

EXPLORING RESPONSES TO VIOLENT AND HATEFUL EXTREMISM (VHE): A CASE STUDY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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Annotation. Trinidad and Tobago offers a unique site for the study of responses to violent and hateful extremism. The country saw a high per capita rate of citizens joining ISIS after the failed coup d'état in 1990, and then more recently a spike in disinformation and hateful narratives facilitated by the pandemic. This paper examines the work of three NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago who seek to address the challenges of violent and hateful extremism. Using a comparative case study methodology, an analysis of the similarities, differences, and patterns across the three cases identifies and unpacks the strengths and weaknesses of each NGO's approach.

This paper is based on analysis of new in-depth interviews with politicians, members of the security administration, and key players in these NGOs, alongside a review of the literature and evaluations of VHE programming undertaken by these NGOs. The paper identifies the drivers of extremist movements (including state institutions) in several communities as well as NGOs' role in addressing those challenges. It also proposes recommendations for situational analysis, design, and evaluation of new VHE programs to prevent duplication and enhance program effectiveness and sustainability

Key words: violent extremism, radicalization, gang violence, Trinidad, Tobago, pandemic, NGO, VHE.

Basic provisions

According to the (British) Commission for Countering Extremism, hateful extremism is defined as creating a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence. Its summary of hateful extremism is "behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred, or equivocate about and make the moral case for violence; and that draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to the wellbeing, survival or success of an in-group; and that cause, or are likely to cause, harm to individuals, communities or wider society."

Other writers indicate that violent extremism includes, but is broader than, terrorism, just as countering violent extremism (CVE) is broader in scope than counter terrorism (CT), which is largely concerned with tactical responses. Recent CVE frameworks emphasise non-coercive, more holistic approaches to the problem of violent extremism that engage the whole of society, working with women as well as

men and generally led by civil society organisations (CSOs). The aim of this approach is to work further upstream than CT. It is targeted at strategically preventing radicalisation and recruitment into violent networks while simultaneously working downstream by promoting disengagement from malign social networks, together with rehabilitation and reengagement into healthy social networks. CVE programs are typically framed in an analogous fashion to public health programs: focusing on primary interventions with broad communities, secondary interventions with at-risk individuals and groups, often youth, and tertiary interventions designed to heal and rehabilitate. Tertiary interventions are often referred to as deradicalisation, but this term overlooks the dominant social and behavioural aspects and risks narrowly, and unrealistically, focusing on changing beliefs and ideas [1].

Introduction

The concept of CVE is widely misunderstood, and the terminology has acquired unwanted baggage, being seen by some to be caught up in securitisation and surveillance. Some have substituted preventing violent extremism (PVE) for CVE, or use PVE to refer to more upstream prevention of radicalisation. However, one can argue that it is better to make inclusive use of the term P/CVE. At the same time, it has become clear that P/CVE concerns issues and dynamics that need to be understood more broadly, with greater attention being given to hate, hate incidents and hate crimes. Hateful extremism, being adjacent to, and sometimes overlapping with, violent extremism, should be recognised as being part of the larger problem: violent and hateful extremism (VHE). Being responsive to issues of toxic identity politics, sectarianism and misogyny, involving discrimination, prejudice and hate can lead to more effective P/CVE programs. whilst also better keeping the focus on helping communities strengthen social cohesion and promoting respect for diversity and pluralism [2].

In Trinidad and Tobago violent extremism—generally defined as planning or committing violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, or social goals—has been perpetrated and promoted by a broad range of individuals and groups, including anti-government groups, environmental extremists, and radical Islamist entities, among others. Trinidad and Tobago is clearly vulnerable to VHE. This paper examines the work the work of three NGOs attempting to reduce/prevent VHE in Trinidad and Tobago: the Foundation for the Institution of Services, Caring and Learning and National Islamic Counselling Services, Ryu Dan Dojo, and Believers Assembly. It identifies the drivers of extremist movements (including state institutions) in communities as well as NGOs' role in addressing those challenges. It also proposes recommendations for situational analysis, design, and evaluation of new VHE programs to prevent duplication and enhance program effectiveness and sustainability.

The paper uses a comparative case study methodology to analyse the similarities, differences, and patterns across the three cases, to examine the strengths and

weaknesses of each NGO's approach. This study is qualitative in that it critically examines primary and secondary documents, and uses data from new key informant interviews and focus group data to assess the role played by NGOs and the challenges they face in dealing with VHE in Trinidad and Tobago. Informants included Islamic and Christian religious leaders from areas affected by radicalization, extremist patterns, and continuous activities of several small groups. Informants comprised leaders of the Boos Mosque, the Jamaat al Murabiteen; leadership and clerics of denominations such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies and Believers Assembly; academics and experts on the issues related to radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism. Community and traditional leaders in areas affected by VHE (such as Diego Martin, Chaguanas, Enterprise and Mayaro) have also been interviewed.

This research approach was adopted to enhance the reliability and validity, and address unintended biases and inter-subjectivity issues[3].

Description of materials and methods

The respondents were asked questions such as: What are the roles of NGOs in countering VHE in T&T? What are the challenges facing NGOs in their efforts to counter these radical messages and narratives pushed by certain religious institutions and individuals? How can these challenges be addressed by relevant stakeholders? The views of these respondents were transcribed using narrative analysis for better clarity, and are reflected in the study. In line with the ethics associated with research and interviews, the study respects and maintains the anonymity of the respondents, while referring to their areas of specialty and the area of stakeholder engagement and the association they represent. These stakeholder engagements and interviews, and the initial drafts of the study, were carried out between October 2019 and February 2022.

This paper also identifies the drivers of extremist movements (including state institutions) in several communities as well as NGOs' role in addressing those challenges. It also proposes recommendations for situational analysis, design, and evaluation of new VHE programs to prevent duplication and enhance program effectiveness and sustainability

VHE FRAMEWORK

With increasing threats of violent extremism in recent years there has also been a significant proliferation of literature on radicalization, VHE, and, to a lesser extent, the means of combatting them. Scholarly discussion of the subjects has largely focused on the process of radicalization and the various factors contributing to it. While there is no universal pathway to radicalization and VHE, there exists a diverse array of political, economic, psychosocial, cultural, and ideological factors that can contribute to varying degrees at varying stages to an individual's radicalization and adoption of VHE.

Driven by income inequality, state instability unemployment, lack of political participation, state-citizen distrust, social marginalization, and low self-esteem, youth constitute the majority of people who join radical and violent extremist groups[4]. The factors driving an individual to radicalize and join a violent extremist group are as push and pull factors: push factors are circumstances that make an individual's current lifestyle unattractive, such as social marginalization, government repression, or unemployment; pull factors are circumstances that make a violent extremist ideology or group attractive to an individual, such as a sense of belonging, financial incentives, or the desire for adventure or glory. These two sets of factors work together to catalyse the process of and adoption of violent extremism [5].

International organizations such as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, or the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism have recognized the importance of preventing violent radicalization at the root and urged different sectors of society to take action. The EU has clearly outlined that “effective prevention means involving non-governmental organisations, front line workers, security services and experts in the field” [6]. Moreover, it has expressed that EU national strategies to prevent and counter radicalization need to build “trust within and between the communities, promoting a better understanding of each other's sensitivities and problems, engaging different sections of society, and much more” (p. 4). Therefore, “local actors need to be properly equipped to recognize radicalized behaviour and such strategies should engage with families and communities” (p. 6-7). Finally, the communication also states that a multiagency approach through a collaboration of policies, prison and probation services, and social service providers and school communities is a must.

Background To Violent And Hateful Extremism In Trinidad And Tobago.

Historically, a group of locals were involved in a forceful attempt to overthrow the government in July 1990. The event triggered mass violence and looting across the nation and resulted in the death of 25 persons. This attempted coup d'état was masterminded by Imam Yasin Abu Bakr (YAB), leader of the Jamaat Al Muslimeen (JAM), and 113 of his Muslim followers. The siege lasted 6 days and resulted in significant psychological and infrastructural damage to the nation (Potter 2000). Almost 2 decades after the coup attempt, US authorities thwarted an attack on the fuel system at the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York that was being planned by Muslim extremists with ostensible ties to the Caribbean and the JAM [7].

Since these events, there have been several confirmed acts of violent and hateful extremism-related activities in T&T. In November 2013 national security authorities witnessed a new phenomenon when over 100 locals departed T&T to join Islamic State. Between 2015-2021, there were over 500 murders attributed to VHE, many committed by gangs such as the Muslim gang, Rasta City and individuals belonging to radical

groups and mosques. There has also been a continuous stream of criminal acts and other forms of VHE ranging from home invasions, kidnappings, hijackings and high-end burglaries such as from the banks and jewellery stores[8].

The Twin Islands (T&T) In The Age Of Extremism

While T&T has had a relatively stable political history, it has experienced VHE activity in the form of illegitimate violence against the state. This was clearly illustrated in the Black Power Revolution of 1970 and the 1990 insurrection that was perpetrated by the Jamaat Al Muslimeen (JAM). These historical events show clearly that certain local groups have engaged in varying levels of violence to achieve specific political and/or social objectives.

In the years preceding the insurrection, T&T was engulfed in racial tensions, economic recession, religious turmoil, and perceived government corruption. Based on these circumstances, Imam YAB felt that it was necessary for the JAM to connect with people who were facing difficulties and provide them with social and financial assistance. While the government may have considered this to be innocuous at the time, the government's relationship with the JAM broke down in the mid-1970s due to a conflict over the ownership of lands that previously belonged to the Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG). The JAM constructed mosques and houses for their members, despite being warned about their illegal tenancy by authorities. By 1990, there were almost 300 Afro-Muslim teenagers and young adults residing on the compound [9]. In the end, their standoff with the state ended in the JAM's failure to acquire legal ownership of the disputed lands. Consequently, the government seized the JAM compound on the basis of illegal squatting, thus, setting the stage for a violent overthrow. Although this was the main event before the coup, YAB has consistently claimed that persistent racism, poverty, corruption, crime, and social injustice were the main factors that evoked the JAM's forceful reaction [10].

On 27 July 1990 the JAM took the Prime Minister and other Members of Parliament (MPs) hostage, seized the Trinidad and Tobago Television network, and destroyed the police administration building. The six days' siege resulted in 25 deaths and widespread media attention. Financial backing for their operational logistics came from Saudi Arabia through a JAM member based in the US (The Commission of Enquiry Report 2014). However, the attempt to overthrow the government failed as the JAM did not receive the anticipated support from the citizenry.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the JAM continued to evolve and became one of the most powerful organised criminal entities in T&T. Today, this new incarnation of the JAM continues to adversely affect T&T society. With links to state officials and political parties, Imam YAB and his cohorts have also managed to consistently evade Law Enforcement and the Criminal Justice System, in spite of being implicated in countless serious crime cases [11]. Based on the insights of terrorism

scholar Walter Laqueur (1999), the JAM's evolution is similar to the trajectory of other organisations that have moved along the continuum of ideologically motivated extremist group to organised criminal entity.

These problems were exacerbated by governments' failure to prevent the expansion of the JAM through the Criminal Justice System. In 2005, Clive Lancelot Small was convicted by a US Court for attempting to traffic firearms from Florida to his JAM associates in T&T. Furthermore, Radhica Sookraj goes on to describe YAB as the only individual to be arrested under the local Anti-Terrorism Act in November 2005 for threatening deadly repercussions if wealthy Muslims did not pay him money (zakaat). In the following year, Jada Loutoo (2006) reported that a raid by police on the JAM compound resulted in the seizure of grenades, arms, and ammunition [12].

The JAM's resilience and versatility since the insurrection illuminates the level of influence and authority Imam YAB has been able to wield. His capacity to evade the police and manipulate the Criminal Justice System played a fundamental role in his survival. The events of 1990 and its aftermath exemplifies the imprudent, and sometimes incongruous response to VHE in T&T. By underestimating the emerging threat/s, botching the response, failing to effectively punish the insurgents and the lack of adequately severe consequences for their actions, have all emboldened the JAM, and now spawned a range of new radical groups.

Some of these militant groups include the Jamaat al-Islami al-Karibi, Waajihatul Islaamiyyah (The Islamic Front) and the Jamaat al Murabiteen; each having drawn their leadership from former members of the JAM. The leader of the WI, Umar Abdullah, has close connections to Palestinian terrorist organisations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad and is also suspected of actively supporting Afghanistan's war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s (Kelshall 2004). Abdullah has similarly endorsed terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda over the years. The fortitude and power exerted by these groups help create a fertile ground for sowing seeds of VHE as well as radicalization and recruitment into Jihadi-terrorist organizations.

Results

As a result, the membership of these groups keeps increasing, with recruits becoming more susceptible to the intoxicating combination of propaganda (false narratives) and the enticement of perceived empowerment offered by these organizations. The scope of radicalization and extremism even attained a new technological dimension since 2014 when messages of the Islamic State were transmitted through the Internet and social media, as well as through more direct means of recruitment through proxies and allied groups. In light of these global developments, the JAM its splinter groups, networks in T&T's cities, mosques and poverty-stricken urban neighbourhoods, are strategically placed to act as de facto fronts for terrorists or

other local terrorist recruiting efforts and to be involved in violent and hateful extremist forms of behaviour.

It must be noted that the concern in Trinidad and Tobago about VHE comes from not only Islamist-inspired extremism but also from the rising presence, capacity and alarming actions of extremists who may or may not be members of gangs [13]. Also already known forms of political extremism that waned for a period of time have re-emerged with more power, seeking political representation at the local and national levels. Fuad Abu Bakr, son of the now deceased YAB has launched a political party, the New National Vision but so far has been unable to win any seats both at the local and general elections.

Role of NGOs, civil society and government to teach/train and educate citizens in an attempt to prevent VHE

The Citizen Security Program is a strategy implemented in Trinidad and Tobago to deal with VHE. This programme seeks to reduce crime and violence in selected high needs communities in Trinidad and Tobago through community actions and capacity building for the police. The Citizen Security Program is funded primarily through the Ministry of National Security, involves violence prevention training, community-based interventions, youth friendly spaces, and NGO support, among other programs. It also focused on community action councils in areas labelled as hotspots.

In several investigative reports it was observed that funding may be accompanied by conditions which favour geographical areas considered to be vulnerable to extremism rather than areas with the most urgent humanitarian needs. Counter VHE programmes mean engaging with those at risk of turning to violent extremism, which would include individuals who may be associated with designated terrorist and violent groups, even if they are not terrorists or violent individuals themselves. In providing training and funding with respect to countering VHE, care must be given to the considerable risks to the furtherance of domestic terrorism, and VHE itself through the financing of criminals posing as coordinators and community leaders.

Likewise, the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) along with the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) can also be seen as ways to alleviate poverty and in so doing will eradicate extremist behaviour by members who reside in these communities. Equally, the government has also allocated funds to various NGOs to convert their existing efforts to align such with global countering violent and hateful extremism policy and framework.

Similarly, a partnership with the United States Embassy called the SafeCommuniTT has served to deter the younger generations of T&T from engaging in extremist activity. Moreover, the initiative comprises key influences and messengers

which range from government officials to ex-convicts. These persons are taught strategies, ideas and campaigns which are all aimed at changing perspectives of terrorism and radicalization in the youth of society. Perhaps, a greater stance should be taken to engage NGOs in allowing for the deterrent of extremist activity in the youth of Trinidad and Tobago.

In looking at the NGOs in this paper, the first two have been financially assisted by the US Embassy. Two specific projects financed by the US will be discussed, the first as carried out by the NGO, Ryu Dan Dojo (RDD) and the other by another NGO, Foundation for the Institution of Services, Caring and Learning and National Islamic Counselling Services (FISCAL-NICS). The third NGO, Believers Assembly, a Faith Based Organization, has been working over the last six years mostly with girls and women.

Discussions

NGO 1: RYU DAN DOJO (RDD)

The aim of the Ryu Dan Dojo Community Resilience Initiative (CRI) Program is to help build a more resilient Trinidad and Tobago by strengthening community service delivery and increasing positive social interaction and trust among Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuelan communities so as to prevent, reduce and stop violent and hateful extremist behavior [14].

It aims to provide safe spaces where Venezuelan migrants and the host community can interact and access much need information, social services, and physical and educational programming. In its work in Chaguanas and Mayaro communities, the RDD also aims to counter the radicalized and extremist ideas that have transcended these areas and which contributed to, among other things, some of its members joining IS and travelling to Syria and Iraq.

RDD's methodology is a cognitive-behaviour modification approach using an innovative Sports+ Model. Its learning and teaching techniques are aimed at enhancing and encouraging self-regulation, creativity, improved academic and learning abilities, life skills, and promoting the physical, mental, and social development of participants through Martial Arts.

Overall, the US sponsored RDD/CRI program entailed six activities:

(1) Citizen mobilization and outreach – This involved liaising with stakeholders, raising awareness on the project, and mobilizing the community for participation in activities. There were several meetings with local representatives, MPs, mayor, civil society actors, community police, and businesses who were briefed on the project. Their view on the situation and their perspectives were requested and that information was

used to provide feedback/results to its international partner, Democracy International (DI). RDD was also involved in maintaining an ongoing relationship with these stakeholders meeting periodically throughout the project to foster collaboration on the project and the Venezuelan migrant and community security issues. Additionally, RDD was responsible for contributing to improved coordination among actors for service provision to the community.

(2) Conducting needs assessments (in coordination with DI) in Chaguanas and Mayaro – This activity centered around conducting focus groups with T&T community members and Venezuelan community members separately to gather information on perspectives, tensions, and resilience capacities, and to gather ideas to improve coordination among actors for service provision to the community. It was noted that there was a dire need to capitalize on the extensive links with their networking partners and to develop a movement that was built on trust and respect for each other whilst collaborating with others to address the Venezuelan migrant issue, as well as the issue of crime and violence prevention.

(3) Initiating Community Resource Centers as safe spaces where both Venezuelans and T&T locals could access information and/or physical, educational, intellectual, and social services. The RDD was tasked with increasing information provision and access to centers in Chaguanas and establishing a new center in Mayaro.

(4) Contributing to the design of fact cards with partners for distribution in the centers.

(5) Customising and implementing RDD's Sports+ Model in the Chaguanas and Mayaro regions of Trinidad. To facilitate this, RDD adapted and expanded its existing Sports Plus Model—a cognitive behaviour modification approach to deter violent and hateful extremism and build youth social and behavioral skills among at-risk youth. The expanded program included an athletic component (martial arts) and an education and mentorship component. In each of the two locations, RDD conducted this three-month program twice during this project (September–December 2019 and January–March 2020). In each round they mentored at least 15 Venezuelan youths and 15 T&T youths who participated together, establishing cross-population linkages. The program also included:

(a) Sports-Martial Arts/Self-Defence Training.

(b) English and Spanish Language Courses. RDD was able to host conversational English language courses and conversational Spanish-language courses, targeting the youth in the Sports Plus program and their parents (and other adults from the community) in each location throughout each of the three-months programs. RDD also developed a targeted curriculum for these courses based on the levels of the participants and their parents. The adult courses ran simultaneously while the children were in the sports classes to facilitate participation.

(c) Education and Life Skills Training: RDD was able to implement a bilingual tutoring and mentorship program. This program was held three days a week for two hours each, bringing 20 Venezuelan youth and 20 T&T youth together. It focused on teaching basic, reading, and writing skills to children and adolescents ages 7-20, broken into subgroups based on age and baseline knowledge levels. These sessions also promoted social and behavioral skills, in particular, targeting topics such as conflict mitigation, anger management, trauma healing, and problem-solving and encouraged acceptance and social cohesion among the participants. RDD also introduced creative arts and other engaging activities to promote the abovementioned skills. Tutoring was provided by qualified and trained individuals and supervised by certified retired teachers. These enrichment activities also focused on oral language and expression development. Students participated in enrichment activities that supported character development. Several of these activities were centered on prevention, problem-solving, and critical thinking. They embraced storytelling, theatre in education, local area heritage activities and skills, competitions, sports, arts and crafts, all engaging activities based on group decision making, and critical thinking. In these sessions, narratives tending to violence and hate were challenged by several counter-narratives that were explained and discussed in great length.

(d) Family Support: RDD was able to bring parents and youth together for at least one family socialization event during each iteration of the program to strengthen the social networks and reinforce positive behaviors and community cohesion. This component included public education workshops that were instrumental in sensitizing T&T and Venezuelan communities on matters of public safety and worked to foster a single community identity. RDD also held pre- and post-session with the parents of the 30 youth in each group to build an understanding of the program and the positive behaviors and skills it developed, and helped establish a support system for the participants.

(e) In collaboration with other CRI partners, the RDD contributed to the development and helped conduct a public awareness and sensitization campaign to obtain buy-in from the community and strategic partners, promote social cohesion, and fight xenophobia. The main aim of this was to enhance cognitive and behavioral competency to reduce risky behaviors, including tendencies to VHE.

All in all, in its quest to counter VHE, RDD focused on developing community resilience, training and engagement with community members, managing intervention activities, and building its capacity as an NGO.

Evaluation

The RDD focused its work in communities with specific attributes. RDD operated in high-risk communities with a tendency to gravitate towards violent and hateful

extremism. They functioned in communities where there was a presence of radicalised persons with violent and hateful extremist behaviour and of at least 6 mosques (4 in Chaguanas and two in Mayaro) with alleged tendencies to recruit youths for involvement in criminal activities and extremist behaviors. RDD targeted communities with low-income families, very young migrants, none or very low educational background (in most cases) amongst the Venezuelan children, little to no educational opportunities for migrant children, a high number of young persons and unemployment/underemployment.

Based on several interviews with persons in the areas of Chaguanas and Mayaro,¹⁸ including the founders of RDD, many successes have been noted. There was an evidential improvement in cognitive and academic outcomes. Safe spaces were established for migrants and community members which facilitated positive interaction and access to social and educational services. In these safe places, the elements of VHE were discussed and totally discouraged. There was a level of confidence in participants as they manoeuvre the language skills. Youth self-esteem and confidence enhanced coupled with increased physical, mental and spiritual capacities through Martial Arts. There were increased proficiency levels and problem-solving skills. Virtues such as honesty, kindness, forgiveness and non-violence were also encouraged and were well-received. Beneficiaries of the program came from among the low socio-economic group which included migrants. Cross population linkage was also established.

In relation to the RDD's goal of preventing and countering violent and hateful extremism and charting a way forward, there were some achievements of wider effects. There will be a great impact on social problems as community members were exposed to positive engagements and lifestyles. Partnerships were established with locals to provide learning opportunities for students. The Program was executed in "so-called" high-risk communities, therefore, providing enriching opportunities and experiences for participants. These opportunities provide them with alternatives to VHE, other risky behaviors and gang recruitment. Developing skills of resilience would help the beneficiaries face challenges and difficulties in life, which can help them feel better and cope better. As a result of those interventions, there will be less gang /violent extremism recruitment and less violence in the communities but rather opportunities to build resilient communities [15].

Overall, according to interviewees, the CRI Program touched lives in the communities in a real way, bringing a greater awareness of social needs and addressing a percentage of the communities in terms of access, equality of opportunities, and social support. It is evident, therefore, that participation in The CRI Program activities in Chaguanas and Mayaro was able to establish in a real way cross-population linkages between Venezuelan Migrants and the host communities. The effectiveness of the Program brought a wide range of benefits to youth, adults, families, and the

communities. The activities boost academic performances, reduced risky behaviors, promote physical and mental health, promoted individual and community well-being, and provided safe spaces in the communities via the CRI Resource Centers.

Recommendations: There is no magic formula to address the large influx of migrants in Trinidad and Tobago today or to prevent VHE. Language, literacy, sport, life skills, culturally appropriate classes have been key components of RDD's successful attempt at positive integration activities in this CRI Program and therefore should be continued. However, it will require a sustained effort over the long term if they are to have greater impact. Building these processes now will improve the response to future migrants and related issues; giving them the tools needed to bounce back more quickly, to become stronger, and therefore more resilient, in the future. The undermentioned areas may be considered to enhance and bring lasting change in the CRI program:

- (1) Create diverse, improved opportunities for public social interaction such as activities involving the wider community and long-term projects.
- (2) Develop improved skills for interaction amongst participants.
- (3) Develop improved processes to support and promote positive interactions, including providing training for those involved in promoting and enabling this work.

NGO #2: Foundation for the Institution of Services, Caring and Learning and National Islamic Counselling Services (FISCAL-NICS)

Counselling As A Tool To Prevent Violent And Hateful Extremism

According to FISCAL-NICS, Trinidad and Tobago is currently plagued by a scourge of VHE, crime, and abuse which targets persons of all demographic profiles. Research on these issues has revealed that socioeconomic disenfranchisement, familial dysfunction and individual trauma are linked to poorer psychological outcomes, involvement in antisocial behaviour, and future delinquency. Thus, in order to stem the tide of VHE, criminal activity and social deterioration, it is imperative that the underlying issues of trauma and familial dysfunction be addressed.

FISCAL-NICS' mandate is to assist and help the community to develop and enhance family life. It has been noted that as a result of crime and violence within the country, several children lost a parent, and many families are without a breadwinner. Consequently, children and remaining parents are coping with grief, loss, anger, stress, frustration etc, which can impact their behaviors, their ability to function in their personal, professional and family lives, and can increase the likelihood of future involvement of violent and criminal activity. FISCAL-NICS therefore views the need for counselling as critical to address the psychological difficulties facing persons in communities where crime and violence are rampant, and where community members

have experienced traumatic loss of close family members, and to prevent a negative trajectory for such persons [16]. Since at present there are limited facilities to assist bereaved family members at affordable rates in the public sector system, FISCAL-NICS in collaboration with other organizations has attempted to assist with counselling and other services in these areas in the following three locations: Laventille, Diego Martin and Enterprise.

In this regard, there were two aspects of the project, “Counselling As A Tool To Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE)”:

(1) (a) By the end of 3 months, 30 - 40 young orphans and fatherless children between the ages of 6 and 16 years received counselling at their schools or at private offices set up by FISCAL-NICS in strategic areas to help them to psychologically cope, handle the exposure and reduce any tendency of a violent lifestyle.

(b) Counselling training for persons and activists from the high-risk areas who would continue the counselling process after the project was completed during the period assigned.

Over the course of June – July 2018, Community Service Personnel (CSP) were contacted and asked to recommend persons for counselling in the areas of Laventille, Diego Martin and Enterprise. Recommendations were received from teams belonging to the Roots Foundation and Ryu Dan Dojo. Meetings and workshops were held in the Enterprise area, to facilitate meeting with the parents of those children identified as needing counselling.

Both aspects of the project were started and implemented as proposed in July and continued until December 2018. In January 2019, the counselling training program in one area continued.

(2) PVE COUNSELLING PROJECT Over the course of January and February 2019, 14 clients were seen, over five sessions.

Evaluation: Based on the aforementioned sessions, the following problems have been identified in the clients seen: Emotion regulation difficulties, sexual abuse, parenting challenges, trauma and stress related health conditions.

Based on these problems, the following therapeutic modalities were employed: Trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT); Psycho-education on parenting; emotional regulation exercises and exploration of memories. Reports revealed growing insight and willingness to process and address trauma. Additional trauma resolution and strength-building work are needed.

PVE COUNSELLING TRAINING PROGRAMME PORT-OF-SPAIN

In November 2018, a counselling training program commenced for persons living within the Port-of-Spain and Diego Martin areas. There were 32 participants, ranging

between the age groups of 17 to 65 years in this program in November. The sessions continued in in January and February 2019. Sessions covered depression and suicide, counsellor's strength building, marriage and family issues, exit strategies, and psychological first aid.

NEXT STEPS

With the ending of that project, FISCAL-NCIS continued its work with several at risk persons over the last few years. Sessions with all clients who were being seen were completed and closed. For those requiring counselling, ongoing assistance has been provided on a need basis. A graduation program for the graduates of the counselling training sessions at Port-of-Spain was held on 23 February 2019. Graduates from the aforementioned training program have been conducting presentations of various topics from the training programs to various audiences around the country, including mosques, community gatherings and schools. A schedule for 2022-2023 has developed for this with a special focus on youths 16+. A proposal will be sent to the US Embassy and other donors for the second phase of this project where NCIS would take prospective counsellors who are on the ground doing lay counselling and further train them to help them in their weak areas of skills. Also, additional counselling models will be developed for programs for additional training as they were requested by the participants.

NGO #3

Believers Assembly (BA)

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) usually play a critical role in the debates and discourse(s) regarding radicalization, counter-radicalization, violent religious extremism, and terrorism [17]

This is because scholars, experts, and policymakers often argue that the role played by FBOs in combating and taming the activities of violent extremist and terror groups in the world today cannot be overemphasized, given the fact that they serve as a moral compass for societies. Scholars also argue that because these violent radical and terror groups frequently instrumentalise religion negatively to perpetuate their agenda or objectives, the same approach can also be adopted to counter their negative misrepresentation of religion to radicalize individuals and groups into embracing these radical and extremist views[17].

In addition, political actors and other rent-seekers who benefit from the activities of these violent radical groups use religion as a tool to advance and achieve their heinous interests. In looking at the FBO known as Believers Assembly, it is noted that there is a strong focus on working with girls and women in an attempt to steer them away from VHE.

BA over the last six years (2016-present) has focused on women with a view to ensure inter alia, they have a source of income, they have at least a basic education, they develop their skills and talents and they are able to withstand countering the various ideological and doctrinal forces that support any form of VHE. BA as a faith-based NGO continues to be at the forefront in combating VHE and negative ideologies pushed by extremists and radical groups in its recruitment and expansionist strategy. This position can be seen through the collaboration between BA and The Institute of Security and Intelligence Studies (IFSIS) in introducing various aspects of Intelligence Studies, Counselling Psychology and Public and Personal Safety for girls 16+ and women of all ages. These studies have also exposed several narratives in VHE as well as helped and guided the participants to develop, learn and be exposed to counter narratives to VHE.

Since April 2020, BA has also launched a two-hour program on Mondays and Fridays on Zoom with several planned activities including prayer sessions, discussions with other FBOs involved in countering VHE; lectures from educators, persons in the legal, medical and psychological fields and leaders of different faiths. This initiative has also served to enable the youth and children to understand the importance of diversity management, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and consolidation in society. In its outreach program, the BA has also been involved in various interfaith engagements among Christians, Hindus and Muslims in promoting peace and understanding through the organization of unity concerts, weekend classes for children from four to sixteen in mathematics, English and creative writing; sports, movie viewing and other recreational activities that are not only aimed at promoting and strengthening peace, but also addressing the various negative aspects of mistrust being promoted by those who wish to fuel the embers of violence and terror in society and promote VHE.

Undoubtedly, women make unique and valuable contributions to various aspects of countering VHE, including through analysis, fieldwork and policy development. Their participation in the wider fight against terrorism and violent extremism is essential and Believers Assembly continues to encourage allies and partners to engage more systematically on issues relating to countering VHE. Through its outreach program, BA can contribute to evidence-based research to identify how women can be empowered to enhance the fight against extremism and to identify opportunities for substantive, meaningful female roles across a wide spectrum of counter VHE activities. The fight against VHE requires a whole of society approach in which women's participation is essential. Greater social and economic empowerment will fuel improved involvement.

Conclusion

For over three decades now, the government of Trinidad and Tobago and its security agencies have been grappling with the expansion and activities of the JAM

group, which led an attempted coup in 1990, as well as other groups and individuals who have displayed VHE tendencies.

This article examined the critical contribution made by NGOs in firstly countering the negative instrumentalisation and misrepresentation of religion by this terror group and other groups and individuals to achieve its agenda in Trinidad and Tobago and secondly to ensure that nationals especially youths and women are discouraged from leaning towards VHE tendencies.

To address these challenges, this article proposes the following recommendations for effective disengagement against the negative ideology and messages promoting VHE in Trinidad and Tobago. A bottom-up counter VHE approach should be developed that involves and incorporates every stakeholder to make the approach less state-centric and reductionist. In Trinidad and Tobago there are several civil society organizations that could be harnessed to work in the fight against VHE. Continued support and protection should be guaranteed for NGOs and others, including radio and television hosts, vocal religious leaders and politicians who use their platforms to constantly speak against VHE and negative representations of religion by certain rogue elements in society. The Trinidad and Tobago government and its agencies should address structural challenges such as poverty, unemployment, alienation and exclusion, racism, and other forms of social injustice in society to deter vulnerable individuals and groups from embracing negative ideologies.

There should be a deliberate effort made by relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Legal Affairs to address non-violent forms of radicalization such as hate speech, rhetoric, and distortions of religious texts as these are the precursors to VHE. There should be proper synergy and cooperation within NGOs by allaying any form of mistrust and disunity when combating negative messages and ideologies from violent individuals and extremist groups. NGOs and other key stakeholders should not only identify the push and pull factors contributing to the radicalization of individuals, especially the youths and the vulnerable in society but they should also make a concerted effort to ensure that these factors are addressed and prevented in society. There should be strategic and multi-sectoral engagement between state actors, FBOs, CSOs, NGOs, the community, and religious leaders to address and counter the ideological, membership, and funding activities of all extremist groups. Punitive measures should be taken by relevant stakeholders to check the activities of extremist religious leaders in the society through the strengthening and enhancing of the operational capacity of the criminal justice system in discharging its duties and mandate.

As an avenue for further studies, future researchers are also encouraged to examine how religious and community leaders use their platforms and other social media tools to counter the various messages and ideologies preached by terror and other violent

extremist groups. This is because several studies have also assessed the use of social media and its tools as a recruitment hub for such groups. Researchers interested in studying VHE and countering VHE are also encouraged to broaden their scope of engagement, and interviews should not only focus on key stakeholders or informants but should also involve other members of various NGOs at the middle and lower levels to understand their feelings and sentiments towards radicalization and counter-radicalization, as well as its implications for the stability and progress of societies. Involving some of these middle- and lower-level members of these organizations will also contribute to shedding more light on issues around VHE.

Endnotes

¹ (British) Commission for Countering Extremism, 2022.

² Barton, et al., 'Islam, Gender and Civil Society. Book Series:' New Security Challenges Series.

³ Uprety and Prasad, 'Qualitative data collection, analysis and presentation: A theoretical overview' 83–122.

⁴ Briggs et al., 'Community Engagement for Counterterrorism: Lessons from the United Kingdom', 971–981.

⁵ Khalil and Zeuthen, 'A Case Study of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming: Lessons from OTI's Kenya Transition Initiative', 14.

⁶ 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response', (European Parliament. COM (2013) 941 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response.).

⁷ Zambelis, 'Spotlight on Trinidad and Tobago's Jamaat al-Muslimeen', 1-3.

⁸ Tobago is a controversial topic on the two islands. Gang Murders and murders rose every year from 1999 to 2008. Approximately 529 people were murdered in 2008, the highest number ever. In January 2018 Trinidad recorded 40 killings in the month. Nearly 500 murders per year were recorded in 2017. [n 2018 and in 2019, the number of murders have crossed 500 according to the official police statistics with 2019 recording the second highest number of murders in the country's history. In 2021, the homicide rate in Trinidad and Tobago stood at around 32 homicide victims per 100,000 population. The murder levels worsened 4.2 points compared to a year earlier, when 28.2 homicides were registered per 100,000 inhabitants. There were 448 murders in Trinidad. This trend has continued into the current year as during the month of January and up to March, the country recorded over 107 murders. Port of Spain and its immediate environs have a higher crime rate than any other part of Trinidad. Homicides countrywide rose from fewer than 50 in the 1980s, to 97 in 1998, then to 360 in 2006 (30 murders per 100,000 persons). It rose to approximately 529 in 2008 but decreased in the following years.

⁹ Collihan and Danopolous, ‘Coup d’état Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure’, 435-450.

¹⁰ Zambelis, ‘Jamaat al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago’, 1–12.

¹¹ Collihan and Danopolous, ‘Coup d’état Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure’, 435-450.

¹² Zambelis, ‘Jamaat al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago’.

¹³ Laqueur, *Terrorism*.

¹⁴ Sookraj, ‘*Muslims Can Seek Injunction vs Bakr*’.

¹⁵ Loutoo, ‘*Judge frees Bakr Ibrahim upholds no-case submission*’.

¹⁶ In Trinidad and Tobago, gang activity continues to be a threat to national security. In fact, the Police say intelligence suggests there are close to 130 separate gangs operating in Trinidad and Tobago, and while guns and drugs have long been drivers of gang-related crime, in recent times other illegal activities have also become key contributors including illegal quarrying and extortion. Hate speech against the government and the business community and physical attacks on business places have been increasing over the last three years. (Interview with crime reporter, March 1, 2022)

¹⁷ Interview with Sensei Marva Logan, Director of RDD, 31 January 2022

¹⁸ Interviews with former MP Chaguanas, Mr Fazal Karim and social worker Alicia Williams et al., 15 January 2022. Chaguanas and Mayaro are two areas where mosques teaching radicalism and espousing VHE are located.

¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Hafeez Khan, founding member of FISCAL- NICS, 5 January 2022.

²⁰ Ishaku et al., ‘The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Counter-Radicalization in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram’, 1003.

²¹ Maza et al., ‘Challenges of Countering Terrorist Recruitment in the Lake Chad Region: The Case of Boko Haram’, 96.

²² In some cases, recommendations like these backfire, as was seen in the Life Sport programme. The social Life Sport programme was an initiative geared at reforming youths in high-risk communities. Former Life Sport co-ordinator Rajae Ali and four others were committed to stand trial for allegedly conspiring to murder radio DJ Kevaughn “Lurbz” Savory. Ali, his brother Ishmael Ali, Keshon Dempster, Brandon Borneo, Brent LaCroix and Donna Dyer are before the court on charges under the Anti-Gang Act, possession of arms and ammunition to endanger life, and conspiracy to murder Savory. All the offences are alleged to have taken place on November 27, 2014, in Port of Spain. Ali and his brother Ishmael are also charged with nine others for the May 4, 2014, murder of Senior Counsel Dana Seetahal.

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ТРИНИДАД ЖӘНЕ ТОБАГО МЫСАЛЫ АРҚЫЛЫ: ЗОРЛЫҚ ПЕН ЭКСТРЕМИЗМГЕ ДЕГЕН ЖЕК КӨРІНІШКЕ ҚАТЫСТЫ (VНЕ) ЖАУАПТАРДЫ ЗЕРТТЕУ

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Аңдатпа. Тринидад пен Тобаго зорлық-зомбылық пен жеккөрінішті экстремизмге қарсы әрекетті зерттеуге арналған бірегей сайтты ұсынады. Елде 1990 жылғы сәтсіз төңкерістен кейін ИСИМ-ге қосылған азаматтардың жан басына шаққандағы жоғары көрсеткіші байқалды, содан

кейін жақында пандемияға ықпал еткен жалған ақпарат пен жеккөрінішті әңгімелер көбейді. Бұл құжат Тринидад пен Тобагодағы зорлық-зомбылық пен жеккөрінішті экстремизм мәселелерін шешуге тырысатын үш ҰЕҰ жұмысын қарастырады. Салыстырмалы жағдайды зерттеу әдістемесін пайдалана отырып, үш жағдай бойынша ұқсастықтарды, айырмашылықтарды және заңдылықтарды талдау әрбір ҰЕҰ көзқарасының күшті және әлсіз жақтарын анықтайды және ашады.

Бұл мақала саясаткерлермен, қауіпсіздік әкімшілігінің мүшелерімен және осы ҰЕҰ-дағы негізгі ойыншылармен жаңа тереңдетілген сұхбаттарды талдауға және әдебиеттерге шолу мен осы ҰЕҰ орындаған VHE бағдарламаларын бағалауға негізделген. Бұл мақалада бірнеше қауымдастықтардағы (соның ішінде мемлекеттік институттар) экстремистік қозғалыстардың қозғаушы күші, сондай-ақ осы мәселелерді шешудегі үкіметтік емес ұйымдардың рөлі анықталған. Ол сонымен қатар қайталанудың алдын алу және бағдарламаның тиімділігі мен тұрақтылығын арттыру үшін жағдаяттық талдау, жобалау және жаңа VHE бағдарламаларын бағалау бойынша ұсыныстарды ұсынады.

Тірек сөздер: зорлық-зомбылық экстремизмі, радикалдану, бандитизм, Тринидада, Тобаго, пандемия, NGO, VHE.

ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ОТВЕТОВ НА НАСИЛЬСТВЕННЫЙ И НЕНАВИСТНЫЙ ЭКСТРЕМИЗМ (VHE): ПРИМЕР ТРИНИДАДА И ТОБАГО

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Аннотация. Тринидад и Тобаго предлагает уникальный сайт для изучения реакции на насильственный и ненавистнический экстремизм. В стране наблюдался высокий процент граждан на душу населения, присоединившихся к ИГИЛ после неудавшегося государственного переворота в 1990 году, а затем, совсем недавно, всплеск дезинформации и ненавистнических нарративов, чему способствовала пандемия. В этом документе рассматривается работа трех НПО в Тринидаде и Тобаго, которые стремятся решить проблемы насильственного и ненавистнического экстремизма. Используя методологию сравнительного изучения конкретных случаев, анализ сходств, различий и закономерностей в трех случаях выявляет и раскрывает сильные и слабые стороны подхода каждой НПО.

Этот документ основан на анализе новых подробных интервью с политиками, членами администрации безопасности и ключевыми игроками в этих НПО, а также на обзоре литературы и оценках программ VHE, проведенных этими НПО. В документе определены движущие силы экстремистских движений (включая государственные учреждения) в нескольких сообществах, а также роль НПО в решении этих проблем. В нем также предлагаются рекомендации по ситуационному анализу, разработке и оценке новых программ VHE для предотвращения дублирования и повышения эффективности и устойчивости программ.

Ключевые слова: насильственный экстремизм, радикализация, бандитизм, Тринидада, Тобаго, пандемия, NGO, VHE.

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