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THE (NEAR) FUTURE RELEASE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS FROM PRISON: THEIR REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION BACK INTO SOCIETY

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MOST IMPORTANT TARGETS WORKING WITH VEO AND RADICALIZED OFFENDERS IN/OUTSIDE PRISON

General:

- To ensure security and safety
- To prevent reoffending
- To support offenders rehabilitation and reintegration into society

Specific:

- To prevent the radicalization of other individuals and/or family members
- To prevent the affiliation to existing terrorist groups

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The first step for a fruitful rehabilitation path: ability to develop a trusting relationship with the (violent extremist/radicalized) offender;

Extremist/Radicalized offenders can be moved by ideologically/non-ideologically or mixed motivations. They do not necessarily have unique needs when compared to other types of offenders. Some criminogenic factors are similar to the ones of the mainstream offenders (social isolation, anti-social associates, limited education, drug/alcohol/mental health problems, poor family support).

Tackling ideological belief since the very beginning is not always the key, while dealing with motivation for offending can give better outcomes.

Cherney, The Release and Community Supervision, p. 7.

Rushchenko (2019). 295-314.

Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2020) Rehabilitation Manual.

PRINCIPLES THAT CAN FACILITATE THE RESETTLEMENT

To **individualize the risk/needs assessments** with the aim to better understand the offender's personality and being ready to respond to his/her challenges;

To **manage transitional periods** by strengthening the offenders capability to face daily problematic situations;

To take specific care of the **last phase**, working on the capacity building for the time post-reintegration: professionals must ensure that the individual has a positive social network to rely on;

To build relationship based on **trust**: offender must be in the position to trust in his/her probation officers;

To look for **social and organizational support** during the reintegration process. According to the *co-producing desistance model*, *significant others* and *meaningful relationship* can be of great help to reinforce personal identity change through desistance.

Weaver. *The relational context of desistance*, p. 398

Maruna. *Desistance from crime*, p.171-194

Curcio, Pattavina, William Fisher (2018), pag. 182-204.

Bushway, S., Nieuwbeerta, P., Blokland, A. (2011). 27-60 **William Fisher**

RELEASE AS THE END OF THE PRISON SENTENCE: THE VEOs ARE FREE TO MOVE INTO SOCIETY

Disadvantages

The prison environment (with its accompanying known problems) could facilitate radicalisation paths (8).

Depending on the prison regime (dispersal, concentration, combination (9)), VEOs could be in a position to radicalise other prisoners (e.g. proselytism).

VEOs might acquire admirers in prison that pose a threat to their willing participation in deradicalisation or disengagement programmes.

If the VEOs are also foreigners, they will encounter additional difficulties (as do most of the 'mainstream' foreign prisoners) in being admitted to prison activities, rehabilitation programmes, probation or other CSMs (due to, among other reasons, the fact they could be discharged to their countries of origin, or a lack of confidence in their reliability).

VEOs' motivation to follow a rehabilitation path might stem from an interest in having CSMs applied instead of finishing their sentence in prison.



Advantages

VEOs can view the time spent in prison as a breathing space and an opportunity to reflect on their lives.

Extremist/radicalised offenders are under permanent supervision; prison staff are in the position to identify possible elements of radicalisation.

Multi-agency staff can initiate the rehabilitation path at the start of the prison experience and can monitor its progress daily.

VEOs' contact with radicalised groups is significantly limited (the prison environment restricts contact with the outside world).

RELEASE FROM PRISON AS THE APPLICATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE SANCTION: VEOs ARE SUPERVISED BY PROBATION OFFICERS

Advantages

VEOs are not under 24/7 supervision by probation or CSM staff.

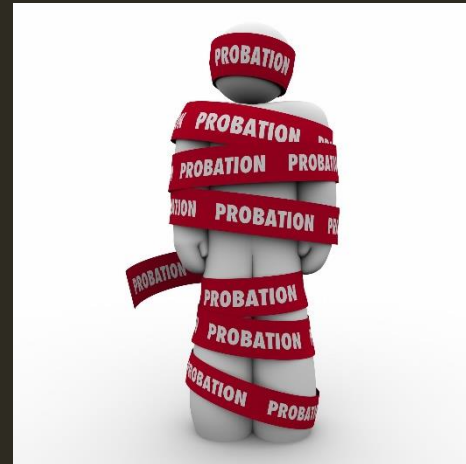
VEOs can easily stay in touch with other VEOs or radicalised groups through the internet or other forms of contact.

VEOs not sentenced to serve time in prison but placed directly under CSMs (or not sentenced at all) could underestimate the severity of their conduct.

VEOs could commit new crimes related to terrorism, or common crimes.

If the conditions attached to the applied CSM are too restrictive, there is a serious risk that the offender will be recalled/imprisoned.

VEOs not under any judicial process are not easily reached and involved in the disengagement path.



Disadvantages

Multi-agency staff can more easily stay in touch with VEOs' families and social networks.

VEOs can avoid the double stigmatisation.

VEOs can provide relevant testimonials for P/CVE strategies and can offer good counter-narratives or alternative narratives to specific target groups (10).

VEOs' rehabilitation garners a higher level of participation and support (or at least, not open opposition) from society, while seeking social and functional integration (11).

The participation of extremist/radicalised individuals in disengagement programmes can serve as a positive starting point towards a change in personal identity.

RELEASE FROM PRISON IN BOTH THE CASES

Elements in common

The need for strong personal motivation for desistance.

The support of significant others and positive social bonding throughout the whole rehabilitation path is vital.

Reintegration involves deradicalisation (disengagement, cognitive distancing). The reintegration process does not end on the last day of the prison sentence. Exit strategies are needed that consider the shift to offenders' gaining independence.

A multi-agency approach is key to stable reintegration (12).

Risk/needs assessments should be tailored to the individual circumstances of the VEO

CHALLENGE 1#: INSPIRING OFFENDERS

(Violent) Extremist/radicalized individuals are the most important actors of any rehabilitation process. According to relevant studies and to the field of research, called by criminologists *redemption research*, a personal decision-making and a sincere willingness towards an identity change are vital for the success of the rehabilitation process itself. Finding a way to inspire offenders towards an active participation into their rehabilitation path can be the first challenge of the multi-agency cooperation.

Hlavka et al. (2015), pag. 4; Maruna et al, (2009), pag. 31

Blumstein, Nakamura. (2009). Redemption Curcio, Pattavina, Fisher (2018) Gender Differences on the Road to Redemption

CHALLENGE 2#: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Challenge 2#: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through family, it is easier to gather useful information about the offender's personality and life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It can be difficult to find a way to communicate with the family, due to language barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thanks to family intermediation, it is easier to help offender finding a job	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The family can be suspicious and not trusting in authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For Islamist offenders, the family tends to play an important role for cultural and religious reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family members can face some difficulties in accepting the involvement of the offender in a terrorist context
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involving the family from the very beginning of the path helps the monitoring the dynamics that regulate the relationships among the offender and the other members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some member of the family can be unable to offer stable and supportive help to the offender
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family can help the offender in maintaining/re-building of positive social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the family itself can be the source of individual radicalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family support can be a relevant motivation for a self-transformation toward desistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the involvement in the reintegration path can cause family members emotional strain/psychological distress

CHALLENGE 3#: DOUBLE STIGMATIZATION

Offenders are stigmatized as criminals AND terrorists

Second chance principle is hard to apply



Stakeholders should create awareness around why rehabilitation of those specific offenders is the best solution for the whole society.

THE NEED FOR A LONG-TERM MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH

When dealing with VEOs who are on probation, serving a CSM or non-sentenced social context can play a decisive role. The responsibility for continuing the work begun in prison, in probation or in another setting, on a voluntary basis, lies with different agencies, organisations and communities. In order to prevent an overlap in interventions or to uncover a crucial area of interest, cooperation among different stakeholders should start as soon as possible

All the existing models of multi-agency cooperation (despite differing vastly across countries) suggest that the fundamental elements for an efficient collaboration system (18) are as follows.

1. Understanding each other's assessment tools and the meaning of the outcomes.
2. Clarifying the role of each partner according to their specific professional tasks, and developing mutual trust and motivation.
3. Sharing the objectives of the applied strategies and the interest in achieving them.
4. Initiating, implementing and ensuring continuity and cohesion in cooperation among prison, probation and exit services.
5. Sharing relevant information (it is necessary to distinguish between classified and sensitive information: for the latter, partners should develop an efficient sharing system).

COMPOSITION OF MULTI-AGENCY NETWORKS

Research shows that multi-agency teams should involve different practitioners from the following areas.

1. Professional: P/CVE specialists, social work, psychological services, religious counselling.
2. Institutional: judicial system, prison services, probation services, municipalities, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies, civil society organisations, schools.
3. Social environment: communities, families.



WORKING FOR REHABILITATION: THE MULTI-AGENCY TEAM

multi-agency team must clearly define the goals and objectives of the cooperation as well as the indicators of success and failure. (The primary goals should be preventing the commission of new crimes and rehabilitating extremist/radicalized offenders).

To reach these goals, actors should work on:

deradicalisation (described as a process that includes behavioral disengagement and cognitive distancing and led to the so called *exit phase*)

(behavioral) disengagement

These two goals not necessarily must be seen as inseparable or in a fixed order: they can be reached in different, following, moments. The rehabilitation process is organized in multiple steps, each one indispensable to obtain the final target of avoiding reoffending.

PROMISING PRACTICING

Three different approaches:

- **Psychological support** (individual sessions or group interventions)
- **Religious and Spiritual Support** (chaplains should be trained for this task)
- **Social support** (the involvement of family and friends in a disengagement path can be useful – when possible. (Role of *significant others*)

KIND OF ENGAGEMENT OF THE OFFENDER IN THE PROGRAMME

Voluntary. Individuals that have been involved in extremist/radicalized groups autonomously decide to leave them and follow the programme

Depending on judicial decision. The programme become a specific part of the enforcement of the sentence outside the prison and is normally developed in collaboration with the probation service, outside of the prison setting.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (1)

- 1) Programmes addressing all forms of (violent) extremism/radicalisation should exist. Anyone seeking to disengage from any form of violent ideology should be able to find support.
- 2) Adopting cross-extremism approaches to rehabilitation can help practitioners learn and benefit from adjacent field.
- 3) Apply a multi-agency approach to P/CVE and VEO reintegration. Neither security agencies nor NGOs can succeed in this endeavour alone. All actors need to find respectful and effective structures for cooperation and information sharing.
- 4) Maintain the focus on behavioural disengagement. Especially with VEOs, the first steps should focus on preventing them from committing acts of violence and other crimes in the future.
- 5) Ensure proportionality and continuity. Interventions must be based on tailor-made risks and needs assessments and must consider the positive and negative consequences of all interventions on the individual and on the relevant community. Moreover, continuity must be maintained throughout the process, including during transitions from prison to probation programmes.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (2)

6) Mitigate stigmatisation by reducing the labelling of individuals and by raising awareness in the community about the importance of rehabilitation programmes. Avoid reinforcing the perception that VEOs receive preferential treatment, as this could provoke feelings of anger and frustration among community members.

7) Train and engage communities, families, municipalities and local authorities that they understand the importance of rehabilitation programmes and contribute to a conducive environment.

8) Consider and plan for specific approaches focused on gender, age, religious and ethnic needs, from the beginning.

9) Enhance the existing capacity of all stakeholders and actors involved in rehabilitation programmes and invest in the development needed to meet new needs as they arise and are identified.

10) Implement the use of restorative justice and consider involving victims of VEOs (depending on their own needs).



Any questions?

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