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The Role of Families in Avoiding Terrorist and Violence Activities

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Abstract

A rising wave of violence and terrorism the world over has seen many governments and other authorities pursue different approaches to dealing with such activities. The major role played by families has been a contributing factor that has helped reduce cases of violence and terror especially by young extremists. One of the approaches adopted by many governments has been the use of a family based model of dealing with radicalization at the onset of extremism among the youth. Families have played a vital role in this process which is explored in the paper. Through the analysis of the causes of violence and terrorism it is evident that parents play a very major role in influencing their children. The influence that families have on the lives of youth is what accounts for such youth engaging in violent and terrorist activities. Moreover, the same families that may be dysfunctional and cause violence in the youths may as well provide essential solutions in dealing with this particular societal issue. Since families are the core units of the society, they should be the front line of programs and initiatives that are aimed in prevention and control of violence and terrorist activities.



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Key Words: Extremism, Violent Extremism, Violence, Families, Youths



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Introduction

The 21st Century has seen a wave of violent extremism rise all over the world. The contemporary American society is now so used to violence that they have in fact accepted it. Evidence of the acceptance of violence and extremism is available in the movies, films and visual media that the USA is renowned for the world over. It is important to note however that violence and terrorism is not limited to the United States of America only. Many Countries on the globe are grappling with terrorism and violent extremism that has been corrupting their societies for close to a century now.

Attributes of Terrorism

Not to say that violence never existed before, but the form of barbarism that was witnessed in earlier forms of civilizations were different compared to the violence that is witnessed today. While the violence and extremism experienced and propagated by earlier civilizations was due to reasons based on necessity, the violence of today is pervasive and with no genuine causes behind them (McDermid, 2010). Terrorism, the most dominant cause of death and suffering all over the world apart from diseases and calamities is a societal evil propagated by perverted individuals. The proponents of such violence justify their violent and extremist action using religion or other traditional beliefs. However, the true and pure believers of such religions have argued otherwise terming such extremist groups as a pervasion of otherwise pure and peaceful religious teachings (Martin, 2017).

While some violent and terrorist activities are solely founded on personal or group vendettas, some of the major cases have been due to radicalization through religion. Moreover, some scholars also argue that the rise in media depiction and acceptance of



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graphic and violent scene in video media is responsible for cases of violence in otherwise peaceful neighbor hoods. Violence in films, video games and print media has made the society numb to the adverse possibilities of the youth being exposed to such media (Cronin, 2003). Therefore after exposure to such graphic depictions of violence, the youth grow up accepting and even emulating violent characters who are depicted in such media. Having violent role models in the form of movie characters, the youth thus don't find it hard to engage in violence and event extremist activities.

To curb this rising wave of violence and terrorist activities a collective effort is necessary. It is important for the governments, parents, families and the whole society in general to contribute collectively and end the spread of this wave. Governments can come up with antiterrorism programs that are aimed at killing extremism at its root hence therefore stopping its development and spread altogether (Butler, 2015). According to Dhabi (2014) the USA patriotic act has every citizen even parents responsible for ensuring that terrorism is avoided at all costs especially in American soil. In America, the government has taken a stand to deal with terrorism at its roots (Dhabi, 2014). USA declared war on terrorism in the year 2001, after the September bombings of the New York trade centre by an extremist group called Al Qaeda. Since then, the government through its military and defense apparatus have been carrying out missions in the Middle East where most of the terrorist and extremist groups are based.

Apart from the USA, many other countries have contributed to the fight against violence and terrorism. In Europe, the UK, France, Belgium and several other forces carry out joint operations in the Middle East against terrorist cells. Most of the modern approaches against terrorism have included the affected parties dealing with terrorism by taking the war



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to the terrorists at their own turf. By waging war on terrorism, such governments have been able to save lives and livelihoods of their citizens (Brenna-Galvin, 2002).

However, some scholars have argued that the war on terrorism has had counterproductive effects and lead to the rise of many extremist groups. Such scholars argue that the identification and targeting of extremist groups by big governments such as USA has given relevance to even the smallest extremist groups. The publicity attention given to such groups have given such groups the relevance and significance that contribute to the high number of recruits wanting to join their ranks (Abadie, 2006). When dealing with violent activities especially associated with crime especially robbery, drug trafficking and even human trafficking, the role of governments have been paramount. Through special a police departments and regular police governments have been able to deal with and control the violent activities within the neighborhoods in their countries (Abadie, 2006).

Apart from the government, the role of families especially the nuclear family has played a vital role in the avoidance of terrorism and violence activities. Evidence of the relevance of family guidance has been especially vital in steering many youths clear of crime which is the main factor and contributor of violence and terrorism (Bott et al., 2009). By guiding and monitoring their children especially male youths, many families have been able to identify elements of radicalism. Early realization of the activities that children especially adolescents have helped many families save their children from radicalism that leads to violent extremism.

In recent years, many governments have acknowledged the need of encouraging families to monitor their own as an effective way of dealing with terrorism. Families are vital in the prevention and control of violence (Newman, 2006). Through the shaping of attitudes



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towards non-violence and also acting as a front line in identification of radicalization, families have helped stop violence and terrorism at its onset. Families are the key players in dealing with violent extremism at an early stage especially by intervening against the radicalization process.

At times, families have even been proved to be major causes of the problem. Parent-child relationships are major contributory factors to violent expressions in children. Most often difficult parent-child relationships have been proven to be a contributory factor to the tendency to violence in a child. In such circumstances, a credible community figure may play a major role in providing guidance and the necessary support system that will help steer such children away from violence (Spalek, 2014).

Causes of Violence and Terrorist Activities

Recruitment and exploitation of children by extremist groups is the major cause of violence and extremist behaviors among the youth. Recruitment of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups is taking place in countries throughout the world, in situations of armed conflict and in the absence of armed conflict (Spalek, 2014). Regardless of the conditions in which it takes place, the recruitment usually leads to exploitation and victimization of children. While the recruitment of children by armed groups has a long history, the recruitment of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups is a more recent phenomenon and has undergone notable developments in the past decade. In recent times recruitment of children or youths has majorly been through social media in stable countries like the USA and England while using forced recruitment in politically unstable countries like Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq just to mention a few (Martin, 2017).



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Violence on social media and other forms of visual media influence the perception of violence in children and youths. Children growing up watching or playing violent media are more susceptible to engage in such activities in the future. Moreover, terrorist groups through their media propagated propaganda are able to radicalize such children through videos depicting violence. Public or videotaped decapitations, for example, are one of the many methods of media violence used by extremist groups (Straus, 2017).

Bad family relationships lead to many children engaging in violence later on in life once they become adults. Children who grew up being abused are the most vulnerable of all being radicalized easily to take part in violent extremism by recruiters who take advantage of their emotional and psychological instability. Another contributing factor to violent tendencies in children and youth is racial or ethnical profiling (Bott et al., 2009). Bullying in school because of one's race, ethnicity or heritage may lead the bullied to despise the race or ethnicity of the perpetrators and sometimes even react in violent ways. Extremists prey on such individuals who are so easy to manipulate because of their initial hate for other cultures or ethnicities.

Another cause of violence and terrorist activities is unhealthy societies. Such societies are infested with economic, social and even political problems. The Middle East for example, is the most affected by activities of violence and terrorism because of the underlying societal problems that contribute to people's tendencies towards violence. Unresolved conflicts and oppression are among the major causes of violence and extremism in the Middle East. Societies and communities of people feel deprived of their freedom and rights and therefore often have to fight to get them. Another underpinning issue is the significance of poverty in the propagation of violence in such communities. When resources are scarce people have to



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do anything possible to survive. This explains the large number of suicide extremists who commit bombings knowing that their families will be compensated for their deaths with economic provisions that will help them survive (Waraich, 2010).

Preventive Measures against Violence

Strengthening family based relations is the first measure in curbing violence and terrorism. Family, as a conduit of culture and belief, can play a central role in shaping attitudes toward non-violence. Social networks and peer groups in general play a profound role in facilitating, or undermining, processes of radicalization to violence. Positive social networks are important in reinforcing non-violent norms and resilience to violent extremism. Some research has found family to be more important than other kinds of social networks in shaping individual perspectives on non-violence. Parental influence appears to be particularly important. Where parents have less impact on their children's decision-making, they are less able to guard against radicalization to violence (Spalek, 2014). In many contexts, "parent-son" relationships represent a particularly important gap. Where programming can strengthen family influence on youth, and increase links between individuals and the broader community, this may reduce the appeal of violent extremism.

The second measure is the support and empowering of women. Since the women are the major home makers, their support is paramount in this context. Children, especially the youth who are more susceptible to violence and terrorism are more comfortable with their mothers and sisters than they are with the male members of their families (Dhabi, 2014). Due to this fact it is important to empower the women and give them the necessary support that they may need to deal with youth and hence intervene in possible cases of radicalisation or violence. Moreover, the mothers who are situated at the heart of families are more able to



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detect any changes in behaviour compared to fathers or other male members of the family. The women are the most often best-placed to identify, predict and respond to potential vulnerabilities.

In many cases also the women are well able to provide counter-narratives that may be useful for this cause. Women can humanize the possible hardships and the negative impact that terrorism can have on the family, when a recruit leaves to join a terrorist group. Compared to the male members of the family, the women are the best able to inspire feelings of remorse and guilt that will help in stopping youth from engaging in such activities. Therefore, the empowerment and support of women will act as an amplification of their efforts therefore contributing positively to the prevention of radicalisation processes in the society (McDermid, 2010). Furthermore, it will enable the woman to act just instead of watching since they will be empowered with the necessary tools to stop the children from engaging in violence and extremism.

Another measure is the engagement of the male members of the community in order for authorities to gain access to vulnerable communities and prevent radicalisation processes. In many cultures, men act as the chief family and community leaders, and their cooperation is necessary for a family-based program to succeed (Butler, 2015). Fathers and male family members are also central in shaping notions of masculinity that extremists have proven adept at manipulating and militarizing. Fathers, brothers, and other men in the community can work to blunt such narratives – including by calling attention to the falseness of violence and terrorism propaganda, or by emphasizing culturally relevant, non-violent values of protection of, and provision for, family. While there are some programs to support mothers as violence prevention actors, fathers are a missing link. The same tools and programs that help support



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mothers should be extended to fathers to help build their capacity and skills – including how to communicate with children (Straus, 2017).

One more recommendation that may help propagation of violence and terrorism is the building of family awareness of violent radicalisation signs and prevention techniques. Families that are in vulnerable communities can be trained on how to detect signs of radicalisation of their youth at an early stage and therefore prevent such youth from eventually engaging in violent extremism. Families are often insufficiently armed with the knowledge or tools to prevent violence and terrorist radicalization, and face the risk of being stigmatized, blamed, judged, shamed, job losses, and taboo when engaging in dialogue.

While in some cases parents are the first to recognize the early signs of radicalization to violence, they are not always equipped with the skills to address the political, psychological, sociological, and ideological issues. Meaningful education efforts to support parents might address issues such as the warning signs of radicalization to violence through child development, particularly how the onset of adolescence makes young people more susceptible to violence (Martin, 2017). Another issue addressed by meaningful education is the use of technology, particularly social media by violence proponents. Education will also address the relevance of active and fruitful community debate and the role it plays in stopping violent extremism. Finally, there also needs to be safe channels for parents to report early signs of radicalization to violence, and an infrastructure of experts able to deal with vulnerable youth before they become a security risk (Cronin, 2003).

An additional proposal to how families can better help in avoiding violence is rehabilitation of former violent individuals or terrorists. Families are the main pull factors that can help influence the actions of violent extremists or terrorists. Through families or the



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actions of loved ones violent extremists can be able to give up violence and even seek rehabilitation or asylum from the government.

Commitment to family, or a desire to start one, can be an important motive in disengaging from violent extremism. While disengagement is a process, not a static event, family connections appear to be an important factor in shaping outcomes and creating “cognitive openings” through which former violent individuals or extremists can reassess their commitments. Some disengagement programs emphasize binding former extremists to their families and larger communities. Those who lack close family ties are encouraged to build them. In some cases, upon release, former prisoners have been assisted in finding a wife, as well as identifying and being provided housing and employment. Domestic and communal attachments that promote non-violence appear to be among the more effective buffers against participation in violent and terrorist activities.

Apart from the recommendations and mitigations discussed above, families also play a major role in the avoidance of terrorism by not isolating their children. Isolation from other members and cultures of the community is a known method that is used by many proponents of violent extremism. Therefore, parent or the guardian members of families should let the children interact with other culture and acknowledge and appreciate such cultures (Brennan-Galvin, 2002). When appreciation of other culture is ingrained in an individual at an early age, future corruption or radicalization is minimal in such an individual. The ability to resist violence and terrorist activities is a multilevel aspect that individual and societal or communal networks for it to work.

It is a property not only of individuals, but of families and communities, requiring common values, strong social networks, and shared problem-solving mechanisms. Yet, in



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many communities, women and children's access to the public sphere is limited. This social isolation limits interactions with authorities, including law enforcement, and reduces opportunities for families, particularly mothers, to share information with other families outside the home (Butler, 2015). This undermines constructive identification of radicalization and therefore prevention efforts. Where such isolation dynamics prevail, extremists enjoy greater flexibility to move and the means and opportunity to reach potential recruits without detection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through the measures discussed above, parents and families in general can help avoid violence and terrorist activities. Apart from just being the measures that can be used to prevent such violent extremist activities, the measures discussed above are the basis and the foundation of the major role played by families in prevention of violence. The measures are basically a high light of the important and significant role that families have played in the avoidance of violent extremism. Through the analysis of the causes of violence and terrorism it is evident that parents play a very major role in influencing their children. The influence that families have on the lives of youth is what accounts for such youth engaging in violent and terrorist activities. Moreover, the same families that may be dysfunctional and cause violence in the youths may as well provide essential solutions in dealing with this particular societal issue. Since families are the core units of the society, they should be the front line of programs and initiatives that are aimed in prevention and control of violence and terrorist activities. Families indeed play a very big role one which to date is more significant compared to military or law enforcement methods of dealing with violent extremism.



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