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## Youth De-Radicalization: A Canadian Framework

**Hafal (Haval) Ahmad<sup>a1</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Royal Roads University, British Columbia, Canada

### **Abstract**

Youth radicalization leading to violence has become a growing fear among Canadians, as terrorist attacks are carried out in Western states. Although Canada has suffered relatively fewer acts of violence, this fear has intensified and a de-radicalization strategy is needed in the Canadian context. In a qualitative case study methodology, interviews were conducted with school counsellors, religious leaders, and academics to explore solutions to youth radicalization. Youth de-radicalization approaches from the United Kingdom were analyzed and found that community-based initiatives were missing from programming. Social identity theory is used to explain that youth join radicalized groups to feel a sense of belonging and have to be provided an alternative and moderate group identity to de-radicalize. This study found youth de-radicalization in Canada is best served through a community collaboration approach.

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### **Introduction**

Radicalization among youth remains a growing concern to Canadians with an increased fear of homegrown terrorism. According to a survey conducted by the Angus Reid Institute (2016), nearly two-thirds of Canadians (62%) believed that homegrown terrorism was a serious threat. This fear of further attacks by violent extremists required a response to the developing trend of radicalization. While Canada has experienced radicalization leading to violence in the past with the Front de liberation du Quebec (FLQ) in the 1960s and other extremist groups, modern radicalization has evolved to include extremists who conduct violent acts in the name of religion. As a result, de-radicalization of youth from violent extremism addresses the likelihood of further attacks in Canada and addresses the anxiety of

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author Contact: Hafal Ahmad is currently a non-institutional researcher and can be reached under: [haval099@hotmail.com](mailto:haval099@hotmail.com)

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domestic terrorism. An example of the modern radicalization is the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has become a growing concern within the Middle East, and appeals to young Muslims to join their extremism in a claim for territory (Human Rights Watch, 2014). With their extensive manipulation of Islam through social media, ISIS has recruited young foreign fighters from around the globe and has implored extremists to attack Western targets (Bell, 2014). These issues lead to the central question of this research on what initiatives and practices can be incorporated into Canadian youth de-radicalization approaches.

Canada is currently “experiencing a growing radicalization problem, underscored by the October 2014 terror attacks that resulted in the deaths of two Canadian Forces members” (Bell, 2016). Despite the relatively low number of successful terrorist plots in Canada, many religious and government organizations have been rushed to create an effective de-radicalization program for young Canadians (Nasser, 2015; Wade, 2015). Previous Canadian counter-measures appeared ineffectual and contained a lack of emphasis on the importance of social identity and community-based initiatives (Freeze & Stone, 2016). Examples of these missing components are illustrated in Stephen Harper’s Conservative government, who was criticized for having a punitive approach to de-radicalization, as their strategy involved treating perpetrators “as harshly as possible” (Cullen, 2014). However, in March 2016, the current Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau highlighted the need for community-based approaches, by unveiling a plan that involved \$35 million over five years “to fund programs that reach out to vulnerable people open to radicalization” (Wilton, 2016). However, despite numerous programs globally, there has been difficulty in creating a successful de-radicalization program. This frustration was noted from former Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) analyst, Paul Gurski who contended that de-radicalization programs were implemented all over the world, yet “no one has really figured out the best approach” (Freeze & Stone, 2016). However, by analyzing existing policies and practices by other organizations and governments, an effective model can be derived and adapted for use in the Canadian context.

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In deciphering why young Canadians consider joining brutal campaigns like ISIS, identity issues were cited as a common theme among radicalized youth (Bizina & Gray, 2014; Koehler, 2016; Williams & Lindsey, 2014; Altier, Throughgood, & Horgan, 2014). In the formative years of youth development, the concept of the self and identity could be threatened. In some cases of radicalization, “young men turn to extremism in their search for identity acceptance and purpose which they are unable to find in the community more often concerned with wealth accumulation rather than healthy relationship-building” (Bizina & Gray, 2014, p. 72). As a result of this issue, social identity theory was implemented in this study as a theoretical framework. Tajfel (1981), who originally formulated social identity theory, recognized that an individual’s identity is derived from group memberships and the emotional significance attached to that group (Tajfel, 1981, p. 225). In a search for a group identity, peers can begin to see their group as the norm and the correct narrative, leading to extremist views (Spears, 2011, p. 203). Social identity theory may explain why youth radicalize and can inform an effective paradigm for de-radicalizing young Canadians.

To find a framework for de-radicalization in the Canadian context, the policies of United Kingdom (UK) will be analyzed, as well as primary data from Canadian religious leaders, school counsellors, and academics. Using Seawright and Gerring’s (2008) selection techniques in case study research, the UK and has been chosen for an extensive analysis because of its similarities to Canada in terms of the use of community-based initiatives, interaction with religious leaders, level of government involvement, and perception from the community. Exploring these factors will demonstrate that de-radicalization is not a simple program initiative, but involves multiple stakeholders at the local, provincial, and national level.

De-radicalization efforts in Canada have not adequately incorporated community relationships, nor have they proactively or reactively addressed identity issues that may influence the radicalization process. Without these community-based connections, some vulnerable youth may continue to be recruited as foreign fighters or incited to commit domestic terror plots. Since most youth de-radicalization approaches are implemented to

prevent violent extremism, youth de-radicalization in Canada is best served through a community collaboration approach.

### **Research Question**

The research was supported by a central question and three supporting questions to find effective practices for youth de-radicalization in Canada. Interviews and a comparative analysis between Canada and the UK were conducted to find these practices. These elements included the family, school, religious organizations, community, and the government. Incorporating practices derived from an exploration of the successes and failures of different approaches can create a better system overall and effectively contribute to de-radicalization efforts within Canada. For these reasons, the following questions directed this research:

#### *Central Research Question*

1. What effective practices can be incorporated into Canadian youth de-radicalization approaches?

#### *Supporting Research Questions*

1. How can de-radicalization approaches from the United Kingdom be adapted for use in Canada?
2. What lessons can be learned from current Canadian de-radicalization approaches?
3. What is role of the family, community, religious organizations and government in youth de-radicalization in Canada?

### **Definition of Terms**

Due to the subjective definitions contained within the research, numerous terms had to be operationalized including youth, radicalization, and de-radicalization.

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*Youth*

The transitional age of youth needs to be operationalized in the context of youth de-radicalization to ensure validity. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2013) defined youth between the ages of 15 to 24 and understood this as “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence . . . as members of a community” (UNDESA, 2013). The Canadian legal definition of adulthood does not account for the formative years of growth, including the development of extremist ideology. Gaudet (2007) also contended that youth is a fluid and transitional period and does not halt at the age of 18. In fact, “the symbolic age of majority (age 18) is but one of numerous benchmarks along the path to adulthood” (p. 18). With de-radicalization techniques, the youth’s life-course must be analyzed with the formation of their identity. Therefore, age 15 to 24 encompasses the transition to adulthood “within a temporal context in order to avoid categorization that disregards the conditions that led them to experience various types of transitions” (p. 19). This demographic also marks the beginning of self-autonomy, which can place youth at risk and cause feelings of isolation from support networks (p. 19), increasing the risk of radicalization and requiring de-radicalization techniques.

*Radicalization*

The definition of radicalization in the literature differs from those offered by institutions and government agencies. While the Canadian government has defined radicalization as a process (RCMP, 2011), scholars have offered definitions that vary within temporal and global contexts. Definitions varied from simply describing radicalization as a “process of developing extremist ideology and beliefs” (Özerdem & Podder, 2011) to a “movement in the direction of supporting or enacting radical behaviour” (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 70). Due to this variance, the study combines interpretation in literature from Özerdem and Podder (2011) that radicalization is a process and from Bartlett and Miller (2012) that radicalization can be non-violent or violent in nature. Therefore, radicalization is

the process of forming an extremist view that has a high propensity to result in violent attitudes or violent action.

### *De-Radicalization*

De-radicalization in literature has focused on general approaches and provided less attention to a working definition. Despite this, some soft explanations of de-radicalization have been offered. Dechesne (2011) believed de-radicalization sought “to prevent further escalation of violence” and “creates the conditions conducive to dialogue” (p. 287). However, Dechesne’s (2011) definition lacked an explanation on what the process actually involved. Porges (2011) alluded to this gap, stating that “no single model of deradicalization is universally applicable” (p. 2). De-radicalization has often been viewed as the reverse process of radicalization, but the concept can be vague and subjective in its meaning. Porta and LaFree (2012) asserted that the de-radicalization process had two components that were often overlooked or conflated. One part contained the “de-radicalization of attitudes and beliefs” and the other included “the disengagement from violent behaviour and the process of leaving violent groups and reintegrating into other social groups” (Porta & LaFree, 2012, p. 7). El-Said (2015) agreed that de-radicalization referred to disengagement from violence: de-radicalization is “a package of policies and measures designed and implemented by authorities in order to normalize and convince groups and individuals who have already become radicalized or violent extremists to repent and disengage from violence” (p. 10). De-radicalization can also be effective without the need for a formalized program and “may not require any coordinated action to get it underway” (Dechesne, 2011, p. 288). Drawing from these viewpoints, the definition for de-radicalization for this study is the following:

A formal or informal approach aimed at reducing commitment to an extremist viewpoint that has led or could lead to violent action.

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*Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory*

This research is based upon the principles of Social Identity Theory that asserts youth seek belonging within a group, which comprises their identity and worldview. Creating this belonging may have the power to inform an identity that is resilient to the false promises that radicalization may hold. Social Identity Theory explores how individuals identify in reference to a group and how this connection allows the individual to relate to the social world through belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The social construction of this belonging requires an in-group and the out-group. Essentially, different groups within society divide between an “us versus them” mentality, where “group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image” (McLeod, 2008). This type of social framing can lead to issues like racism, extreme beliefs about an opposing group, or discrimination (McLeod, 2008). While attempting to find counters for radicalization, research and policy in Canada dedicated little to create spaces where youth could build this resiliency or offering group belonging to curb radicalization. With young Muslims, Abbas (2007) believed that youth had multiple identities in Western society, and these played a decisive role in radicalization. These youth faced the challenge of “trying to negotiate multiple identities across ethnic, social, and religious dimensions,” thus complicating their identity in relation to society (Abbas, 2007, pp. 3-4). Costanza (2015) elaborated further that this identity crisis is one of the core considerations in de-radicalization research: “For some, the path towards finding a stable identity in the midst of an often hostile sociocultural environment has led them to accept radical interpretations of Islam that provide them with a personal sense of safety, security, and self-worth” (Costanza, 2015, p. 1). This could be the missing link in creating an effective de-radicalization program that addresses these intangible issues.

### Literature Review

The literature review contains a general overview of de-radicalization approaches in Canada and considers theoretical approach and practice. These guiding principles are an important foundation to de-radicalization studies. Due to the closeness in culture and law

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between Canada and the UK, this section will also include a critical analysis of the UK's de-radicalization program to find key processes that would benefit the Canadian approach. Within the literature, de-radicalization programs and approach take different shape and contain different focus. Through the review of this literature, it can be found that these factors can inhibit or promote a successful de-radicalization program.

### *The Canadian Context of De-Radicalization*

Homegrown terrorism has been a developing concern in Canada, as radicalization has appeared to increase in recent years (Chin, 2015, p. 21). With knowledge of this threat, Canada has focused de-radicalization programs on those “who have not yet crossed the line into violent extremism or terrorist acts” (p. 21). Canada's formal efforts to counter violent extremism were initiated with the formation of the Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams (INSETs) in 2002, with a mandate to enhance the capacity and intelligence-sharing among partners within provincial and municipal police departments (RCMP, 2014). While the objective of INSETs is “to ensure the effective and timely investigation of national security threats” (PSC, 2013), consultation with communities was noticeably absent from the initiative. In 2010, Public Safety Canada (PSC), with collaboration from 18 government departments and agencies, initiated the Combating Violent Extremism Working Group (CVEWG) with the objective of “information-exchange and collaboration” to prevent violent extremism (Monaghan, 2014, p. 491). With many youth getting drawn into ideologies and joining groups abroad, the Canadian response to the threat of radicalization is to “counter a very effective extremist ideological marketing” (Kilford, 2014).

Regional Canadian programs include the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV). CPRLV was established in March 2015 by the City of Montreal to serve Montreal and Quebec area as a non-profit organization. The aim of CPRLV was to work with individuals who were at-risk of radicalization leading to violence (CPRLV, 2016a). The agency contains three different subdivisions including prevention and skills development, research, and psychological intervention. Its approach “concentrates on

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prevention rather than repression and provides support rather than stigmatizing individuals and communities” (CPRLV, 2016b). The goal of CPRLV (2016b) was to reroute cases out of the judicial system by providing psychological resources as an alternative. CPRLV (2016c) provides a 24/7 hotline and some useful online tools and guides such as the *behaviour barometer* to recognize behaviour symptoms of radicalization leading to violence.

Another program within Canada is the ReDirect program. This was an initiative established by Calgary Police Department in the fall of 2014 as a “prevention and education program aimed at youth and young adults vulnerable to becoming radicalized, before they develop extremist ideologies or intentions” (Calgary Police Department, 2016a). A representative from ReDirect stated that individuals in the program participate consensually, and are typically 12 to 24 years of age. Similar to CPRLV, ReDirect relies on confidential referrals and does not attribute radicalization to one particular group. Given strict policies on revealing referral rates within the program, the ReDirect representative could not provide these statistics. This policy exists to prevent stigmatization and the misinterpretation of data and perception from the general public. ReDirect portrays its initiative as an educational and awareness hub to stop the radicalization of young people through prevention programs with the main goal to seek out vulnerabilities in youth and promote improvement (Calgary Police Department, 2016b). For those that have accelerated in the process of radicalization, the program serves as a resource for an exit strategy. According to the ReDirect representative, primary funding originates from the Calgary Police Service and the City of Calgary through Calgary Neighbourhood Services.

Since CPRLV and ReDirect are relatively new programs, their work has not been covered extensively in the literature, other than what has been offered by CPRLV or the Calgary Police. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate their long-term effectiveness and success. While the number of referrals do not necessarily reflect the success of the programs, it is difficult to critically analyze when relevant data is protected.

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*Theoretical Approaches of De-Radicalization*

Theoretical applications of de-radicalization are conflicted in literature, including variances between Western and Middle Eastern de-radicalization programs. Western de-radicalization programs were focused on economic assistance, counselling, and placed little emphasis on ideological concerns linked to de-radicalization (Koehler, 2015, p. 127; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013, pp. 99-100). Conversely, Middle East state-run programs “heavily rely on a theological component” (Koehler, 2015, p. 127). Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) argued that these theological-based programs were ineffective and instead programs should focus on issues where the participant already feels doubt (p. 108). Despite these differences, similarities between Western and Middle Eastern programs did exist, in that “go-betweens” were usually employed including “religious scholars, repentant terrorists, or family members” to provide greater influence on the participant and to facilitate long-term de-radicalization (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013, p. 100).

State-run programs were also issues, in that “government agencies might also not be the right partners” for de-radicalization, as their interests could be perceived as a bid to gain “intelligence and informants” (Koehler, 2015, p. 126). The numerous de-radicalization programs represent the need to counter radicalization and policymakers have been increasingly concerned about this issue, triggering a “number of government efforts” (Upal, 2015, p. 138). This includes the government of Turkey, where one approach involved an “outreach program administered by the national police” and another that “tries to promote the correct interpretation of Islam and is administered by the Religious Affairs Office . . . of the Government of Turkey (Ekici, 2015, p. 176). Canada’s formation of de-radicalization approaches is similar, as they have mostly been government or police-based in practice. Jacoby (2016) believed that Canada’s long history of community policing promoted practices of human rights and good governance (p. 294), and consequently, the Ministry of Public Safety and the RCMP are “charged with taking the lead in de-radicalization programs” (p. 295). However, there has been a gap in community service provision offered by the government: “As there is little direct community-based programs, community groups in

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Canada have thus taken it upon themselves to educate the public, provide social services and liaise with government agencies” (p. 295). Canada and other Western countries also had to be cognizant in implementing a de-radicalization program that focuses on ideology or religion, as they were presumably protectors of free speech and had to be “very careful not to include an ideological component to their work” (Koehler, 2015, p. 131).

Programs for de-radicalizing youth are also varied in approach. Some programs contained an overt focus on religion, which can place disproportionate blame on minorities. Ekici (2015) cautioned against focusing on minorities, especially associating Islam with terrorism or as the sole cause for radicalization. Calling terrorism “Islamic” could serve to offend Muslims with media perpetuating this labelling (p. 174). In fact, Ekici (2015) noted that Muslims might feel that terrorism is not associated with other radical ideologies or religions, and the media abstained from associating terrorism with Christians or Jews or uses labels such as “Christian terrorism” or “Jewish terrorism” (p. 174). Upal (2015) asserted that this type of focus negated the effect of Muslim identity on de-radicalization and that counters should focus on what alternatives can be given to Muslims who are attracted to the Jihadi narrative (p. 152).

In terms of the philosophical and theoretical approach to de-radicalization programs, identity theory was often used as a foundation in literature and research, as they are “widely known and extensively researched but are also cross-culturally applicable to virtually all social interactions” (Williams & Lindsey, 2014, p. 137). These identities needed to be reconstructed in the de-radicalization process to create a long-term and sustainable change within the individual. In addition, many authors believed identity was a key element in de-radicalization, and that it informed why individuals had difficulty moving on from a radicalized group (Harris, 2010; Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan, 2014; Bovenkerk, 2011). Identity also pointed to the need for pro-social bonds that could reinforce disengagement from radicalized beliefs. In fact, identity in the form of pro-social bonds that were crucial to de-radicalization (Altier, Boyle, Shortland, & Horgan, 2017, p. 310). These included “stable employment, marriage, and family” (Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan, 2014, p. 653). Another

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issue explored in the literature review was the focus on de-radicalization was the important role of building relationships to prevent misconceptions or misunderstandings of why radicalization occurs.

Chin (2015) emphasized the importance of including religious communities in discussion on de-radicalization, and implement broad prevention practices “that are inclusive, consultative, and address the grievances and issues of all minority groups so they feel less marginalized” (p. 22). In fact, building relationships between police and minorities could promote cooperation and maintain “effective communication and access to information” (p. 20). As demonstrated by Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, and Boueck (2010), de-radicalization programs need to build their programs based on these local populations and stakeholders:

The best designed plans leverage local cultural patterns to achieve their objectives. One implication of this observation is that deradicalisation programs cannot simply be translated from one country to another, even within the same region. They have to develop organically in a specific country and culture. (Rabasa et al, 2010).

Building on this approach, Chin (2015) agreed that community-based initiatives had the ability to enhance the capacity of the community, promote positive leadership, and promote alternative activities to radicalization (p. 125) and had to be “long-term orientated and lasting” (Koehler, 2015, p. 125). The community-based approach was sorely needed, but some communities would be unable to “confront radical elements on their own without assistance from police” (Chin, 2015, p. 20). Education was also touted as having an impact in de-radicalization. Veenkamp and Zeiger (2015) believed the support of families coupled with a focus on educational institutions could build resiliency within communities. These educational institutions needed to promote and teach “critical thinking skills, civic education, community engagement and volunteerism in schools,” which could “help address the drivers of violent extremism in certain countries” (Veenkamp & Zeiger, 2015, p. 153). However, education could possibly have little effect in de-radicalization, as studies in the UK proposed that those involved in extremism tended to be youth “who were enrolled in full-time education, and from higher-income families” (p. 154). Despite these contradictions, Jacoby

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(2016) postulated that family was an important foundation for Canada specifically, and noted that “everyone plays a part in keeping our communities safe” (p. 290). These wide-ranging theoretical approaches to de-radicalization in general demonstrated the need for community-based programming. While there have been numerous studies on de-radicalization, very few studies have addressed programs “working in the pre-criminal space” (Koehler, 2016, p. 29). Despite having programs centred on de-radicalizing before planned violence occurs, there remains a significant knowledge gap on this pre-criminal space that this study serves to address and build upon. Altier, Boyle, Shortland and Horgan (2017) also criticized past studies for containing a narrow focus on a specific terrorist group or region (p. 309). Other authors agreed that de-radicalization is complex but many failed to articulate how this program would be applied and how Canada specifically could adapt other approaches to find a process that is in line within a Canadian perspective.

#### *De-Radicalization Practices in the United Kingdom (UK)*

The UK created the Channel program, as part of the *Prevent* strategy in response to increasing rates of radicalization. The initiative came into effect as part of the British government’s post 9/11 counterterrorism strategy “aimed at stopping people becoming terrorists” (Gayle, 2016). The UK government stated that the program is “about ensuring that vulnerable children or adults of any faith, ethnicity, or background receive support before their vulnerabilities are exploited by those that would want them to embrace terrorism” (HM Government, 2015, p. 7). The approach is “based on studies that have looked at sample groups of convicted terrorists and developed an elaborate assessment framework for ascertaining ‘vulnerability factors’ that are either causally related to or at least correlate with all of the individuals’ psychologies” (Ali, 2015, p. 2). Since the British government made it a “statutory duty” to report and refer individuals at-risk of being radicalized, frontline workers are obliged to create referrals (p. 3). Through this program, individuals who are identified, screened and determined to be at risk of radicalization may be referred to counselling, faith guidance, civic and political engagement, engaging with support networks, social housing, education, or health services (HM Government, 2010).

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There has been some criticism about the Channel program, as the UK's approach to de-radicalization could actually "promote extremism, rather than countering it" (Gayle, 2016). In 2015, there were 3,955 people referred to the program by frontline workers including teachers, which made an average of 11 referrals a day (Halliday, 2016). Referrals of children nine and under was one of the main criticisms, with the youngest being four-years-old (Halliday, 2016). The problematic rationale to refer children at a young age challenges the strength of the program and questions the real priorities of the Channel program. Thomas (2010) found the UK's approach deteriorated into specific focuses on ethnic groups, "rather than developing a focus on positive relations between communities" (p. 442). Even though the UK engaged with some communities, there were still issues in the outcome. As discussed by Briggs (2010), community consultation within the *Prevent* strategy seemed superficial and actually did little to work with communities on de-radicalization: "local authorities engaged selectively with communities, and that decisions continued to be made behind closed doors with little or no community involvement" (p. 976). Some Muslims have also voiced concern that the Channel program works against Muslim communities, many of whom continue to believe that it is "essentially a tool for intelligence-gathering or spying" (Chin, 2015, p. 13). This focus on Muslim communities was also a source of confusion within the *Prevent* program itself and whether it should exclusively focus on Muslim threats or include violence waged by extreme right-wing groups (Briggs, 2010, p. 977).

Despite these concerns, the UK has attempted to include education in their de-radicalization strategy. The government also used funding to strengthen resiliency in "local communities through the Muslim community and youth groups and initiatives" (Stevens, 2011, p. 168). However, these initiatives proved meaningless, as the singular focus on the Muslim community led to the assumption that the entire Muslim community was at risk of violent extremism and radicalization (p. 168). Briggs (2010) believed that de-radicalization approaches should focus on all "fragile communities, not just Muslims" (p. 972). While the focus of the UK program is commendable, its execution of this principle was misguided and served to harm the Muslim community and community cohesion.

### *Summary*

De-radicalization programs are often formulated with an subjective understanding of the root causes of radicalization and the subsequent corrective action to these causes. At times, these understandings are linked to religion or ethnic groups and fail to consider the weight of other social factors that may affect youth. Depending on the causes of radicalization, the UK may centre their initiative on this understanding, which can make programs ineffective or successful. It also demonstrated the valuable practice of including stakeholders who regularly interact with youth, as group inclusion and interaction can influence youth identity and ideals. The UK de-radicalization approach demonstrated a disconnect from this understanding by instigating fear of discussing these ideas through mandatory reporting of “radical” individuals. With Canadian de-radicalization programs, more analysis is required to properly gauge their success. However, these programs appear to be on the track of educating youth on alternatives and attempt to shape identity through belonging and engagement. As for the UK approach, it remains that diverse stakeholders need to be included, especially if they are perceived as major players in de-radicalization.

### **Methodology**

The research has utilized qualitative methodology in the form of case studies. The qualitative collective case study allowed for the exploration of youth de-radicalization by using different sources to collect data (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The methodology was also chosen to encompass the circumstantial context of youth de-radicalization. An advantage of this type of case study is finding common trends and features between cases (Goddard, 2010, p. 4). In addition to primary data, the UK was selected for further analysis and is later analyzed for successful practices in the discussion section of this research. Case study selection of this country was based on the principles formulated by Seawright and Gerring (2008). As previously mentioned in the introduction, the UK model of de-radicalization is analyzed because of the similarities to Canadian law and culture.

### *Data Collection*

Requests for semi-structured interviews were sent to 36 potential participants from three different categories. These categories include 1) religious leaders, 2) secondary school counsellors, and 3) academics from different disciplines (international conflict and policy, radicalization, de-radicalization, and youth resilience). Out of the 36 requests, 19 participants agreed and completed the interview. Among the 19 participants was a representative from the Centre for Prevention for Radicalization Leading to Violence in Montreal, Quebec and a representative from the ReDirect program in Calgary, Alberta. Dr. Lorne Dawson, a Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies and Co-Director for the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society (TSAS), was also interviewed as an expert on de-radicalization subject matter. Data was collected until data saturation was reached, as interviews were completed with each of the three categories until no new evidence or insights were uncovered (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). The interviews took place in four different communication types: five via Skype, two via e-mail, two via telephone, and ten in-person at a location that was convenient for the participant. Once participants agreed to be involved in the study, an informed consent form was sent for the participant's review to allow time for questions before the interview. All participants agreed to the content of the informed consent form and signed. The average interview time was 60 minutes.

The objective of the semi-structured interview was to discover extensive information about de-radicalization and uncover themes among participant responses. More importantly, this type of interview contained open-ended questions and that allowed participants to express their opinions within the 60 to 90-minute time allotment. The interactive approach allowed for discussion of participant experiences with radicalization and de-radicalization, as well as highlighting their understanding of why youth may radicalize. During the semi-structured interview process, and with the participant's permission, the conversation was recorded with a digital recorder.

To ensure anonymity, participants were divided into categories. The only link between the category, number, and participant's names was a digital document stored in a password-

protected file within encrypted software. Only the researcher had access to participant names. During the research process participants are referred to as the following:

1. Religious clerks: R1, R2, R3...
2. School Counsellors: S1, S2, S3...
3. Academics: A1, A2, A3...

The anonymity conditions were waived from Dr. Lorne Dawson, CPRLV, and ReDirect with express consent from the participants. These conditions were also approved by the Royal Roads University Ethics Office. After all interviews had been completed, raw data was manually transcribed from the audio recording. Once the data was transcribed, it was uploaded to NVivo software for coding.

#### *Participant Selection Criteria*

Participant selection was based on three qualification criteria and was sourced from the categories of school counsellor, religious leader, or academic. The participant required extensive knowledge in one of the three areas to be selected for participation: experience working with youth for at least 15 years, academic research or knowledge of the subject of radicalization or de-radicalization, or intimate knowledge of religious teachings and practices.

School counsellors were selected due to their direct interaction with youth during the development phase of youth identity. Counsellors may be the first to observe youth challenges within the school system. Two out of five school counsellors interviewed had worked with radicalized youth in the past. In total, six out of the 19 participants had direct experience with radicalized youth. Religious leaders were selected for their role in the community and their valuable insight on problems facing their communities, as well as solutions. All interviewed religious leaders self-identified as belonging to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith. Academics from the listed disciplines were selected for their background in research on the topic, contribution to the literature of radicalization or de-radicalization and applicable fieldwork.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher applied thematic analysis to evaluate primary data from participants. This included collecting raw data from interviews, consolidating and preparing data for analysis, reading through data points, coding the data with thematic analysis methods, identifying themes and descriptions, and interpreting the meaning of the coded data (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). To compile and code data, the researcher utilized NVivo software. Each recorded interview was transcribed, with the final document being uploaded to NVivo. The researcher completed an overview of all participant input to find emerging themes. After this was completed, themes were defined and relevant passages were coded in their respective theme.

### *Research Limitations*

A limitation of this research is that youth were not engaged or interviewed. Potential harm could have resulted in their participation in this research. The harm could include re-traumatization, and if the youth disclosed sensitive information during an interview, the researcher would have to break confidentiality and report to authorities. These types of circumstances would include a direct or indirect threat to the well-being of the youth or others. The harm also includes the potential of revealing the youth's lifestyle and personal views to their community, which could destabilize the youth and further cause radicalized views. Funding for travel was also a limitation of this research. However, with the use of in-person, online, and telephone communication methods, participants were reached without the need for a travel budget.

Another limitation of de-radicalization study is that results cannot be applied universally to other cases. Findings that were collected could have yielded different results if collected in different regions and could even differ within Western countries. The subjective matter of the study also could vary individually and regionally within Canada. Although steps were taken to reduce the effect on the research in terms of sourcing participants from across Canada and from different disciplines, this still could have affected the final outcome of the data.

### *Ethical Considerations*

There were several ethical considerations within the research. First was that the Royal Roads University Ethics Office accepted the study. As stipulated by the Ethics Office, the subjects of this research were not contacted until the Ethics Office approved the ethical review submitted by the researcher. As part of this study, participants were informed that their interviews were to be audio-recorded and all 19 participants agreed to this element of the research. After this data had been recorded, all identifying information from participants was omitted from the transcript. By maintaining honesty and openness with participants, this allowed for an open discussion on sensitive issues surrounding radicalization and de-radicalization. While participants did discuss their experiences, names of individual cases were not disclosed to the researcher.

## **Findings**

### *Overview*

Primary data findings included in-depth interviews with school counsellors, religious leaders from different faith groups, and academics involved in research and fieldwork pertaining to youth, resilience, and education. Through the semi-structured interview, participants were asked what contributes to youth radicalization in Canada and how these factors can be addressed. The possible causes of radicalization among youth were included in primary data to create a contextual understanding of how youth form extremist views within Canada. Dismissing this data set would be irrational, considering that a successful de-radicalization approach may be based upon the root causes of radicalization. Questions presented to participants discussed the incorporation of religion in de-radicalization efforts, including the role of family, school, community, and government in youth de-radicalization.

### *Characteristics of Radicalized Youth*

Seven out of the 19 participants have direct experience with youth radicalization, and the remaining 12 have extensive experience working with youth through counselling

psychology, research, or other frontline roles as youth service provider. While there were some different opinions on the characteristics of radicalized youth, 83% of participants discussed the feeling of belonging and disenfranchisement. Participant R1 explained that youth who are vulnerable to radicalization “are not very outgoing-- you know there are exceptions to this, but generally speaking, they don't have a large circle of friends and they're not usually very popular at school, and they are kind of isolated individuals” (Participant R1). While participants elaborated on the existence of these characteristics, some argued that these can be unseen and unnoticed. When asked about experiences with radicalized youth, Participant S4 provided an example on this issue:

Yes, one of my students. I'm reading the paper about it and I wasn't expecting it. What created that need for him to go back and fight with ISIS? Was it something that happened to him? I was shocked and disappointed. It wasn't what I expected of this young man. There was nothing that I could pinpoint where I thought he might lean that way. . . That's upsetting for me. What was the trigger? He was having a typical transition and showed no signs. My relationship with him gave no indication of his choice; he had a vision for himself. (Participant S4)

### *Contributing Factors into Radicalization*

Five themes were discussed by participants as contributing factors into youth radicalization including media distortion, mental health, the perception and narrative of Muslims as the “other” in society, socio-economic issues, and foreign policy.

#### *Media Distortion*

Nine participants made 18 references about media distortion and how this is related to youth radicalization. Participant A1 believed that media profiled terrorists or radicals and implied these individuals originated from one particular group of people:

Is there a profile of who they are? They can be white, born and raised in Christian culture or they can be another race, raised in Hindu culture, Muslim culture,

Indigenous cultures in different parts of the world. It just so happens, I think that now, unfortunately so much of this gets labelled as Islamic, which is not accurate when looking all over the world where these things happen and incidents are happening in North America or Europe where the religion of the person is not even mentioned. The British MP [Jo Cox] who was killed a couple days ago, they haven't mentioned the religion of the person who shot her. (Participant A1)

Participant R1 offered that interaction with the media is a community responsibility and this interaction would provide the other narrative to a media story. Participant R2 stated “to be fair, it is also the job of the Muslim communities to engage with the media, which they are not doing as much as they should,” and offered that mosques could change the dynamic of media by engaging with media outlets to tell their narrative. Failure to work with the media could have a negative impact of creating perceived injustices among Muslim youth (Participant R1). Formal media is not the only outlet criticized by participants, but also social media and the globalized communications in general. Participant R4 elaborated on these issues:

The world right now is the internet world and people have access to all kinds of speeches and are listening to different types of scholars. Positive, negative, moderate, radical. So when they see these types of things, these images in the media, and then they-- on the other hand, find these scholars using that as a template to provoke them and to basically brainwash them and to make them join this type militancy. And then basically it becomes the-- also further fuel to fire. (Participant R4)

Participant A3 also identified these discrepancies in media, where the religion of extreme right-wing groups who committed violence was omitted from media reports. Building on that, Participant S1 suggested that media distortion is used by radical violent extremist groups as propaganda to promote the idea that “the West is against us.” Social media was used as a tool to support extremist agenda in convincing youth that the West is against them, especially when Muslims are faced with racism and Islamophobia in Canadian society (Participant S1).

### *Mental Health*

Seven participants made 21 references to mental health as a component of radicalization, but not all agreed on its role. Five school counsellors agreed that mental health is a prominent factor in the process of youth radicalization, while religious leaders had varying viewpoints on its contribution to the process. As for academics, the majority agreed that mental health does play a role, but the extent varied depending on the individual. Participant A3 explained:

I think definitely mental health plays a role, but again, I wouldn't say always. I wouldn't say 100% of the time or even 80% of the time . . . mental health stuff does come into this, especially things like depression. (Participant A3)

Another participant with a background in counselling psychology added that mental health issues can prevent youth and families from seeking services due to stigma about bad parenting:

Given that I'm a counsellor and there's really connection between that and mental illness, so that really strong sort of stigma up against having mental illness, and also that stigma-- understandably so-- my son or daughter, my child, might be at risk for radicalization and what that might do in attracting all kinds of negative stigma and blame for the family, blaming the parent for that. No one wants to put themselves in a position in which people might perceive them to be a threat. (Participant S1)

Two participants from the religious leader category presented a different opinion on the weight of mental health as a contributor to radicalization. Participant R2 dismissed the notion of mental health as a causal factor but acknowledged that there was a correlation between mental health and radicalization.

### *Socio-Economics*

Participants argued that socio-economic factors had relatively little effect compared to other causes. Participant R1 believed that the economic orientation of a community could increase the role of socio-economics in radicalization; however, its role was limited:

The segment of Muslim professionals is actually increasing and this [economically disadvantaged] segment is decreasing. So it does play a role but at the same time, I don't believe it plays as great a role as some people would think. (Participant R1)

Another participant discussed three issues relating to socio-economics could influence radicalization, stating that “if we look elsewhere at other Western democracies, essentially three aspects which interplay on . . . radicalization into violence. One is sort of systemic issues. These are issues related to ideas about poverty, lack of opportunity, lack of employment” (Participant A4).

### *Foreign Policy*

Seven references were made to foreign policy as a driver for youth radicalization. Certain youth are unable to articulate their anger at foreign policy decisions that they perceive is attacking their identity or other groups that share their identity. Participant R1 explained that

It's usually misinformation that is happening over here that, for example, the foreign policy of the land that they are living in, sometimes conflicts with their faith . . . the Government of Canada is at war with certain nations that are predominantly Muslim. So if the youth grow up seeing this, and there's nobody to show them how to channel their emotions using the proper avenues, then they are going to channel their emotions somewhere. (Participant R1)

Participants that discussed the influence of foreign policy believed that violent extremists groups like ISIS would exploit this narrative in order to recruit youth. Participant R2 attributed the increase in the number of radicalized youth and suicide bombing from 2003 to

2014 to changes in foreign policy and involvement in the Middle East: “This occurred after the West went into the Middle East. Pre-2003, there wasn’t a suicide bombing, now 2003 to 2014, there have been 892 that took place. Something drastically changed and was very wrong. A lot of that may be stemmed in foreign policy” (Participant R2).

This motivation to act and respond to the foreign policy among youth is illustrated through an example given by Participant A1 during her work in Pakistan. When droning strikes were carried out in Pakistan by the United States, the coverage by media was sparse, even after these attacks internally displaced people and destroyed numerous institutions. Drone strikes were utilized to the point where schools were never in operation because of the level of bombing (Participant A1). Participant A1 believed these types of foreign policies could cause youth to form and develop radical extremist ideas that could lead to violence.

#### *Muslims as the ‘Other’*

Six participants discussed the notion of ‘Muslims as the Other,’ and how that generates a radicalized reaction among youth. Participant A4 explained this notion or feeling is sometimes generated and caused by state actors:

When the United Kingdom settled what is still its *Prevent* program, one of the things they realized after a couple of years was that sending police officers to local community meetings or meet with local community leaders or teachers or whoever, . . . saying to that community, we want to talk to you about radicalization leading to violence and the threat of terrorism, was a very bad opening move by the law enforcement and police community. Because what it did, or at least what we understand it did, was it put the local communities on edge and apprehensive straight away because it signaled or it was interpreted as a signal of two things: first that you're targeting us as a community, and that's problematic. The second thing is you're prioritizing the issue of terrorism whereas we equally have other challenges. (Participant A4)

Participant R6 tied the notion of ‘Muslims as the Other’ to identity issues and how it can shape youth individuality and serve as a factor in radicalization. The participant sympathized with those labelled due to ignorance and racism:

I can’t imagine growing up and people saying you look like you’re from this terrorist group. Is there a point where the kid says “well screw it, that’s what you think of me then I’ll do it.” But I think what people think of us does matter. When we’re searching for identity, who am I? And what are my values, they’re so malleable and so vulnerable in teenage years. (Participant R6)

A school counsellor agreed that labelling youth in this way would force them into that label instead of defining their identity on their terms (Participant S2). This was explained further by another school counsellor from a psychological perspective, emphasizing on the need for belonging:

When someone is not feeling like they’re part of something-- feeling connected, feeling disconnected from a majority group, having a sense of “other” somehow, a family generally feeling wronged-- it might make an individual consider what else they could be part of to feel connected. (Participant S3)

### *Factors of De-radicalization*

All the nineteen participants made 77 references to belonging and engagement and 32 references to education as the two main vehicles of youth de-radicalization in Canada. The role of religious leaders was also frequently mentioned in supporting belonging and education with 31 references, and then the role of school came second with 22 references. Family, community, and the government play a lesser role compared to the other listed players. In fact, there was a common agreement that the role of government should be limited to funding and evaluating the impact of foreign policies on local citizens and society. Figure 2 demonstrates the factors contributing to de-radicalization:

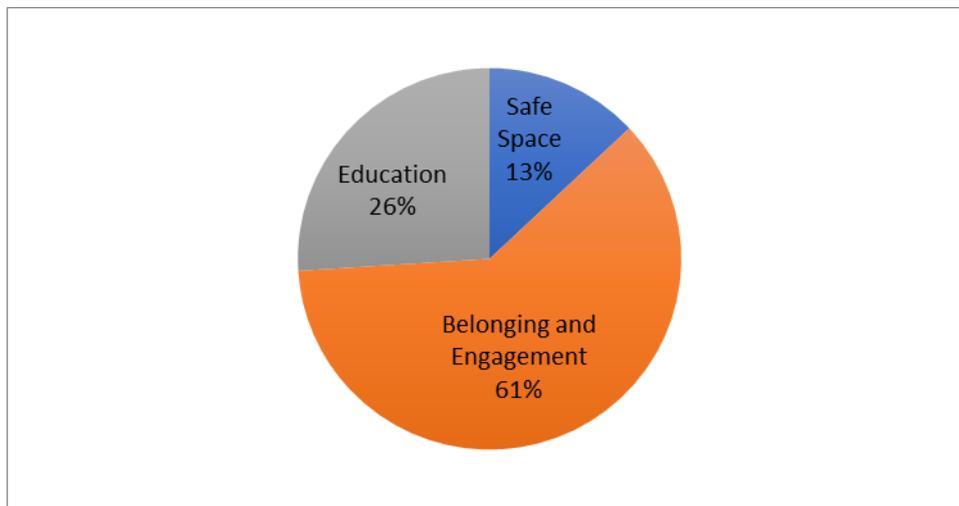


Figure 1: **Factors Contributing to De-Radicalization**

*Creation of Safe Spaces: Belonging and Engagement*

Belonging and engagement, the most referenced theme in the research, was discussed extensively by participants. There were also numerous references to creating a safe space for youth that might be at-risk of radicalization. Participant A4 elaborated on how this space was needed for community members who were concerned for the well-being of the youth. Other participants discussed the lack of spaces for these young people to engage with their communities. Participant A3 contended that extremist groups that recruit youth can create these faux spaces: “Radicalization seems like a viable option and let’s face it: radicalized groups do an excellent job of creating a space, a welcoming space, for young people” (Participant A3). For de-radicalization, these spaces need to be created to give youth a chance to discuss their frustrations with a trusted adult (Participant A3). This has to be carefully facilitated with a trusted member of the community that can relate to youth:

It’s about creating a space for young people, you are . . . saying how you are actually doing and realizing “I’m actually safe here, physically and emotionally.” It takes particularly skilled facilitators to make that space happen, but when it does, it’s magic.

Young people are able to be really authentic and honest about who they are. And they won't be shamed, silenced for being depressed. (Participant R6)

Multiple participants echoed that belonging was a key de-radicalization factor and prevented youth from seeking out alternative avenues to achieve this belonging. Participant S3 detailed how schools can allow youth to feel this inclusion:

People that have hope, that perceive an opportunity and feel connected to their surroundings, will embrace those opportunities. If there are factors that don't help them feel hope or a feeling of satisfaction, they will look to an alternative means to feel whatever that is. (Participant S3)

### *Education*

Participants supported youth education through dialogue, which encouraged youth to consider different narratives and viewpoints. Participant A5 stated that creating a dialogue with youth promotes this type of resiliency needed to deflect radicalization while allowing them to “gain a better comprehension of the phenomenon and its dynamics” (Participant A5). Education also had a role in de-radicalization and shifting values of a radicalized individual. Participant A2 stated that de-radicalization involved the reversal of values gained during the process of radicalization, which occurred through educating the youth on what values they gained by becoming radical (Participant A2). Allowing for different views within the de-radicalization process can push the youth to seek other perspectives of an issue that has radicalized them:

It's exposure to different ideas. In getting our information from the media, there's a part of it that isn't human and if we don't have human contact or exposure that challenges us, . . . it's easy to embed yourself and be stuck there. (Participant S3)

Other participants noted the term “de-radicalization” should be avoided in educational programs because of the level of stigma attached to the phrase (Participant R1).

*The Role of Religious Leaders*

14 participants made 31 references to the role of religious leaders in providing religious counselling and a counter-discourse to extremist views. Participant A5 emphasized that religious leaders need to address radicalized youth, as others outside the religion may not have the perceived legitimacy for the youth to openly discuss religious views. Other participants also pointed out the uncomfortable notion that extremists groups like ISIS claim their violence in the name of religion:

ISIS and similar groups like the Taliban, very explicitly link their calls for violence to their religion, so the religious links cannot be dismissed, given the devastating consequences of the growth of ISIS . . . It is convenient to say, “this has nothing to do with religion,” but ISIS adherents clearly do not feel that way, and this fact must be addressed head on. (Participant A6)

Religious leaders in the study also noted their upbringing in Canada better suited them to relate to youth that are at risk of radicalization (Participant R1). It was noted that the age gap between religious leaders and youth could also change the dynamic in discussing issues that affect Muslim youth:

I can very easily relate to their struggles and what they’re going through because I grew up in the same country. Now, I did spend a period of time studying abroad, but that doesn’t change the fact that I went to school here, I grew up here, I share many of the same interests as this age group. So it is much easier for me to communicate with them and also them to accept a message from somebody who they might see as a, at least, their counterpart age-wise or generation-wise, if not knowledge-wise. (Participant R1)

A school counsellor also noted the importance of condemning violence as a value to achieve political or religious goals (Participant S1). Religious leaders need to make it very clear to followers that violence is not tolerated in mainstream religion (Participant S1).

### *The Role of School*

The school environment serves as a place to connect with at-risk youth. Most participants contended that schools had a role to play in developing youth well-being as an indirect de-radicalization method; however, existing gaps could jeopardize the strengthening of resiliency (Participant A2). A counsellor working within a Canadian school noted that addressing youth in the school setting was necessary to create an environment where they could approach adults to discuss problems or struggles (Participant S1). Participant S1 also acknowledged the role of staff to check in on youth and see how they are coping. He elaborated further stating that it was important to “wander the halls or if I see them walk through student services here, or to remember, ‘wow, I haven’t seen this kid in a few weeks, usually they check in once a week.’ It’s incumbent upon me to identify and to take that first step” (Participant S1). Another participant added that schools can create unsafe spaces for youth and should be addressed to remove vulnerabilities and develop critical thinking skills to affect their actions within the course of their life (Participant R2).

### *The Role of the Family*

With the family component of de-radicalization, there were conflicting views on the extent that families could help youth. Participant R6 conducted a workshop with families about dealing with parent separation in developmental stages of adolescence, yet it was important for parents to maintain a supportive place for youth. When children did not have access to open communication with parents, they could turn to media and the internet for guidance and belonging instead (Participant S4). Participant A5 believed that the family was an important actor in de-radicalization, to keep a youth grounded in their beliefs and maintain open dialogue to discuss issues that youth may seek guidance on.

### *The Role of the Community*

Community initiatives were discussed with participants and yielded results on favourable and sometimes damaging effects of different approaches to de-radicalization. In discussing the UK *Prevent* program, Participant A4 believed the program took the wrong

approach in addressing radicalization in the community. Instead, program managers should go into listening mode and ask communities about the issues they are facing to discuss sensitive issues of radicalization (Participant A4). Communities also had responsibilities in providing youth with opportunities: “it’s so important to have a variety of positive opportunity in both community and school. When those things don’t exist, young people will fill their time” (Participant S3).

#### *The Role of the Government*

Participants suggested that the role of the Canadian government in de-radicalization was to design community-based initiatives. This included separating programs from enforcement of de-radicalization and “keep it categorically clear that these programs don’t have an investigative element” (L. Dawson, personal communication, August 15, 2016). Participant S3 believed the government needed to seek continuous feedback from stakeholders to ensure that approaches were benefiting the community at large. It was also suggested that youth be made part of this review process in regards to asking if programs align with their needs and engaging in participatory styles of work (Participant A3).

#### *Collaboration between Stakeholders*

Effectiveness of de-radicalization was correlated to the level of stakeholder engagement. One participant asserted that de-radicalization was a long process that required a collective effort from community and law enforcement (Participant A2). Other participants believed coordination with community-based organizations was best to de-radicalize youth: “we need to make sure working with all these organizations that nobody is falling through the cracks” (Participant R1). Another participant provided detailed information sessions through his mosque to raise awareness and give stakeholders a contextual background of marginalization of Muslims within the community:

I got the RCMP, emergency services, [OMITTED] police in for a presentation and in exchange, I would give them ethnic food. I said in exchange, I just want 45 minutes of

your time. So I gave them what I called sensitivity training about what Islam is and what you need to know about the Muslim community. (Participant R2)

### *Summary*

Participants noted the possible reasons why youth radicalize and how de-radicalization is best informed by these causes. Findings pointed to areas that could be developed by the Canadian government including the role of vital institutions within Canada including religion, family, school, and the government. As a theme in the primary data, effective practices for Canadian de-radicalization included close collaboration between stakeholders. The approach could not simply be a community-based initiative, but had to involve law enforcement and government as a backing that could enforce or foil violent extremist plots. The other implication was that Canada needed to incorporate an informal approach that strengthened resiliency in communities and provide a space for youth to voice frustrations about contentious issues. In return, this type of discussion can inform and reinforce a positive identity within the Canadian context.

### **Discussion**

The findings demonstrated key themes in the concepts of de-radicalization and radicalization. Primary data from participants and the literature review pointed lack of consultations within communities and an absence of building a resilient identity. As a result, cases of extremism could worsen if root causes are not addressed. This section discusses the importance of trust within communities, Canada's formal and informal approach to de-radicalization, identity issues within de-radicalization, and an analysis on the practices of the UK. Through the initial findings, formal de-radicalization programs are not necessarily better than informal community connections at combating radicalization.

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*Trust within Communities: Safe Spaces, Belonging, and Identity*

In review of the UK's Channel program, it became evident that the Muslim community, advocates, and educators had concerns about the program leading to further radicalization rather than de-radicalization. Participants believed that those tasked with creating de-radicalization programs had to listen to issues that harmed the community. Otherwise, imposing perceived best practices could be risky and an uninformed method of de-radicalization. Findings from participants also indicated that in the formative years of identity, children needed a space for belonging, which was created through engagement. If these spaces are withheld, children may hide their views and seek out online resources to validate their beliefs and ideas. Youth may become further entrenched in radical views by forming an opinion based on uninformed social media platforms and messages on extremist pages.

Participant S3 reinforced this idea that youth will seek out sources that reinforce their existing perceptions instead of challenging their beliefs. This one-dimensional thinking could provide a justification for a violent act because of the cognitive bias inherent in individuals. Participant S3 asserted as the young mind develops, they have an increased understanding of grey things in the world, and youth are "way more black and white with the information that they have" (Participant S3). This idea of youth's dichotic thinking coupled with Social Identity Theory would suggest that if youth are not provided the space to belong and discuss these "grey issues," youth would try to find resources online that may only present one narrative of that issue. If youth are not given this opportunity to address different beliefs in the school or community, they may lose that sense of "being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226). As participants noted, this could result in an "other" identity that can then become detached from mainstream society and lead to radicalization. The youth would then seek out another group online that may hold these values and beliefs and continue the radicalization process.

Going back to the UK's approach, the model appears to push youth from a safe space. Participants seemed conflicted on the role of the government in de-radicalization, but noted

this institution was responsible for funding these initiatives. A common theme was putting the community as the face of de-radicalization to establish trust, a sense of inclusion, and belonging. More importantly, this sends a message that the radicalized individual is still a member of the community. By simply referring to radicalized individuals as the ‘other’ in society, “we tend to lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with potentially critical citizens who could help shape our democracy” (Van San, Sieckelink, & de Winter, 2014, p. 277). The community-based approach can lead to different outcomes and can reconcile public perception with the intention of the program.

#### *Canada’s Formal and Informal Approach to Youth De-Radicalization*

Canada falls behind other Western states in formal de-radicalization programs; however, this may not be negative. According to L. Dawson, research is only beginning to understand what it means to be radicalized: “How do you make a de-radicalization system when you don’t know what the process of radicalization is. What constitutes success in these programs? These things have to be debated” (personal communication, August 15, 2016). Despite this, Canada may be successful in fighting radicalization because of its cautious approach in starting a de-radicalization program. The ideas of engagement, safe space, open dialogue, investment in mental health, and education were all cited by participants as having a positive effect on de-radicalization. These themes contribute to a successful integration in Canada, creating a sense of belonging and identity. For Canada specifically, L. Dawson suggested that policymakers exercise caution in making a formal approach, as jumping in with a program without having supportive research would create potentially harmful programs (personal communication, August 15, 2016). When asked about the shape of the program that Canada should have, L. Dawson emphasised that it should be community-based. This supports the views of primary participants that argued programs should be balanced and that affected stakeholders are included.

Education on critical thinking was also a commonality among research participants. This may expose youth to alternative viewpoints, so they could resist propaganda attempts by extremist groups. Participants also discussed the school as an informal site for de-

radicalization, due to its proximity to youth and appears to be overlooked as an effective de-radicalization tool. This can demonstrate how the community can become the representative of de-radicalization and provide those outlets for youth to discuss contentious issues that may cause frustration or anger. It is also interesting to note that none of the 19 research participants suggested or mentioned the need for a de-radicalization program in Canada. Instead, participants focused on informal approaches and structures to de-radicalize.

### *Identity Crisis and the Alternative*

As discussed with Social Identity Theory, youth seek ways to belong through group interaction, allowing them to relate to society. This suggests confronting radicalized youth by devaluing their beliefs has little chance of reversing the process of radicalization, as youth may further embrace their beliefs to protect their group identity. Therefore, offering alternatives to a youth's existing extremist identity remains vital in de-radicalization. Youth that continue to delve in these online extremist narratives were noted to exhibit isolationist behaviour (Participant R1). Simply taking away the online element is counterproductive as that identity or relation to an extremist group needs to be disrupted to be de-radicalized. This phenomenon is exemplified in the recent case of Aaron Driver, a 24-year-old ISIS supporter from Ontario that was shot by the RCMP after detonating an explosive device in a taxi. Driver was arrested in June 2015 for his online activities and was later released on peace bond. After the release, there were no alternatives offered to Driver to replace his extremist outlook. Professor Alexandra Bain interviewed Driver about his peace bond and noted that without replacing Driver's virtual network with a real one, there was no means of de-radicalizing (Shephard, 2016). Professor Bain continued stating that disengagement had to occur before de-radicalization could start:

We have to disengage from notions of violence first. Trying to talk them out of this. I think it can never be one person . . . it has to be a social network that deals with these young people. It has to be more powerful than the *baqiyah* family [an online ISIS community]. That becomes everything to them. We have to offer them something back, an alternative. (Shepard, 2016).

This example demonstrated how Driver felt a lack of belonging in his community, feeling that his views would be rejected and stigmatized. However, he did later find belonging online. To disengage Driver from his extremist views, he needed an alternative identity, coming in the form of openness to debate and listening to his radical views. Once this feeling is established, a positive identity can be formed through community-based initiative.

### *Criticisms and Good Practices of the UK Prevent Program*

The UK created an *us versus them* mentality by requiring mandatory reporting of potential radicalized individuals. Unfortunately, the *them* can be easily manipulated when made to feel he or she is not part of the group and in this case, the British identity. While the *Prevent* program did establish an assessment framework using studies of former convicted terrorists to determine radicalization factors, they did not consider the psychological lifespan or development of different ages. In addition to these issues, frontline workers and teachers report any suspected individuals and referred them to Channel, creating a fearful environment. This fear fuels extremist propaganda. Instead, the approach requires awareness to counter it, promote belonging, unity, and a safe space.

Through practices from the UK, good practices can be adapted for use within the Canadian model of de-radicalization. While UK's program was centred on a referral system from those dealing with youth directly, they are not trained to address issues surrounding radicalization and de-radicalization. This is exemplified in the nearly 4,000 referrals in one year of the program. In trying to address radicalization, the UK seemed to seek out one minority group to reduce domestic terrorism and lower the recruitment levels of ISIS. However, in doing so, the UK created an *us vs. them* mentality, thereby isolating and targeting individuals who may become distrustful of their community by participating in the referral process. This could diminish the openness to discuss issues that cause radicalization and further reinforce the idea that the UK government is targeting one religion and one group of people. This type of approach appears to "otherize" the individual and serve to distance him or her from social cohesion and values that encompass British identity. The Canadian government must be diligent in strategically acknowledging that religion can be a part in the

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de-radicalization process and should include those community members within a national strategy.

The UK government focused on finding potential radicals, and the cost was destroying the trust relationship between communities, agencies, and public. As previously discussed, the UK made it mandatory for schools to report and refer students to the program by law. This caused significant suspicion and fear from within institutions that are supposed to facilitate a safe space for discussion of ideas. The Channel program disregarded the possibility that schools can be a platform to discuss ideas and promote positive debate as a learning process. This also leads to the importance of de-radicalization initiatives originating from the community. The UK has adopted a platform that is often perceived as silencing dissent against the British government, where parents seek legal advice because the program causes “fear and confusion among the Muslim community” (Whitton, 2015). An effective Canadian approach includes proactive approaches and a close communication with stakeholders instead of an adversarial relationship, and focusing on multiple areas of community engagement instead of only focusing on Islam or religion as a root cause of radicalization. Through this analysis, the faults of the Channel program serve as lessons to a Canadian framework.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

To eliminate possible chances of youth radicalization leading to violence, Canada should consider proactive investment on a larger scale to youth well-being. This could prevent vulnerable youth joining violent extremist groups, and also prevent them from involvement in gangs and criminal activities. The UK focused on prevention by forcing untrained frontline workers to report possible cases of radicalization, causing division, suspicion, and fear. Canada can incorporate lessons from the successes and failures in these approaches by building trustful relationships and networks between the public and those providing the service. According to the primary participants of this research, this could be achieved by

including communities into de-radicalization and discuss community problems with these stakeholders. Otherwise, they may feel targeted and marginalized in their society.

### *Recommendations*

Based on findings from the literature review, primary participant data analysis, and the analysis of the UK and Canadian approaches, this study provides a set of recommendations. These recommendations are aimed at policymakers in Canada and frontline staff working with youth, especially at schools. The recommendations are divided into three categories: 1) policy makers, 2) schools, and 3) religious institutions.

### *Recommendations for Policymakers*

1. Increase funding in the youth initiatives sector, especially within schools. While education is a provincial responsibility, youth well-being is an investment for Canada on a global scale. Therefore, the federal government should establish a funding program where school districts, neighbourhood houses, community centres, and youth centres across Canada can apply directly. This fund should be used strictly in developing social and extracurricular activities that occur during spring and summer break. These programs can include recreational or outdoor activities, youth employment programs, and training in vocational programs. As supported by the literature and participants, engagement remains one of the key factors in de-radicalization and helps in forming an identity within the Canadian culture that is separate from the *us vs. them* categorization.
2. While Canada is doing relatively well with integration practices and policies as an indirect de-radicalization effort, it remains paramount for the government to distance itself from any current and future de-radicalization programs and initiatives to maintain trust between the public and service providers. As the funder, the government should also maintain transparency and openness about what the program involves and detailing how information collected from this initiative is used.

Collaboration with law enforcement groups is necessary in these programs and should proactively strive to include community stakeholders in these discussions.

3. Collaboration between police, security agencies, and moderate religious leaders is necessary. Most of the interviewed religious leaders acknowledged that they have the responsibility to report any suspicious activity or imminent danger, but police and security agencies in Canada should also notify a trusted person from the religious group if they become aware of an at-risk youth. The expectation is that moderate religious leaders can engage in a dialogue with the at-risk youth, provide religious guidance, correct misperceptions of religious teachings and text, or simply provide a safe space for the youth to express his or her worldviews. This type of engagement can form a trust relationship, where religious leaders can play a major role in deescalating the process of radicalization.
4. Religious leaders play a major role in de-radicalization for their perceived legitimacy by youth and their respected position within their community. The government should provide free and formal counselling training to religious leaders that are willing or interested in working with at-risk youth. This will enhance the professional ability of religious leaders based on theoretical and practical knowledge. This form of training should be given to religious leaders representing places of worship, in the form of scholarships to educational institutions that provide a professional counselling program. These programs should be offered in a flexible model to allow religious leaders to continue their community and religious commitments.
5. Investment in youth mental health needs to occur at the school level. Currently, school counsellors have a large caseload. For example, one school counsellor participant stated: “we have 400 kids on our caseload, and we are basically more triage, like if there's a problem, we refer out” (Participant S2). As identified by two participants, unless it is suicide attempt or suicidal ideation, that wait list to see a mental health professional can be stretched to a six-month waiting period. Within that waiting time, the mental health of youth can deteriorate, and youth at-risk of radicalization can

translate this into violent action. Provincial governments should invest in mental health and youth well-being through hiring more professionals to reduce the waiting time for young people. This goal would include the following: wait times of less than 48 hours to see a professional; less than 24 hours for a telephone screening or intake to provide advice; based on the telephone screening, immediate evaluation to ascertain if the youth requires professional help. With schools' busy dynamic and focus, school staff and counsellors cannot determine the risk factor in most cases, especially with schools being underfunded in the mental health sector.

6. Policymakers need to adopt a bottom-up approach in designing de-radicalization approaches by including youth in the process of discussion, planning, and decision-making. It remains ineffective to develop a policy for a generation or a group of people where policymakers cannot relate to their challenges, worldviews, problems, and needs. These issues need to be addressed directly from youth through the planning stages, and not only through focus groups or other means. This will enhance inclusion, belonging, and participation in society among youth. When it comes to specific policies in developing de-radicalization programs or approaches, inclusion of former radicalized youth to participate in the discussion at policymaking level should occur. Hearing these unique perspectives directly cannot be matched to the interpretation of adults around the policymaking table.

#### *Recommendations for Schools*

1. This section of recommendation can be applied on the school, district, or provincial level. Schools, especially middle and secondary schools need to allow time for open dialogue. Youth need to express their worldviews, perceived injustices, social and political concerns. While schools are busy teaching principles of math, biology, and other technical subjects, open learning is forgotten where youth can speak on topics that are absent in the curriculum. Four school counsellor participants agreed that youth need to communicate their thoughts on world events, and there is a little time to do this with the school's busy schedule. As the school is a community, students should

have the opportunity to critically discuss current issues in a safe and protective environment. Otherwise, youth tend to find an alternative through online platforms. A class of 40 minutes every second day dedicated to a discussion of worldviews will not only channel youth anger but will also enhance learning that is not offered in textbooks. While this specific recommendation is more for ministries of education, school districts can add this component in a form of an elective block. Critical thinking would be a major outcome of learning in this elective.

2. School districts need to invest more in community secondary schools. This approach to education provides that schools are open in summer hours, in the evening, and after school to facilitate community activities. Community schools offer an opportunity for families to be part of the school community, and simultaneously provides students with a sense of identity, whether through contribution to the extracurricular activities, school clubs, and community planning events with parents and staff (Burnaby School District, 2016).

#### *Recommendations for Religious Leaders*

At-risk youth in the process of radicalization may rely on advice from well-respected religious leaders. If youth are turned away or discouraged from questioning beliefs, they may find an alternative source that validates their viewpoint. Religious leaders are encouraged to follow these recommendations:

1. Have the flexibility to discuss any topic, thought or idea in a non-judgmental manner, including those that oppose religious principles to assist youth in maintaining an open and moderate view of religion.
2. Religious leaders should strive to become informed on world issues, politics, and even on social media to relate to youth. This will help religious leaders to better understand the difficulties youth are facing. Assistance does not need to entail religious advice or discussion of a religious text, but can be in the form of achieving a sense of social belonging.

3. Religious leaders have a role to play in reaching out to the media. As world events unfold, and with recent terrorist attacks in Europe, there is a great frustration among Muslim youth on how the media is portraying these incidents as a “Muslim-only” problem. It is not only the media’s responsibility to report accurately, it is also the responsibility of the community to reach out to the media. By religious institutions maintaining an open dialogue with the media, they can offer their account of events, correct a misinformed report, and even give local youth a chance to present their voice.
4. Religious leaders should emphasize that all interpretations of religion have evolved with changing attitudes and beliefs. This would help prevent youth from falling victim to misinterpreting passages and question interpretations when exposed to recruitment propaganda like ISIS.

### *Conclusion*

Globalized communication has connected youth in different ways, but the role of media has created dichotic understandings of a very complex world. Practices in the UK have shown that community-based initiatives are required to create a safe and inclusive platform for youth to share their views and maintain a positive Canadian identity. Adding a critical thinking component to Canadian schools can give youth a foundation to question and be curious about their surroundings. The Canadian model of de-radicalization is not a simple program. It needs to occur in prevention. When youth have passed the point and have become radicalized, they are creating a place for them to feel included, thereby creating an identity with a group that provides this belonging. Simply taking away online materials or placing youth on restrictive conditions does not ensure a moderate view. This is why an alternative group identity is needed to replace a harmful group that claims it is inclusive of the youth’s views. While identity and belonging were a main issue from research participants, it was lacking as a key indicator in the literature, as was a concise and unified definition of de-radicalization. Youth need an advocate and a community to surround them when they are feeling isolated. This type of approach is required at all levels including the school, the

family, the government, and the community to protect youth and promote youth well-being in a safe and inclusive society.

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