discussed with the client  
• The client’s personal and social circumstances are judged to be stable enough for continued treatment  
• Treatment can be administered under necessary safety conditions of the sanction | • Introduction and description of the programme  
• Increase client’s compliance and conditions for programme completion  
• Detailed assessment – inventoring opportunities and barriers, investigation of involvement in organised crime and/or violent crime, functional analyses  
• Case formulation and treatment planning |
| Phase 2 – interventions  
Work on themes | • Support the client in solving real, actual and important problems that makes it difficult to disengage from organised crime  
• Training in goal formulation  
• Social problem solving training  
• Self control and anger management training  
• Cognitive restructuring | • Real, actual and important problems associated with disengagement have been solved  
• Priority themes are judged as thoroughly addressed and goals for themes have been reached  
• The client have positive and rewarding experiences of alternative behaviours | • Investigation of and addressing themes  
• Application of suitable general and specific treatment strategies |
| Phase 3 – maintenance  
Relapse prevention & maintenance plan | • Increase conditions necessary for maintenance of behavioural changes by structured relapse prevention  
• Set up a maintenance plan for the future | • The goals of treatment have been achieved  
• Th client’s awareness of his/her own recidivism process are increased  
• Plans for relapse prevention and maintenance have been written | • Structured relapse prevention  
• Maintenance plan for the future  
• Evaluation and termination |
Healthy Identity Interventions (HII)

Developed by NOMS – UK since 2008.

In place since 2012 (after piloting, evaluation etc.)

Based on casework, literature review and what works
Aims at encouraging and empowering people to disengage from an extremist group, cause or ideology.

Challenges motivations, attitudes, values that support violent extremism.

Identity is the core concept of the program – people identify strongly with relationships, groups and values.

Aim to help people step away from destructive in-groups they identify with.

Delivered in one-to-one setting or two facilitators.

Flexible format depending on assessment – ERG 22+

Approaches: what works, pro-social modeling, emotional management, identity development and mindfulness.

Concrete aim: For those strongly identifying and engaged – simply question their continuation.

For those who begun to have doubts – to separate.

For those already disengaged – consolidate their new commitments.
HII – Modules and Sessions

**Engagement and Insight Sessions**
- Explore needs, beliefs, values
- Identify what is important in their lives

**Foundation Sessions**
- Understand how they become what they are today
- Explore why they become interested and involved in the cause/ideology/group

**Mindfulness Sessions**
- Teach participants how to manage thoughts and feelings that impair their daily lives

**Personal Identity Sessions**
- Re-examine their commitments they have made in life and how these commitments could be followed without offending.

**Group Involvement and Conflict Sessions**
- Explore costs and benefits of their involvement with offending
- Explore what changes they can make to avoid offending

**Self-Image Sessions**
- Explore how they can preserve the desired self/identity without offending

**Seeking Change Sessions**
- Explore ways to pursue their legitimate goals without offending

**Moving on Sessions**
- Making plans on how they can move on with their lives without committing crimes, including developing new skills, taking other opportunities, create other relationships and so on.
HII-Evaluation

ONLY BY PRACTITIONERS AND PARTICIPANTS

POSITIVE FEEDBACK
RIVE

- Developed by an international team of experts led by prof. Martine Herzog-Evans – France 2016.
- Based on a large literature review exercise and consultation with experts
- Targeting:
  - Criminogenic need, especially cognitive distortions – RNR
  - Reduce the number and intensity of negative ‘moral emotions’, especially anger and hatred,
  - **Increase identity opening**, reduce ‘them and us’, challenge identity fusion, increase the feeling of belonging
  - **Increase pro-social self-determination** by employing collaborative work style,
  - Develop awareness of religious plurality and accept the diverse nature of Islam
  - Address **practical problems and needs**
- Based on clear and explicit theoretical framework: e.g. RNR, significance quest, need for closure etc.
- Groupwork but also one-to-one
- Structure – four steps:
  - Induction phase – relationship building, screen for psychopathology needs, identify goals in life etc.
  - Initiation phase – risk assessment (LS-CMI and VERA), case formulation, modules.
  - Consolidation phase – individualized, focusing on social work, problem solving, access to rights, attitudes, cognitions and behaviour, develop a less rigid view on the out-group, Cycle of support and accountability?
  - Conclusions phase
- Mid-term psychometric and criminological assessment
- But never implemented – serious flaws in integrity, institutional resistance, instability etc.
Other interventions

At least 18 programs in Europe (Mehra, 2016)

CoSa – in The Netherlands

Al-Furqan – UK – distinguish between truth and falsehood

Back on Track – Denmark
## What is missing??

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A consistent and integrated theory or set of theories that explain:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why people become VE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why they desist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How these two can be integrated in a meaningful correctional intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Theories to be tested for validity for different groups, different regions, etc.

### Development of an evidence-based comprehensive program – like RIVE in France

### Integrate all stages of intervention – relationship building, risk/needs assessment, individualized and comprehensive interventions, reflection and evaluation (care for fidelity!!!)

### Develop and test standardized risk assessment tools – VERA 2 and ERG-22

### Better integration of web-based interventions – to prevent or treat – see Sakina initiative in Saudi Arabia – mirroring terrorist strategies (forums, online debates, youth workers, involvement of...

### More engagement with narratives – see next!
More integration of counter-narrative work

- Watch: A sex slave as a gift for you from Abu Bakr al Bagdadi
- To challenge the terrorist narratives
- With experienced and skillful facilitator
TO CLARIFY THE TYPOLOGY OF VEO IN EUROPE

ELABORATE AND TEST GUIDELINES FOR HOW TO BUILD UP CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH VEO

EXPLAIN THEIR BECOMING AND DESISTING WITHIN AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK WITH CLEAR PRACTICE GUIDELINES – ADAPTED TO THE EUROPEAN PROFILE (IF ANY?)

DEVELOP VALIDATED RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS BASED ON DIRECT ACCESS TO VEOS – PILOTED AND VALIDATED IN DIFFERENT JURISDICTIONS, FOCUSING ON BOTH TERRORISTS TO BE AND ACTUAL TERRORISTS

DEVELOP INTEGRATED INTERVENTIONS THAT ARE EBP AND COMPREHENSIVE – INCLUDING ALL MAJOR NEEDS AND USE OF NARRATIVES

PILOT THEM AND EVALUATE THEM INDEPENDENTLY USING ROBUST METHODOLOGIES

PUBLISH AND MAKE THE PROGRAMS/TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR SPECIALISTS !!!!!
Thanks!!

Email: idurnescu@gmail.com