

# EX POST PAPER

## What can we learn from adjacent phenomena?

### Summary

The RAN LOCAL working group met in Lisbon, 15 and 16 May 2018, to discuss the connections between preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism (P/CVE) and adjacent phenomena. Four phenomena were discussed in particular: criminal youth gangs, hooliganism, honour-related crimes and cults. Experts in these different fields presented their knowledge and lessons learned. We looked at the similarities between the process of radicalisation and these adjacent phenomena. The aim is for local prevent coordinators to learn from these approaches – which might be equally applicable to P/CVE work. The purpose of this paper is to present the outcomes of the meeting, with a particular focus on how to apply the insights from adjacent fields to one's own work.

This paper is written by Y. Gssime and M. Meines from the RAN Centre of Excellence. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

## Introduction

### Why you should contact your colleagues from adjacent fields:

- **Same people:** You probably work partly with the same target audience. Your colleagues might have knowledge and information available about the people you are working with. This could help with your prevention work.
- **Extra perspective:** Your colleagues could provide different perspectives and knowledge on how people are recruited and what elements of attraction (extremist) groups might use.
- **Similar interventions:** Your colleagues partly use similar (preventive) interventions with useful elements that might be transferrable to P/CVE work.

Sharing the knowledge of adjacent fields can help local coordinators improve their P/CVE work and make tailor-made interventions even more effective. So don't miss this opportunity to contact your colleagues from adjacent fields!

Starting with the plenary part of the meeting and concluding with the lessons learned about the different phenomena, this paper shows the advantageous of collaborating with colleagues from adjacent fields.

## Five things you should know about adjacent phenomena

### 1. The link with radicalisation

'People join a group that has something to offer.' Whether this is an extremist group or a cult, a gang or a group of hooligans, it always seems to be about a sense of belonging, identity and a (future) perspective. Different groups use the same tactics to recruit (young) people and people are attracted to similar elements. There also seems to be an overlap, even in cases where ideology and narratives differ or are even absent. This means local P/CVE coordinators are handling similar issues as their colleagues working on hooliganism, criminal youth gangs and cults. As such, they can learn from each other's knowledge, strategies and interventions to improve the effectiveness of their own strategies and interventions. There is no need reinvent the wheel.

### 2. Create the bigger picture

Different adjacent phenomena may be intertwined. For instance, the line between hooliganism and right-wing extremism (RWE) is not always clear. 'It [football hooliganism] involves behaviour that is "likely to incite public disorder", and which is "expressing hatred of, or stirring up hatred against" a person or group based on

religion, race, nationality or sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup> It is because of this behaviour that the UK decide to amend the Football Offences Act. Passed in 1991, the Act focused only on physical and criminal harm and not on discriminatory behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Another example of intertwined phenomena is the relation between radicalisation and honour crimes. In these cases, radicalisation may be viewed as a way out for girls struggling to overcome enormous social control and pressure at home. It seems the social environment is of great importance here: social vulnerability in certain neighbourhoods and groups – due to less opportunities and chances – contributes to the attraction of extremist thoughts and actions. For this reason, it is important to remain focused on prevention, while not losing sight of the bigger picture.

**3. Financial resources**

Since early prevention of terrorism and radicalisation is a big item on some political agendas, funding is available for interventions, research and new strategies. Even though adjacent fields are dealing with similarly important topics, access to funding remains rather limited. This is one reason it is important to join knowledge, budget and forces. Local P/CVE coordinators are working with the same people, in the same social context, and dealing with similar forms of recruitment and elements of attractiveness as their colleagues from adjacent fields. The perspectives from these adjacent fields can contribute to dealing with P/CVE. Using a multidisciplinary, integral approach could even result in better outcomes for all parties.

**4. Understanding human psychology**

The process of joining a radical, ideological, hooligan or criminal group is, to a certain extent, similar. Understanding the mechanisms of involvement is useful for both local P/CVE coordinators and their colleagues working in adjacent fields. Such knowledge may be useful in implementing prevention strategies on resilience building. It is important to teach children how to think critically and to raise public awareness about the functioning of social media and what happens to people who find themselves under pressure or in a vulnerable stage of life. It is also crucial to teach people how to identify emotional blackmailing and manipulation.<sup>3</sup> Recognising the similarities in how different groups recruit young people and how they function can prove beneficial. It can contribute to young people's understanding that radical groups are not the right answer to their personal problems. For example, experts on cults already have a lot of psychological knowledge. So, involving them could be a first step towards gaining more psychological insight and awareness.

**5. The importance of framing**

The way that the issue of radicalisation is framed by politicians and media does not necessarily contribute to understanding and dealing with this issue. For example, the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-43405134>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nporadio1.nl/homepage/10307-nieuwe-voetbalwet-moet-hooligans-in-engeland-strenger-aanpakken>

<sup>3</sup> Forward, S., & Frazier, D. (1997). Emotional blackmail. Bantam.

focus on Jihadism excludes RWE from the debate on radicalisation<sup>4</sup>. It is problematic to exclude RWE from the radicalisation discourse because RWE crimes should also be considered acts of terrorism according to the definition<sup>5</sup>. One way to properly frame social issues is to widen the discourse. Be aware of the images connected to certain words and focus on facts and universal understanding by using the vocabulary of human rights. For instance, labelling violence against women by family members as ‘honour crimes’ implies the idea of cultural justification because of the word ‘honour’.<sup>6</sup> When simply framing it as murder, social control or violence against women, it is directly accepted as a violation of human rights. The correct framing of social issues helps expose hidden agendas and reveals similarities.

## Hooliganism

### Lessons learned

---

*‘If we were passionate about football, we would have become footballers – not hooligans.’*

---

Hooliganism is not only about football. As is the case with radicalisation, hooliganism provides an **exciting alternative** to the mundane – sometimes depressing – routine of daily life. As such, the field of hooliganism clearly shows how a pattern of **action and reaction** and ‘US vs Them’ thinking can linger underneath extreme ideas and actions. A different layer beyond sports becomes visible within hooligan groups when the issue is taken to a broader societal level. The arrival of migrants and the impact they have on society, or living in a culturally diverse country, can serve as a strong pull factor that attract people to RWE ideas.<sup>7</sup> This happens in **one and the same group**: hooliganism and radicalisation towards RWE often go hand in hand. There is no clear division.

Passionately supporting a football club is considered normal behaviour. **Everyone can have an opinion on football** and a preference for a specific club. It is perceived as normal to be quite passionate about ‘your’ club, which may represent one’s hometown and identity. For this reason, violence is usually accepted as justifiable instead of being dealt with in its totality. It might even be considered **normal**. This is also the case with **polarisation**. In cases where the

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/white-europe-60000-nationalists-march-on-polands-independence-day>

<sup>5</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary: (threats of) violent action for political purposes

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.stopvaw.org/honor\\_killings](http://www.stopvaw.org/honor_killings)

<sup>7</sup> Amir Ben-Porat (2008) Death to the arabs: the right-wing fan’s fear, Soccer & Society, 9:1

media report only strong opinions, individuals feel compelled to choose sides. This contributes to polarisation, which, in turn, leads to more radicalisation.

### *Practical tips*

- Get in touch with the local hooliganism coordinator to exchange information about the persons involved. You might be worried about the same people, families or groups of youngsters. If possible, exchange the names of recruiters and the tactics they use, since these might be similar tactics or even the same persons targeting people within the local context as the RWE groups.
- Hooliganism and radicalisation both have links to more general reactions on global developments, such as migration flows. Fake news and narratives about these global developments can cause irrational fear and/or calls for (illegal) actions. ‘Let’s talk to young people and make them think for themselves again.’ Invest in education on critical thinking and media literacy to prevent youngsters from joining extreme groups.
- Becoming part of a group can be an alternative to boredom and a lack of activities. Provide young people with a purpose and alternative actions by encouraging them to organise activities and create opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

## Cults

### Lessons learned

‘Who are the followers? People like you and me, we can all be influenced.’

People who are part of a cult do not consider their group to be a cult. They are part of a group that has **something to offer** them, a group that ‘does something about the mess in society.’ The profile of a follower is quite broad. However, from the moment they become part of a cult, they usually face the same kind of situations. Followers of cults are often recruited at the moment they find themselves in a **vulnerable stage** of their life. Phases of **transition** can make individuals vulnerable, for example losing a family member, moving to another town or country for work or study, or after a breakup. This also applies to radicalised individuals:

---

### *Human psychology: how to make a connection?*

- *Similarities may make people reflect on their own life. Talk about a safe subject with the same rationale in order to make someone understand what is really happening.*

- *Emotionally reconnecting can be done with the help of family members. Arguing is counterproductive, while talking about positive memories or cooking someone’s favourite food can touch emotionally and break through the disassociation.*

- *Invest in education to make young people understand the logic of psychology and the process of identity building. Teach children about emotional hygiene: if something looks too good to be true, it is.*

---

they are often young and in a search of their own identity. Cults, as is the case with violent extremist groups, take advantage of these vulnerable moments to **dissociate people from society and their social context** and even further from themselves. They do so by continuously putting **pressure** on them – for example through love bombing<sup>8</sup>, triggering fear or imposing a sense of guilt. The consequence is that followers lose their ability to reason or to think critically. In this way, they do not question their membership or the goals and ways of the cult. They simply become part of this (new) social context.

The ideologies behind extreme groups may be different, but **human psychology is the same**. Sharing insights in the processes of human psychology abused by recruiters could be a first step on the path to a fruitful collaboration between local P/CVE coordinators and cult experts.

#### *Practical tips*

- Check if cults are present in your regional or local context. If so, find the colleagues or NGOs dealing with these cults and preventing people from joining or helping people to leave. Exchange ideas on recruitment tactics and what people need when they leave cults or an extremist group.
- Invest in understanding human psychology and identity building by inviting experts on cults. They often have a lot of knowledge on this subject which could be very useful in P/CVE work.

## Criminal Youth Gangs

### Lessons learned

‘Once you see the criminal gang, it means that the roots are already deep and can be everywhere.’

---

*‘What happens in Ecuador, influences Barcelona.’*

---

This quote suggests the importance of prevention work. Joining a criminal group is always a process with underlying root causes. Criminal youth gangs, for example, often exist in unsafe and poor neighbourhoods. Residents feel unsafe and young people, especially, have lost hope for the future. By becoming gang member, they feel a sense of security and protection. A gang can also provide a source of income. In these cases, more police presence is not always helpful – investing in such neighbourhoods is.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cultwatch.com/howcultswork.html>

**However, the neighbourhood is no longer the only place where criminal youth gangs operate.** New movements are, for example, related to migration flow. Also, information about youth gangs in Barcelona reflects on the fact that what happens in Ecuador can influence youth gangs active in Barcelona. Through social media, gang members are connected all over the world and their scope has been significantly enlarged. This also applies to violent extremist groups that can contact other groups from all parts of the world. For example, white supremacy movements in the United States contact members of RWE groups in Sweden, Germany and other countries in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

### *Practical tips*

- Talk to the person or unit (mostly within the police force) in charge of dealing with criminal youth gangs. Find out what persons are at risk of being recruited for criminal youth gangs and which persons are at risk to be radicalised. These people might be part of the same social context or communities.
- Tips from criminal youth gang experts on how to curb the risk of recruitment:
  - An important weapon in the battle against extremism is to constantly communicate with individuals at risk. In this way, the existence of the individual is acknowledged and it is a way to break the distance. Use definitions that fit the daily reality of your interlocutor.
  - Focus on leaders and recruiters, these are the influencers. With minimal resources, a maximum impact is generated.
  - Cooperate with all partners to be able to intervene directly when needed. Make sure the partners are aware of the issue and understand the importance of cooperating.
  - Mark the breaking with the criminal gang or extremist group with a symbolic act. For example, anti-gang authorities destroyed the weapons of the former gang members in an unofficial ceremony. One could also think of visualising alternative life paths.

Nevertheless, local interventions are still considered to be of great importance. After all, it is at the local level where individuals join a gang or radicalise. It is also within the local context where you can find ways to offer alternative actions or narratives to help people leave the gang or extremist group.

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/16/opinions/global-white-supremacy-opinion-golinkin/index.html>

## Honour Crimes

### Lessons learned

‘Shame and honour go hand in hand.’

The concept of honour is related to shame. For this reason, it is **closely connected to – a girls – behaviour**. However, when framing honour-related crimes as a violation of human rights, domestic violence or as social control, it becomes clear that it occurs in many settings and that it should be contested. It is a cultural practice and religion is being (ab)used for justification. This means that honour cases are **not being correctly addressed** for fear of stigmatising or discriminating.

As mentioned earlier, different phenomena may be **intertwined**. This may be the case with radicalisation and honour-related violence. For instance, girls may join radical groups to escape the enormous social control they are forced to deal with, especially if they have done something that may reflect badly on their family. Consider female foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). For these girls, traveling to Syria was **a way to escape their controlling families** and to live a ‘romanticised and adventurous life’.<sup>10</sup>

However, whether we are talking about criminal youth gangs or a more culturally sensitive topic like honour-related crimes or radicalisation, professionals are finding themselves engaged in a **difficult conversation**. They should be equipped with the right tools. Also, it is useful to be aware of the differences between specific communities to handle each case the right way. For example: ‘A girl walked away from home and asked for help. The practitioner called her parents to take her home – but they were the reason she walked away.’

---

### *Whom to equip?*

*If a girl feels like she will be taken away to marry abroad against her will, she can put a spoon in her underwear in order to be searched discretely at the airport. This will give her the chance to inform the staff about her departure. Airport staff should be equipped to handle such kinds of situations.*

---

---

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf)

### Practical tips

- A girl might not feel comfortable talking to a male prevent worker, especially when it comes to private issues, such as identity, belonging and/or gender-related issues. In general: try to ensure a connection by employing the best fitting prevent worker based on culture, religion or gender. [According to young people](#), it is a great benefit to have something in common.
- Be aware of specific communities and distinguish between them. It is important to know and understand how these communities think and act in order to understand and perhaps even influence the concept of honour or the ideas behind radical choices.
- Provide alternative narratives about honour and extremists. Use media and peer education, work together with NGOs to raise awareness on the topic in a sensible way. A Danish example can be found here: <https://bydelsmor.dk/>
- Use universal language to describe the problem: human rights, social control, domestic violence, violation of the law.