

## Mishal: A Case Study of a Deradicalization and Emancipation Program in SWAT Valley, Pakistan

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### Abstract

Nestled in the SWAT valley lies Pakistan's earliest known deradicalization initiative for former militants, the *Mishal* Deradicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP). The Deradicalization program was launched following a military operation in 2009 against the Pakistan wing of the Taliban, namely, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The program aimed to deradicalize and rehabilitate arrested militants, with what officials claim is a 99 percent success rate and with more than 2,500 former Taliban fighters now 'reformed'. The program abides by a 'no blood on hand' policy, whereby it only takes in militants who have not caused any bodily harm to others. In this paper, we analyze the deradicalization program and highlight the limits and challenges it faces. The paper also highlights the common individual and environmental factors among the beneficiary population of the deradicalization program. This study finds that most participants of the program belonged to large or broken families with weak socio-economic profiles. Additionally, these individuals had very little technical knowledge of religion. This study also finds that the program is more oriented towards re-integration rather than deradicalization due to its policy of inducting only low and mid-level cadre militants. The program also has other severe limitations including lack of credible religious scholars, limited financial and human resources.

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### Introduction – Deradicalization and Disengagement: Theoretical Perspectives

The idea that a violent extremist can be convinced to give up radical views or at the very least the pursuit of violence, is extremely appealing. In theoretical terms, the former is referred to as deradicalization, while the latter is called disengagement. Deradicalization is

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described as the “social/psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity” (Horgan, 2009). Disengagement, on the other hand, is defined as the process involving a “change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation” (Horgan, 2009). Horgan (2009) defines disengagement as a process whereby an individual’s role within a violent organization may change from active violence to a less active, non-violent role. According to Horgan (2009), disengagement alone may not guarantee deradicalization. Nor is deradicalization a necessary accompaniment to disengagement. As Schmidt (2013) also points out, disengagement may take place without deradicalization. However, disengagement remains a pre-requisite for deradicalization (Hoeft, 2015).

Horgan (2008) also found the process of disengagement to be unique for each individual and that the disengaged terrorist may not be ‘deradicalized’ or repentant at all. Often physical disengagement may not result in any concomitant change or reduction in ideological support’ (Horgan, 2009). However, contributing factors for disengagement are likely to aid the process and tools required to formulate a course which could further lead towards deradicalization. Horgan (2005) identifies that these contributing factors may involve both psychological (ideology, change in priorities of the individual, change in leadership) and physical factors (arrest and detention by law enforcement agencies, forceful removal by the organization or change in role within the organization).

Bjorgo (2009), alternatively identifies push and pull factors which determine the decision of an individual to disengage from violence. ‘Push factors’ make the individual rethink the decision to join an organization, while ‘pull factors’ help in the final decision to quit through alternate options. Bjorgo (2009) also names negative social sanctions, losing faith or confidence in the group, changes in views regarding the use of violence, disillusionment with the group, and exhaustion as push factors, in addition to a desire for a ‘normal’ professional career, and establishing a family, as examples of pull factors.

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Della Porta (2009), in his study of Italian terrorists and underground political groups mentions that greater support for a group's cause or ideology makes it difficult for individuals to disengage. Other contributing causes which may lead to disengagement include internal conflicts, family and career commitments and 'burn out' (resulting from the stress of an emotionally demanding commitment, or aversion to violent methods of a group). According to Ebaugh (1988), the process of exiting an organization begins with individual doubts about personal commitments. She also finds that these doubts are exacerbated by sudden external events which unexpectedly trigger certain behavior and challenge personal commitment. Subsequent events often termed as "the straw that broke the camel's back" could prove to be the catalyst for formal breakaway from an organization. Barelle (2015), based on interviews with 22 former militants, identified horror of violence, burn-out and disillusionment as the major triggers of disengagement. Hwang (2015) added that pressure from parents, humane treatment by the police, cost-benefit calculations, feeling remorse and experiencing disappointments can also lead to disengagement.

### **Deradicalization in Pakistan: Literature Review**

While the existing literature provides useful insights into deradicalization efforts in other parts of the Muslim world including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and in countries with substantial Muslim minorities such as Singapore, there has been no significant research into the Pakistani experiment with deradicalization.

This might be due to the fact that the programs have largely been run under the administrative control of the Pakistani military, which restricts access to the former militants as well as any data related to the programs. Although, popular perception is that the programs were run in collaboration with the NGO sector, the study found that to be inaccurate as far as *Mishal* is concerned. Rana (2011) provided the initial discussion on the deradicalization model being applied in the SWAT valley, claiming the model drew its contours from similar

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programs in Saudi Arabia. The study, based on interviews with former and current administrators, found that this still holds true to some extent. However, while the military planners and designers of the program, which the authors of this study were able to locate and interview, did follow the Saudi pattern to some extent, other similar initiatives were also studied and a blend which incorporates local cultural values is currently being followed. Basit (2015) in his evaluation of Pakistan's counter-radicalization and deradicalization programs, discussed the main objective of the SWAT valley program, which was to rehabilitate the militant detainees who worked with the Pakistani wing of the Taliban. Khan (2015) found that the main reason behind the program's success had been continued military presence and surveillance, which local police had been unable to supplement. In her research article for Hedayah, Paracha (2016) identified clear objectives and methods used in local deradicalization programs based on interactions with juveniles who were trained as potential suicide bombers by the Taliban. However, the findings of this research are not applicable to adult militants.

In addition, there are multiple press publications on the Pakistani deradicalization programs which provide useful insight into how these programs work and their effectiveness (Horgan, 2015; S. A. Khan, 2015; W. Khan, 2015; Qazi, 2011; Temple-Raston, 2013). However, both academic studies as well as press publications lack in-depth quantitative and qualitative data, insights on approaches, objectives, and selection criterion adopted in the programs and their measures for success. Most of these studies are not based on primary sources and therefore offer conflicting analysis at times.

Based on the current deradicalization literature from Pakistan and the identified research gaps within it, our discussion leads to the following points: (a) there is a need to conduct an analytical study into the means and methods employed in such programs, using primary sources and empirical data which have hitherto been unavailable, and (b) there is a need to utilize information from militants who have undergone or are currently undergoing deradicalization to help evaluating the impact on target beneficiaries following reintegration

into the society. The lack of available data on methodology and approaches adopted in the programs also leads to the question on whether objectives are successfully achieved. In fact, there is a dire need to ascertain what the realistic objectives of such programs are in the first place. Thus far, it has been practically impossible to gauge what is expected from programs that claim to be able to deradicalize terrorists.

### Methodology

The study was conducted through a field visit to the *Mishal*<sup>2</sup> Deradicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP) in the SWAT valley. The center, *Mishal*, was conceptualized and set up in 2010 by the Pakistani military as the first formal deradicalization program in Pakistan. Along with four other similar initiatives (*Rastoon*, *Feast*, *Zarghoona* and *Sabaoon*<sup>3</sup> for child soldiers) the deradicalization programs were initially a joint collaboration between the military and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). However, *Mishal* remains the only currently functional deradicalization program in SWAT and is run exclusively by the military with financial support coming from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North West Frontier Province) Government. However, limited civilian staff is actively involved in the program under supervision of the military, including one psychologist, a social module instructor and vocational training instructors.

Instead of presenting anecdotal evidence to support the paper, the study conducted field research and applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. This study, conducted over a period of five days, can claim to be the first of its kind to explore the deradicalization program in the SWAT valley through an in-depth case study involving former militants and past beneficiaries. A formal written request for access to the program by our team was approved by the Head of Peace and Conflict Studies Department, National Defence University, Islamabad, and presented to the *Mishal* DREP administrator. The request which

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<sup>2</sup> *Mishal* means 'light' in pashto language

<sup>3</sup> *Sabaoon* means first ray of light from Dawn in Pashto language

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was granted by the military administrators allowed permission to interview the staff, instructors and some of the current and former beneficiaries. Quantitative data, including information on the demographic profiles of the militants undergoing deradicalization – such as ages, past occupations, duration spent in prison, marital status, education and socio-economic profiles – was available for 47 former militants. The qualitative method comprised of formal semi-structured open-ended interviews of an exploratory nature with those individuals involved in the program to ascertain the factors responsible for their radicalization (including socio-economic factors and psychological factors) and their involvement in the program. Overall, the sample size included 20 interviews including 12 with current and former beneficiaries and 8 with administrators and course facilitators. The qualitative method also included a study of the program documents.

The data collection through primary sources was subjected to a number of ethical considerations, including the safety and anonymity of the subjects. In order to ensure the research did not interrupt the counseling process, only interviewees recommended by the center's administration were included. The research team was provided with access to a limited number of former beneficiaries and militants who were considered emotionally stable and low-risk for the interviews. On an individual level, we briefed the subjects about the nature and objectives of the study and sought prior consent for their interviews. The subjects were informed that they could choose not to answer any question which they considered could bring them harm. The interviewee had the full right to terminate the interview at any time.

In this paper, a background of the militancy in the SWAT valley is provided for understanding the context in which deradicalization was initiated. An overview of the DREP with its key components, selection criteria, objectives and demographic data of the interviewees is also provided in detail.

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## Limitations

This study has its share of limitations, including restricted access and a short time-frame for field research, meaning a limited sample size of current and former beneficiaries was available for the interviews, while almost all of the studied beneficiaries, both current and former, come from similar backgrounds in terms of religion, ethnicity, organizational affiliation and geography. Since the analysis and tools utilized were qualitative in nature, the study is based on the author's own judgments and analysis, which is open to scrutiny. The chosen methodology also involves the risk of bias. Firstly, the fact that the response of the subjects could reflect their interest in being seen as rehabilitated. There is a clear incentive for the beneficiaries to show that they have been rehabilitated, as they seemed aware that any show of allegiance to militancy would have a detrimental effect on their release. Another bias could be confirmation bias, both on the end of the interviewees and the researcher – the danger of looking for answers one wants. It also is of potential interest to the subjects in distancing themselves from the ideology of the militants; because they undergo evaluations by psychologist, they are aware of the kind of answers researchers may be looking for. As for the researchers, the questions may be biased since they implicitly seek verification of known factors. These biases are likely to have influenced the results of the study. However, by triangulating the information from those involved in the process including administration, instructors, psychologist and beneficiaries, efforts have been made to reduce the likelihood of such biases influencing the study.

## Background of Militancy in the SWAT Valley, Pakistan

SWAT is a river valley, set at the base of the Hindu Kush Mountains, and an administrative district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The valley, unlike the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, has remained a popular vacation destination due to its untouched beauty, pristine rivers and mountainous geography. It is located at a



distance of 150 miles from the capital, and according to the last official census conducted in 1998, has an estimated population of 1.7 million. The dominant ethnic group is Pashtun (mainly of the Yousafzai tribe) and Pashtu is the mother language (Fleischner, 2011).

The post-9/11 wave of radicalization and subsequent Talibanization in the SWAT valley region can be traced back to the formation of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), or, the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law. The movement was spearheaded by Sufi Muhammad in 1992 (Hussain, 2008), who demanded the imposition of *Sharia* Law in the region. Sufi and his followers had managed to bring life in the valley at a virtual standstill by 1994 (Abbas, 2006). The goal of the TNSM was to replace the current governance system with an Islamic one, he claimed (Marwat, 2005). In 2001, Sufi Muhammad was sentenced to jail for seven years for leading thousands of local men to fight against the American-led invasion in neighbouring Afghanistan. By 2002, the Pakistan government had officially banned the TNSM outfit (Abbas, 2006).

The arrest of Sufi Muhammad meant that the mantle of the TNSM leadership was passed on to his son-in-law, Fazal Hayat, colloquially known as Mullah Fazlullah. While the organization lay dormant in the years leading up to the earthquake of 2005, it was catapulted into the limelight once again. Fazlullah led relief activities in the area, set up an illegal radio station and reorganized the TNSM cadres. This in turn coincided with the rise of the local Taliban, whereby local militias established micro-emirates in large swathes of Pakistan's *Pashtun* areas, particularly the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (Fair, 2009).

The siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad in the summer of 2007 became the stepping stone to the creation of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a loose umbrella of militias from FATA and the SWAT valley under Baitullah Mehsud, with Fazlullah as the head of the SWAT chapter (Akbar, 2016). Throughout the summer of 2007, the TNSM battled with Pakistani military and seized control of a sizeable area by winter. The fighting continued over the course of the next year with a peace deal being brokered between the state and TNSM in 2009, acquiescing to the demand for imposition of *Sharia* in the valley. The peace agreement soon collapsed and another military operation was launched in July 2009, and this time, it



effectively destroyed the militant networks and forced Fazlullah and his hardcore adherents to flee to Afghanistan. The operation led to the killing of at least 2,000 militants and the arrest of most of the TNSM leadership, including Sufi Muhammad.

### **Overview of the Deradicalization and Emancipation Program in SWAT**

The deradicalization program was initiated with the objective of providing an environment conducive for the restoration of self-respect of selected participants. The idea was to deradicalize and remove the psychological burden placed by ideological exploitation and/or coercion, so as to make them productive members of society. In doing so, the program administrators made the assumption that a majority of low-cadre militants were coerced into joining militancy through a wrongful interpretation of religion and were hence ideologically exploited.

Within the broader objective, the program laid down further sub-objectives which included: (a) achieving long-term peace and stability in the SWAT valley through deradicalization of selected elements (b) minimizing the workload of the formal judicial system by segregating reformable groups from irredeemable hard-core extremist elements (c) reducing the possibility of exploitation and radicalization of immediate family members of groups (d) displaying a caring face of the state in general and the military in particular to disseminate a message of reformation and reintegration of those who had been misled and (e) communicating a moderate ideology of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

The arrested militants were categorized on the basis of their involvement and their placement in the militant hierarchy. The various categories created were as follows: (a) 'Jet Black' is a militant with confirmed 'blood on hand' with supporting evidence for his crimes in the shape of witnesses and testimonies of community members (b) 'Black' category militant is mid-level cadre (c) 'Grey' category is low-level cadre militant.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Program document.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with military administrator of *Mishal* DREP

The selection process bars inclusion of any militant with ‘blood on hand’ in the program. Preference is given to individuals with longer detention periods, individuals with a large number of dependents and no means of income, individuals with no family links to terrorists and old age detainees<sup>6</sup>.

Following the selection process, individuals chosen to undergo the deradicalization program are transported to the *Mishal* centre and are briefed on the objectives of the program. They are explained the reasons behind their captivity and the opportunity being afforded to them through the deradicalization program. The current duration of the program is three months and if the management considers that certain detainees have not been completely deradicalized, they may be relegated to the subsequent program or sent back to the internment centre.

### Demographic Data

The demographic profiles of the 47 beneficiaries undergoing the deradicalization program at the time of the research, is demonstrated in the proceeding graph. The paper profiles the age of the beneficiaries, their period of detention prior to inclusion in the deradicalization program, marital status and literacy levels. Out of 47 former militants, only 4 are below the age of twenty years. Most former militants (22) are mostly between the ages of 21-30 years, while 12 are within the age bracket of 31-40 years. Only 9 candidates can be considered elderly, who fall in the age bracket of 40 and above.

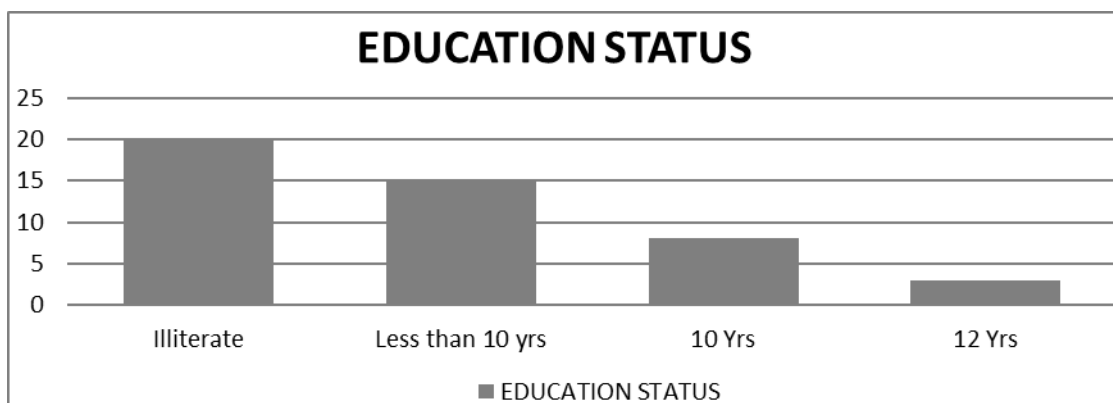
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<sup>6</sup> Program document



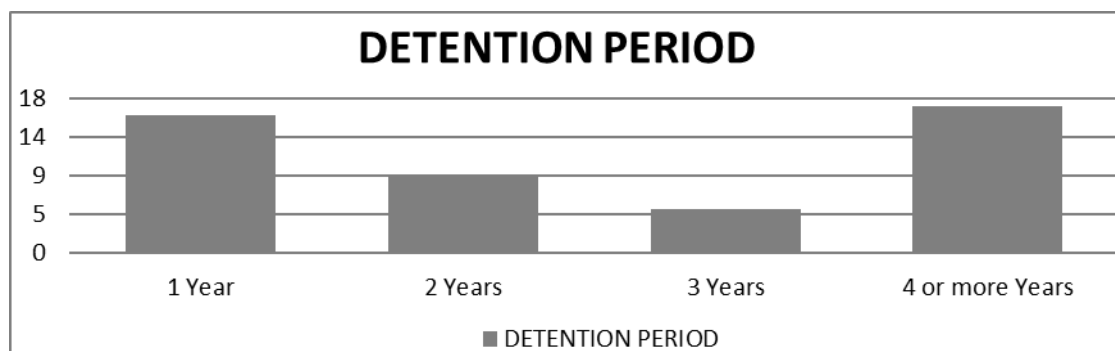
**Figure 1.** Age Profiles

In terms of marital status, the beneficiaries are a mix with 24 married and 23 in the unmarried category. And as shown by the educational profile of the subjects, the majority is illiterate; twenty out of a total of 47 have had no formal or informal education. Whereas, 27 have some sort of education - and 11 beneficiaries have attained an education of over 10 years before joining the militants. Of the sample, 15 subjects have had less than 10 years of education.



**Figure 2.** Education profiles

The majority of the beneficiaries undergoing deradicalization have spent more than four years in detention. At least 9 out of the 17 who had been in detention for more than four years, had spent 6 years in detention before being chosen for the program. Sixteen beneficiaries had spent only one year in the detention centre before becoming a part of the deradicalization program. This shows that for beneficiaries to be selected for the DREP, the time spent in detention centre is not a major determining criterion.



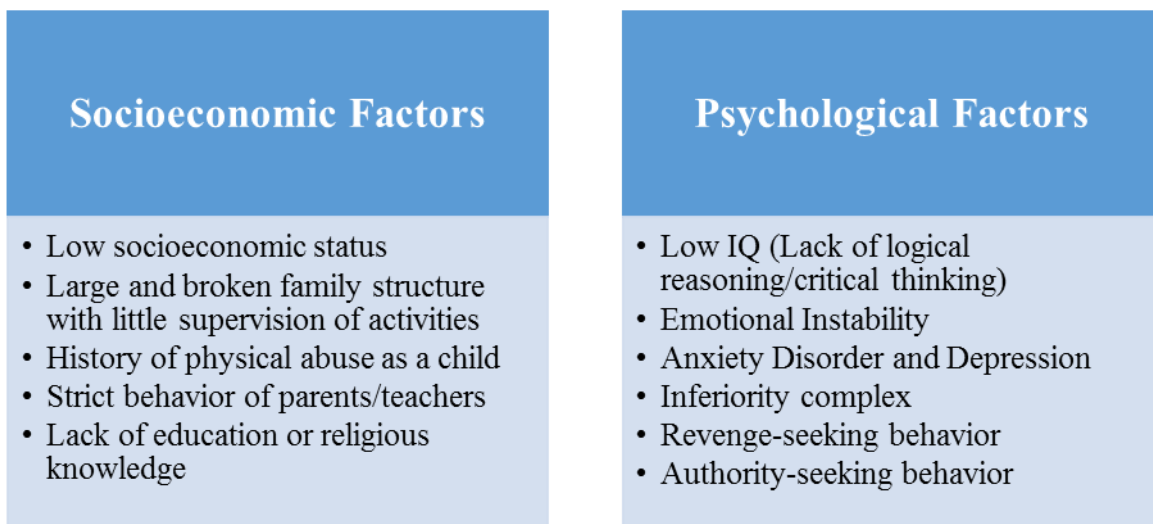
**Figure 3.** Detention period

### Deradicalization Process

Psychological rehabilitation is the cornerstone of the deradicalization process. In *Mishal's* program, both civilian and military psychologists undertake an initial assessment of the individuals to gauge the reasons behind their decision to join militancy. Besides this, psychologists also assess the ideological orientation of the individual and the religious sentiments behind their actions, including what the concept of *jihad* means to them. The process of psychological counseling begins with a one-on-one meeting between the psychologist and the individual, where he is oriented with the program. The psychologist also conducts interviews with the subject's family and community members, with an aim to uncover the life story and assess the reasons he joined the ranks of militancy. The primary role of the psychologist in the deradicalization program is in stark contrast with other similar

programs where religious scholars are usually assigned the task of assessing ideological orientation of former Jihadists.

The study reveals certain common features in terms of psychological, socio-economic and ideological variables. These include: (a) low socioeconomic status (b) large and broken family structure with little supervision of activities (c) history of physical abuse as a child (d) strict and negligent behavior of parents and teachers and (e) lack of a formal or informal education. In addition to these variables, the following personal traits have been identified among the individuals based on their psychological assessment: (f) lack of critical thinking (g) emotional instability (h) anxiety disorder and depression (i) inferiority complex (j) revenge-seeking behavior (k) authority-seeking behavior.



**Figure 4.** Socio-economic and psychological that contribute towards radicalization

These findings are comparable to a similar study on the deradicalization program in SWAT for adolescents, done by Peracha et al (2016). The research by Paracha (2016) identifies that the majority population under treatment at *Sabaon*<sup>7</sup> was ‘*not dangerous in themselves, but can be made to behave in very dangerous ways.*’ As shown by the figure

<sup>7</sup>Deradicalization centre in Swat for adolescent and child soldiers of Tehrik-e-Taliban Swat chapter

above, the majority of individuals at *Mishal* also share similar traits of a weak ability of critical thinking. Two other factors identified through psychological assessment as the reasons why individuals join militancy are also very important: they are coercion (fear and force) and familial association with militants. Once the Taliban rose to power in SWAT valley, many joined out of fear or due to family ties with members from TTP, while others were simply forced. “Many families in SWAT were poor families with 5-6 children. The Taliban asked them to pay 10,000 rupees or hand over one child to fight for them. They had no choice”.<sup>8</sup> Among the beneficiaries interviewed, only one identified religious motivation as the factor for joining the TTP. “When their campaign started, we thought they were on the right path of Islam. When I first listened to Fazlullah, I was willing to give up my life for the cause.”<sup>9</sup>

The push and pull factors for deradicalization vary from individuals, and are based on socio-economic and psychological elements. In some cases, it is the interplay of more than one of these factors. Some identify abhorrence to extreme violence; others stated ideological differences as the main reason for becoming disillusioned with the militants. One subject, for instance, when probed, said that once the Government had agreed to implement *Sharia* Law, the militants should have laid down their weapons.

“They were never peaceful people. Even though the government agreed to their demand, they continued to fight and spread terror.”

Another interviewee said that;

“I saw them killing people who were praying in the mosque, ransacking houses with no regard for women. They destroyed the lives of many innocent people and children. They worst was when they beheaded and butchered people. It still wakes me up at night.”

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with military administrator

<sup>9</sup> Interview with a former militant

In terms of pull factors, the fear of state reprisals, success of the military operation, death of top-tier commanders and love for family were identified. Also, the respondents appeared to have already disengaged due to the violence and destruction caused by war which they had not anticipated. One beneficiary responded that;

“Taliban destroyed the future of the local people. They brought pain and misery to SWAT and destroyed schools and roads, harmed people and children and this is why the common man in Swat turned against them.”

The significant finding of this study is that religious indoctrination is not the main motivating factor in the case of radicalization in SWAT valley. However, it has to be kept in mind that the militants interviewed were not hardcore terrorists and that other explanations may apply to those high ranking militants.

### **Effectiveness of the Program**

The deradicalization program in SWAT valley has been modeled on the Saudi Arabian model for deradicalization. However, the difference between the two programs is connectivity with a religion module. The resources and methods employed for the religion module are nowhere in comparison to the Saudi program. While various studies have established the need for credible religious figures in deradicalization programs, the military relies on its own religious clerics for the job. This reduces the impact that the religion module can have and as such casts doubt over the efficacy of such a module. The methodology for the religion module also lacks effectiveness.

The objective of the religion module is to provide a corrective view of religion without challenging or changing core beliefs. The process of the module, unlike in other countries, is not one of dialogue or conversation. The main instructor is a military religious cleric called



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‘*Khateeb*<sup>10</sup>’. The *Khateeb* delivers a daily lecture to the collective class of beneficiaries – there are no individual sessions between the *Khateeb* and the subjects. The lecture starts in a lighter tone with the *Khateeb* greeting his pupils and asking about their health. This is followed by a lecture on the topic of the day. The principal topics included in the religion module are the concept of Jihad, *Fitna*, rights of citizens in community and rights of parents. And here is another point of separation from the Saudi Arabian model: there is no examination or testing for the religion module.

Our study concluded that the effectiveness of the religion module is hampered by two main factors; most beneficiaries are illiterate and some cannot speak any language other than *Pashtu*. To address this deficiency there are some local instructors who are invited as guest speakers on religious topics. However, there are generally no questions in classroom from the individuals – it was observed that when questions are asked, these usually pertain to basic religious tenets, such as the process of performing ablutions before a prayer. Few respondents shared what they had learned from the religion module, which points towards the ineffectiveness of the module in some ways. One respondent, a former beneficiary, said that he had joined the militants after listening to a sermon by a Taliban leader on Jihad as a religious obligation. He said that the religion module had been helpful in conveying the right meaning:

“We cannot call such people our brothers who fight against their own brothers and kill in the name of religion. Quran tells us that if someone declares another Muslim as Kaafir (non-believer), he himself becomes a non-believer.”<sup>11</sup>

Another respondent when asked about what he had gained from the religion module responded that he had learned that in any problem, it was good to consult others before taking a decision. He added that he learned about respecting elders and how to behave with the

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<sup>10</sup> Military religious scholar

<sup>11</sup> Interview with a beneficiary of *Mishal* DREP

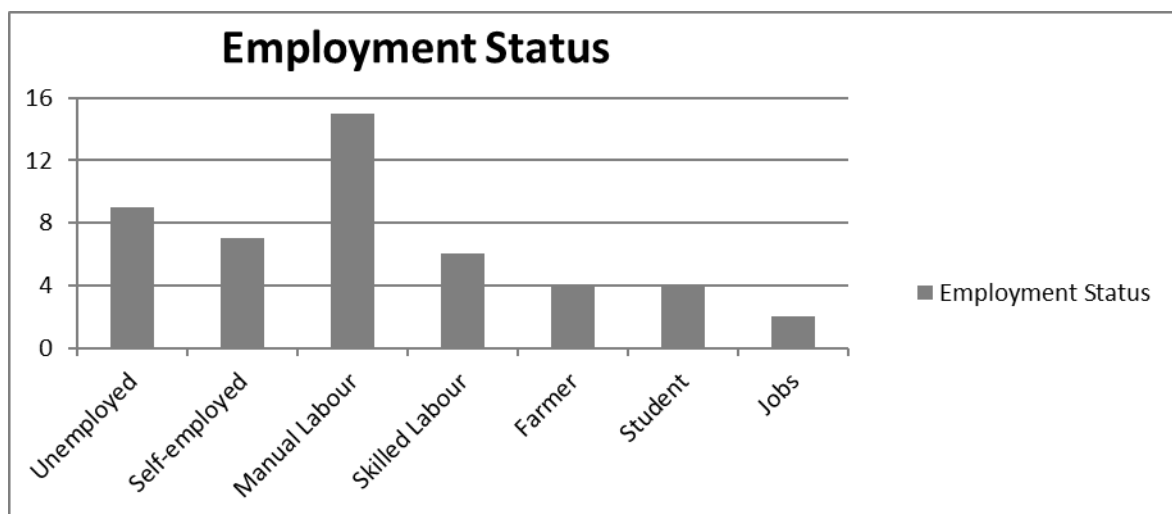
young. Another respondent said “I learned so much about religion. I also learned that one should be respectful towards parents.”

Research has indicated that use of credible scholars and family members as credible go-betweens is a well placed strategy (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). Meetings with family members are another key component of the program. These meetings aim to address one of the main causes among the push factors: broken family structure and a lack of family supervision. Since family support is the first component required by the DREP for reintegrating beneficiaries, it assumes greater importance. Families are also required to be guarantors for individuals after they are released into the community. The program administrators believe that offering the opportunity of regular meetings with militants’ family members aids improving their support system and also offers them with an alternate association to substitute their ties with the militants.

The meetings for families are arranged on a monthly basis and there is no limit to the number of family members who can come for the visit. This meeting is also used as an opportunity to offer psycho-social help to family members and show the caring face of the administration and the military. In addition to the meetings, the beneficiaries are regularly allowed to make phone calls to their family members. They are not allowed, however, to keep any cell phones.

The DREP offers a set of vocational training courses to its beneficiaries, which focus on offering them the opportunity to learn useful skills which can in turn help them find employment after their release. The courses offered include an electrician course, computer skills, carpentry, automobile mechanics, welding, appliance repair, welding, vulcanizing, tailoring etc. These are labor-intensive, practical skills which grant beneficiaries the opportunity to support themselves and their families. The vocational training is offered under the assumption that having an actual job and a place to go every day to work is a protective mechanism to avoid reengagement in militancy.

A statistical look at the employment status of the 47 beneficiaries reveals that a majority of them were either unemployed (9) or were working as manual laborers (15) on daily wages prior to joining militancy. However, a considerable number were self-employed (working as shopkeepers or drivers) and skilled laborers (6) such as tailors, carpenters or welders prior to their arrest. The lowest category in terms of employment belongs to those with jobs (2), are students (4) or farmers (4).



**Figure 5.** Employment status before arrest

Another key factor which makes the vocational training module effective is the incentive of financial support offered to the subjects on release. This support is a one-time fiscal grant with no expectation that the money will be returned. The beneficiaries are asked to produce their own plan of employment in their post-release scenario and to budget their needs. For instance, if an individual in the program has learned the art of carpentry and wants to open his own shop, he has to provide a financial plan projecting his costs. The only drawback of this option is the lack of financial resources available with the administration, which limits the amount that is offered as support. Since most of these individuals have spent

a considerable time in detention facilities, they are reintroduced to the challenges of the outside world through applying themselves in vocational training. The detention results in a loss of will power which the vocational module aims to restore as well. It helps subjects in regaining their minds and to concentrate on and find consistency in manual work.

What happens to these individuals after reintegration is more important than what happens to them inside the deradicalization centers. The reintegration criterion includes educational performance, vocational skills, expert psychosocial assessment, and the family's level of engagement with the former militants.<sup>12</sup> The post-release process is perhaps the most effective component of the program: the DREP model is multi-layered and involves families of the beneficiaries and community members, including elders of the area from the local Village Defence Councils.

Since the program itself is only three months in duration, the post-release gains more importance. The administrators of the deradicalization program in SWAT valley provide secondary rehabilitation in the form of additional counseling, minor financial help and hosting weekly visits. The post-release program is important in many ways: for one, the behavior of the former residents during the DREP is monitored in an extremely controlled environment, something the subjects are well aware of. Due to this, the true change in their attitudes and behaviors from the perspective of deradicalization can only be gauged in a natural environment, which is why secondary rehabilitation is so important. Also, the post-release program is important to monitor whether the initial reintegration has been successful or not and to identify the challenges which an individual now faces in the real world.

These challenges, we found out in our study, can be wide ranging. They may include social stigma due to their past activities, where some community members are unfavorable towards their release, despite the efforts of local elders. Secondly, it is important to see whether the former militants are able to become financially independent. Thirdly, it is important to assess whether the psychological treatment has been successful or not. This is

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with *Mishal* DREP Psychologist

why the psychological module and social module instructors aim to mentally prepare individuals of the coming challenges and how to deal with them.

After their release, the deradicalized militant has to report to a designated military official in their area on a fortnightly basis for the first three months. There is no relaxation for the beneficiaries on the basis of good behavior and reporting is mandatory. The beneficiary is also not allowed to leave his area of residence.<sup>13</sup> After the first three months, the reporting process is relaxed somewhat and the beneficiary must now report on a monthly basis. Failure of any beneficiary to report will lead to his name being put on a list of absconders and result in issuance of orders for his arrest. Other than the voluntary reporting by the beneficiary, their behavior is also monitored through random spot-checks and through interviews with community members.

The administrators of the deradicalization center point to two factors as yardsticks of the success of the program: low recidivism rate and the number of beneficiaries who have been reintegrated in society. The recidivism rate, which is primarily the responsibility of the local military units stationed in the respective areas, is monitored by the center. This rate, military administrators claim, is less than 1%. “The recidivism rate out of the initial five DREPs remained relatively high due to evolution of the newly instituted process. Later, the recidivism rate dropped down to negligible limits”, the program administrators claim. The low recidivism rate can also be attributed to inclusion of low cadre militants ‘with no blood on hand’. On the other hand, the administrators point to the number of released beneficiaries who have been successfully integrated back into society with the help of their communities and families. Table 1 shows the center’s data on the number of beneficiaries who have been reintegrated. The table shows that a total of 1,478 beneficiaries were released between 2010 - 2015. The intake process is not uniform and the center can only host anywhere between 215 to 260 subjects at a time. The other significant finding from the table is that the number of

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with military administrator and beneficiaries

subjects who have not been released after going through a course is very low: 16 out of 1,478, a total of 1 %.

Table 1: Available data on number of beneficiaries of *Mishal* deradicalization program from 2010-2015

(Source: Program documents)

<b>Batch</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Intake</b>	<b>Reintegrated</b>
<b>Batch-1</b>	Aug-Nov 2010	129	129
<b>Batch-2</b>	Dec 2010-March 2011	152	148
<b>Batch-3</b>	April-July 2011	215	215
<b>Batch-4</b>	June-Sept 2011	110	110
<b>Batch-5</b>	July-Oct 2011	170	167
<b>Batch-6</b>	Sept-Dec 2011	57	57
<b>Batch-7</b>	Jan-April 2012	139	139
<b>Batch-8</b>	June-Sept 2012	100	97
<b>Batch-9</b>	Jan-April 2013	63	63
<b>Batch-10</b>	May-Aug 2013	61	59
<b>Batch-11</b>	Feb-May 2014	71	69

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<b>Batch-12</b>	June-Sept 2014	77	77
<b>Batch-13</b>	Oct 2014-Jan 2015	56	56
<b>Batch-14</b>	March-June 2015	78	76

## Conclusion

The discussion presented in this paper points to the conclusion that the existing program of Deradicalization and Emancipation in the SWAT valley is oriented towards individual level disengagement and reintegration of low-level cadre militants belonging to the TTP SWAT chapter. The model works on the assumption that low-level cadres were either coerced into joining the militants or were exploited on religious and ideological grounds, exacerbated by their lack of education. It is assumed that since these individuals have been isolated from the militants and have spent a considerable amount of time in detainment, they can become useful members of society if their ideological orientation is corrected and psychological burdens are removed in a respectful environment. The finding that disengagement supersedes deradicalization at *Mishal* is noted not to have been found intentional on part of the administration. The focus on disengagement over deradicalization is due to two types of limitations of the program: organizational limitations and limitations in terms of resources. The first type of limitation includes the military choosing to supervise and lead the deradicalization effort itself. This may be addressed by allowing the NGO sector to take charge of the deradicalization program with the military taking care of administrative affairs only. This will also allow more openness towards the results of the program. The short duration of the program (just three months), lack of financial and human resources are other major limitations. Secondly, the military has chosen to bring in its own religious instructor



which reduces the credibility of the interlocutor. The lack of financial resources also leads to inability of the program administrators to hire better human resource.

There is some criticism on the effectiveness of the program due to the fact that it excludes hard-core terrorists. The criticism is based on the idea that low-level cadre militants, who mostly join militancy out of coercion and fear, are not ideologically committed and are already looking for an easy way out of imprisonment. However, the inclusion of the Black category shows that the military has upgraded its program to include a higher tier of militants. But whether this increases the existing rate of recidivism, needs to be assessed in future studies. However, even reducing the risk of reengagement for lower level militants can be classified as a success and worthy attempt. There are some people who may never be truly deradicalized. This, however, does not mean that the deradicalization programs should be stopped.

The program has room for improvement and may deliver even better results with more financing and improved human resource. While ensuring necessary safeguards, an inclusive approach (including Grey and Black category beneficiaries) is considered mandatory for a comprehensive and realistic manifestation of the DREP concept. The psychological counseling, religion and vocational training module require remodeling to include dynamism and education for the illiterate. The vocational training module adds flexibility to individuals' skills; however, post-release application is still found lacking, which could be supplemented by additional programs. The program administrators may need to incorporate a labour market survey approach so that skills offered in the program are responsive to the needs of the local market. The program also needs to include a post-release support mechanism for beneficiaries in addition to the one-time financial support currently offered by the program.

Finally, it must be added that the success of the deradicalization program in the SWAT valley depends on the presence of the military due to several reasons. First, the local police lack the human resources and capacity to effectively monitor the released beneficiaries; hence the major burden is borne by military units and intelligence agencies. Second, there are hints that the TTP is still active in the area, which means the released beneficiaries are at a risk of

reengagement. In order to ensure that the risk is managed properly and the attempts of a return of the TTP are contained, the demands for removal of military from SWAT should be addressed through better communication and highlighting the need for military presence with the locals, and by gaining their trust. There is no doubt that the deradicalization program in SWAT offers a cost-effective approach in handling a large number of detainees and their risk-managed release. However, it must be ensured that the program is not a deradicalization program in mere nomenclature, with a focus on numbers alone; but actually pays equal attention to a pragmatic change in their ideological beliefs.

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