

Amy-Jane Gielen

Cutting through Complexity

Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)



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Amy-Jane Gielen



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1 Introduction

1.1 The complexity of violent extremism and challenges for evaluation

Amira¹ is a 16 year old schoolgirl in a small town in the Netherlands. She has lived with her mom and sisters since her parents got divorced. The family has a long history of engagement with child protection services because of repeated domestic violence by the father, often instigated by his alcoholism. Amira's parents are refugees and her mother is a Muslim. Amira herself is not concerned with Islam. She is a typical teenager. She hangs out with friends and is absorbed with clothes, make-up, boys and social media. That all changes when her mother is diagnosed with cancer and nearly dies. As a divorced refugee, her mother has very little by way of social or family network she can draw on while she is so sick. Word goes round in the local Muslim community and young women with a Salafi religious orientation start helping out. They also start speaking with Amira, observing that she is not behaving like a 'true' Muslim. For example, she does not wear a head scarf. These women introduce her to books, websites and lectures so she can learn more about Islam and how she should behave and act as a 'true' Muslim. After the summer holiday Amira makes a radical decision. She decides to swap her skinny jeans for a khimar; she is completely veiled in black, with the exception of her eyes, nose and mouth. This choice generates a lot of resistance, both at school and in town. She is nearly run over by a driver who shouts 'terrorists' at her; and her maths teacher dedicates his lessons to her new choice of clothing, continually asking her if she is going to Syria (to join ISIS). At that point 'going to Syria' is not on her radar at all, but her new clothing and religious quest is attracting attention on social media. Amira even receives a marriage proposal from a 'mujahid' (a fighter in Syria). It turns out that an old friend of one of her sisters has already travelled to Syria. She becomes more and more engaged in the extremist network, both via social media as well as via other women she knows locally. She becomes part of a pro-ISIS What's App group in which members share thoughts about western 'hypocrites' and 'hijra', their Islamic duty to migrate to an Islamic country, the so-called caliphate. Joining this group gives Amira a sense of belonging and recognition: at least she is not the only one who feels discriminated and feels she might be better off in the caliphate. Through a network in Syria, Belgium and the Netherlands, money

1 To ensure privacy, the name and age of Amira have been changed. See also section 1.6

is transferred into her account, and the following week she decides to travel to ISIS, but gets stopped at the Turkish border.

Peter² is a 17 year old high school student and very much engaged in politics. His parents are still together, giving him a very protected and strict upbringing. He is never allowed to go anywhere or to do normal teenage things. This becomes an issue when he starts secondary school in a big city. It is one of the reasons why he gets bullied at school. He is particularly bullied by children with a different ethnic background. Combined with the fact that he is very much engaged in right-wing politics, the experience of bullying fuels his sense that 'foreigners' are bad and that the idea of a 'multicultural society' is a failure. In his online searches on the failure of the multicultural society he meets John on an internet forum. They start chatting online about their similar political ideas. Soon John invites him for drinks at an organization called 'Voorpost'.³ During these events 'comrades' discuss different societal issues and their often extremist right-wing views on these. For Peter these events are like 'coming home'. Finally he has a group of mates who think like him and with whom he can voice his political opinions without being frowned upon. He is no longer ashamed to say what he thinks and to stand up for his beliefs. In fact, Peter decides to shave his head and wear army boots to school. He even hands in an essay at school in which he provides fifty arguments for why the Holocaust could never have taken place. His history teacher is furious. How dare a student write such nonsense! For Peter this is just confirmation that the multicultural society stifles his right to freedom of expression. He becomes even more set in his views, and starts participating in demonstrations organized by Voorpost. After one of these demonstrations, Antifascistic Action (AFA), an extremist left-wing organization, attacks him and his friends. They are also named and shamed on the AFA website as nazis. This calls for revenge. When they learn that the AFA has squatted a building in their city they make plans to smoke them out. One evening they storm the building wearing balaclavas and armed with an extendable baton, pepper spray, an air gun and Molotov cocktails. The AFA squatters manage to escape, but the building is set afire. In the weeks that follow, Peter and his friends are arrested for arson.

2 *Ibid.* (see also Gielen, 2008). See also section 1.6

3 Voorpost considers itself a nationalistic action group. They oppose the EU, European cooperation, the Belgian state and are proponents of an independent Flanders and a reunited Netherlands. Further they are anti islamization, globalization and Americanism, calling for cultural survival.

The above cases are two real life stories of different extremists I have worked with and interviewed in my decade as a researcher, advisor and intervention provider in the field often designated as ‘countering violent extremism’ (henceforth, CVE⁴). The stories depict completely different cases in which two individuals become engaged in different forms of violent extremism: jihadism and right-wing extremism. While the root causes and pathways toward extremism differ, the stories do exhibit one similar and important aspect: the complexity of a radicalization process. This complexity was an issue that I addressed more than a decade ago in my master’s thesis.

In the aftermath of the 2004 murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh ‘counter-radicalization policies’ were initiated in the Netherlands. As a political science student, I was intrigued by the debate on the question of what government could effectively and legitimately do to prevent and counter violent extremism. I started ‘evaluating’ counter-radicalization policies in Amsterdam boroughs as part of both my bachelor’s thesis (Gielen, 2006) and my master’s thesis (Gielen, 2007), which were eventually published (Gielen, 2008; Uitermark & Gielen, 2010). I soon reached the conclusion that I could not evaluate these policies properly without gaining a better understanding of why and how people radicalize. After all, how could I reliably assess whether counter-radicalization policies were effective, if I did not have a well-grounded understanding of radicalization and its causes, or of the accuracy of designating the target audiences of these governmental policies as ‘radical’ or ‘extremist’? Also, I wondered how I could determine whether these groups were indeed less vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism after being exposed to interventions to counter violent extremism?

I tried to overcome these research challenges in two ways. First, I immersed myself in groups of radicalizing youths with Muslim and right-wing extremist backgrounds. Encounters during this period of ethnographic work brought me stories like the ones summarized in the above vignettes (Gielen, 2008). They made me deeply aware of the complexity of radicalization as a phenomenon. Each individual’s potential path toward radicalization is shaped by manifold factors, interacting in multiple ways. These factors, as well as the way a person deals with them, differ between individuals and across contexts. Second, I decided to embark on a literature search, looking for theories and models to explain how and why people start to adopt views that

4 This concept is further discussed in section 1.3

legitimate violent action, and that may lead them to join a radical organization or even to commit acts of violence (for now, I refer to this process as 'radicalization'). During my quest, I soon noticed that this complexity was not in fact adequately addressed in the existing literature. To be sure, many of the factors and interactions I had observed were covered, but virtually none of the theories covered the whole range. Furthermore, and at least as important, the ways such factors, their interactions, individuals' agency and context worked together were undertheorized, to put it mildly. I found that, depending on their own scientific discipline, scholars drew on relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970; Buijs *et al.*, 2006; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009), social movement theory (Wiktorowicz, 2004), network theory (Sageman, 2004), theories from social psychology (Kruglanski & Webber, 2002) and identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986; Buijs *et al.*, 2006; Schwartz *et al.*, 2009). Some of these theories, and combinations thereof, led to development of sequential models for the process of radicalization, such as Moghaddam's (2005) 'staircase to terrorism' model and McCauley & Moskalenko's (2008) 'pyramid' model.

Based on my ethnographic work, I realized that any attempt to understand radicalization and evaluate measures to prevent and counter radicalization, would have to account for the diversity and complexity found. I thus decided to embark on another adventure: developing a new evaluation approach. Thus equipped, following my bachelor's and master's studies (Gielen, 2007, 2008; Uitermark & Gielen, 2010), I started my own, independent consultancy specializing in evaluation of what was then in the Netherlands called 'anti-radicalization measures'. It did not take long to realize that the so-called 'gold standard' (Timmermans & Berg, 2003) for evidence-based work, meta-analysis based on randomized controlled trials (RCTs), would be of no real help here. As had also become clear in cases of non-communicable diseases (see, e.g., Moret *et al.*, 2007; Gielen & Grin, 2010), evaluations based on RCTs offered severely limited potential to understand interventions in complex phenomena, be they irritable bowel syndrome, lower back pain or radicalization. This is due to their narrow focus on linear causal relations between a limited set of values, neglecting agency and contextuality.

Obviously, a new evaluation approach was needed; one that recognized complexity, including the role of context and agency. Ideally, this new approach would incorporate what we already understand as a basis for evaluating measures, and also enable evaluation results to be fed back to refine that understanding. Such a method would help address a key

methodical gap, contribute to knowledge accumulation and provide part of a basis for further theory development in the field. I therefore started to explore modes of evaluation that would not answer the question of *if* an intervention worked (yes or no), but rather provided insight into *how* interventions might work *in a particular context*. Such insights have much more to offer for the design and redesign of interventions and theory building than simple yes/no answers on effectiveness questions.

It is this adventure that I report in the current dissertation. While my underlying personal interest and the academic knowledge gaps will, by now, be roughly clear, it is high time to elucidate the societal relevance of my efforts. In a sentence: All too often policy measures and societal discussions, much like the academic literature, fail to take complexity into account, and current evaluation approaches tend to reproduce rather than remedy this failure, though all this has more than merely academic consequences.

1.2 Policymaking and societal debate: The repercussions of neglecting complexity

In order to appreciate the societal relevance of this dissertation, it is useful to start with two example cases. These are cases that indicate how and why lack of full recognition of the complexity of radicalization may have consequences for policymaking and proper judgement in the public sphere.

In France, Dounia Bouzar and her Centre for the Prevention of Sectarian Trends (*Centre de prevention des d'reives sectaries liées a l'Islam*) became a trusted partner of the French government and was contracted to implement as part of the government CVE programme. Bouzar claimed that she had deradicalized many ISIS recruits (mostly women). This attracted media attention from around the globe (Symons, 2016). Her methods focused on disengaging the sectarian grip (Bouzar *et al.*, 2014; Bouzar, 2017). This was done via 'de-indoctrination sessions' with parents and radicalized individuals. Parents were either individually coached or supported in family group sessions to help them re-engage with their children and reawaken their emotions. This was done, for example, by singing a song or reminiscing about a specific holiday (Bouzar *et al.*, 2014: 30). Radicalized individuals had to attend meetings at which former extremists or families of a former extremist, provided testimonials.

While working with parents is considered an important element in exit programmes (Gielen, 2018a; Sieckelink & De Winter, 2015; RAN, 2019), it is just one of several elements that need to be addressed. Based on scientific insights on both radicalization and deradicalization, we know that for success, exit programmes require a holistic approach that addresses the multiple causes of why an individual has become radicalized (McDonald, 2018; RAN, 2019; in line with my earlier ethnographic work, cited above). Yet, personal characteristics, mental health, trigger factors, and micro and macro environmental issues all seem to be bypassed in Bouzar's approach to disengagement. The French government has meanwhile ended its working relationship with Bouzar and her centre (Uhlmann, 2016), and the French approach has shifted toward setting up deradicalization centres. Of the 13 planned centres, however, only one was realized. It opened its doors in September 2016, only to be closed less than a year later, following a report published by the French senate criticizing the deradicalization programme on offer. The French Ministry of Interior released a press statement characterizing the centre as an exercise in 'limitations' (*Le Monde*, 2017). The centre, which worked on the basis of voluntary enrolments, 'de-indoctrination' (which is not the same as addressing ideology and religion) and vocational training, had only nine participants, none of whom completed the programme (Uhlmann, 2016; Sage, 2017).

Similar to Bouzar's approach, the centres' programme did not address the multiple factors that play a role in the radicalization process, and this had consequences for the effectiveness of the policy. This experience raises the question of whether exit programmes can be effective. Or, to be successful, what specific underlying conditions and mechanisms are required? Must we conclude on the basis of the French experience that voluntary exit is always ineffective? Or would merely the application of different interventions do the trick? Should interventions address or avoid the ideological aspect of radicalization? The French example underlines the need for more evaluation of CVE policies and programmes.

A similar case in which the complexity of radicalization was ignored in policymaking was in Amsterdam. Here, Mayor Eberhard van der Laan largely disregarded the ideological dimension of violent extremism (Gielen, 2017c). Rather, the views of one of the mayor's foremost advisors, David Kenning, became leading in the city. Kenning argued that with the new generation of jihadists, ideology was not an important factor. Rather, radicalization toward violent extremism was a consequence of issues related to criminality, family,

identity, anger and islamophobia (Van Teeffelen, 2017). Thus Amsterdam's CVE policy focused on dealing with the socio-economic and cultural breeding grounds for radicalization, neglecting other important causes of radicalization (Gielen, 2017c).

In each of these two cases, the story started with an understanding of the problem of radicalization which, by drawing on a too limited or even flawed set of ideas on radicalization, neglected much of the issue's complexity. However, the problem definition shapes the search space for solutions (Schön, 1983; Hoppe, 2011). Thus, solutions emerged that also failed to sufficiently take into account the complexity of the radicalization processes they sought to address. As these stories show, this may lead to ineffective policies and heated debate. Thus, radicalization is not, or rather not effectively, addressed, and public debate produces more heat than light, threatening the reputations and positions of key players. This is not the place to analyse at length why problem definitions are so limited. For our purposes here it suffices to say that the reasons encompass personal beliefs, ideologies, worldviews and institutions. How this may work became clear in a recent study by Warrington (2018) on Danish governmental policies targeting online radicalization. Through a discourse analysis of policy documents and open, semi-structured interviews with policymakers, she identified six 'logics' behind assumptions regarding the dangers of online radicalization that shaped solutions in specific ways. Interestingly, these assumptions based on partial, sometimes intuitive, understandings⁵ ultimately interfered with two perhaps more valuable logics. The first is the very recognition of online radicalization as a new and complex phenomenon about which 'we' know little, but which does pose an urgent risk – this latter conviction being reinforced by the securitization discourse prevailing in Denmark. The second is the awareness that the lack of solid, reliable evaluation methods leaves no other option than to just try to keep what appears to be working.

5 Including the assumption that online radicalization is a "gateway to offline engagement" (Warrington, 2018: 134), the basic sense that "*sometimes you just have to try something*"; the assumption that an inclusive, online debate with engagement of civil society would help overcome issues of legitimacy and trust in the state; and the assumption that extremist content cannot be eliminated suggests the need to promote "critical thinking" (*ibid.*: 137) as a solution. This is further confirmed by the (normatively induced) assumption that socio-economically marginalized youths may be especially susceptible to such content. Thus arise solutions relating to counter-narratives, online discussion fora, etc.

Let us reflect on these realities from a policy science perspective. If anything, these examples exhibit a seriously underdeveloped process of what Hoppe (2011: 27–31) called ‘problem structuring’. Problem structuring implies two, interrelated and iterative, activities: problem finding and problem solving. In proper, inclusive problem finding one goes back and forth between the conditions underlying a problem, and the diverse ways these are portrayed in various actors’ problem representations, so as to find a problem definition that sufficiently covers all the various conditions and representations.

In our examples, as well as in the Danish case, problem finding was far from ideal: the set of problem representations and problem conditions scrutinized for problem finding appears to have been rather limited. Even without in-depth analysis, it is easy to recognize aspects from the literature on how this might arise from the interplay between normative assumptions (more or less intuitive empirical preconceptions) (Dunn, 2015 [1980]; Webber, 1991) and more developed elements constituting ‘policy theory’ (Hoogerwerf, 1990; Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995) or a ‘theory of change’ (Weiss, 1995). As Hoppe (2011: 71) emphasized, this may be further directed by organizational and individual heuristics (‘bounded rationality’), seeking a ‘fit’ with the outside world (‘ecological rationality’) or considerations to which one feels accountable (‘social rationality’). The second activity of problem structuring is problem solving; that is, the construction, application and evaluation of solutions that may effectively and legitimately⁶ address the problem. Problem solving iterates with – informs and is informed by – the problem finding. This iteration underlies the contingent relationship between policy problems and solutions, as found by Peters (2005: 351) in an insightful overview of the policy literature. It yields what Teisman (1993) and Hoppe (2011) referred to as ‘problem-solution couplings’. Thus, the limited problem finding witnessed in our cases may lead to limited solutions that bypass key problem conditions and representations. If policy work becomes focused on such solutions, blind spots in problem finding may be further reinforced.

These difficulties are aggravated by the fact that radicalization is far from a simple, structured problem. In addition to the inherent complexity discussed above, which leaves our empirical understanding limited at best, actors involved have different and often competing beliefs, values and worldviews.

6 Of course, a solution may derive its legitimacy partly from the very fact that it addresses a problem. But this may not be enough: the solution may have features disliked by some groups in society, for instance. Thus problem solving is as much a political process as problem finding

These, in turn, produce a plurality of policies and practices that are not necessarily aligned with common scientific insights. In the words of Rob Hoppe (2018: 389) “what one ‘sees’, deems ‘relevant facts’, accepts as ‘evidence’, and as ‘potential solutions to a problem’ may widely differ”. These features together make radicalization a so-called wicked problem (Ritter & Webber, 1973; Hayden, 2006; Camillus, 2008; Mertens, 2015; Fischbacher-Smith, 2016; Noordegraaf *et al.*, 2017). In cases of wicked problems, problem structuring must essentially be based on an intertwining of political discussion and analysis. A pertinent question for evaluators of measures in our field is how their work may contribute to that process.

While there is an abundance of literature on how to move from a complex and wicked problem toward a more tamed and structured one (Schön & Rein, 1994; Hoppe, 2011; 2018, Hayer & Laws, 2006), very little has been written on how to evaluate complex and wicked problems. Some have proposed deliberative or interactive forms of evaluation (see, e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Grin & Van de Graaf, 1996; Loeber, 2004), in which actors with different normative and empirical perspectives discuss the effectiveness of policy measures. Evaluation then becomes a form of political judgement, in which views on what is effective and desirable inform and correct each other. The point is, however, that this requires some basic common ground, such as at least a rough delineation of the problem (Grin *et al.*, 1997: 39; Loeber 2004: 291–293). Yet, the examples above cast doubt on whether a field as complex as countering radicalization can in fact be evaluated, as the actors, factors, conditions and contexts to be taken into account are hard to delineate. Indeed, Noordegraaf *et al.* (2017: 393) questioned whether something as complex as measures to prevent and counter radicalization can be evaluated at all. They considered it to be a *transboundary wicked problem*, which “transcends the distinction between cause and effect, local and global problems and facts and impressions” (*ibid.*: 289). These authors therefore proposed a transboundary evaluation approach consisting of three components. The first component of the evaluation framework is ‘robust conceptualization’, entailing that stakeholders develop a shared vision of the type, focus and limitations of the evaluation. The second step is multidisciplinary theorization, in which a theoretical model is developed based on different scientific disciplines. Finally, expressive illustration is required, in the form of anecdotes, images and examples, to disseminate the findings to the different stakeholders.

Noordegraaf *et al.* (*ibid.*) developed and applied this transboundary evaluation framework to evaluate the Dutch national counterterrorism strategy 2011-2015. This led them to shift their focus from evaluating interventions to ‘intervention capacity’, defined as “the combined capacity of agencies and stakeholders involved in dealing with terrorism” (*ibid.*: 398). While this is useful in and of itself, it also shifts the burden of knowing what to do to the practitioners making up that capacity and inhibits proper, independent evaluation of their efforts. In addition, important ambiguities remain as to how to decide, for instance, what stakeholders should be selected, for example, to develop a shared evaluation focus, and why. Which theories from which disciplines should be included and excluded in development of the multidisciplinary theoretical model? This framework is essentially a more tailored form of the interactive evaluation approach of Guba and Lincoln (1989), which led to a shared thick description of the Dutch approach to counterterrorism. However, this exercise provided no insight into the degree of success of Dutch counterterrorism policy measures and the relevant contextual conditions. Neither did it offer opportunities to learn from similar policies in other countries. For precisely this reason, Guba and Lincoln’s (*ibid.*) evaluation approach has been criticized (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 23).

In fact, this mutual reinforcement between lack of proper theory and lack of good evaluations was a key motive for me to embark on my quest for modes of doing evaluation that also contribute to understanding *how* measures do or not produce outcomes. The reflections above help to further sharpen the mission of that journey: we may use evaluations not only to understand *what has been left out* of consideration in a particular policy process or societal debate, but also to learn *how diversity and agency might matter* in producing outcomes. In other words, by casting a wider net and remaining open to additional factors and interpretations, evaluations may achieve two key objectives:

- unmasking too simplistic solutions and their associated problem definitions;
- finding out how factors *not* originally taken into account in an intervention and in the associated debate play a role in the working-in-context of that intervention, thus enriching not only practice with an enlarged understanding, but also correcting problem definitions based too heavily on the views of certain actors rather than the problem at hand.

Such forms of evaluation could contribute to policymaking and debate in interesting ways. Not only would they demonstrate the weaknesses

of specific, too simplistic, limited interventions, even more importantly, they would contribute to better problem finding in policy practice, while advancing societal debate. In the longer term, they would further develop the knowledge bases that inform problem finding and solving.

In this dissertation, I discuss my attempts to further develop, from this perspective, realistic evaluation as an input that may bring policymaking and societal debate to a qualitatively higher level of understanding. Specifically, realistic evaluation may help make policies more effective. At least as important, while it is obviously not in itself sufficient to bring normative debate to a conclusion, it might help to clarify the merits, limits and blind spots of different problem representations, as well as their mutual relations. Before I discuss realistic evaluation and realistic review further, however, we must first look at CVE policies more generally. What kind of policy programmes have been developed in Europe? What are the origins of these policy programmes? What are their main elements? This information provides a starting point for understanding the relevance and potential of the realistic evaluation approach, but also its limits and current flaws.

1.3 CVE as an essentially contestable concept

One analytical implication of the fact that radicalization is a wicked problem is that even its definition, as a phenomenon, is complicated and without consensus. While anti-radicalization policies are widely accepted in the Netherlands and other European countries, in scholarly literature and policymaking the term countering violent extremism (CVE) is more common, as discussed widely and critically. In line with this critical debate, this dissertation defines CVE as follows:

Proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence. Fundamentally, CVE actions intend to address the conditions and reduce the factors that most likely contribute to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists. Where possible, CVE should be incorporated into existing programs related to public safety, resilience, inclusion, and violence prevention. CVE efforts do not include gathering intelligence or performing investigations for the purpose of criminal prosecution. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019)

After the 2004 Madrid bombings and attack on filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands and the London '7/7 attacks' in 2005, various EU member states adopted preventative approaches to radicalization and violent extremism, also known as 'counter-polarization and radicalization' programmes, or preventing violent extremism and deradicalization. These approaches are similar in essence (Bakker, 2015; El Difraoui *et al.*, 2015; Lindekilde, 2012). They attempt to address (i) the root causes and drivers of radicalization and violent extremism and to enhance protective factors against violent extremism, (ii) they understand radicalization as a process in which violent extremism is the final stage of an individual trajectory in which world views and ideology become increasingly more 'extreme', and (iii) these programmes target specific categories of people. This section briefly discusses these main elements of CVE policies in Europe.

First, while there is no academic consensus on what precisely causes violent extremism, there is now general agreement among CVE researchers and policymakers that an interplay of different grievances, causes and risk factors plays a role in violent extremism. Borum (2015) identified so-called risk clusters related to violent extremism: affections/emotions, behaviours, cognitive style, beliefs/ideology, attitudes, social factors, identities and capacities. Similarly, Ranstorp (2016) offered a 'kaleidoscopic overview' of nine risk factors related to violent extremism: (i) individual and (ii) social factors such as frustration and alienation; (iii) political and (iv) ideological factors such as dissatisfaction with foreign policies and interference with religious practices; (v) identity crises reinforced by a migration biography or post-traumatic stress disorder; and (vii) group dynamics and recruitment strategies consisting of (viii) groomers and (ix) social media (Gielen, 2017b). Campelo *et al.* (2018) conducted a systematic literature review of causes of violent extremism in Europe. That review highlights a multitude of risk factors at the personal, micro-environmental and macro-environmental level. At the individual level, the study identifies different traits and psychological vulnerabilities, such as having a depressive nature; experiences with addictive and risky behaviour; early experiences of abandonment; vulnerable family structures; a quest for an ideal; personal uncertainty; perceived injustice; trigger events such as trauma and (near) death; and psychopathological mechanisms that reinforce extremist engagement. Micro-environmental factors may include having radicalized peers, a dysfunctional family and sympathy with the sectarian use of dehumanization to justify violence. At the macro-environmental level they identified the following risk factors: social polarization, perceived group threat, the role of religious ideology,

the geopolitical context and processes of societal change. However, since radicalization is so complex and the identified root causes are so numerous it is impossible for any policy programme to cover all the factors and causes, in addition to the new explanatory factors and root causes that are still to be discovered, and thus also need to be included.

Second, the CVE approach is primarily based on the normative idea that violent extremism should be understood as a *process*. This in turn suggests that violent extremism is governable through risk assessment and preventive interventions in the early stages of this process (Githens-Mazer, 2012). Heath-Kelly (2013) argued, for instance, that the concept of radicalization enables policymakers to formulate a linear narrative around violent extremism. This makes the narrative accessible to problem-solving approaches. As such, intervening in the ‘radicalization process’ is understood as a crucial component of countering violent extremism, through a focus on categories of risk. Kundnani (2012: 4) argued that the concept of ‘radicalization’ emerged as a vehicle for policymakers to explore the process of how someone becomes a violent extremist and to provide an analytical basis for preventative policies that go beyond the threat of violence or detention. According to him, radicalization models encourage authorities to believe that they can prevent future terrorist attacks by intensive surveillance of Muslims in Europe. The purpose of such surveillance is to establish whether these individuals express world views that can be defined as extreme – though it must be recognized that no convincing demonstration has been provided of any causal relationship between such world views and violence.

The third important element of CVE policy in Europe is that it is aimed at various but specific target audiences: communities or religious congregations, particular groups (e.g., youth groups and schools) and vulnerable individuals. To reach this varied population, countries across Europe have implemented CVE policies consisting of elements like awareness raising and training for practitioners; community engagement; education of young people to make them more resilient to the draws of violent extremism; multi-agency approaches to signal and assess vulnerable individuals; and deradicalization and disengagement programmes for violent extremists (Bakker, 2015; De Goede & Simon, 2012; Gielen, 2017b; El Difraoui *et al.*, 2015; European Commission, 2016; Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016; Wittendorp *et al.*, 2017).

Yet, CVE and these underlying assumptions are contested, especially by scholars in terrorism studies who apply critical theory, such as Foucault's post-structuralism and Althusser's structuralism. In essence, their critique is that this field is dominated by a common set of narratives, beliefs and assumptions on (countering) violent extremism which is often informed by social, political and personal beliefs that are continually reproduced and empirically unchallenged (Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Heath-Kelly, 2013, Kundnani, 2012, 2015). Heath-Kelly (2013: 412) reviewing the policy programmes of the UK, concluded that "as post-structuralist scholars have argued about projects of surveillance and screening, such security practices may act in the name of managing risk but they are actually performative of it – producing risk to enable interventions". Using such a critical theoretical perspective, scholars have observed that CVE programmes primarily legitimize anticipation of security threats to enable intervention at the earliest possible stage, drawing on the idea that radicalization is ultimately (i) a linear process (ii) in which individuals enter into a radicalization process and (iii) then develop and display behaviour or express particular ideas that can be identified as part of a radical belief system (De Goede & Simon, 2012). CVE programmes have the goal of identifying these behaviours and ideas, and intervening and changing them.

I agree that by focusing on specific root causes, by viewing radicalization as a process and by targeting specific communities, CVE policies risk being based on flawed or normative assumptions and eventually may even produce counter-productive effects. Defining and identifying radical behaviour is always relational and normative, following from the ideas, values or conduct that the radicalized individual is being compared to (Vermeulen, 2014). In terms of root causes, there is always a normative dimension in policymakers' identification and addressing of particular root causes.

As I have argued, radicalization is a complex and wicked problem with many different explanatory factors. First, identifying and intervening in particular root causes will always ignore other root causes, which will affect the outcomes of the chosen policy programmes. In evaluating these programmes these decisions need to be taken into account. Second, viewing radicalization as a process evokes the idea among policymakers that they can intervene in the process, starting with identifying individuals who are in the early phases of radicalization. The focus on risky individuals then often becomes a focus on 'people at risk of becoming risky'. The explicit link with violent extremism becomes more and more blurred (Heath-Kelly,

2013). Third, a critical examination of the UK's Prevent policy, in which the government sought to prevent and counter violent extremism by engaging with Muslim communities, has provided insight into the associated risk of stigmatizing Muslims and creating 'suspect communities' (Kundnani, 2009, 2012; Bigo *et al.*, 2014; Vermeulen, 2014).

We have thus established that violent extremism is a wicked problem. CVE is also a contested concept. It is criticized as being based on normative choices on which root causes are and are not to be addressed. Moreover, radicalization is typically depicted as a linear process that can and should be countered at the earliest possible stage. Furthermore, the choice of which specific audiences are to be targeted in the implementation of CVE policies is a normative one. These issues need to be addressed when evaluating CVE.

1.4 Realistic evaluation and realist review

CVE policy is essentially designed and implemented as a 'battle of ideas' revolving around this complex and wicked problem. This poses challenges for evaluation. However, more than a decade after the conclusion that "CVE evaluation is still in its infancy" (Nelen *et al.*, 2010), CVE evaluations still remain scarce and CVE evaluation practice continues to be underdeveloped (Bellasio *et al.*, 2018). John Horgan, one of the world's leading terrorism experts, stated the following on the lack of CVE evaluations:

One thing that many of these [CVE] programmes have in common, however, is their resistance to evaluation. I am in favour of innovative and evidence-led CVE programming, but programs that shy away from evaluation offer little more than smoke and mirrors. Evaluation needs to happen early and often. For the most part, it remains an afterthought. A CVE programme without an evaluation component is, in my view, worthless (European Eye on Radicalization, 2018).

The dearth of CVE evaluations is due to several factors related to the wickedness of (countering) violent extremism: (i) the lack of consensus on how the many root causes of and factors in violent extremism interplay and thus what combination of interventions is essential to successfully counter violent extremism; (ii) the broad array and complexity of interventions across the CVE spectrum; (iii) the lack of indicators and tools for measuring the outcomes of prevention; and (iv) the prominent role of context when implementing

CVE, as for example, political context, timing and geography all influence CVE effectiveness (Gielen, 2017b). CVE evaluations could, however, be of academic and policy relevance for several reasons. CVE evaluation can enhance the legitimacy of this often contested policy by providing clarity on the (normative) assumptions that CVE policies are based upon, thus unmasking too simplistic solutions and contingent problem definitions. The magnitude and growth of the 'deradicalization business' (El Difraoui *et al.*, 2015; De Graaf & Weggemans, 2018) further legitimizes questions of whether tax-payers' money is being spent effectively. CVE evaluation, by sorting out what is more effective in a given context and how, can help us to develop the academic field, as there is currently not even consensus on a conceptual and theoretical framework guiding the implementation of validated prevention strategies. CVE evaluation can thus improve practice as well avert malpractice. Finally, CVE evaluation can stimulate human rights and compliance with obligations of non-discrimination by shedding light on potential counter-productive effects of targeting specific audiences.

We are in need of an evaluation method that can accommodate the complexity and contextuality of CVE, while providing an authoritative basis for new evaluations and at the same time exposing incorrect or too normative assumptions in CVE policy. The search for methods is made more difficult by the currently limited availability of CVE evaluations, which are essential for theory building. The method sought should thus be able to overcome this constraint. Preferably, it should also support the building of further conceptual understanding, by establishing the 'how' of the success or failure of specific measures.

Realistic evaluation and realist review claim to be designed for just such challenging and complex conditions. Realistic evaluation was developed for the evaluation of social programmes, understood as social systems in which there is an "interplay between individual and institution, agency and structure and micro and macro social processes" (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 63). Seeking to go beyond a simplistic quantitative-qualitative dichotomy, Pawson and Tilley (*ibid.*) stressed the mechanisms (M) that induce effects, and they introduced the notion of context (C). Their approach stems from the realist proposition that the "relationship between causal mechanisms and their effects [is] not fixed, but contingent" (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 69). Realistic evaluation aims to identify the combination of mechanisms and context that leads to particular outcome patterns, also known as context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations or 'C-M-Os'.

These indicate how programmes activate mechanisms, among whom and in what circumstances, to bring about changes in behaviours or events. In short, realistic evaluation revolves around the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’ (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Gielen, 2017a: 3). Although there is an upward trend in the use of realistic evaluation, bona fide realistic evaluation of social programmes remains scarce. Realistic evaluation methods, though developed in part as a critique of randomized controlled trials (RCTs), have been used mainly in the medical domain as an alternative to RCT-based evaluations (Redfern *et al.*, 2003; Tolson *et al.*, 2007; Greenhalgh, 2009; Rycroft-Malone, 2010).

Though the methodological rules of realistic evaluation are not set in stone and still emerging, a few basic principles tend to be followed (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Realistic evaluation starts with theory on how mechanisms relate to certain contexts and combined produce certain outcomes. Following the positivist wheel of science, a testable hypothesis is deduced from theory and derived and refined inductively from data (Wallace, 1971). The next step is data collection. Pawson and Tilley (1997) do not prefer any specific form of data collection; rather they advocate multi-method data collection. Data is to be analysed by drawing out relevant contexts and mechanisms that contribute to outcome patterns. This is the third step. What ultimately follows is ‘programme specification’. According to Pawson and Tilley (1997: 57), “Programmes work (have successful ‘outcomes’) only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities (‘mechanisms’) to groups in the appropriate social and cultural conditions (‘contexts’).”

The realist approach was applied to CVE by Veldhuis (2012), who used it to identify relevant contextual factors and mechanisms for rehabilitating violent extremists. Her study is important as it highlights the potential of the realistic approach. It also illustrates that a lot more is necessary to make the realist approach applicable to evaluating specific CVE measures. She applied the approach not to *evaluate*, but to *design* rehabilitation programmes. More precisely, she argued that the end result of her research would be a first step on that road. Rather than as a programme theory for an extremist rehabilitation programme, her work should be considered an exercise to illustrate to policymakers that they should develop a theory of change before they implement a programme (*ibid.*: 7). Her research yielded a rudimentary, tentative theory of change based on the first step of realistic evaluation: formulating a set of hypotheses on what might work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. In the absence of research on rehabilitation

programmes for violent extremists, she mainly drew on the literature on 'general' rehabilitation programmes (*ibid.*). She observed that other forms of knowledge can serve as inputs for realist theory development, but claimed that systematic reviews and meta-analyses of existing evaluations are most preferable (*ibid.*: 6). She also suggested alternatives for when such evidence is lacking: single studies, but only if they adhere to the highest possible research standards and expert opinion – though she argued that this should always be integrated with the best evidence from more systematic research. Veldhuis' proposal – that theories of change should be developed only based on systematic reviews or single evaluations that meet the highest research standards – is the exact opposite of Pawson and Tilley's proposal in their realistic evaluation method. According to them, if we truly want to understand how contexts and mechanisms (potentially) produce outcome patterns, we cannot limit ourselves to only systematic reviews that provide a simple answer in the form of a mean effect size to the too simplistic question of 'what works'. Rather, in order to really understand what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances, we must not exclude any research method. They claimed that 'folk theory', in the form of, for instance, expert opinion, policy documents and participant observation, can provide valuable insight into relevant C-M-Os (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Yet, unfortunately, while Pawson and Tilley claimed their evaluation method to be suitable for situations in which prior evidence is lacking, they offered little insight as to how, for example, expert opinion can be used to develop a theory that hypothesizes on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances, which is the starting point of realistic evaluation. The only thing they offered on that point is this very brief description from a case they evaluated:

[W]hilst the case for adult education has been made many times, available theory on its rehabilitative potential was negligible. Research thus began with a period of theory development derived from qualitative investigation, in which educators were interviewed to elicit realistic theories on program mechanisms ('what it was about the programme which might generate change in a prisoner') and program contexts ('with which sorts of inmates in which conditions the initiative might be successful') (*ibid.*: 88).

Using 'folk theories' is not uncommon in the social sciences. Related notions referred to by other scholars are background theories and appreciative systems, which are central in *reflection-in-action* (Schön & Rein, 1994). Webber

(1990) discussed a variety of sources of knowledge (e.g., formal scientific and media-based), synthesized by policy actors into policy theories, and others have stressed that this also includes forms of informal, practice-based knowledge, such as *mētis* (Scott, 1998) and *local knowledge* (Yanow, 1996, 2006). Yet, Pawson and Tilley provide no (heuristic) guidelines on how to apply folk theories when conducting realistic evaluation.

In sum, the realistic evaluation method is a promising heuristic evaluation model to apply to CVE, because it can take into account the contextuality and (normative) assumptions that underlie this wicked and contested problem. However, realistic evaluation has never before been applied to CVE. While realistic evaluation offers guidelines on how to use theory to deductively develop a theoretical model in situations where theories and evidence are abundant, it provides no detailed guidelines on how to develop a theoretical model that can be tested in situations where theories and evidence are lacking. This aspect of the realistic evaluation method requires further development.

Realist review

As an alternative to systematic review methods that cannot deal with the challenges of evaluating complex programmes and interventions, Pawson (2002b, 2006) developed the method of realist review, sometimes referred to as ‘realistic review’ or ‘realist synthesis’. Realist review relates to realistic evaluation in the same way that meta-analysis relates to randomized controlled trials in traditional evidence-based medicine and policymaking. Realist review adheres to the same realist principles as realistic evaluation. Like realistic evaluation, the overarching goal is to create a middle-range theory of for whom, how and in what circumstances programmes work. The theory can then be used to formulate policy recommendations, either to hone implementation or to shape new interventions (Pawson, 2006: 74). Realist review differs from realistic evaluation in the research focus. While realistic evaluation is meant for evaluation of a specific programme or intervention, realist review is a method to review and synthesize *existing* evaluation studies. Realist review is helpful where existing studies of complex interventions are heterogeneous or limited. Realist review does not provide a ‘yes or no’ answer or ‘mean effect size’ in response to the typical evidence-based policy question of ‘what works’. Instead, it is explanatory, again revolving around the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’.

Pawson (2006) explained that realist review follows the six steps of the Cochrane reviews. Cochrane is a global database of systematic meta-analyses of interventions in the healthcare sector aimed at improving evidence-based healthcare decision-making. Pawson (2006: 41–42) summarized the six steps of the Cochrane review process as follows: (i) clarifying the scope of the review; (ii) searching for primary studies; (iii) appraising quality; (iv) extracting the data; (v) synthesizing the data and (vi) disseminating the findings. Realist review differs from the traditional Cochrane review in several ways. For instance, it does not focus on ‘what works’ or on translating outcomes into mean effect sizes, but explicitly takes contextual factors and mechanisms into account. Closely related, a realist review cannot be standardized or reproduced in the same sense as a Cochrane review. Instead, the review is explorative and iterative in nature (*ibid.*: 91–94). More detailed guidance on how to conduct a realist review can be found in summary articles (Pawson *et al.*, 2005; Wong *et al.*, 2012) and empirical studies drawing on realist review (O’Campo, 2009; Wong *et al.*, 2010). Most realist reviews have been done in the field of healthcare. Researchers conducting such reviews can often draw on a large body of literature for hypothesizing what might work and how, but also when searching for primary studies for review (Gielen, 2017a: 4).

With the exception of Veldhuis’ work, realist review has never before been applied to CVE. Researchers using the approach in this field face the lack of an abundant body of literature to draw on for meta-analysis. Pawson (2006), however, has claimed that realist review is also appropriate for areas of intervention and programmes in which evaluation is lacking. Having said that, Pawson (2005) also indicated that the realist review method would require adaption and innovation in order to address the widening range of complex programmes (Pawson, 2006: 93–96 in Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012).

This need for further development of the realist review method to accommodate increasingly complex programmes was also pointed out by Betts (2013). Her realist review of aid effectiveness and governance for developing country reform concluded that broad and diverse programmes and interventions require a more systematic approach for data extraction (*ibid.*). So in theory, realist review can provide a suitable method for synthesizing the limited CVE evaluation literature, contributing in turn to theory building. This would provide a more solid basis for new CVE evaluation. It is, however, likely that the review method would have to be adapted to be applied to CVE.

In sum, with Veldhuis' work being an important exception, neither realistic evaluation nor realist review have been previously applied in relation to CVE. More generally, too, these techniques are still under development. Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) observed that few evaluations and reviews labelled as realist actually abide by the realist principles. This is also true of the study by Veldhuis. While not stated as a realistic evaluation, she proposed research methods for theory development that are substantially aligned with realist principles. So, while on paper realistic evaluation and review seem suitable for tackling the evaluation of CVE, in practice the method might need additional development. The further development of this evaluation method in order to make it suitable for the evaluation of CVE lies at heart of my research, as presented in this dissertation.

1.5 Research focus and approach

To reiterate, CVE is a relatively new and very complex phenomenon. The term itself has become somewhat of a catch phrase for a broad array of interventions targeting different populations at different stages in the radicalization process. Most common evaluation methods have proven unsuitable for dealing with the complexity of CVE. The result is a serious lack of evaluations in the field. Academia thus has little theoretical basis for adequately advising the policy and practitioner community on the best course of action. Considering the social impact of violent extremism and the economic consequences involved, the CVE 'industry' has become the brunt of criticism, and both CVE interventions and practitioners are now being subjected to increased scrutiny.

Greater focus on the evaluation of CVE is therefore called for. Realistic evaluation seems to be a good means of dealing with the complexity of CVE programmes. However, applying realistic evaluation to CVE is unprecedented. Will it indeed prove to be a suitable method, or will adaption be required? Also, can it help us gain a better understanding of CVE, ultimately contributing to the building of a theoretical foundation upon which the research community can base its policy recommendations? This leads to the central focus of this dissertation:

How can realist review and realistic evaluation be employed and developed in the field of countering violent extremism (CVE), and what can realist review

and realistic evaluation contribute to the development of CVE policy and to deepening our understanding of violent extremism?

This focus can be divided into the following five questions:

1. What is countering violent extremism (CVE) (chapter 2)?
2. How can realist review be employed and developed within the social sciences and, in particular, in the domain of CVE (chapters 2, 3 and 6)?
3. How can realistic evaluation be employed and developed within the social sciences and, in particular, the domain of CVE (chapters 4, 5 and 6)?
4. How and what can realistic evaluation and realist review contribute to development of more informed CVE policy and programmes (chapters 2 and 6)?
5. How and what can realistic evaluation and realist review of CVE measures contribute to deepening our understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism (chapters 4, 5 and 6)?

This dissertation brings together a number of articles either published or under consideration by international peer-reviewed journals. Chapter 2 is based on the published article *Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances and How?* (Gielen, 2017a). It presents a realist review of existing CVE evaluations, which provides us with a better understanding of what CVE is and dos and don'ts for CVE policymakers and practitioners. It thus helps us to answer the first, second and fourth research questions.

Chapter 3, *Lessons from a Realist Review of Countering Violent Extremism: Development of Refined Heuristic Guidelines for Complex Social Programmes*, offers a secondary analysis of the realist review presented in chapter 2, concentrating on the methodological and heuristic aspects of conducting a realist review. In contrast to chapter 2, chapter 3 does not focus on the *outcome* of a realist review of CVE measures, but rather on the steps toward it and the challenges that arise when applying the method of realist review to CVE. Heuristic guidelines for realist review of complex social programmes (such as CVE) are presented, contributing to the answering of the second research question.

Chapter 4 is based on the published article *Supporting Families of Foreign Fighters: A Realistic Approach for Measuring Effectiveness* (Gielen, 2015a). It zooms in on one specific measure: family support. Family support

is a relatively new measure under the CVE prevention umbrella. The chapter elaborates how folk theory can be used to develop hypotheses on context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations (C-M-Os) as part of the first step of realistic evaluation. The chapter illustrates how family support programmes might activate mechanisms, among whom and in what circumstances to generate change. The development of C-M-Os based on folk theories is an important step in applying and developing the realistic evaluation method for CVE (research question 3). The developed hypotheses help us to gain a better understanding of the role family plays in radicalization and deradicalization processes (question 5).

Chapter 5 is based on the published article *Exit Programmes for Female Jihadists: A Proposal for Conducting a Realistic Evaluation of the Dutch Approach* (2018a). In contrast to chapter 4, it goes beyond the first step of realistic evaluation of developing rudimentary C-M-O configurations, to illustrate how all four steps of realistic evaluation can be applied (question 5). Exit programmes for Dutch female jihadists are taken as a case study. The chapter examines how the proposal for conducting a realistic evaluation can contribute to more informed policymaking on exit programmes (question 4) and to theory development on female jihadists (question 5).

The focus of the above chapters is on the application of realistic evaluation and review in ex post situations. Chapter 6, *Evidence-Based Informed Policy Design for Support Groups for Families of Foreign Fighters: Ex Ante Application of Realistic Evaluation and Review*, addresses the question of whether and how realist review and realistic evaluation can also be applied ex ante, in order to develop a more evidence-based and informed CVE policy theory and design. This chapter provides a description of a new CVE intervention: support groups for families of foreign fighters. It illustrates how both realist review and realistic evaluation can be applied (question 2 and 3) to support groups for families of foreign fighters, leading to a more evidence-based policy theory. The chapter goes further than previous chapters in that it not only develops an evidence-based policy theory, but actually tests that theory in practice by interviewing and organizing focus groups for families of foreign fighters, several professional and community organizations and policymakers (question 3). This chapter demonstrates that such an ex ante approach can contribute to legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness of CVE policy (question 4).

Chapter 7 returns to the central focus of the dissertation. Drawing on the findings of the previous chapters it provides answers to the larger questions of how realistic evaluation can be employed and developed in the field of countering violent extremism (CVE), what realistic evaluation and realist review can contribute to the development of CVE and how realistic evaluation and realist review can contribute to deepening our understanding of violent extremism. It also presents several recommendations for the improvement of CVE policymaking and evaluation.

1.6 My role as a researcher

Throughout this introduction I have noted that some of my insights and case studies arose from my work as an independent researcher and consultant (A.G. Advies), which I have been doing for more than a decade. After graduating as a political scientist in 2007, I embarked on an evaluation journey in which I attempted to assess programmes and interventions aimed at preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Time and time again I found myself confronted with the limitations of 'regular' evaluation methods, such as experimental evaluation (RCTs), process evaluation and interpretive evaluation.

From 2012, I worked as an independent consultant for the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of the European Commission, for which I was involved in the RAN working groups on internet and social media and internal and external dimensions (foreign fighters). The latter working group was dedicated to the European foreign fighters travelling to Syria. We organized meetings twice a year with policymakers, intelligence and security professionals, and practitioners and community organizations that were dealing with the foreign fighter phenomenon. At these meetings participants shared their views on both the phenomenon of violent extremism and particularly foreign fighters and also shared the policies and interventions they had designed and implemented to prevent and counter violent extremism. As an evidence-based policy to prevent and counter the foreign fighter phenomenon was lacking, the policies and interventions were mainly based on the assumptions of policymakers, practitioners and community members or their view of the problem and how the problem could potentially be tackled. These policy theories, were rooted in years of experience and knowledge exchange with policymakers and practitioners across Europe.

It was at one of these meetings, in April 2013 to be precise, that intelligence and security professionals observed that an alarming number of people who were previously part of criminal gangs had travelled to Syria, making use of their criminal experience and network in Syria (e.g., their ability to access and use weapons). While this *crime-terror nexus* had been studied in academia (e.g., Bibes, 2001; Shelley & Picarelli; Makarenko, 2004), it was not until three years later, in 2016, that it was addressed in relation to European foreign fighters (Basra *et al.*, 2016). So while the academic world was and still is trying to grasp the foreign fighter phenomenon in terms of who foreign fighters are and what drivers, root causes and trigger events caused them to travel to a combat zone, policymakers and practitioners had to make sense of the situation, while working to prevent and counter it at the same time. This led to the sharing of interesting insights and practices.

In September 2013, another RAN meeting was organized which revolved around the question of what practitioners and communities were doing to prevent and counter the foreign fighter phenomenon. It was at this meeting that the situation of families of foreign fighters was addressed. Practitioners and communities from different European countries had noticed that the family members of foreign fighters were heavily impacted. In Germany, where practitioners had a history of dealing with families of right-wing extremists, the first support programmes for families of foreign fighters were being offered. In Antwerp, one policy officer decided to literally go out knocking on the doors of the affected families to ask them how the municipality could help. In Denmark the city of Aarhus decided to organize support groups for families so that they could share their experiences. All of the practices described offered insights into relevant contextual conditions, the mechanisms behind offering family support and its potential and real outcomes, which were summarized in meeting reports. I was responsible for taking those minutes.⁷ I then sent those minutes to all of the participants at the meeting to confirm that my report correctly reflected and summarized the most important analyses and conclusions of the meeting. The reports of the RAN foreign fighter working group have since led to several publications authored or coauthored by me on supporting families of foreign fighters (RAN, 2013; Gielen, 2014).

⁷ These minutes are available upon request to the RAN host organization, RadarAdvies in Amsterdam, or the European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

An unintended consequence of my publications on family support was that one of my articles (Gielen, 2014) became the first hit on Google searches for 'support for families of foreign fighters' (in Dutch 'familieondersteuning voor Syriëgangers'), as at the time no publications were available on the families of foreign fighters. It was not until 2016 that the first scientific publication was published on this topic (Maher & Neumann, 2016). Several months after the 2014 publication I received a phone call from a social worker. He had been approached by the father of a foreign fighter and wanted to help him, but did not know how. He found me by conducting a Google search on how to support families of foreign fighters. Based on my experience within RAN and the foreign fighter working group, I started by asking him some very basic questions such as when the son had left and whether the police had been notified. The social worker eventually decided he felt out of his depth and asked if he could refer the father directly to me. Within two minutes I received a phone call from the father, who shared the story of his son who had travelled to Syria. The father, it turned out, had been sent home from the police station when he wanted to file a report of his son as a missing person. This shocked me, because if the police refused to register foreign fighters, how could the relevant organizations know who had gone – let alone returned (with combat experience). As an advisor to the Dutch central government and municipalities, I had built up a relevant network of people who I contacted to raise the issue. This resulted in a community policy officer coming to the father's house so that he could – discretely – report his son as a missing person.

I anticipated that my role would end there. The father had a specific problem, which I helped him with, and that was the end of it. However, as there was no organization in the Netherlands at that time that offered family support, the father had no one else to turn to but me. As he felt I was knowledgeable on the issue, he not only phoned me to ask additional support questions, but also referred other families of foreign fighters to me. I thus unintentionally became a support provider to families of foreign fighters. I initially did this on a voluntary basis next to my PhD studies and work as an independent researcher and consultant to RAN, ministries and municipalities. However, this soon became a full time job and I was no longer able to help new families. I approached the ministry and municipalities to inform them of the parents' strong need for family support and the fact that there was no organization in the Netherlands that could provide the support. In addition, I could no longer help new families on a voluntary basis. From that point onwards, I continued to support the families that were already part of my

‘voluntary caseload’. But new families that needed support would have to be financially covered by their municipality. Helping families also resulted in municipalities asking me to provide interventions for young females who had tried to leave for Syria. Providing support to families of foreign fighters and to individuals who had attempted to travel to Syria thus became part of my independent consultancy work. As part of this work I took notes and wrote reflections on my meetings with these families and individuals in my professional notebooks. The notebooks were archived in accordance with the code of conduct as developed by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU Gedragscode voor Gebruik Persoonsgegevens in Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek). As a rule to municipalities, I worked with a strict privacy protocol: the information families shared with me and the notes I took were strictly confidential, unless families gave their explicit permission for me to share their answers to specific questions or experiences. The municipalities in question were aware of my assistance to these families. Therefore, the actual existence of the cases, can be verified with the municipalities.

While I initially saw my work as a family support and intervention provider completely separate from my PhD, the work brought me many insights that – at least at the time – could not be found in the scientific literature on CVE, on family support and on exit programmes. In essence, my work provided insights on the target audience of CVE programmes, information on the types of programmes and interventions that were being implemented by practitioners and policymakers and the lessons they and I had learnt during implementation. It thus helped me to better understand the underlying assumptions (mechanisms) of CVE interventions and relevant contextual conditions that produced certain outcomes. In short, my work uncovered folk theories and valuable data for the first step of realistic evaluation: developing theories (hypotheses) on what *might* work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. In other words, I was suddenly provided with a key to my evaluation puzzle. The insights I collected at conferences and meetings with policymakers and practitioners, as well as my voluntary and consultancy support to families of foreign fighters and their radicalized children, and had reported on as a *reflective practitioner* (Schön, 1983) proved invaluable as inputs for theory development, which was the first step of the realistic evaluation method. While the insights from my voluntary and consultancy work with relatives of foreign fighters and radicalized individuals are included in this dissertation, it is important to note that my analysis does not critically rely on them. They are included in chapter 4

(on families of foreign fighters), chapter 5 (on exit programmes for females) and chapter 6 (support groups for families of foreign fighters). These chapters describe how the data gathered as a reflective practitioner may be used in the first step of realistic evaluation as part of constructing a tentative theory to be tested in later steps. In other words, in these three chapters, the data was never used to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of specific programmes or interventions. Rather, the data was used only as part of the first step of realistic evaluation: developing hypotheses on what *might* work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. In chapter 4 the folk theories helped me to build C-M-O configurations for family support which can be used by other scientists for the actual evaluation of family support programmes. In chapter 5, one (anonymized) case study of a radicalized female was used to illustrate how case studies can be analysed in a realistic fashion so that more academics can apply the method, ultimately leading to greater insight into the effectiveness of programmes aiming to disengage and deradicalize. In chapter 6 multi-method data collection was applied, of which interviews and focus groups with families of foreign fighters was only one part, to test the hypotheses formulated via realist review. This research had complete autonomy in formulating the research questions, in choosing the research methodology and in selection of the research participants.

To conclude, my work as a reflective practitioner helped me to develop the realistic evaluation method, in order to make it applicable to CVE evaluation, which was precisely the aim of my PhD research.

2 Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances and How?⁸

2.1 Introduction

Europe is confronted with increased violent extremism, and the security threat is expected to rise further in the years to come. Within the EU, member states are especially concerned about jihadist terrorism. Particularly worrying is the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, in which Europeans travel to and from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. But jihadist terrorism is not the only issue. Right-wing and left-wing extremist violence and that of lone attackers also pose a threat (Europol, 2016; 2017).

These developments have strengthened calls for effective counter measures. Throughout Europe, responses to the increasing threat have involved a range of measures. Most countries have enacted new and increasingly tough counterterrorism laws and conducted increased security surveillance. At the same time, ‘softer’ measures have been implemented. These seek to prevent and counter radicalization and jihadist recruitment by improving the resilience of at-risk individuals and communities. ‘Soft’ strategies include awareness-raising among frontline practitioners, discrediting the extremist narrative via ‘counter-narratives’, and exit programmes such as deradicalization and disengagement initiatives (European Commission, 2014). Such measures were introduced in chapter 1 as ‘counter-radicalization’ or ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE).

CVE programmes have developed rapidly across Europe. However, evaluation of these programmes and interventions has not kept pace. In fact, after more than a decade of counter-radicalization policy and CVE programmes, effect evaluations remain scarce (Lousberg *et al.*, 2009; Lub, 2013; Gielen &

8 This chapter is a slightly edited version of Gielen, Amy-Jane (2017a), “Countering Violent Extremism. A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances and How?” *Terrorism & Political Violence*, pp. 1-19, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1313736 (published ahead of print).

Junne, 2008; Gielen & Grin, 2010; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Bovenkerk & Van Hemert, 2013; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2013; Dawson *et al.*, 2014). Quite simply, as scholars we cannot as yet answer the question of what works in countering violent extremism.

This chapter explores the added value of the realist review approach in the field of CVE, to which realist review had not previously been applied. It starts by briefly exploring different evaluation methods, finally proposing 'realist review' as the most promising for the CVE domain. Realist review, also known as realistic review or realist synthesis, seeks to answer the question 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances'. It does this by synthesizing existing evaluation studies (Pawson, 2006). One of the crucial differences between general review and realist review is that general review attributes a hierarchy to the quality of evaluations. Randomized controlled trials are considered best. Yet, this is highly problematic in the field of CVE, as there are few quantitative evaluations, and randomized controlled trials are even more rare. By moving away from the 'what works' question and focusing instead on 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances' the realist review method allows us to draw on different types of studies. These may be empirical evaluations relying on quantitative or qualitative forms of data collection, but also theoretical studies and process evaluations. What follows is a realist review of CVE studies, describing what we can learn from these studies.

2.2 Evaluation methods and CVE

When evaluating CVE, one can opt for different evaluation methods. This chapter does not provide an extensive overview of all evaluation methods. Rather, it briefly discusses different methods that have been proposed or applied in our field.

Effect evaluation

Effect evaluation looks at the actual outcome of a programme or intervention. Has the programme or intervention met its objectives? Like social science more broadly, this type of evaluation research is generally divided into two camps. The first, positivist camp advocates quantitative methods, with randomized controlled trials often referred to as the 'gold standard'. Thus, the target audience of an intervention is divided, often at random, into

an experimental group to which the intervention is applied and a control group to which no intervention or a placebo is applied. The aim is to establish the effectiveness and side effects of an intervention, assuming a relatively direct, linear relationship between the intervention and outcomes. However, this assumed linear relationship means that the social context tends to be neglected (Berg & Timmermans, 2010). This is a weakness, as CVE is implemented not in an isolated clinical environment but in a social context. Violent extremism itself is a social phenomenon, and CVE programmes are influenced by and dependent on the social context in which they are carried out. Within the field of CVE no randomized controlled trials have been undertaken, only two quasi-experimental studies by Aldrich (2012) and a quantitative longitudinal study by Feddes *et al.* (2015).

The second, interpretivist camp emphasizes the role of interpretation and context (Yanow, 2006). By drawing on interpretive methods of data collection, such as interviews and participant observation, interpretivists seek to provide a 'thick description' of a specific intervention. However, interpretivists have been criticized as providing insight only into the effectiveness of one specific intervention in one specific context. An example of an interpretive effect evaluation is the study by Lakhani (2012) in which 56 interviews were conducted to assess the impact of community engagement under the UK's 'Prevent' strategy.

The strengths and weaknesses of both types of techniques mirror one another to some extent. Interpretive evaluators argue that for interventions and programmes that appear to have multiple and interacting causal relationships, randomized controlled trials do not necessarily provide the answer (Uitermark *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, the outcomes of interpretive evaluations are not necessarily valid in other contexts.

Pragmatic evaluation

Williams and Kleinman (2014) proposed utilization-focused evaluation in which stakeholders have a significant role. Horgan and Braddock (2010) suggested multiple-attribute utility technology (MAUT) as the most suitable evaluation model for our field, as it includes a number of stakeholders in the process of *developing* a programme, rather than only in its *ex post* evaluation. This early stakeholder involvement is said to ensure that multiple constituencies are accommodated. While Horgan and Braddock (*ibid.*) propose the use of merely mathematical calculations, Williams and Kleinman (2014) favour

a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Yet, both their methods are considered 'pragmatic evaluation'. These are evaluation techniques oriented toward meeting the needs of programme decision-makers and stakeholders (Rossi, 2004).

The pragmatic approach, however, is often criticized as leaning too much toward the needs of policymakers. These evaluations are sometimes said to be little more than a technical analytical discourse revolving around the positive effects of a programme. Little or no room is left to look at possible negative consequences or at whether the programme objectives are actually relevant to the problem situation, or what contributive value the intervention has for society as a whole. Williams *et al.* (2016) recently conducted a pragmatic evaluation of a US CVE programme using grounded theory and mixed methods. While the results were promising, they argued that further research was needed to assess whether the programme would also work in other municipalities.

Theory-driven evaluation

Theory-driven evaluation looks at a 'theory of change' or 'policy theory'. This comprises the underlying policy or scientific assumptions of a programme, rooted in part in the reflections, experience and knowledge of practitioners and policymakers garnered on the job (Weiss, 1995; Hoogerwerf, 1990; Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995). Policy theories are distinguished from social scientific theories in that these latter are designed to explain and provide generally applicable statements about human behaviour. Policy theories do not intend to explain, but aim merely to support certain (proposed) courses of action, to legitimize policy (Hoogerwerf, 1990). The merit of this type of evaluation lies in its ability to consider what interventions and programmes might work in countering radicalization, without having to conduct an actual evaluation. While a theory-driven approach to evaluation of CVE interventions and programmes provides plausible hypotheses for what works and does not work, it does not provide the definite answer. Empirical testing remains important. This is highlighted in the theory-driven study by Lub (2013) in which a meta-evaluation of different CVE measures was conducted.

Process evaluation

A process evaluation looks at the implementation of an intervention and whether it succeeded as planned. This type of evaluation can be very useful

from a project management perspective, as it provides information on, for example, whether all of the workshops in a specific programme were organized and whether the target audience was reached. But it cannot make any claims about causal effectiveness. An example of a process evaluation within CVE is Hirschfeld *et al.* (2012), which looks at programmes aimed at preventing violent extremism in the youth justice sector of the UK.

Realistic evaluation

Realistic evaluation, also called 'realistic evaluation', aims to identify the combination of mechanisms and contexts leading to outcome patterns, also known as context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations (C-M-Os). These indicate how programmes activate mechanisms, among whom and in what circumstances, to in turn produce behavioural change. In short, realistic evaluation is concerned with the question 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances' for social interventions and programmes (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 85). Gielen (2015) applied this method to foreign fighter family support programmes and Veldhuis (2012) applied it to reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for terrorist offenders.

2.3 Realist review

While CVE evaluations remain limited, the above discussion highlights that there are several evaluation methods that can be and currently are applied in the CVE domain. However, the risk of comparing methods is that it inevitably raises the question of which evaluation methods are superior and which inferior. This leads to the attribution of hierarchy to CVE evaluation studies. A discussion of which studies are 'better' and 'best' will not help us to move forward, as the body of studies currently available is heterogeneous and limited. Furthermore, the above discussion underlines the importance of taking contextual conditions into account and including theory to establish the mechanisms that underlie the workings of an intervention or programme. To advance, we need to begin by finding out what we can learn from synthesizing the existing CVE evaluation studies. Realist review is particularly helpful for this task.

Realist review is a specific method within the realistic evaluation tradition. It is not used to evaluate particular interventions or programmes, but rather to synthesize *existing* evaluations. Realist review is essentially a form of

systematic review, but it follows the realist principles and thus also revolves around the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’. In contrast to traditional systematic reviews, it does not value one evaluation method over others or attribute a hierarchy to evaluation methods. Furthermore, realist review does not seek to define a mean effect size. Rather, its premise is that each evaluation study can be valuable in terms of analysing relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (Pawson, 2006: 74). As a consequence, realist review is not standardized or reproducible. It is the task of the reviewer to develop an interpretive trail that traces how specific evaluation studies lead to certain judgements (Pawson *et al.*, 2005: 32).

The method’s starting point is that complex interventions are not simple ‘black boxes’, but generally consist of different components that do not act in a linear fashion and are highly dependent on the context in which they take place. The overarching goal of realist review is to create a middle-range theory of how and why programmes work, which in turn can be used to derive policy recommendations, either for implementation or for the shaping of new interventions (Pawson, 2006: 74). Most realist reviews have been conducted in the healthcare sector. In those reviews researchers can often draw on a large body of literature for hypothesizing what might work and how. However, realist review is also specifically meant for areas of intervention and programmes where evaluation is lacking, which is the case for CVE. So as a method, realist review would seem very suited for finding out what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in countering violent extremism.

The methodological rules for realist review are still emerging. Though not set in stone, they tend to follow the six steps of the traditional ‘Cochrane reviews’ as conducted in the medical sector: (i) clarifying the scope of the review, (ii) searching for primary studies, (iii) appraising the quality of studies, (iv) extracting the data, (v) synthesizing the data and (vi) disseminating the findings (*ibid.*: 79–100).

Step 1: Scope of the CVE review

The first step is thus to clarify the scope of the review. Like counterterrorism and counter-radicalization, there are no clear definitions of CVE. Rather, it has become a catch phrase for a policy spectrum ranging from early prevention and safeguarding measures for society, groups and communities to very targeted programmes for violent extremists, such as deradicalization and

disengagement (Harris-Hogan *et al.*, 2016). Thus, CVE consists of a multitude of interventions and programmes, with varying underlying mechanisms and implemented in different contexts, leading to different outcome patterns. The first aim of the review is therefore to provide an overview of studies that convey insights into relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns in relation to countering violent extremism.

Step 2: Searching for primary CVE studies

The next step of the review is to search for primary studies. For the current realist review, several databases were searched, such as the Social Sciences Citation Index, 'CataloguePlus' (which includes all of the main databases) and Google Scholar, to identify studies related to countering violent extremism and evaluation. Search words were 'countering violent extremism', 'CVE', 'violent extremism', 'preventing violent extremism', 'prevention of violent extremism', 'radicalization', 'deradicalization' and 'countering radicalization' in combination with 'evaluation' or words related to evaluation such as 'impact' and 'effectiveness'. The search period was from September 2001 until March 2017, as most CVE policy was developed after the 9/11 attacks and onwards. The search produced 109,886 citations. Inclusion criteria were studies that either empirically evaluated existing CVE programmes or specific CVE interventions or theorized on what might work for CVE based on empirical or theoretical studies. No exclusion criteria were formulated for geographical scope, as the realist review method suggests that we can learn as much from a deradicalization programme in Yemen as we can from a mentoring programme in the UK. However, studies that focused completely on legal or 'hard' measures, such as freezing finances, waterboarding and surveillance, were excluded from the review. Additionally excluded were studies that only looked at processes of radicalization or violent extremism, without providing insights on how these should be countered and studies that lacked any form of methodology.

This realist review produced 73 different studies (Table 2.1). Fourteen of these studies can be considered 'effect evaluations'. Although some authors did not consider their own study an effect evaluation, due to the lack of control groups (randomized or not) or an absence of pre- and post-measurements, these 14 studies are labelled effect evaluations here, as they attempted to assess impact or effectiveness among a target audience of specific CVE interventions or programmes. These evaluations used a range of methodologies. Four studies used a quantitative methodology (of which two

quasi-experimental); nine studies were qualitative in nature (conducted through, e.g., interviews, participant observation, focus groups and desk research); and one study applied a combination of methods (i.e., theory, surveys and focus groups).

The review also revealed 14 studies that could be considered 'process evaluations'. These focused on the implementation and output of a specific CVE intervention or programme, using methods such as interviews with stakeholders (e.g., policymakers and practitioners) and document analysis.

The remaining studies were theory-driven in the sense that they drew on the radicalization and deradicalization literature (often based on empirical studies with the target audience) or other bodies of literature, such as psychology, the literature on gangs and cults and experiences of practitioners, to assess what these might teach us for effective CVE measures and policies. These studies did not claim to offer policy evaluations in any strict sense (e.g., identifying positive or negative effects of interventions), but rather offered critical discussions of effectiveness in the light of new or established scientific theory or empirical data.

The evaluations identified addressed a wide range of interventions and programmes. A number of evaluations (23) focused on 'increasing resilience', individually (through mentoring), in groups (through training programmes for youth at risk) and at a community level (through forms of community engagement). Preventive programmes, such as counter-radicalization efforts and 'soft' counterterrorism programmes were most discussed (24 studies). These studies looked at efforts of specific countries, such as Denmark, the UK, Australia, Canada and the US, or by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Kenya, but also at CVE programmes in general and at the EU level.

'Exit programmes', commonly known as deradicalization and disengagement programmes, were the subject of 15 studies, in the sense that these studies looked at specific programmes or provided empirically-based or theory-driven models for how one could deradicalize or disengage. Forms of counter-communication, such as radio programming and countering online extremist content, were discussed in eight of the studies. Finally, two studies looked at how families and networks (peers/friends) could be effectively mobilized to counter violent extremism. One study was a combination, as it sought ways to increase resilience through peer networks.

Table 2.1: Overview of CVE evaluation studies as part of the realist review

Author(s)	Type of study	Type of intervention/programme
Aldrich (2012)	effect evaluation (quantitative)	Counter-communication: radio programming
Aldrich (2014)	effect evaluation (quantitative)	Counter-communication: radio programming
Feddes <i>et al.</i> (2015)	effect evaluation (quantitative)	resilience via group training
dunn <i>et al.</i> (2016)	effect evaluation (quantitative)	resilience via community engagement
Johns <i>et al.</i> (2014)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via group training/mentoring
Vermeulen (2014)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via community engagement
Aly (2014)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via education
Kundnani (2009)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via community engagement
liht & savage (2013)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via group training
lakhani (2012)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	resilience via community engagement
Choudhury & Fenwick (2011)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	CVe programme
James & Zeuthen (2014)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	CVe programme
Finn <i>et al.</i> (2016)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	CVe programme
Williams <i>et al.</i> (2016)	effect evaluation (qualitative)	CVe programme
youth Justice Board (2012)	process evaluation	CVe programme
Jacoby (2016)	process evaluation	CVe programme
lamb (2013)	process evaluation	resilience via community engagement
o'toole <i>et al.</i> (2012)	process evaluation	resilience via community engagement
spalek & davies (2012)	process evaluation	resilience via individual mentoring
mofet & sgro (2016)	process evaluation	Family and network support/resilience via education
Bakker & schuurman (2016)	process evaluation	exit: deradicalization and disengagement
el said (2012)	process evaluation	exit: deradicalization
Barkindo & Bryans (2016)	process evaluation	exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Bjorgo & horgan eds. (2009)	theory-driven/process evaluation	exit: deradicalization and disengagement
demant <i>et al.</i> (2008)	theory-driven/process evaluation	exit: deradicalization and disengagement
horgan & Braddock (2010)	theory-driven/process evaluation	exit: deradicalization and disengagement
stevens & neumann (2009)	theory-driven/process evaluation	Counter-communication: counter narratives
mastroe (2016)	theory-driven/process evaluation	CVe-programme
greenberg (2016)	theory-driven	Counter-communication: counter narratives
davies <i>et al.</i> (2016)	theory-driven	Counter-communication: counter narratives
Ferguson (2016)	theory-driven	Counter-communication: counter narratives
Beutel <i>et al.</i> (2016)	theory-driven	Counter-communication: counter narratives
szmania & Fincher (2017)	theory-driven	Counter-communication: counter narratives
gielen (2015)	theory-driven	Family and network support
Williams & horgan (2016)	theory-driven	Family and network support
lub (2016)	theory-driven	CVe programme
l indekilde (2012a)	theory-driven	CVe programme
l indekilde (2012b)	theory-driven	CVe programme
Bakker (2015)	theory-driven	CVe programme
schmid (2013)	theory-driven	CVe programme
harris-hogan <i>et al.</i> (2016)	theory-driven	CVe programme
Bjorgo (2016)	theory-driven	CVe programme
thomas (2010)	theory-driven	CVe programme
de graaf & de graaf (2010)	theory-driven	CVe programme

Author(s)	Type of study	Type of intervention/programme
Korn (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Cohen (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Thomas (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Selim (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Young <i>et al.</i> (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Kutner (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Ragazzi (2016)	theory-driven	CVE programme
Spalek & Weeks (2017)	theory-driven	CVE programme
McDonald (2011)	theory-driven	Resilience via youth work
Stevens (2009)	theory-driven	Resilience via community engagement
Bigo <i>et al.</i> (2014)	theory-driven	Resilience via community engagement
Mirahmadi (2016)	theory-driven	Resilience via community engagement
Naz (2016)	theory-driven	Resilience via community engagement (women)
Weine <i>et al.</i> (2017)	theory-driven	Resilience via mental healthcare
Quartermaine (2016)	theory-driven	Resilience via education
Ling (2016)	theory-driven	Resilience via education
Ghosh <i>et al.</i> (2016)	theory-driven	Resilience via education
Weine (2012)	theory-driven	Resilience via individual, group and community engagement
Briggs (2010)	theory-driven	Resilience via community engagement
Veldhuis (2012)	theory-driven	Exit: rehabilitation and reintegration
Dechesne (2011)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Demant & de Graaf (2010)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Berger (2016)	theory-driven	Exit: disengagement
Henry (2016)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Ferguson (2016)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Hamidi (2016)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Bastug (2016)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement
Mitchell (2017)	theory-driven	Exit: deradicalization and disengagement

Steps 3 and 4: Judging and analysing CVE studies

Quality appraisal and extracting and synthesizing the data are, respectively, the third and fourth steps of realist review. In terms of quality appraisal, traditional review attributes a hierarchy to evaluations, in which randomized controlled trials are considered best. The data extracted in the review are preferably presented in a matrix with mean effect sizes and some form of judgement with respect to the quality of the evaluations (Pawson, 2006: 87–93). In our case, however, this would have no added value, as most of the CVE studies are not comparable. To illustrate, the two studies of Aldrich (2012 and 2014), with their quasi-experimental methodology and relatively positive outcomes, would be qualified as the ‘best evaluation’ and as such might also be considered ‘best practice’ in CVE. However, these studies assessed

the effectiveness of radio programming as part of a CVE strategy in Mali, Niger and Chad. These are countries where relatively large segments of the population listen to the radio and lack other communication media, such as the Internet. It would be inappropriate to recommend radio programming as a CVE best practice in general, as the context in more digitalized (Western) countries is completely different.

Realist review argues that any hierarchy in evaluations should be abandoned. Instead, primary studies should be valued in two ways: by an assessment of relevance ('Is the primary study relevant to the explanatory focus of the review?') and an assessment of rigour ('Does the study help clarify the particular explanatory challenge?') (Pawson, 2006: 87–99).

The fourth step, extracting the data, is not about the mean effect size, but about finding relevant context, mechanism and outcome pattern configurations (*ibid.*: 97–93). For this purpose, each identified article was analysed in terms of the following themes: (i) type of evaluation; (ii) type of intervention, aim of the programme or intervention, description of the programme or intervention including target group, theory of change and outcome; and (iii) any lessons learnt or recommendations produced.

Steps 5 and 6: Synthesizing the CVE studies and dissemination of findings

Realist synthesis, the fifth step of the review, is about refinement of the programme theory in order to determine what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances. Keeping in mind these steps of judging, extracting and synthesizing the data, the review does not separately discuss each study in which 'A does not work, B does work and C works partially'. Rather, relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are discussed and realist recommendations are made such as 'remember mechanism X', 'beware of Y' and 'take care of Z' (*ibid.*: 93–99). These realist recommendations are then disseminated in the policy arena, with this dissemination forming the sixth and final step of realist review (*ibid.*: 99–102).

2.4 Realist CVE synthesis

Now that the methodology of realist review has been elaborated, what can we learn from our realist review of CVE studies? This section does not summarize all 73 articles separately, but rather discusses the most important

findings regarding contexts, mechanisms, outcomes and lessons learnt at the programme and intervention level.

CVE programmes and policy

Several studies in the review were specifically dedicated to what we could learn from other programmes, countries and literatures to shape our CVE policy. It is from some of these studies, alongside evaluations of specific interventions, that we derive a first important lesson for development of a CVE programme: the effectiveness of a CVE programme is very much dependent on how the programme is interpreted. If specific groups and communities feel negatively and disproportionately targeted by the CVE strategy, its effectiveness will be undermined (De Graaf & De Graaff, 2010; Lindekilde, 2012; Spalek & Davies, 2012; Khalid & Zeuthen, 2014). The studies also teach us that any form of CVE policy should address the grievances (both real and perceived) and factors that led to radicalization and violent extremism.

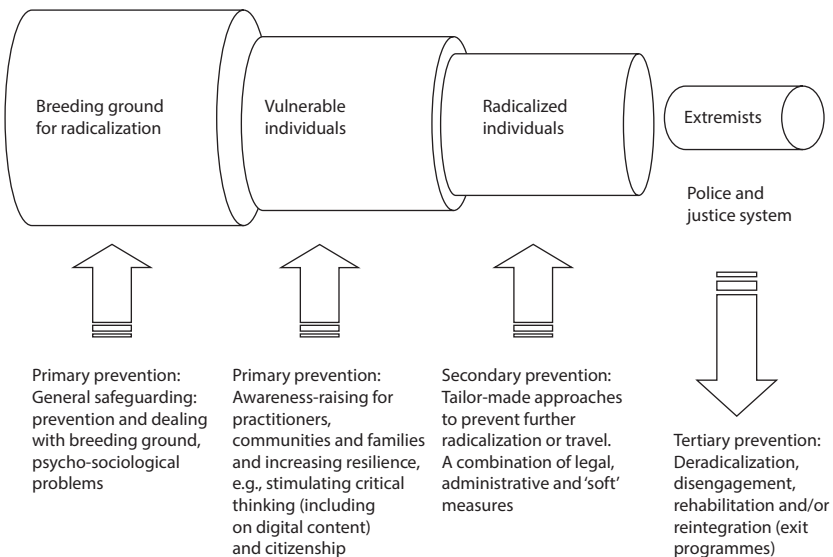
Bakker (2015), for example, presented the Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law (TTSRL) radicalization model. This model is a theory of change consisting of root causes (political, economic and cultural), identification processes, network dynamics, relative deprivation, trigger events and personal factors (psychological characteristics and personal experiences). For any CVE programme to be comprehensive, all of these aspects must be addressed. Similar but less extensive models were presented by Hirschfeld *et al.* (2012) and Bigo *et al.* (2014).

The only CVE programme that has been evaluated using mixed evaluation methods is that of the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), a community-based Muslim-led organization in the United States. Their CVE programme consists of three pillars: educating communities, training law enforcement and social service providers on Islam, and a focus on volunteerism and multicultural programming (Williams *et al.*, 2016). An evaluation of the programme (*ibid.*) claimed that it was the first evidence-based CVE-relevant programme in the United States and that it had the potential to be effective in other US municipalities.

Studying Australian CVE policy, Harris-Hogan *et al.* (2016) differentiated three forms of preventive CVE strategies based on a public health model. Primary CVE initiatives were identified as those focusing on the

prevention of radicalization. These are designed to educate individuals about violent extremism and to prevent establishment of breeding grounds for the radicalization of individuals, but they can also include awareness-raising programmes for practitioners. Programmes in the secondary group consist of interventions for those who are showing signs of radicalization, such as engagement with an extremist social network. Tertiary-level CVE programmes are those aimed at known extremists. These seek to facilitate those already considered extremist to disengage from a violent extremist network and desist from violent behaviour. Similar forms of prevention are also recognized in the studies of Williams *et al.* (2016), Korn (2016), Cohen (2016), Selim (2016) and Young *et al.* (2016). The CVE prevention model has been visualized by Gielen (2008, 2015b) and in figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Overview of CVE policy spectrum in the form of a prevention classification model



Lub (2013) drew lessons about the possible effectiveness of primary and secondary CVE interventions used in the Netherlands and Europe. He distinguished four typical CVE interventions: (i) multidisciplinary interventions aimed at preventing or reducing radical behaviour of individuals, (ii) peer mediation, (iii) self-esteem enhancement and (iv) intergroup contact interventions. He has researched the evidence base of these interventions in other fields as well, such as criminal behaviour, education, and drug and alcohol abuse. He concluded that the scientific basis for peer mediation

and self-esteem enhancement is weak, and the scientific basis for multidisciplinary interventions is small. Intergroup contact, on average, reduces prejudices about other groups, but effect sizes are generally small, and there is no evidence of any long-term impact.

Resilience

As noted, most studies discuss the notion of ‘increasing resilience’ and illustrate several ways in which this can be done. The study by Weine (2012) was developed along the lines of the above-mentioned public health inspired CVE prevention model. It recognizes different target audiences for interventions aimed at increasing resilience, particularly, vulnerable individuals, vulnerable subgroups and (diaspora) communities. Most interesting in this study is a summary of what we already know, scientifically speaking, about resilience and CVE. This highlights that (i) one can be resilient to some risks but not to others, (ii) resilience is formed at both the individual and the social level, (iii) families are the strongest buffer for risk factors for violent extremism and (iv) resilience in diaspora communities is shaped by a combination of home-country experiences, characteristics of a refugee camp with which one may have experience and the mainstream values of the country of residence. The most recent study, by Weine *et al.* (2017), stresses the importance of mental health professionals in community-based CVE initiatives. These authors argue that a multidisciplinary team should assess individuals at risk and arrange support and treatment. At the community level, they should provide outreach and education.

With respect to increasing resilience at the individual level, Spalek and Davies (2012) presented a process evaluation of a mentoring programme implemented in the UK for individuals considered vulnerable to different forms of violent extremism. Their study shows that a mentoring programme in CVE involves concepts such as relationship, trust and confidentiality. These are considered necessary preconditions to confront people with their (violent) extremist views. This study also highlights that political and cultural contexts should be taken into account in mentoring programmes, as they can influence programme outcomes.

To assess the effect of programmes aiming to increase the resilience of vulnerable groups, Feddes *et al.* (2015) conducted a quantitative effect evaluation of a Dutch resilience training called *Diamant* (Dutch for ‘diamond’). The programme sought to prevent radicalization. Among the valuable results

of this evaluation was the finding that increasing empathy and self-esteem played an important role in reducing support for violent extremism. As such, the resilience training was considered a promising tool for countering violent radicalization. However, an important disclaimer was made by the authors; that is, it had not yet been investigated whether the Diamant training was effective beyond high-school dropouts, for example, in deradicalizing actual violent extremists (*ibid.*: 9).

Schools are considered an important arena for increasing the resilience of young people (Ghosh, 2016; Thomas, 2016; Long, 2016). However, scholars do not agree on the best method for achieving this goal. For example, the UK CVE educational strategy revolves around the promotion of British values, but has been criticized. McDonald (2011) and Liht and Savage (2013) focused on increasing resilience, providing suggestions for how extremist messages could be countered and alternatives promoted. According to McDonald (*ibid.*), we should not fall into the extremist trap by trying to counter their dichotomies, such as ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and the West ‘at war’ with Islam. Rather, we must promote an alternative narrative making use of concepts such as loyalty, belonging and duty. In a qualitative effect evaluation, Liht and Savage (2013) found that such an approach can be effective. They developed a course to expose young Muslims to the different values of influential Muslims, including extremist discourse. Their theory of change was based on the concept of value complexity, and competing and even extremist values were openly discussed in terms of outcomes. The findings provide initial evidence that promoting value complexity might be more effective than the promotion of liberal Muslim or secular values (*ibid.*).

Aly *et al.* (2014) conducted a qualitative effect evaluation of an Australian education intervention: the Beyond Bali Education Package. They applied the theory of ‘moral disengagement’ to develop the intervention. Moral disengagement is the way that “individuals justify violence, dehumanize victims, disregard the harmful consequences of violence and absolve themselves of blame” (Aly *et al.*, 2014: 369). The programme was specifically designed “to build social cognitive resilience to violent extremism by engaging self-sanctions and preparing students to challenge the influence of violent extremism that can lead to moral disengagement” (*ibid.*: 369). The study found that “the programme had achieved some success in building resilience by engaging participants in constructing violent extremism as unjust and inhumane; fostering empathy with victims of violent extremism; developing self-efficacy in resisting violent extremist influences and

responding to influences in positive, productive ways while considering the devastating impacts of violent extremism” (*ibid.*: 383).

Most of the studies identified in the review were on community engagement and resilience. Those on negative outcomes and side effects claimed that community engagement programmes had led to the singling out of Muslim communities, stigmatization, polarization and ‘suspect communities’ (Briggs, 2010; Bigo *et al.*, 2014; Kundnani, 2009; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, Vermeulen, 2014; O’Toole *et al.*, 2012). Reviewing these studies, one may be inclined to think that community engagement is an ineffective approach to CVE which should be abandoned. Briggs (2010) is one of the few to explain the mechanisms behind community engagement and why it is such an important part of a CVE strategy. First, communities are able to serve as an early-warning system toward intelligence and police services. Second, when properly equipped, communities are able to safeguard young people from violent extremism, as they have a direct entry point with their young community members. Third, via community engagement interventions can be provided that address the grievances that young people harbour, both real and perceived. Finally, engagement can help prevent and overcome some of the negative side effects of specific community members being or feeling targeted by intelligence and police services.

How community engagement is done in practice was discussed by Lamb (2013) using a theory of change for community engagement. Based on the ‘three cups of tea’ concept, Lamb (*ibid.*) highlighted the importance of building a trust-based relationship before discussing the issue of CVE. With case studies in three cities and countries, Vermeulen (2014) illustrated subtle differences in community engagement. Community engagement in a neighbourhood of Amsterdam was very focused on engaging certain individuals, rather than organizations. In London and Berlin, community engagement focused on organizations, but the types of organization varied. In London, intensive relationships were sought with orthodox organizations, whereas in Berlin programme initiators opted for a more pragmatic approach (*ibid.*). An Australian community engagement initiative with Sydney Muslims and the police was evaluated positively. In surveys, community members indicated that they considered the initiative successful as it had led to direct contact, it was public and it involved in-depth relationships and partnerships. However, the ‘suspect community’ critique was heard here as well (Dunn *et al.*, 2016).

While most CVE community engagement programmes are criticized because Muslim communities tend to be targeted and singled out, the earlier-mentioned community-based Muslim-led organization WORDE has been applauded. According to Mirahmadi (2016), the success of its programme lay in its bottom-up top-down approach and the diversity of the organization. Diverse faith and ethnic groups had ownership and shaped the programme, but at the same time were supported by local government and law enforcement.

Exit programmes

Horgan and Braddock (2010) and Veldhuis (2012) underlined that 'exit programme' has become a catch phrase for efforts toward changing radical beliefs (deradicalization), the cessation of violence (disengagement) and reintegration and rehabilitation of violent extremists. El Said (2012) conducted a process evaluation of several exit programmes around the world. The findings provide insights on different contexts and outcome patterns of exit: preventing further radicalization, rehabilitating and counselling those who have already been radicalized (both state and individual initiatives) and collective deradicalization either in or out of prison. In terms of lessons learnt, the study stresses the political context and leadership, the role of families and civil society, and the role and quality of the religious experts involved. The political and developmental strength of the state was also found to be important. However, no single formula was found to deal with all cases of violent extremism, even within a single region. Rather, counter-radicalization and deradicalization efforts must be tailor-made and take into account cultural mores, traditions, history and rules and regulations within each country.

The importance of context was also highlighted by Demant and De Graaf (2010), but in a different manner. They emphasized that any government-run deradicalization policy must be understood by the discourse produced or reinforced through its interventions. This discourse, they argued, can have a profound effect on processes of deradicalization. Drawing on Turkish case studies, Bastug and Evlek (2016) illustrated how a change in government policy from soft measures to hard measures affected disengagement and deradicalization programmes.

Schuurman and Bakker (2016) provided a small sample process evaluation in which they evaluated an exit programme for one specific target audience:

formerly imprisoned violent extremists. This study is helpful, in particular, in illustrating crucial contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of an exit programme, such as managerial support for probation staff and good cooperation with stakeholders such as municipalities. It also highlights that stakeholders can hold different views of the envisaged outcome, which can affect interventions, for example, by producing a (too) strong focus on behavioural aspects (disengagement) instead of cognitive interventions (deradicalization).

Similar process evaluation studies were conducted by Demant *et al.* (2008), Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) and Dechesne (2011), but these were combined with a theory-driven approach. Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) distinguished 'push and pull factors' for leaving violent extremist organizations. Push factors were identified as the reasons for wanting to leave the violent extremist organization: generally dissatisfaction with the extremist group (e.g., negative experiences and loss of faith in ideology or politics). Pull factors were defined as positive alternatives, such as family obligations and a longing for a normal life. Demant *et al.* (2008) categorized factors leading to deradicalization or disengagement based on *content* instead of *direction* (push or pull). They distinguished three types: normative, affective and continuance factors. Normative (ideological) factors consist of discontent or a decreased appeal of the ideology. Affective (social) factors include discontent with the extremist group or subculture. Finally, continuance (practical) factors refer to effects on life circumstances, such as feelings of stigmatization and external pressure and isolation. Both Demant *et al.* (2010) and Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) identified potential barriers to disengagement, such as social and psychological dependence on the group and fear of legal sanctions. Alternatively, individual decisions to exit can be facilitated by trigger events and by significant others who discourage violence. Similar conclusions were reached in the study by Ferguson (2016), on disengagement in Northern Ireland.

In short, these studies are based on empirical data from voluntary exits and provide insights on what opportunities and barriers should be taken into consideration when shaping exit programmes. Demant *et al.* (2010) also stressed the importance of a comprehensive approach to deradicalization and disengagement. In their opinion, right-wing exit programmes are too focused on dealing with practical circumstances, whereas the ideological (normative) component is neglected. Exit programmes for extremist Muslims are said to focus too much on normative factors, fixating on theology

and overlooking affective factors. Demant *et al.* (*ibid.*: 181) claimed that European exit programmes would benefit from a broader focus in which normative, affective and continuance factors are dealt with in a more even and combined fashion.

Family and network support

The earlier-mentioned study by Weine (2012) stressed the importance of family for increasing resilience. Furthermore, El Said (2012) highlighted the importance of family in deradicalization, like the above-mentioned studies on exit, as significant others such as families can encourage and facilitate exit. This is only one of the few rationales behind family support programmes as part of a CVE strategy, as discussed in Gielen (2015a). At a primary prevention stage, family support can be offered to parents of individuals at risk to help them create and maintain a positive family environment. Families with a child who has travelled to a conflict zone can be offered support in establishing and maintaining contact. They can also be provided tools and information to safeguard siblings and other close family members of the foreign fighter, because they too are at risk of being groomed for violent extremism. Finally, families of violent extremists who were killed during combat or a suicide mission need support. It is often forgotten that these families are not perpetrators, but victims of the choices their family member made. The loss, shame and rejection by community and society often cause grief, anxiety, despair and trauma and may thus trigger grievances and other radicalization factors. Family support in the form of grief counselling can help prevent siblings from following the same path as the violent extremist family member. Yet, family members of deceased violent extremists have not previously been mentioned in the CVE literature.

Williams and Horgan (2016) proposed that the focus of CVE should be not only on the families, but also on peers. Based on their research they argued that peers seem best placed to notice early-warning signals of violent extremism. However, the study also reveals the reluctance of peers to reach out to CVE practitioners and networks, or even to family members, because they fear potential repercussions. This study proposes an evidence-based crisis hotline that peers can phone or text anonymously. Williams *et al.* (2016) evaluated a Muslim-led CVE programme that included 'peer gatekeeper training'. High school students were taught to recognize and assist peers who felt isolated, were experiencing a personal crisis or were suffering from (cyber)bullying. Among the recommendations was a proposal to include

peer gatekeeper training as part of an evidence-based CVE policy (*ibid.*: 88). The merit of the peer method was also acknowledged by Moffett and Sgro (2016), who described a peer-to-peer initiative in their study. The central idea behind the initiative was for students around the world to counter extremism among their peers and in their communities. Young people were stimulated to develop and implement a social or digital intervention (e.g., an initiative, product or tool) targeted to empower their peers and counter hate.

Counter-communication

Stevens and Neumann (2009) and Aldrich (2012, 2014) highlighted the different forms that counter-communication can take, such as online counter-communication and radio programming. While radio programmes are considered relatively effective in changing attitudes toward violence, for example, in Africa, as observed, radio programming is unlikely to be the best way forward in Europe. What might work in Mali will not necessarily work in highly-digitalized France.

According to Stevens and Neumann (2009), we should concentrate not only on reducing the availability of online extremist content by, for example, take-down measures, but also provide alternatives to extremist content. This approach is known as ‘counter-narratives’ or ‘alternative narratives’. While the rationale behind it seems logical, the counter-narrative approach has recently been the target of increased scrutiny. Ferguson (2016) argued that there is little hard evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to violent extremist content and participation in violent extremist activities. The assumption that the extremist narrative can be countered by providing an alternative or counter-narrative also remains unproven. Davies *et al.* (2016) examined the content of six online CVE programmes and concluded that they lacked a theoretical foundation and did not address the mechanisms that underlie the radicalization process, such as contextual factors and identity issues.

2.5 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has explored the added value of the realist review approach in the field of CVE. Realist review was developed specifically for evaluation of complex social programmes. But until now it had not yet been applied in the CVE domain. While traditional reviews often present a matrix of

mean effect sizes and some form of judgement with respect to the quality of the evaluations examined, the realist review method enables synthesis of existing CVE evaluations without attributing a hierarchy to the evaluation methods used in the studies. Such a hierarchy has no added value anyway in the CVE field, as CVE studies are not generally comparable. Rather, the realistic method seeks to highlight relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes in order to answer the explorative question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’.

The realist review presented in this chapter underlined that CVE is an umbrella phrase encompassing many different interventions and programmes. The studies examined help us to gain a better understanding of what CVE precisely entails. The review also revealed that while the CVE literature is developing rapidly, effect evaluations remain limited. Of the 73 CVE studies identified, only 14 could be considered effect evaluations. Most CVE studies are theory-driven, providing policy recommendations based mainly on theoretical frameworks or conceptual models, rather than empirical evidence. However, the realist review method used in this chapter illustrated that different forms of evaluation can increase our understanding of what types of CVE measures are being used, how they work, for whom they work and what lessons we can draw from them.

This chapter thus contributed to the CVE domain by synthesizing the currently available literature. This places policymakers and practitioners in a better position to draw on the scientific lessons derived so far. Scholars, too, can benefit from the review, as the lessons learnt can advance theory building for future evaluations. Furthermore, we are now in a better position to zoom in on specific aspects of CVE using the realist review framework as developed in this chapter. The realist review framework can be applied to very specific interventions or programmes. For example, increasing resilience is an important aspect of countering violent extremism and draws on different programme theories, such as the theory of moral disengagement, bonding and bridging and value complexity. Future reviews, could focus on one or more of these theories to develop a more refined programme theory configuration on increasing resilience as part of a CVE strategy.

The review raises some points worthy of further discussion. First, the review found that CVE studies and evaluations have taken flight in the past years. Half of the reviewed studies were published in 2016 or 2017. While this growth in the field is encouraging, it also provokes questions on how we as

a research community can keep the realist CVE review up to date. Second, the final step of realist review is informing policymakers and providing them scientific information on 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances'. This requires active engagement between policymakers and scientists and requires us to think about different forms of dissemination. Is dissemination best done via peer-reviewed journals? Or should we also seek more targeted and interactive formats? Finally, such engagement should contribute to the earlier and active involvement of researchers in the CVE policy domain, because we still have a long journey ahead before evaluations of CVE interventions and programmes become the rule rather than the exception.

3 Lessons from a Realist Review of Countering Violent Extremism⁹: Development of Refined Heuristic Guidelines for Complex Social Programmes

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter applied realist review, for the first time, to a programme aimed at countering violent extremism, and also provided a realist synthesis of existing CVE evaluation studies. The analysis demonstrated that the realist review method, developed by Pawson (2002b, 2005, 2006), is an appropriate technique for evaluating single interventions, as well as that the principles of realistic evaluation can be used to conduct a meta-analysis of existing evaluation studies. This latter is called ‘realist synthesis’ or ‘realist review’.

While realist review was developed for evaluating different types of complex social programmes (Pawson, 2005), it has been applied mostly in the healthcare sector. Of all the realist reviews conducted since the origin of the method, most have been published in journals such as *BMJ Open*, *Social Science & Medicine*, *BMC Health Services Research* and *BMC Public Health*.¹⁰ This makes sense, as realist review was developed in the healthcare field as an alternative to the systematic reviews so commonly used in the medical domain. Such systematic reviews are typically anchored in randomized controlled trials and measure outcomes in terms of mean effect sizes. Healthcare is, in fact, renowned for being ‘evidence-based’, entailing “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best

9 This chapter expands on the secondary analysis of the realist review of CVE evaluation studies presented in Gielen (2017a) and chapter 2. This chapter zooms in on the methodology and heuristics of conducting realist review, which was not included in the 2017a publication.

10 A search for ‘realist review’ in CataloguePlus, which includes databases such as OneFile, Medline/PubMed, JSTOR Archival Journals, SAGE Publications, SAGE Journals and many more databases, revealed 637 relevant studies published mainly in healthcare journals. Most realist reviews were published in *BMJ Open* (98), closely followed by *Social Science & Medicine* (68) and *BMC Public Health* and *BMC Health Services* (both 44). The realist reviews published in *Implementation Science* (50) were also mostly healthcare related.

evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients” (Sackett *et al.*, 1996: 71). Evidence tends to be abundantly available in the healthcare domain, via medical databases such as Index Medicus, MEDLINE and PubMed. This evidence, furthermore, is rigorously reviewed and synthesized in the international database of the Cochrane Collaboration, with the aim of improving evidence-based healthcare decision-making.

Yet, the realist review method has also, although scarcely, been applied to other fields, for instance to crime prevention. However, as Pawson (2005) notes, the realist review method requires adaption and innovation to address the widening range of complex social programmes (Pawson, 2006: 93–96 in Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012). This need for further development to accommodate increasingly complex programmes was also pointed out by Betts (2013). Her realist review of aid effectiveness and governance reforms in developing countries concluded that broad and diverse programmes and interventions require a more systematic approach to data extraction. This also raises the question of how to conduct such a review correctly. Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) pointed out that while the realist review method is becoming more accepted and applied, the essence of realist review does not always seem to be followed and understood. They counted more than 100 realistic evaluations and some twenty studies that had been published as realist reviews. Yet, their analysis revealed that few were truly realist in nature, in the sense that they had an explanatory focus and actually investigated contexts, mechanisms and outcomes *in configuration* (*ibid.*: 177).

This brings us to the following questions, which this chapter seeks to answer: (1) How can realist review be conducted correctly, respecting the realist methodology? (2) To what extent can the realist review method be applied to complex social programmes outside the medical domain, particularly in fields where, in stark contrast to the medical field, evidence in the form of evaluation studies and reviews is less abundant or even lacking?

This chapter begins by providing heuristic guidelines for the conduct of realist review. Essentially, a detailed step-by-step guide is given for the conduct of realist review, going beyond the above-mentioned six broad steps to realist review. These heuristic guidelines are necessary because detailed descriptions of how to conduct realist review are scattered across different publications. The heuristic guidelines in this chapter therefore synthesize Pawson and colleagues’ theoretical and empirical work. Afterwards, the chapter examines whether the realist principles and heuristic

guidelines for realist review can be successfully applied to such complex social programmes as are common in the CVE field. It does this by presenting a secondary analysis of my realist review of CVE evaluation studies in the previous chapter (see also Gielen, 2017a). Rather than focusing on the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of the CVE evaluations, this secondary analysis provides a methodological reflection on how the review in the previous chapter was conducted, what challenges arose and how they were dealt with. This methodological reflection provides the basis for adapted and advanced heuristic guidelines for realist review for application of the method to evaluate complex social programmes like CVE.

3.2 Heuristic guidelines for realist review of complex social programmes

According to Pawson (2006), realist review follows the six steps of the Cochrane reviews. The Cochrane library is a global database of systematic meta-analyses of interventions in the healthcare sector. The purpose of the Cochrane database is to improve evidence-based healthcare decision-making. Pawson (2006: 41–42) summarized the six steps of the Cochrane review as follows: (i) clarifying the scope of the review, (ii) searching for primary studies, (iii) appraisal of quality, (iv) extracting the data, (v) synthesizing the data and (vi) disseminating the findings. Realist review differs from the traditional Cochrane review in several ways. For instance, it does not focus on ‘what works’ or on translating outcomes into mean effect sizes, but explicitly takes contextual factors and mechanisms into account. Closely related, a realist review cannot be standardized or reproduced in the sense that a Cochrane review can. Instead, realist review is explorative and iterative in nature (*ibid.*: 91–94).

The six steps for realist review are elaborated in different publications: primarily Pawson’s 2006 book, *Evidence-based Policy: A Realist Perspective*, but also in other works by Pawson and colleagues (Pawson *et al.*, 2005; Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012; Wong *et al.*, 2010; Wong *et al.*, 2012) and in the RAMESES realist review publication standards (Wong *et al.*, 2013). Each publication provides valuable insight into what realist review precisely entails and how it should be conducted. However, because the insights are scattered across several different publications a general overview and step-by-step guide for realist review is lacking. This might explain why, as Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) concluded, so many realist reviews have been conducted incorrectly.

Table 3.1 presents a synthesis of the different realist review steps discussed in the previously mentioned literature. This synthesis provides heuristic guidelines for realist review. These heuristic guidelines should not be considered a technical checklist for realist review, as the iterative nature of realist review makes such a checklist impossible. Rather, they should be read as more detailed guidelines on how to conduct a realist review.

Table 3.1: Heuristic guidelines for realist review. Adapted from Pawson *et al.* (2005), Pawson (2006), Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012), Wong *et al.* (2010), Wong *et al.* (2012) and Wong *et al.* (2013)

<p>1. Clarify the scope of the review</p> <p>a) <i>Rationale for review:</i> Why is a realist review necessary? Why is realist review the most appropriate method? Why is the particular unit of analysis for review 'complex'? Does the programme meet the seven characteristics of complexity? What will this review contribute to the current understanding of the subject?</p> <p>b) <i>Objectives and focus:</i> state the aim of the review and review questions. Review questions should be explanatory and revolve around one or more of the following questions: what works, for whom, how, in what circumstances and why?</p> <p>c) <i>Scoping the literature:</i> scope the literature for programme theories (not necessarily empirical evidence on the programme theories). provide a description and justification of the preliminary scoping phase of the literature. indicate what search words were used and which databases and literature were examined, for example, was only peer-reviewed literature examined, or were for example policy documents also included.</p> <p>d) <i>Development of a theoretical model:</i> identify and categorize theories on how the programme or intervention is supposed to work. prioritize theories and explain why certain theories are considered more important than others. develop a model with explanatory middle-range hypotheses that speculate on configurations between context, mechanisms and outcomes.</p> <p>2. Searching for primary studies</p> <p>a) <i>Collect evidence by searching for primary studies:</i> primary studies can include peer-reviewed literature or policy documents, but should provide empirical evidence on the programme theories under investigation. studies can be collected via databases, by contacting individuals familiar with the literature and by snowballing (handpicking studies mentioned in studies already found). if sufficient primary studies cannot be found within a domain, branch out to other domains.</p> <p>b) <i>Provide details on the search for primary studies:</i> details should be provided of the accessed electronic databases, such as the names of the databases, search terms and dates of the search. if individuals were contacted, indicate how they were identified and selected.</p> <p>3. Quality appraisal</p> <p>a) <i>Assess relevance:</i> does the primary study fit the scope of the review? What inclusion and exclusion criteria were used?</p> <p>b) <i>Assess rigour:</i> does the study help in clarifying the explanatory challenge of the review?</p>

- c) *Create a document flow chart:* provide details on the number of documents found, assessed and included and excluded in the review with reasons for exclusion at each stage.

4. Extracting the data

- a) *Extract data:* provide a description and explanation of how data or information was extracted from the included evaluations and justify this selection process. Note taking and annotation are important during the process of data extraction.
- b) *Provide information on the characteristics of the documents included in the review.*

5. Synthesize evidence

- a) *Analysis and synthesis processes:* provide a detailed description of the analysis and synthesis process in which the quality of the evidence is reviewed and compared. Then examine the data on relevant outcomes and on the supporting and contradictory evidence associated with the original programme theories. Conduct a final search to seek out additional studies and fine-tune the synthesis. Often, revised programme theories emerge in the course of the review, after testing these further, a more refined programme theory may be developed.

6. Disseminate the findings

- a) For publication in academic journals, the relevant academic publication standards should be followed.
- b) For dissemination of findings in a policy arena, presentation of the results should not take the form of mean effect sizes of a specific programme or intervention. Rather, they should be presented as policy recommendations, such as 'remember x', 'beware y' and 'take care of Z'.

3.3 Applying realist review to CVE

This section applies the heuristic guidelines for realist review to CVE and discusses the challenges that arise when employing realist review in a field as complex as CVE. The discussion pertains to the realist review of CVE studies presented in chapter 2. In that review, different types of CVE evaluation studies from around the globe were identified via a literature search and then analysed. The aim of the analysis, which was published in *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Gielen, 2017a), was to gain a better understanding of what types of interventions are considered CVE and what we can learn from studies of the various types of CVE interventions. The present chapter extends Gielen (2017a), by reflecting on how the heuristic guidelines for realist review (Table 3.1) were applied to reach these findings, and how and when the complexity of CVE required the heuristic guidelines to be adapted.

3.3.1 Step 1: Clarify the scope of the review

Rationale for review

First of all, an argument needs to be provided as to why realist review should be applied. First and foremost, the primary reason to apply realist review to CVE is the complexity of CVE, and the unsuitability of 'regular' review methods to deal with that complexity. The unsuitability of the systematic review was illustrated by the German National Centre for Crime Prevention (*Nationales Zentrum für Kriminalprävention – NZK*). That organization identified eleven evaluation studies of seven different German CVE interventions of which the methodological level was considered low and hardly any information was provided on the effectiveness of the CVE measures (Kober, 2017). As a consequence, it is almost impossible to draw any conclusions as to whether the CVE intervention projects were able to prevent violent extremism or were actually ineffective (*ibid.*). Thus, we are in need of a review method that can deal with the scarceness and heterogeneity of CVE evaluation studies.

We also need a review method that can deal with the complexity of CVE. To assess the complexity of a social programme, Pawson (2005: 22-23) described seven characteristics of complexity. Applying them demonstrates that CVE can indeed be considered a complex social programme. First, there is no single recipe for success in countering violent extremism. Programmes always consist of multiple interventions, each with their own *theories* on why they might contribute to countering violent extremism. For example, educating young people is often part of a CVE programme. Education consists of several mechanisms, each with its own theory and contribution to CVE, such as stimulating critical thinking, providing an alternative to an extremist narrative and creating resilience against different forms of violent extremism. Second, CVE can only have effect via the *active input of stakeholders*, including practitioners (youth workers, psychologists and community policy officers) and the target audience. This is closely associated with the third property of complexity, that the intervention follows a *long policy chain*. Moreover, the way a CVE programme is *intended* does not always correspond to the way the programme is actually *interpreted*. It is useful in this regard to keep in mind the examples of community engagement-focused CVE programmes. In one of these, government agencies sought to establish a trust-based relationship with key figures from minority and religious communities, but their advances were in fact interpreted as being

targeted as a 'suspect' community (Vermeulen, 2014). Fourth, CVE is *non-linear*, as politicians, policymakers, practitioners and the target audience (individuals, communities) all influence and affect implementation. If, after a terrorist attack, politicians claim 'we are at war', this will affect, for example, community engagement programmes that are part of a CVE strategy. CVE is highly *context-dependent*, which is the fifth feature of complexity. For example, radio programming against violent extremism is more likely to work in Mali, where there is little access to media other than radio, compared to the digitalized West with its diversity of media resources (Aldrich, 2014; Gielen, 2017a). Sixth, CVE programmes are often based on an *exchange of ideas*. In Europe, this has been stimulated via the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), in which thousands of practitioners and policymakers exchange best practices in CVE. The effect is that many countries and cities have borrowed parts of their CVE programmes from elsewhere. A German telephone hotline and support for families of foreign fighters, for instance, have been exported to many countries, including the Netherlands, Austria and France. Family support programmes are now an integral part of CVE programmes across Europe (Gielen, 2015a). However, each country has introduced some 'couleur locale' to its own programme. As a consequence, family support programmes across Europe differ from the German original. Finally, complexity entails that the conditions and mechanisms that make a CVE programme work can *change over time*, in both intended and unintended ways. For example, frontline practitioners often receive awareness-raising training with 'checklists' on how to signal violent extremism. The mechanism behind the awareness raising is to ensure that frontline practitioners know how to recognize and act on (potential) violent extremism. However, violent extremists have become savvy and are also familiar with the checklists. ISIS even has special manuals to instruct potential foreign fighters on how not to get caught; it advises them, for example, to shave their beard before travel.

In sum, CVE is a theory, based on an exchange of ideas; it follows a long policy chain, is non-linear, context-dependent, active and can change over time. CVE is thus a highly complex programme which warrants a realist review.

Objectives and focus

A key realist principle is that the review should always be exploratory. The true realist and explorative question 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances', however, is too ambitious in CVE. Answering it would require us to completely understand what CVE precisely is, including what

interventions can and cannot be classified under this umbrella concept. We would also need an understanding of what theories underlie these interventions and enough evaluation material to draw on to further investigate the many different theories. The previous section's characterization of CVE as a wicked and complex problem underlines the lack of a proper understanding of what CVE precisely entails in the first place. As such, the focus of the review is to get a better sense of what the wicked and complex topic of CVE entails. It is possible to remain true to the realist paradigm by focusing on the following research questions:

- What programmes and interventions are considered to be countering violent extremism?
- In what contexts are CVE measures implemented?
- What are the underlying mechanisms of CVE programmes and interventions?
- What outcome patterns are generated by these mechanisms?

Scoping the literature

The literature was scoped using the Social Citation Index, 'CataloguePlus' (which includes all main databases) and Google Scholar. Initially only the search words 'CVE' and 'evaluation' were used, and both scientific articles and policy documents were examined. This inspection revealed however that CVE is a catch phrase for all sorts of activities related to the prevention or countering of radicalization, extremism and violent extremism at the individual, group and community level. So while the scoping phase did not enable us to draw out a dominant theory, it did expose the broad spectrum of CVE. Essentially it is a new, trending word for preventing violent extremism (PVE), deradicalization and countering radicalization as well as prevention of violent extremism. Thus, this scoping process was highly relevant in helping us to identify relevant search words of value in the second phase of the realist review: finding evaluations to be included in the review.

Development of a theoretical model

The last step of the initial scoping phase was development of a middle-range theoretical model that suggests hypotheses on configurations between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. However, this was based on the assumption that the scoping had led to the dominant programme theories that could be tested. Due to the objectives and focus of our review and the results of the scoping phase, it was not possible to develop a hypothesized middle-range theoretical model in the first step of the review. Instead, a conceptual CVE model was developed. That model was based on a

prevention classification system previously used in the healthcare domain, and still employed in criminology, aiming to eliminate risk factors and enhance protective factors (Gielen, 2008; cp. Harris-Hogan *et al.*, 2016). This conceptual model of CVE entails three elements (Gielen, 2017a; Gielen, 2017b):

- Primary prevention. Broad prevention activities are concentrated on eliminating the breeding grounds and root causes of violent extremism and increasing protective factors against violent extremism. This is generally done via group activities (often via education) concentrating on citizenship, resilience, positive identity formation and community engagement. In this prevention phase it is also important that practitioners be properly trained to signal vulnerable, at risk individuals (*ibid.*).
- Secondary prevention. This element is more individually-oriented, focused on vulnerable individuals and individuals who are already in a radicalization process but have not committed criminal offences, such as people who are considering travelling to Syria to join ISIS. Interventions in this phase are directed toward extremist *views* and risk factors and to preventing these from leading to radical *behaviour* (e.g., violent extremism). This form of prevention is often tailor-made for the individual in question. Mentoring is an intervention often applied at this stage, in combination with interventions seeking to influence the social context of the individual, for example, through family support or by providing an alternative network. This requires multi-agency support (*ibid.*).
- Tertiary prevention. The emphasis of tertiary prevention is also on individuals, but the focus is on curative interventions for those who have actually turned to *violent* extremism, such as foreign fighters. The objective of tertiary prevention is abandonment of the violent extremism path. This can be achieved via different means and with different goals. Reintegration and rehabilitation efforts tend to focus on achieving a form of ‘normal life’ via schooling or work. Disengagement concentrates on changing the extremist behaviour and aims for the cessation of violence. Deradicalization is concerned with changing extremist attitudes and rejection of the violent extremist ideology. Disengagement and deradicalization are often realized through ‘exit programmes’. Exit programmes are tailor-made and involve multiple interventions, such as mentoring, practical and socio-economic support, ideological and religious counselling, family support, psychological support and providing an alternative social network (*ibid.*).

3.3.2 Step 2: Searching for primary CVE studies

Within a highly complex field like CVE, the scoping phase is an opportunity to conceptually grasp the issue, which helps in the next step: the search for primary studies. Three databases were searched for studies related to countering violent extremism and evaluation: the Social Sciences Citation Index, 'CataloguePlus' (which includes all the main databases, e.g., the Social Citation Science Index, SAGE, Taylor & Francis Online, Academic Search Primer) and Google Scholar. Following the findings of the scoping phase, in addition to 'CVE' + 'evaluation', search words included 'countering violent extremism', 'CVE', 'violent extremism', 'preventing violent extremism', 'prevention of violent extremism', 'radicalization', 'deradicalization' and 'countering radicalization' in combination with 'evaluation' or words related to evaluation, such as 'impact' and 'effectiveness'. The search period was from September 2001 until March 2016, as most CVE policy was developed after the 9/11 attacks and onwards (Gielen, 2017a). The search produced 109,886 citations, which required a process of quality appraisal (step 3).

What is not taken into account in the heuristic guidelines for realist review is how to keep the review up to date. CVE is a fast-developing field. More and more research is being undertaken on the topic. This means that a review of the field quickly becomes out of date, particularly as lengthy peer review processes may precede publication of such a review in an international peer-reviewed journal. In the case of Gielen (2017a), the review process took more than a year. During that year, the domain of CVE really took flight, and many more CVE studies *and* evaluations became available – a point that was quite rightly made by the anonymous reviewers. However, simply updating the draft article by adding the important new studies mentioned by the reviewers would be counter to the concise and systematic approach prescribed by realist review for the search for primary studies. As a consequence, a new search for primary studies had to be set up, this time including the period from 1 March 2016 to 1 March 2017. This led to an additional 50,061 citations which were subjected to the same quality appraisal process described in step 3. This illustrates how rapidly the CVE evaluation field is developing. It also means that a realist review of CVE is never finished. However, the knowledge accumulated based on the primary studies up to 1 March 2017 can provide a starting point to incorporate more recent studies.

3.3.3 Step 3: Quality appraisal

In accordance with the principles of realist review, the citations were assessed for relevance and rigour. A number of inclusion and exclusion criteria were formulated. Relevant studies were initially taken as those that provided effect evaluations of existing CVE or PVE or counter-radicalization programmes or interventions. No exclusion criteria were formulated on geographical scope, as the realist review method suggests that we can learn as much from a deradicalization programme in Singapore as from a community engagement programme in the UK. However, studies that focused completely on counterterrorism measures, such as freezing finances, waterboarding and surveillance, but not the prevention and countering of violent extremism, were excluded from the review (*ibid.*: 5). This was because findings from the scoping phase indicated that these were considered counterterrorism measures and not countering violent extremism. Additionally excluded were studies that only looked at processes of radicalization or violent extremism, without providing insight into how they should be countered and studies that lacked any form of methodology (*ibid.*). With respect to the assessment of rigour, the studies were not judged in terms of how much they contributed to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather whether they provided insight into what CVE entails, in what contexts CVE measures are implemented, what the underlying mechanisms are and what outcome patterns are generated by these contexts and mechanisms?

In most realist reviews, evaluations are abundant and realist scholars thus have to carefully select which studies to include. However, while there were many relevant hits for the search words noted above, my first analysis revealed that actual empirical evaluations of CVE interventions or programmes were highly limited. Despite the more than 100,000 hits in the first search phase, only eleven studies were identified that could be considered 'effect evaluations'. These eleven studies attempted to assess impact or effectiveness with the target audience of specific CVE interventions or programmes, using qualitative or quantitative research methods or a combination of the two. Three studies, of which two were quasi-experimental, used a quantitative methodology. The remaining eight studies were qualitative in nature, based for example, on interviews, participant observation, focus groups and desk research. The studies were very heterogeneous in that they covered individual mentoring programmes, group-based resilience programmes and even the community-level effects of national programmes.

Due to the limited number and heterogeneous nature of the eleven studies, the larger set of full texts obtained were re-analysed using less strict exclusion criteria. To be included in the selection, the studies no longer necessarily had to be an effect evaluation, but could also be a process evaluation or theory-driven research focused on how violent extremism might be countered. Primary studies were not judged in terms of how much they contributed to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather by whether they provided insight into what CVE entails. Process and theory-driven evaluation can be very helpful in that sense. While these types of evaluations do not provide the 'O', they can give valuable information on configurations of contexts (C) and mechanisms (M). This search with less strict exclusion criteria produced a total of 41 relevant studies.

As noted, my initial realist review of CVE evaluation studies became outdated between submission and review of the article for publication. Indeed, important CVE evaluation studies were published in 2016 and early 2017. Thus, a new search was conducted, this time including the period 1 March 2016 – 1 March 2017. This led to the aforementioned addition of 50,061 hits. These hits were screened on the basis of the same inclusion and exclusion criteria applied earlier. This produced an additional 32 relevant studies, for a total of 73 studies. Fourteen of these studies can be considered 'effect evaluations'. Although some authors did not consider their own study an effect evaluation, due to the lack of control groups (randomized or not) or an absence of pre- and post-measurements, these 14 studies are labelled effect evaluations here, as they attempted to assess impact or effectiveness among a target audience of specific CVE interventions or programmes. These evaluations used a range of methodologies. Four used a quantitative methodology (of which two quasi-experimental); nine studies were qualitative in nature (conducted through, e.g., interviews, participant observation, focus groups and desk research); and one study applied a combination of methods (i.e., theory, surveys and focus groups). The review also revealed 14 studies that could be considered 'process evaluations'. These focused on the implementation and output of a specific CVE intervention or programme, using methods such as interviews with stakeholders (e.g., policymakers and practitioners) and document analysis (Gielen, 2017a).

The remaining studies were theory-driven in the sense that they drew on the radicalization and deradicalization literature (often based on empirical studies with the target audience) or other bodies of literature, such as psychology, the literature on gangs and cults and experiences of practitioners,

to assess what these might teach us for effective CVE measures and policies. These studies did not claim to offer policy evaluations in the sense that they provided positive or negative effects of interventions. Rather, they offered critical discussions of effectiveness in light of new or established scientific theory or empirical data (*ibid.*).

Part of the realist review is that no hierarchy is attributed to the different evaluations. Instead, the review applies the premise that each study can provide valuable information on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes in countering violent extremism. Figure 3.1 outlines the search and appraisal process in a flow chart.

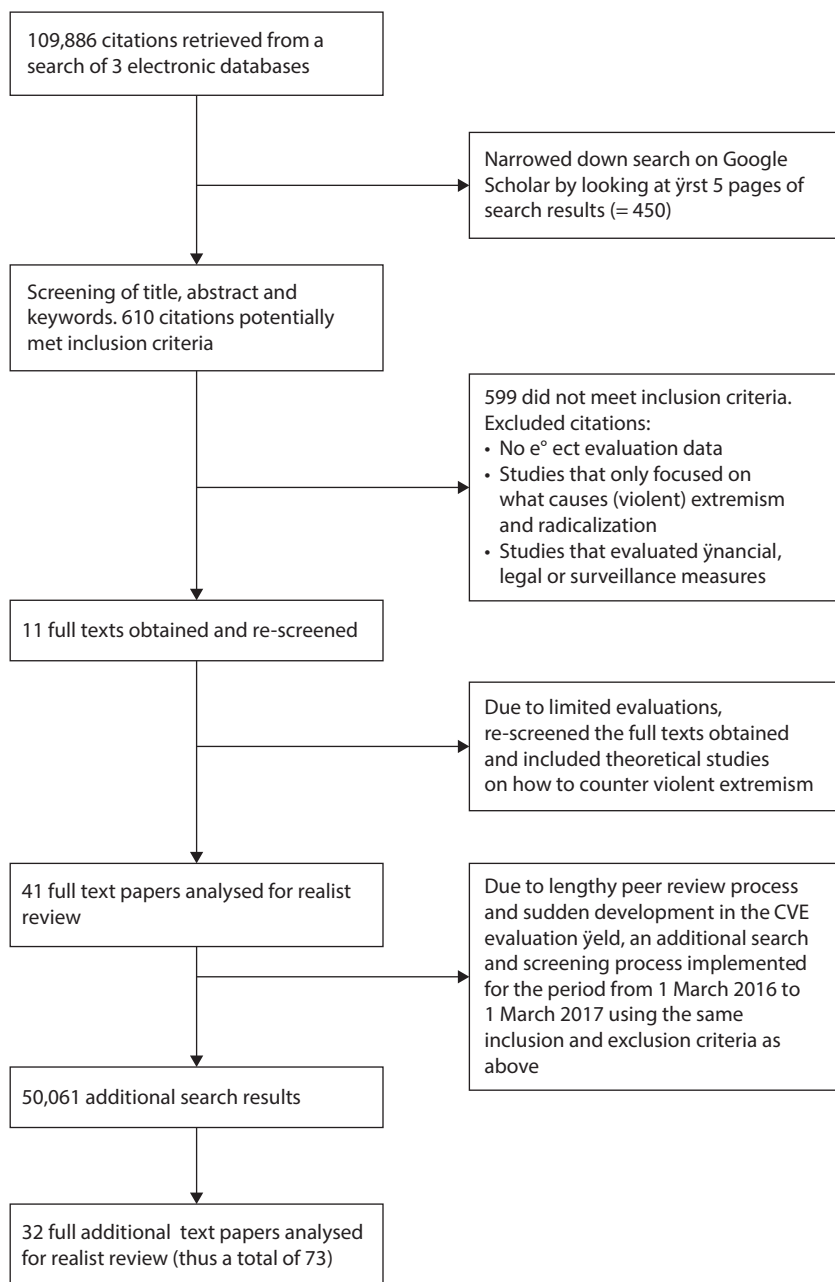
3.3.4 Step 4: Extracting the data

The realist review thus produced 73 relevant evaluation studies addressing a wide range of interventions and programmes, such as increasing resilience (in many different forms), CVE programmes in general, deradicalization and disengagement programmes, different forms of counter-communication, and programmes and interventions aimed at families around the globe and utilizing many different evaluation methods. The aim and focus of the review, in combination with the diversity of programmes and interventions addressed in the 73 studies, thus required a more systematic approach for extracting the data than the interpretive and non-replicable trail advised by Pawson (2006). The following six aspects of the primary studies were analysed (Gielen, 2017a):

- type of evaluation (if effect, what type and what methods; or process or theory-driven);
- type of intervention (CVE programme or single CVE intervention such as mentoring or family support programme);
- aim of the programme or intervention;
- description of the programme or intervention (e.g., target group and theory of change);
- outcome (positive and negative effects, side effects); and
- lessons learnt.

The latter four aspects were meant to draw out relevant C-M-Os, as only two of the 73 evaluation studies had applied the C-M-O model. It was impossible to summarize all of the extracted data in a matrix. Instead, the primary studies were presented in a table mentioning (1) the authors of the CVE evaluation study; (2) the type of programme they evaluated (a CVE programme in general or a specific intervention such as counter-narratives) and (3) the method used for the CVE evaluation study.

Figure 3.1: Flow chart of screening process for primary studies as part of the realist review



3.3.5 Step 5: Synthesizing the CVE studies

The fifth step of the review was to refine the programme theory that was developed in the first phase of the review: determining what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances (Pawson, 2006). However, the previous steps showed that CVE programmes and interventions are heterogeneous and scattered across a very broad policy spectrum. Due to a lack of evaluations in the CVE field, it was impossible to compare programme theories to determine what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances. As a consequence, synthesizing the data did not lead to a C-M-O model for how all the different CVE contexts, mechanisms and outcomes work in configuration. The possibilities would be endless, and without sufficient evaluations, no specified claims could be made about the different CVE interventions. The data from the studies was therefore synthesized by clustering the programmes and interventions and describing relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes separately. The final result was an unconfigured CVE model describing different types of programmes and interventions, alongside their underlying context, mechanisms and outcomes. This is presented in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: CVE contexts, mechanisms and outcomes unconfigured. Derived from the 73 CVE evaluation studies.

Contexts of CVE		Mechanisms of CVE		Outcomes of CVE	
C1	Individuals in one-to-one setting	M1	Mentoring to increase increase empathy, confidence, relationship skills and the ability to reflect on one's actions and life history	O1	Prevention of the breeding ground for radicalization
C2	Individuals in group setting	M2	Social and economic support to create a stable environment with a daily routine to create and sustain reintegration and rehabilitation	O2	Safeguarding individuals at risk
C3	Families	M3	Religious or ideological counselling to reduce the attraction of the extremist narrative	O3	Prevention of travel to a conflict zone
C4	Practitioners	M4	Alternative narratives to reduce or dispel the extremist narrative	O4	Disengagement (changing behaviour to dissuade from violence)
C5	Communities	M5	Psychological support and counselling to deal with existential questions, making sense of things and finding a meaningful place in society	O5	Deradicalization (the rejection of the extremist ideology)
C6	Pre-radicalization	M6	Education on citizenship, (digital) media literacy, prejudice and stereotyping and violent extremism to enhance critical thinking skills and increase resilience of young people	O5	Reintegration (the achievement of 'normal life')
C7	Vulnerable at risk	M7	Family support, parental coaching and awareness raising to help parents identify early-warning signals, stimulate positive parenting styles by reducing the attraction of extremist groups and enhancing protective factors		
C8	Radicalized	M8	Training and awareness raising for practitioners, information-sharing protocols and capacity building for key institutions to increase support available for vulnerable individuals		
C9	Violent extremists	M9	Training, awareness raising and capacity building for communities and peers to increase community resilience and identify and support vulnerable individuals		
C10	Governmental organizations	M10	Engagement between communities and key institutions such as police, social services and other (local) officials to improve and sustain trust-based relationships between communities and institutions		
C11	Non-governmental organizations				
C12	Voluntary				
C13	Compulsory				
C14	Trust				
C15	Transparency				

3.3.6 Step 6: Dissemination of findings

The final step of the realist review was deriving policy recommendations and disseminating these in the policy arena, in forms such as 'remember mechanism X', 'beware of context Y' and 'take care of Z' (Pawson, 2006; Gielen, 2017: 16). But in this phase no refined programme theory could be produced. However, the developed synthesized model could provide a starting point for new reviews zooming in on specific programmes and interventions, such as mentoring and community engagement, and also offer a starting point for branching out to other bodies of literature in which evaluations are available.

3.4 Adapted heuristic guidelines for realist review for complex social problems

The above exercise demonstrates how realist review can be applied to the CVE field and that such a review can be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the different types of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes that fall under the conceptual umbrella of CVE. However, application of the realist review method and the heuristic guidelines did pose some challenges. These challenges cannot be attributed solely to the complexity of CVE, but rather apply to all complex social programmes with the following characteristics:

- The complexity of the problem implies a nearly endless array of unique interventions, each with multiple underlying mechanisms and contextual conditions; in short, the set of C-M-O configurations is vast.
- The complexity of the problem and its solution(s) results in a lack of evaluations. This leads to a limited set of primary studies that address different programmes and interventions consisting of multiple theories, and thus making it impossible to draw out dominant theories.
- The diverse nature of the studies requires a systematic approach to data extraction.
- Rapid development of the field creates the risk of a review soon becoming outdated.

The above-mentioned challenges require that the current heuristic guidelines for realist review be adapted. These adaptations will be applicable beyond complex programmes such as CVE, to other fields that are similarly challenged by a lack of evaluation studies and heterogeneous programmes and interventions. Table 3.3 presents an overview of the extent that the heuristic guidelines for realist review require adaptation in order to be suitable for other complex social programmes.

Table 3.3: Adaption of heuristic guidelines for complex social programmes with heterogeneous interventions and a lack of evaluation studies

1. Clarify the scope of the review

- a) *Rationale for review:* Follow the original guidelines.
- b) *Objectives and focus:* the research question still has an explanatory focus, but seeks to draw out relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes instead of testing and comparing different theories.
- c) *Scoping the literature:* the scoping phase should be used as an opportunity to conceptually grasp the complexity of the social programme and gain a better understanding of the underlying interventions. the results of this scoping phase will be relevant in the second stage of the review, the search for primary studies, as it provides insight on what search words should be used.
- d) *Development of a theoretical model:* developing a theoretical model for what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances is impossible in this scoping phase. it is only possible to develop a conceptual model of what the complex social programme (and all its underlying interventions) involves.

2. Searching for primary studies

- a) *Collect evidence by searching for primary studies:* primary studies do not have to provide empirical evidence on the programme theories under investigation. they should provide insight on what the complex social programme entails, specifically the underlying interventions and the relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes.
- b) *Provide details on the search for primary studies:* Follow the original guidelines.

3. Quality appraisal

- a) *Assess relevance:* if there is a lack of evaluations on the social programme under investigation, the inclusion criteria for primary studies should be less strict. Besides qualitative and quantitative effect studies, process evaluations and theory-driven studies should also be included.
- b) *Assess rigour:* does the study help in gaining a better understanding of CVE, an underlying intervention and C-m-o patterns?
- c) *Create document flow diagram:* Follow the original guidelines.

4. Extracting the data

- a) *Extract data:* use a more systematic approach to extract the data, such as by type of intervention, aim of the programme or intervention, description of the programme or intervention (e.g., target group and theory of change), outcomes (positive, negative, side effects) and lessons learnt.
- b) *Provide information on the characteristics of the documents included in the review:* Follow the original guidelines.

5. Synthesize evidence

- a) *Analysis and synthesis processes:* provide a detailed description of the analysis and synthesis processes, by developing a more refined theoretical model of the complex social programme in which different interventions and their C-m-o patterns are described.

6. Disseminate the findings

- a) For publication in academic journals that are unfamiliar with the realist review method, it may be impossible to fully conform to the r AmAses publication standards. rather than describing each (iterative) step in detail, a brief description should be provided of how the study abides by the principles of realist review.
- b) For dissemination of findings in the policy arena, follow original guidelines, but also present the more refined theoretical model of what the complex social programme precisely entails.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated how realist review should be undertaken correctly and if and how realist review can be applied to a complex social issue outside the healthcare sector, in which realist review has already been regularly applied. The chapter presented heuristic guidelines for realist review synthesizing the theoretical and empirical work on realist review by Pawson and colleagues. These heuristic guidelines were applied to CVE. Countering violent extremism is an apt example case because (i) violent extremism is considered a wicked and complex problem; (ii) the complex phenomenon of violent extremism and the solution to it, in the form of CVE, are highly contingent; (iii) CVE is a field challenged by a lack of evaluations, and realist review claims to offer a suitable solution to that challenge; (iv) theories on violent extremism and CVE are still developing; (v) the systematic review method proved unsuitable for the field, due to the lack of evaluations and particularly the heterogeneity and poor methodology of those CVE evaluation studies that are available; and (vi) the application of realist review to CVE is unprecedented.

The exercise illustrated that realistic review is a very suitable method for the field of countering violent extremism. However, the heuristic guidelines developed in table 3.1, based on the current methodological and empirical literature on realist review, do not address how to tackle a realist review in domains where (i) the complexity of the problem leads to a vast set of C-M-O configurations, (ii) the complexity results in a lack of evaluation studies, (iii) the heterogeneity of the limited available studies requires a different form of data extraction and (iv) the rapid development of the field creates the risk of a review soon becoming outdated.

While the realist review of CVE evaluation studies showed that this evaluation method can be helpful in gaining a better understanding of complex social programmes that are characterized by heterogeneous interventions and limited evaluation studies, it also illustrated that adaption of the heuristic guidelines for realist review is required. The adapted guidelines were presented in table 3.3, but the most important adaptations can be summarized as follows:

- The focus of the review should be on getting a better sense of what the wicked and complex issue entails. The research questions then still have an explanatory focus, but are geared toward drawing out relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes instead of testing and comparing different theories.

- With a highly complex problem like CVE, the scoping phase is used as an opportunity to conceptually grasp the issue instead of to draw out programme theories. The results of this scoping phase are relevant to the search for primary studies as they provide insight into what search words should be used.
- Developing a theoretical model for what works, for whom, how and in what context is an end result of the review instead of the starting point.
- Primary studies should not be judged in terms of how much they contribute to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather if they provide insight into what the complex programme entails and specifically what relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are related to the complex programme.
- If evaluations (primary studies) are lacking, inclusion criteria should be less strict. Besides qualitative and/or quantitative studies, process evaluations and theory-driven studies should also be included.
- Part of the essence of realist review is that it is not replicable. Rather, it is an interactive and iterative process that requires researchers to leave an interpretive trail. However, wicked problems such as CVE require a more systematic approach to analysing and synthesizing primary studies which focuses on what exactly is considered CVE and what its relevant contexts, mechanisms, outcomes and lessons learnt are.
- The continuous development of a field as complex as CVE means that a realist review is never finished. Rather, it is a contribution to systematic knowledge accumulation on the topic and can be used in evidence-based policy theory as an input for future reviews and evaluations.

The final point deserves special attention, because as this review illustrates, in just one year's time, the field of CVE developed so rapidly that the number of studies relevant to the realist review nearly doubled. While this is a very positive development, it basically meant that two reviews had to be conducted, and the original article had to be completely rewritten to include all the additional contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. While the article has now been published (Gielen, 2017a) the rapid development of the CVE field presumably will continue. This does raise questions about how long the findings of such a review remain current and thus relevant for policymakers. Ideally, the academic community should develop a database similar to that of Cochrane in the medical field, which make it possible to take stock of evaluation developments in CVE and use the newest CVE evaluation studies as the input for more refined realist reviews.

To conclude, the realist review method proved suitable for the evaluation of a domain as complex as CVE. However, it required the development *and* adaptation of heuristic guidelines. The adapted heuristic guidelines can be used for future reviews of CVE programmes and of specific interventions, but also for other complex social programmes that face similar challenges as the CVE field. Additional realist reviews will remain necessary to contribute to further and up-to-date knowledge accumulation and C-M-O specifications. Only then will it be possible to contribute to the ultimate goal of realist review: informing policymakers to help them make more informed, evidence-based policy decisions.



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4 Supporting Families of Foreign Fighters: A Realistic Approach for Measuring Effectiveness¹¹

4.1 Introduction

Family support is a relatively new approach within the field of CVE. It was first adopted by Germany in 2012, after which many other countries in Europe and beyond followed. Following the German model, ‘family hotlines’ have been launched over the past years in the Netherlands, France and Austria. These help lines are aimed at parents and relatives concerned about or confronted with the foreign fighter phenomenon. Via the telephone hotline, advice is provided and if necessary referrals are given to specialized family support organizations. The aim is to prevent the further radicalization of young Muslims and to support families whose loved ones have travelled to Iraq or Syria. In other countries, such as Denmark (Aarhus), family talk groups have been set up by the municipality, and in Belgium a family talk group (Les Parents Concernés) was set up by affected parents.

Supporting families is considered valuable for several reasons, and can be provided at different stages (Gielen, 2014).

- At the earliest stage, family support can be provided to parents of individuals at risk, to address their concerns and help them maintain a positive family environment and an open atmosphere in which the child can discuss extremist ideas and the parents can provide positive alternatives.
- If radical or extremist ideas do lead to travel to a conflict zone abroad, such as Iraq or Syria, foreign fighters often remain in touch with their family back home. Family support can then be aimed at facilitating contact with children or relatives and creating a positive environment for a child to return home to.
- If extremist views lead to violence and ultimately imprisonment, families can be supported during their relative’s imprisonment and afterward

¹¹ This is an edited version of a previously published article: Gielen, Amy-Jane (2015a), “Supporting families of foreign fighters: A realistic approach for measuring the effectiveness.” *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 2, pp. 21-48.

in the reintegration and rehabilitation process, such as helping them return to school and find a job. If practitioners are able to create and sustain a relationship with families of foreign fighters, it will be easier to create an entry point for contact with the foreign fighter upon his or her return. This is of key importance, as families play a crucial role in deradicalization and disengagement work (Van San *et al.*, 2011; Sieckelink & De Winter, 2015).

- Family members, such as brothers, sisters and cousins, as well as peers, form an at-risk group of travelling to Iraq or Syria. Families and the broader professional social network around the family (such as school teachers) can be supported to act on early-warning signals and thus prevent others from travelling to conflict areas.
- Providing family support can encourage foreign fighters to come home. A lot of foreign fighters are afraid of returning because they fear prosecution or Guantanamo Bay.¹² In one country where local-level family and individual support was offered, parents spread the word that ‘the government is here to help’. This message found its way back to the foreign fighters in Syria, providing a powerful narrative which highlights the internal/external and local/global dimension of support.
- Finally, foreign fighters cause such a degree of grief, anxiety, despair and upset for family members that they may no longer be able to participate actively in society; for example, they may become unable to work. Psychological counselling is essential in such circumstances.

This chapter looks at family support as part of a CVE programme. What types of family support are offered? How can its effectiveness be measured? To answer these questions, the chapter draws on realistic evaluation, which revolves around the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’ (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). It discusses the different forms and merits of family support across Europe, drawing on lessons learnt by practitioners engaging in family support within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of the European Commission. The chapter includes two case studies in which I myself provided support to families of foreign fighters. Based on these practitioner experiences, hypotheses are developed on family support as part of a CVE strategy, which can in turn be used for empirical testing.

12 In my own experience and that of Belgium organization ‘Les Parents Concernés’, foreign fighters who have become disillusioned and want to return fear being transported to Guantanamo Bay. It seems this is a narrative being used to prevent Europeans from returning home.

4.2 Family support practices across Europe

Throughout Europe several countries and organizations are already providing telephone hotlines and family support. The following three types can be distinguished:

- national and federal forms of support, such as the telephone hotlines originating in Germany with referrals to specialized family support organizations;
- community-based telephone hotlines such as in the Netherlands and Belgium; and
- municipal forms of family support, either for individuals or group-based.

National and federal forms of support

With the launch of a family hotline in 2012, Germany was a pioneer in the offering of family support as part of a CVE strategy. The hotline, also known as the Advice Centre on Radicalization (*Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung*), was set up by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) as a general point of contact for any individual concerned about the possible radicalization of a family member or acquaintance and with questions on the topic. People phoning the hotline receive targeted assistance. The caller has a first point of contact for answers to frequently asked questions and general information about the problem. Help may be offered in individual cases, alongside referrals to a suitable agency. Liaison assistance can be provided between the individual in question and relevant support agencies (governmental and non-governmental), specialists and fellow sufferers (BAMF, 2015).

In cases where assistance via the telephone is not sufficient, callers are referred to one of four non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Germany: Hayat, the Violence Prevention Network, Vaya Kitab or IFAK. These are authorized and funded by the government to provide family support in cases of (possible) radicalization or foreign fighters. Each NGO has a different background and approach to family support (*ibid.*).

Hayat which in Arabic means 'life', already had a strong tradition in family counselling within the ZDK (Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur), a non-governmental initiative to address threats to democratic culture by extremism. The basis for Hayat was particularly formed by 'Exit Germany', a deradicalization and disengagement programme for right-wing extremists,

and a project called Strengthening Families Against Violence and Extremism, which supports family members and peers of young people in Islamic extremist environments (Dantschke, 2010; Koehler, 2013). Hayat seeks to convince those at risk to voluntarily refrain from travelling to a conflict zone and encourages those who have already joined a terrorist organization to return and reintegrate into society (*ibid.*). It does this by performing a risk assessment and supporting and empowering the family network around the individual in question, by for example, providing them with information and counter-narratives against Salafi-jihadi radicalization. The counsellors are bound by confidentiality, unless they learn of a planned terrorist attack or a trip to or from a conflict zone (*ibid.*).

The Violence Prevention Network is the second of the four German NGOs. It focuses on dissuasion of incarcerated young people from ideological violence (European Network of Deradicalisation, 2015). It too has a long history of counselling, particularly of neo-Nazis and their families, and has now extended its expertise to the foreign fighter phenomenon. Unlike Hayat, the network's target group is mainly people who have already committed acts of violent extremism and are imprisoned. It combines training against violence with civic and pedagogical training. These training modules are offered over a five-month period during imprisonment, followed by coaching after release. The families are also included in the training and coaching process, both during and after imprisonment (*ibid.*). Vaja Kitab is another German group that offers support for parents and family members of young Muslims struggling with religious identity issues and the attraction of extremist Islamist organizations. Vaja Kitab started out as a youth work organization and is located in Bremen, where there is a right-wing scene. Initially Vaja focused on young people aged between 14 and 20 leaning toward right-wing and intolerant attitudes. Drawing on those experiences, Vaja Kitab now also offers counselling to parents and other family members, as well as to practitioners who are concerned about potential Islamist extremism. Their aim is to strengthen bonds between families and young people and their social environment (RAN, 2015).

The fourth and final organization is the Association for Multicultural Child and Youth Services – Migration Work (IFAK) located in Bochum. Its Advisory Network for Tolerance and Coexistence (Beratungsnetzwerk für Toleranz und Miteinander) supports parents, schools, associations and educational institutions confronted with children, pupils or clients who are insecure in their identity formation and turning to Islamist values,

traditions and structures. Its advisory network provides the necessary background knowledge, as well as effective and useful means of action in such a situation (IFAK, 2015)

In sum, the 'German model' consists of partnership between the government and civil society actors. All NGOs are funded by the German government, but they do not work as an extended arm of the government, police or security services. They all have a strong history in supporting families, either of right-wing extremists or migrant communities. The German model has now been exported across Europe to France, Austria and two London boroughs. However, only parts of the German model have been implemented at these other locations. France, for example, set up a national hotline, but callers are not anonymous and may be referred to police. France also lacks Germany's institutional infrastructure and rich history of NGOs that can provide family support in relation to violent extremism. In France, if additional help is needed, families are referred to existing social work organizations (RAN, 2015).

Community-operated hotlines and family support

Volunteers from the Moroccan community in the Netherlands recently launched a community-based hotline. The hotline serves as a resource for parents and relatives concerned that their children or family members might be drifting toward extremist groups like ISIS. Callers are referred to social and religious services if necessary. A similar helpline was launched in Belgium, by a parental support group called Les Parents Concernés. It is run by parents whose children have already travelled to a conflict zone. They use their experience to help other parents prevent their children from leaving. They also offer support to families with a loved one who has already left or would like to return. The UK and Sweden offer other examples in which key figures within a community provide family support. In Sweden, for example, a psychologist from the Somali community has supported several Somali parents whose children travelled to Syria (RAN, 2015).

Municipal forms of family support

The municipality of Aarhus in Denmark has set up a network group for families whose children have travelled to Syria, as part of a broader, existing CVE programme. The talk group is meant for exchanges of experiences among parents in similar situations. Access to the meetings is by invitation

only, with invitations extended by the police or municipality. However, at the meetings, no police or municipal authorities are involved. There is a facilitator present and sometimes a psychologist attends. Every so often a representative of the intelligence service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are invited so that parents can express concerns and ask specific questions (Gielen, 2014).

Social workers in the city of Antwerp noticed that while some parents of Belgium converts who had travelled to Syria actively reached out for help, a large group of Muslim parents did not. The municipality of Antwerp therefore decided to approach these families by making house calls. As such, parents were given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss their fears and anxieties. They also received support in maintaining their relationship with a child in Syria or Iraq. This initiative has focused on improving communication within families, as family relations often become strained or in other ways problematic when extremism is involved. The counselling is continued upon the child's return from Syria or Iraq, complemented by a tailor-made exit programme for the individual in question (*ibid.*).

In contrast to Antwerp, the city of Vilvoorde in Belgium has opted for group-based family support, so that families in similar situations can share experiences and support each other. For returnees, again, the municipality tailors exit programmes, which include families as much as possible (*ibid.*).

4.3 Measuring the effectiveness of family support

Beyond an output evaluation of the Hayat intervention (Koehler, 2013) and overviews of several family support interventions (Gielen, 2014), the different forms of family support across Europe have not been evaluated. This is partly because family support is a relatively new approach, but it is also due to the general lack of evaluations in the field of CVE (Lousberg *et al.*, 2009; Lub, 2009, 2013; Bovenkerk & Van Hemert, 2013; Gielen & Junne, 2008; Gielen & Grin, 2010; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Those evaluations that have been done, for example, by Gielen (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010), Bovenkerk *et al.* (2013), Lub (2013) and Feddes *et al.* (2013), do not meet the 'golden standard' applied in the field of medicine; that is, randomized controlled trials. This is the classic method of quantitative-oriented experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation in which the target audience of an intervention is divided into an experimental and a control group, often at random.

The merit of this method is its ability to demonstrate a causal relationship between an intervention and a measured impact. However, as noted before, this method is also criticized. Like other interventions in the social domain, CVE interventions are not implemented in an isolated clinical environment, but in a social context. Their effect is influenced by and dependent upon the social context in which they are undertaken (Uitermark *et al.*, 2012).

To better account for non-linear relationships and context-dependence, Pawson and Tilly (1997) developed the realistic evaluation method (Pawson 2002a, 2002b), which is specifically designed for the evaluation of social programmes. Social programmes are considered “social systems in which there is an interplay between individual and institution, structure and agency, and the micro and macro level” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 63). Social programmes thus produce different contextual conditions. The realistic evaluation method is a step toward settling the paradigm war between the quantitative and qualitative schools of thought. Pawson and Tilley (*ibid.*) claim that quantitative knowledge often ignores context, while more narrative or interpretive approaches are unable to produce lessons that can be applied in other contexts. Instead, Pawson and Tilley (*ibid.*) stress the importance of the mechanisms (M) that underlie an intervention, and introduce the notion of context (C), stemming from the realist proposition that the “relationship between causal mechanisms and their effects are not fixed, but contingent” (*ibid.*: 69). Realistic evaluation is thus concerned with the combination of mechanisms and context leading to outcome patterns, also known as context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations (C-M-Os). C-M-Os indicate how programmes activate mechanisms, among whom, and in what circumstances they can lead to certain outcomes (*ibid.*: 57).

In short, realistic evaluation revolves around the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’. The essence of realistic evaluation is development and testing of C-M-O configurations. Realistic evaluation starts from theory, to develop hypotheses on what might work, for whom and in what circumstances. Hypotheses thus relate to relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes and how they might work in configuration (*ibid.*: 85). What follows is multi-method data collection to test such hypotheses. As noted earlier, realistic evaluation does not favour quantitative methods over qualitative methods, or vice versa; it argues that we should use the best of both worlds (*ibid.*). The final step of the evaluation is not to make generalizations, but to specify what works, for whom, in what context, how and why (*ibid.*: 86). So, if we want to apply realistic evaluation to

family support programmes, we need to start with theory and develop hypotheses on C-M-O configurations for family support. These hypotheses are built around the questions of what *might* work, for whom and in what circumstances in family support, in order to prevent and counter violent extremism.

We know from our earlier discussion that the literature on what works in the field of CVE is very limited, let alone in relation to family support as part of a CVE strategy. As a consequence, there is no evidence-based family support model for individuals at risk, foreign fighters or returnees. However, quite a lot of practice-based knowledge has been gathered on this topic, for example, within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), which was set up by the European Commission as a network of networks for practitioners in the field of CVE to exchange best practices and lessons. RAN published its first *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* in 2014, alongside the EU Commission Communication *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response*. This first edition of the collection was based on two years of exchanges among some 1,000 practitioners at more than 50 different meetings, seminars and workshops. The collection identifies eight approaches commonly used by practitioners and EU member states to prevent and counter-radicalization:

- training and raising awareness among frontline practitioners;
- deradicalization and disengagement programmes;
- conversation, both individual (mentoring) and collective (intergroup communication);
- educating young people;
- community engagement and empowerment;
- supporting and empowering families;
- development and dissemination of counter-communication ('counter-narratives') in both online and offline domains; and
- developing an institutional infrastructure.

The RAN publication presents practices and lessons learnt in family support compiled during a number of events held specifically on family support, such as a meeting on community engagement and working with families in relation to foreign fighters in Syria held 20-21 September 2013. Event outcomes were also integrated into the *RAN Declaration of Good Practices for Engagement with Foreign Fighters for Prevention, Outreach, Rehabilitation and Reintegration* (RAN, 2013) which contains 21 good practices for family

support. Because of the rapid development of the field and challenges facing a number of EU member states in this domain, RAN held a cities conference on foreign fighters in Syria on 30 January 2014. It gathered 120 local practitioners from 23 cities in the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as 50 participants from the national authorities of most EU member states (RAN, 2014). In two workshops, the family support practices of the city of Antwerp (Belgium) and Aarhus (Denmark) were highlighted (*ibid.*).

Finally, I myself provided family support to several families of foreign fighters in the Netherlands. As no family support structures were available in the Netherlands at the time, the parents turned to me as a researcher frequently heard in the Dutch media stressing the importance of supporting families. It is precisely these types of practitioner experiences and reflections that Pawson and Tilley (1997) consider valuable for developing rudimentary theory on C-M-O configurations when evidence-based theory is lacking. They advocate the use of ‘folk theories’ (*ibid.*: 88); that is, what practitioners and policymakers in the field of CVE deem plausible programme mechanisms and contexts. In other words, we are interested in what it is about the family support programme that might generate change in people vulnerable to radicalization. And, what sort of people in what circumstances might family support be successful with? Using ‘folk theories’ is not uncommon in the social sciences. Other scholars have referred to it as *reflection-in-action* (Schön & Rein, 1994), *mētis* (Scott, 1998), *local knowledge* (Yanow, 1996, 2006) and *policy theories* (Hoogerwerf, 1990).

4.4 Folk theories on family support: Lessons learnt

During 2012–2015 I worked as an account manager for RAN, and I was responsible for the working group on foreign fighters. In that capacity I (co-)organized and attended the above-mentioned meetings and wrote the meeting minutes and reports. I co-authored the first and second edition of the *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* (RAN, 2014; RAN, 2015) and the *RAN Declaration of Good Practices for Engagement with Foreign Fighters for Prevention, Outreach, Rehabilitation and Reintegration* (RAN, 2013). The practitioner exchange within RAN, alongside my own experiences in providing support to the families of foreign fighters, provided valuable lessons on family support in relation to foreign fighters. The most important lessons are summarized below.

Forms of family support

Family support can take different forms. These differ in their degree of proactivity. The setting up of an infrastructure through which parents are able to seek help is important. The special hotline, or telephone number, that people can call if they have concerns about a family member is one example. Callers can then be referred to existing government agencies or NGOs or, as in the German case, to highly specialized NGOs set up for the primary purpose of providing family support in relation to radicalization, violent extremism and foreign fighters (RAN, 2013; Gielen, 2014). Alternatively, family support can be initiated by government authorities, both local and national. These can provide assistance at an individual or collective level. For example, government workers can make house calls to parents whose children are have become radicalized or are considered vulnerable to radicalization. Parents of foreign fighters can be invited to special family support groups in which they can talk about their experiences with fellow sufferers. Courses can be offered to parents to enhance their parenting skills. Finally, family support case managers can refer family members to other professional services, such as mental healthcare, media training and help with practical matters such as social services (e.g., to discontinue any social welfare benefits or student grants for the foreign fighter) (*ibid.*). Whatever form of family support is chosen, it must be sensitive to cultural issues and local contexts. In certain communities, cultural barriers may inhibit people from seeking help, and creative and proactive interventions might be necessary to overcome these barriers. Examples are the community-based telephone hotline that was set up in the Netherlands and the assistance extended by the Somali psychologist in Sweden to families of foreign fighters of Somali descent. In small, ethnically diverse communities in which peers have recruited each other and families blame each other, providing family support individually rather than group-based, might prove more effective. Group-based forms of family support might work better in large cities, with the relative anonymity they offer (*ibid.*).

Stages of family support

Family support can be offered at different stages. At the earliest stages, it can be targeted at parents of individuals at risk. They can be encouraged to talk about their worries and helped to create an open atmosphere in which children can talk and discuss extreme ideals, and positive alternatives can be provided. If these ideals evolve into violent extremist behaviour – perhaps

resulting in imprisonment – family support can continue. For example, the Violence Prevention Network does this in Germany. Parents can be offered help in rehabilitating and reintegrating their child after imprisonment, for instance, with assistance in maintaining a daily routine, going to school and finding a job. Family support related to foreign fighters can be provided before, during and after travel. An example of support during travel is helping to establish contact between parents and child via social media (Facebook and Twitter) or other communication channels (such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Sure Spot and Skype). As noted, it can be important to support parents in creating a positive environment for a child to return home to, by helping them keep open communication channels with their children. In several of the above-mentioned practices, practitioners from NGOs and municipalities have even helped parents write emails and messages that they can send to their children in Syria or Iraq (*ibid.*).

Content of family support

It is crucial that any type of family support, both individual and collective, is as private and confidential as possible. Transparency and confidentiality is essential for establishing a trust-based relationship with families. Family support should not be provided as a means to gain more information in a criminal investigation. As such, clarity about the goals and intentions of engagement is essential. Family support should always respect client confidentiality. Only in situations where family councillors learn of a planned terrorist attack or travel to or from a terrorist conflict zone, should client confidentiality be breached. In these cases, family councillors should be open about their contact with police and security services. Whatever type of support is necessary, it is crucial to provide factual information to family members, particularly in terms of criminal law, for example, whether the family member in question has committed a crime (*ibid.*).

Different families will require different types of support because they will have different questions. For instance, some will have legal questions ('Will my child be prosecuted upon return?'), religious questions ('What does it mean when my child says I should make a *hijra*¹³ and how should I respond?'), questions about extremist organizations ('Has my child joined ISIS or a different group?') and practical questions ('Do I need to cancel my child's healthcare insurance?'). Some families benefit from exchanging experiences

13 Move to an Islamic country, in which usually the so-called Islamic State is meant.

with others in similar positions. Most families will be seeking answers to a combination of the above-mentioned questions, which in essence means that each family will require tailor-made support.

Support can be purely therapeutic, stimulating parents to address their emotions and anxieties, or encourage families to actively challenge and deconstruct some of the extremist narratives, as in the German Hayat programme. Practitioners can help families in adjusting their communications and interaction skills with the relative if they fear their relative is (becoming) radicalized. Family members, in that case, can have numerous reactions, some of which might include the following: they are very strict (authoritarian); they are unable to set boundaries and unresponsive to their child's needs (neglectful); or they are responsive to the needs of their child, but lack in rules and discipline (permissive). The fourth and best parenting style is authoritative parenting, in which parents are both responsive and able to set boundaries.¹⁴

Thus, it is important to help families develop an authoritative parenting style, though intervention providers should discourage family members from being authoritarian. An example is a father who threw his 16-year-old son's laptop out the window when he found out that he was chatting online to the terrorist organization Jabhat-al-Nusra. He lacked effective parenting skills with which to deal with the situation. It is important to support parents in talking to their children, particularly when children are still involved in extremist networks. In cases where children have already travelled to a conflict zone, parents usually respond with anger or grief when their child contacts them. The focus of contact between children and their parents should be on maintaining a positive relationship, by talking about daily events, regular family life and the child's well-being where possible. In many cases the radicalized or potentially radicalized individual is pressured by the extremist network to break parental contact. Parental disapproval and confrontation provides a ready excuse (RAN, 2013).

Family members of radicalized individuals often blame the government and police and security services for their failure to stop the racialization process

14 These four categories were presented by Stijn Sieckelincx from the University of Utrecht at a RAN INT/EXT meeting on 26-27 May 2014 in Berlin. These four categories were recognized by the various European family support practitioners attending the meeting

or travel of their child to a conflict zone. As a consequence family support groups often tend to revolve around issues of blame. It can be helpful to directly include those 'blamed' when engaging. For example, this is being practised in the Danish model, in which every so often representatives of the Danish Intelligence Service PET and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are invited to the family support groups in the city of Aarhus (*ibid.*)

Both in the literature (Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015) and in practice (RAN, 2013, 2015) it is recognized that families can have a key role in deradicalization as well as in the prevention of radicalization. However, the role of the family may differ greatly from case to case. Some families may have protective factors like a stable and positive family relationship. Other families may have risk factors such as unstable or negative family relationships or even a direct negative influence in the sense that they promote extremist ideology. So choosing which family members to involve is crucial. This requires a proper assessment of family members and their potential positive or negative influence. It is important to not only include parents, but to focus on the complete family system. Brothers, sisters, cousins and peers can all be affected if a family member or friend has radicalized or turned to violent extremism. Besides being emotionally affected, they are also themselves vulnerable to radicalization. In many cases family members and peers have been recruited for violent extremism (RAN, 2013).

4.5 Developing a theory on family support for empirical testing

The above practice-based knowledge, also known as 'folk theories' or 'policy theories', provides us with insights that can be used to develop hypotheses on so-called C-M-O configurations. These hypotheses provide a starting point for empirical testing of family support programmes in a specific municipality, a country or across Europe. To develop hypotheses on C-M-O configurations we need to specify the relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns of family support based on practice and lessons learnt.

Contexts

Contexts are relevant conditions that influence and affect the intervention or programme. Context should not be confused with location. What is contextually significant may relate not only to the location or physical

space where the intervention is implemented but also to the knowledge, capacities and experience of the key actors providing or receiving the intervention, the interpersonal relationships between the intervention provider and clients and also the relationships between staff members, the institutional setting and the broader social system (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 69).

From the above-described family support practices and lessons learnt, several contexts can be identified. The first concerns the target group of the family support: families whose child is an individual at risk (C₁), someone who has become radicalized (C₂), someone who has travelled to a conflict zone (C₃), a family member or friend of someone who has travelled to a conflict zone (C₄), someone who has been convicted for acting on extremist ideas and is serving a prison sentence (C₅) or a radical or extremist who needs to be reintegrated into society upon return from a conflict zone or after severing a prison sentence (C₆).

Although context is not a synonym for geography, one cannot overlook the differences between cities and countries in terms of family support. Additional relevant contexts are family support provided at a national or central government level (C₇), a federal level (C₈) or local level (C₉). Family support can, furthermore, be provided by 'regular' practitioners who are used to engaging with youths and families (C₁₀), by highly-specialized practitioners with a long tradition of supporting families of (violent) extremists (C₁₁) or by members of the community (C₁₂). Differentiation should also be made between big – and therefore relatively anonymous – cities (C₁₃) and smaller cities and villages in which community members know each other rather well (C₁₄). Also, family support can be provided on an individual basis (C₁₅) or group basis (C₁₆).

Parenting skills of the parents receiving family support might be another important contextual factor. Parents can be very strict, also known as authoritarian (C₁₇), or able to set clear rules and boundaries while at the same time remaining responsive to their child's needs, known as authoritative (C₁₈). Or the style of parenting can be considered neglectful (C₁₉). Finally, some parents are responsive to the needs of their child, but lack rules and discipline (C₂₀). Certain language (C₂₁) or cultural barriers such as shame (C₂₂) might influence whether and how families seek help from either statutory (C₂₃) or non-statutory bodies (C₂₄) that are either government-funded (C₂₅) or work on a voluntary basis (C₂₆).

Mechanisms

Mechanisms describe the underlying theories of the programme or intervention. Mechanisms are thus not the measures of a programme itself, but are the aspects of those measures that might trigger change (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 66). For example, a government or a community telephone hotline is often part of a CVE family support programme. However, the telephone hotline is not the mechanism. The mechanism underlying the hotline is provision of an accessible point of contact that family members can turn to with questions about (possible) radicalization of a relative (M1). A telephone hotline can also connect parents to additional forms of family support, and thus increase protective factors against radicalization (M2). A telephone hotline can provide information on early-warning signals so that parents can better detect radicalization (M3). Support groups for individuals and collective family support are additional interventions that may be part of a CVE family support programme. Again, individual family support is not the mechanism underlying the programme. Individual family support is meant to coach parents and thus help them develop or maintain an 'authoritative parenting style', in which there is a good balance between being responsive to the needs of their child and the ability to set boundaries. As opposed to the confrontational, permissive or neglectful parenting style, an authoritative parenting style helps create an open setting in which the extremist ideas can be discussed and positive alternatives can be provided (M4). Individual family support or group-based family support can advise families on their direct contacts with their child, for example, via social media, to help them establish or re-establish positive family relationships (M5). Individual or collective family support can also provide parents with counter-narratives to help them deconstruct their child's extremist narrative (M6). Providing information on an individual or group basis about the recruitment mechanisms that might be applied by their loved one who travelled to Syria or another conflict zone, equips families better to detect possible recruitment, so other family members and friends can be safeguarded (M7).

Outcomes

Outcome patterns consist of the positive and negative (unintended) consequences of programmes, which are a result from the activation of different mechanisms in different contexts (*ibid.*: 217). At the earliest stages an outcome pattern can be the prevention of radicalization (O1) or prevention of travel (O2). When radicalization does occur, family support can be

offered for purposes of deradicalization (O₃) or in case of travel to stimulate foreign fighters to return home (O₄), or for rehabilitation (O₅) of convicted extremists or returned foreign fighters.

Configured C-M-O hypotheses

Based on practitioner insights, we now have a better understanding of relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes in family support. The next step is to translate these unconfigured C-M-Os into C-M-O configurations that provide us with a rudimentary theory on family support as part of a CVE policy, which can be used for empirical testing.

- At the earliest stages, to prevent radicalization (O₁) or travel (O₂), family support can be provided to parents of individuals at risk (C₁), in which parents are coached in developing and maintaining an authoritative parenting style, in which there is a good balance between being responsive to the needs of their child and the ability to set boundaries. As opposed to the confrontational, permissive or neglectful parenting style, an authoritative parenting style helps to create an open setting in which the extremist ideas can be discussed and positive alternatives can be provided (M₄).
- A telephone hotline offers an easily accessible point of contact that allows family members of individuals at risk (C₁) or radicalized young people (C₂) to ask questions about (possible) radicalization of their relative (M₁) to prevent radicalization (O₁) or travel (O₂). If certain language (C₂₁) or cultural barriers, such as shame, play a role (C₂₂), a community-based telephone hotline might be more accessible to family members of individuals at risk (C₁) or radicalized young people (C₂) to prevent radicalization (O₁) or travel (O₂).
- A telephone hotline for families of individuals at risk (C₁) and radicals (C₂) can connect parents to additional forms of family support to increase protective factors (M₂) and provide information on early-warning signals so that parents can better detect radicalization (M₃), to prevent radicalization (O₁) and travel (O₂).
- Individual family or group-based family support can provide families of foreign fighters (C₃) tips and advice on their direct contact with their child, for example, via social media, to help them establish or re-establish positive family relationships (M₅), creating a positive environment for the child to return home to (O₄).
- Through forms of individual or collective support, family members of those who are becoming radicalized (C₂) or are at risk of becoming

radicalized (C₁) can be provided with counter-narratives to help them deconstruct the extremist narrative of their child (M₆) to prevent radicalization (O₁) and travel (O₂) or contribute to deradicalization (O₃).

- Providing information to families of foreign fighters (C₃) or to people close to a foreign fighter (C₄) on an individual or group basis about the recruitment mechanisms applied, can better equip families and others to detect possible recruitment efforts, so that other family members and friends can be safeguarded (M₇) in order to prevent others from travelling (O₂).
- Highly-specialized practitioners who can rely on a long tradition of supporting families of (violent) extremists (C₁₁) can offer individual or collective forms of family support in which parents are provided with counter-narratives to help them deconstruct the extremist narrative of their child (M₆) for purposes of deradicalization (O₃).

4.6 Conclusion and discussion

The German model has inspired a wide array of countries and communities to develop forms of family support as part of their CVE strategy. However, different countries, cities and communities have chosen approaches that fit their specific context, which has led to various forms of family support across Europe. Drawing on practitioner experience and realistic evaluation – the latter never before applied in this field – provided us the opportunity to hypothesize on what might work, for whom, by whom, how and why in family support. This chapter presented C-M-O configurations on family support. These are by no means comprehensive, but serve as a starting point for empirical testing. Further specifications might also be made in relation to who provides the family support. For example, differences in outcomes might be found depending on whether practitioners are from statutory bodies or from community-based organizations. The form of support offered (e.g., individual or group-based) might also play a role, as well as the institutional infrastructure at the national, federal, local and community level.

I would like to call upon the academic, policy and practitioner community to further develop and empirically test these C-M-O configurations as hypotheses on family support. Additionally, we can further develop and test C-M-O hypotheses by drawing on the literature from other domains, such

as crime prevention and child protection, in which family counselling is recognized as an evidence-based approach (Van der Laan, 2012; Van Yperen, 2012). Ultimately, the aim is to start empirically testing one of the many family support practices in different communities, cities and countries across Europe, utilizing the realistic evaluation method of which the above C-M-O configurations are an important part.

5 Exit Programmes for Female Jihadists: A Proposal for Conducting a Realistic Evaluation of the Dutch Approach¹⁵

5.1 Introduction

Since the proclamation of the so-called caliphate in June 2014, increased numbers of women and girls have travelled to Syria and Iraq. Initially these females were thought to have a passive role in the foreign fighter phenomenon. They were portrayed as victims, groomed to marry ISIS fighters and become ‘jihadi brides’ and mothers to the ‘cubs of the caliphate’. This discourse in which women are viewed as victims has hindered effective policy against female violent extremism. Many European member states initially did not prosecute females returning from ISIS nor did they offer ‘exit programmes’ aimed at deradicalization, disengagement or reintegration (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018; Wittendorp *et al.*, 2017).

Recent studies present a different and more disturbing picture than the discourse of females as victims. ISIS women often receive sniper training, carry Kalashnikovs and wear suicide vests; they become members of the Al-Khansaa brigade (the ISIS religious police) and are involved in propaganda and recruitment, grooming other women and girls online to travel to the so-called caliphate (NCTV, 2017; AIVD, 2017, 2016a, 2016b; CODEXTER, 2016; Saltman & Smith, 2015). In short, there is an increased awareness that women play a much more active role than hitherto assumed and their threat should not be underestimated. Thus, having effective counter-measures in place to deal with female violent extremism is critical, particularly now more women are returning home since the defeat of ISIS.

Empirical evidence on the effectivity of counter-measures such as exit-programmes is scarce and often disputed (Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013; El-Said, 2012; Koehler, 2016). Additionally, the few evaluations that have been conducted are of exit programmes aimed

¹⁵ This is a slightly edited version of a previous published article: Gielen, Amy-Jane (2018a), “Exit Programmes for Female Jihadists: A Proposal for Conducting a Realistic Evaluation of the Dutch Approach,” *International Sociology*, Vol. 33 (4), pp. 454 – 472.

at male violent extremists. Thus, we are in need of evaluations that help us gain insight in the effectiveness of exit programmes aimed at female violent extremism. What we already know is that science and practice stress the importance of tailor-made approaches to deradicalization and disengagement (RAN, 2017; Gielen, 2017a; El Said, 2012; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; Weggemans & De Graaf, 2017). However, tailor-made implies a different set of interventions for each case study, which cause challenges in terms of comparativeness. We are thus also in need of an evaluation method that can deal with different contextual circumstances. Taking the Netherlands as a case study, the need for (a suitable method for) evaluation of exit-programmes becomes even more clear. With 100 female jihadists in the country and at least 80 who have joined ISIS, the Netherlands has, in relative terms, the largest number of female jihadists in Europe (AIVD, 2017).

As part of the Dutch approach municipalities are responsible for CVE, including tailor-made and multi-agency efforts to foster the deradicalization and disengagement of individuals who have travelled to Syria or attempted to do so (NCTV, 2014; Gielen, 2015b). While Dutch municipalities can involve the probation services, child protection services and the 'national exit programme' recently established in the Netherlands, they always remain responsible for the individual and the type of programme they receive. Dutch municipalities, particularly 'priority municipalities' (*geprioriteerde gemeenten*) with many foreign fighters, have been pioneering an approach since 2013 for people who have attempted to travel to a conflict zone or have returned from there. Some have chosen to adopt mainly legal and administrative measures, such as revoking passports and involving child protection services. Others have opted for a holistic approach that includes mentoring, religious counselling and psychological and psychiatric support. This makes municipalities a very logical focus and locus of research.

While a local and tailor-made approach is crucial to success, it does present some methodological challenges in terms of evaluation. For example, the Netherlands has 390 municipalities, and all social and youth care within the country has been decentralized to the municipal level. This implies that the contextual conditions that influence and affect exit programmes can differ markedly at a local level. While some municipalities have a relatively large concentration of jihadists, both women and men, and are thus more experienced in dealing with the issue, other municipalities have never dealt

with extremism before. Another important contextual factor is age. Women travelling to ISIS territory or attempting to do so, are typically young, and often minors. This affects counter-measures, as punitive measures such as imprisonment are often not an option.

Realistic evaluation is particularly suited to deal with these and other challenges related to evaluating CVE (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Gielen, 2015a, 2017a). The realistic evaluation method emphasizes the contextual factors and mechanisms that underlie interventions and lead to specific outcome patterns. Tracing these might provide insights to help answer the research question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists’.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a proposal as to how realistic evaluation can be applied to answer this question. It follows the four steps of realistic evaluation. The chapter starts by developing hypotheses (step 1) on relevant contextual conditions and mechanisms for effective exit programmes for female jihadists. It does this by drawing on theory regarding female terrorism, exit programmes and the local Dutch approach. Secondly, it illustrates the types of multi-method data collection that can be used (step 2) and the relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns that should be analysed (step 3). The potential end result is a more refined theoretical model (step 4) on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists. Before the four steps are applied, female jihadists and exit programmes are clarified conceptually.

5.2 Definitions

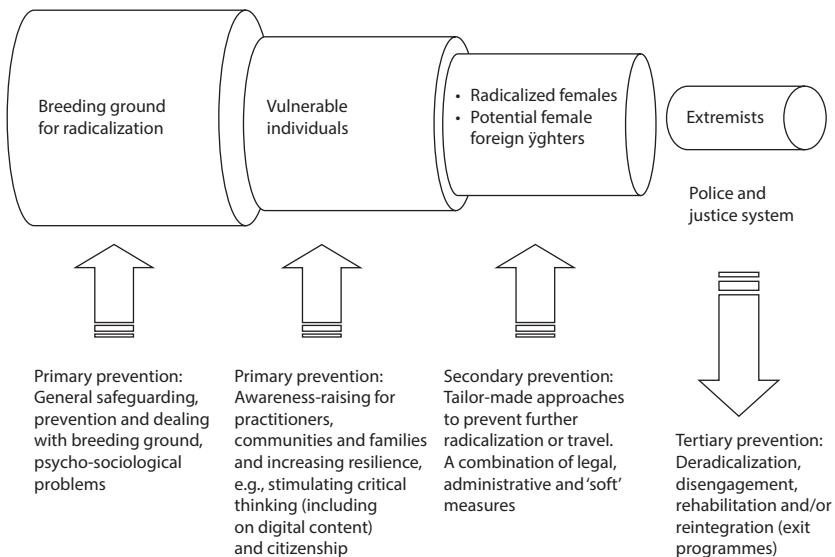
For the purpose of this research a *female jihadist* is considered a girl or woman who has either considered (and is registered as such by the police) or attempted to travel to ISIS territory; who facilitates or recruits others for travel or marriage to jihadists; has returned from ISIS territory; or has committed acts of violent extremism. These females have a certain amount of agency in the sense that they knowingly and willingly (consider) travel to ISIS territory and recruit others to do so and have taken some kind of preparatory measures, such as marrying an ISIS fighter online, before travelling, organizing finances to be able to travel or being part of a pro-ISIS social media chat group (e.g., on WhatsApp, Telegram or some other platform).

Minors taken by their parents to the so-called caliphate are not considered female jihadists.

What these women have in common is that authorities (police, municipality or others) know that they were considering attempting to travel to ISIS territory or returning from ISIS territory. As such, authorities have undertaken measures to prevent or counter that process. Those measures can vary from revoking passports to exit programmes. Exit programmes are considered all efforts undertaken by or under the responsibility of a municipality aimed at deradicalization (changing extremist beliefs), disengagement (dissuading from violent extremist action), reintegration and rehabilitation (Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Veldhuis, 2012).

Exit programmes can be undertaken at different stages: to prevent imprisonment, during imprisonment or after imprisonment. Based on the CVE prevention classification model (Gielen, 2017a; figure 5.1), 'exit programmes' for female jihadists fall in the secondary and tertiary category of CVE. While secondary prevention is aimed at preventing travel and (further) radicalization or extremism, tertiary prevention interventions are offered once someone has already engaged in acts of violent extremism, as is the case with female returnees. Unlike secondary prevention, tertiary prevention is offered after criminal prosecution and possible imprisonment.

Figure 5.1: CVE prevention classification model based on Gielen (2017a, 2017b)



5.3 Theoretical model (step 1)

The first step of realistic evaluation is to develop a theoretical model for forming hypotheses on what might work, for whom and how in exit programmes for female jihadists. However, the empirical basis of the scientific literature on exit programmes is rather limited (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). Those studies that are empirically based look either at voluntary exit or at government-led exit programmes, particularly in the Middle East, which is a completely different context than the European or Dutch situation. Also, studies that focus on voluntary exit or government-led exit programmes generally focus on males or a combination of males and females. There are no empirical studies on government-led exit programmes specifically targeted toward females.

Luckily, the realistic evaluation method allows a much broader definition of theory, which can also draw on related bodies of literature and include policy documents and experiences and assumptions from practitioners and policy. To hypothesize on what *might* work, it is crucial to gain insight into why and how female jihadists radicalize and travel, and how this process can be effectively countered. Therefore, different types of literature were included in this scoping phase. Literature on (i) processes of (de)radicalization and (dis)engagement of women involved in violent extremist organizations, (ii) female jihadism and violent extremism, (iii) exit programmes and (iv) the Dutch municipal multi-agency approach. The rules of realistic evaluation, furthermore, allowed us to draw not only on scientific knowledge but also on my own experiences in interventions for women who had attempted to travel to Syria. I could thus draw on my practice-based knowledge as an intervention provider and as an advisor to municipalities across the Netherlands on family support and exit programmes for female foreign fighters. Pawson and Tilley (1997: 88) labelled this practical and policy experience ‘folk theory’. Applied to exit programmes for female jihadists, folk theory consists of what practitioners in the field of CVE deem to be plausible programme mechanisms and contexts. That is, ‘what element of the exit programme might generate change in females vulnerable to extremism’ and ‘under what circumstances might the programme be successful’.

Radicalization: Motivational factors and demographics

The motivations for joining and leaving violent extremist organizations can be categorized into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (Bjørngo, 2009). A review of the

literature on female violent extremists conducted by Jacques and Taylor (2009) highlights five categories of motivations for joining an extremist organization: social, personal, idealistic, key (trigger) events and revenge. The literature in relation to females joining ISIS, discerns several pull and push factors (Saltman & Smith, 2015). A key pull factor is the notion of a religious duty to move to an Islamic country (*'hijra'*) and contribute to building the so-called caliphate. Another pull factor is the notion of belonging and sisterhood and romanticized notions of the experience. Push factors emerge from the breeding grounds for radicalization and include isolation, the search for identity, having a sense of belonging, a feeling that the international Muslim community is being oppressed and persecuted and aggrievement at the (perceived) lack of international action (*ibid.*).

My own professional experience as an intervention provider has led me to the opinion that an additional push factor is the very troubled life histories of many Dutch ISIS women. Many have experienced violence (domestic or sexual), absent parents (physically or emotionally), discrimination and racism, troubled families (multi-problem/broken homes) and a general vulnerability. These observations are supported by a Dutch study on ISIS women (Noor, 2016) and a study by the Dutch police that analysed the histories of foreign fighters (male and female) and concluded that in 60% of the cases psycho-sociological problems played a role and in 20% of the cases psychiatric problems were a factor (Weenink, 2015). The General Dutch Intelligence Service has also reported some specific characteristics of the women joining ISIS. They are generally between 15 and 30 years of age (with most between ages 16 and 20); and though they have various ethnic backgrounds, relatively many are converts to Islam (AIVD, 2017).

Recruitment

Jacques and Taylor (2008, 2009) found that some women had joined terrorist organizations either voluntarily or were recruited and were prepared to commit violent extremists acts. Recruitment can be proactive in the sense that vulnerable women are actively groomed, or it may be more reactive in that recruiters do not act until the women show an interest. Other recruitment influences mentioned in the literature are peer pressure within friend and family networks and online chat groups, love (marriage, a boyfriend) and force and exploitation (Jacques & Taylor, 2009). The Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism has also stressed the role of social media, claiming that social media is a catalyst for recruitment (NTCV,

2016). My own professional experience corroborates the role played by peers in recruitment. In my experience, the females who joined or attempted to join ISIS always had an existing relationship with other peers (family or friends) who were already involved in the jihadist network, either locally within their own municipality or in a neighbouring municipality, or globally (in Syria). These relationships were further enhanced by regular contact via social media (particularly Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and the dark web, such as encrypted communication platforms like pro-ISIS Telegram groups. The recruiters fed into the previously mentioned vulnerabilities of these girls and women, playing into them with propaganda corresponding to the various push and pull factors.

Roles and gender

One of the most significant advantages held by female violent extremists is that the threat they pose often goes unrecognized or is downplayed. As a consequence, they are highly underestimated and effective (Cunningham, 2007: 123). Throughout history women have played various roles in violent extremist movements (De Graaf, 2012). In a literature review of female terrorism, Jacques and Taylor (2009) discerned six roles: sympathizers, spies, warriors, warrior leaders, dominant forces and suicide bombers. As noted, there has been a tendency to downplay the threat posed by ISIS women, portraying them as 'jihadi brides', mothers or victims. Research, however, has found the roles played by female jihadists to vary, from facilitating (mother and wife), to recruitment, to active or passive combatants in which women receive sniper training, wear suicide vests and carry Kalashnikov rifles (AIVD, 2016; Saltman & Smith, 2015). Recent accounts suggest that women are starting to put their training to use as active combatants. Reports from Mosul (Moore, 2017) and Libya observe women being used as suicide bombers. Last year the French police arrested three women with gas canisters in their car. The police claimed that the women were radicalized, had pledged allegiance to ISIS and were planning a terrorist attack on the Gare du Lyon train station (Verschuren, 2016). The more active role of women who sympathize with ISIS or live in ISIS territory fits with the ideological and rhetorical shift that ISIS seems to have made on the role of women (Winter & Margolin, 2017).

Motivation for exit

As noted, motivations for joining a violent extremist organization can be understood as push and pull factors. The same distinction can be applied

to motivations for leaving violent extremist organizations. Push factors for exit are dissatisfaction with the extremist group members, its leaders or the ideology. Pull factors consist of positive alternatives, such as wanting a 'normal' life or having family obligations to fulfil, such as becoming a parent or having to care for a sick relative (Horgan, 2009; Barrelle, 2015). Demant *et al.* (2008) argued that while these push and pull factors are indicative of a direction (moving away or toward) they do not illuminate the content of exit. Demant *et al.* (*ibid.*) distinguished three content factors for exit. The first is the ideological factor and revolves around disillusionment with the ideology, such as realization that a sustainable Islamic State is not feasible. Social factors include a sense of dissatisfaction with extremist peers or the extremist group or movement. Practical factors revolve around the personal life situation, such as feeling isolated, stigmatized or externally pressured to participate in the extremist group.

Exit programmes

As previously discussed there is very little empirical evidence on exit programmes. Based on the limited scientific and policy theoretical literature and the few empirical studies that have been conducted, some important lessons can be drawn. El Said (2012) reviewed several exit programmes around the globe and concluded that exit programmes must be tailor-made and take into account the contextual factors of each country, including culture, traditions, history and laws. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), set up by the European Commission with more than 2,000 practitioners working in CVE, has collected approaches and inspiring practices in CVE. Its collection of approaches and practices (RAN, 2014, 2017), too, underlines that exit programmes should be tailor-made. It furthermore advises that exit programmes take a long-term approach and consist of multiple interventions aimed at the individual level via mentoring, psychological counselling, theological guidance and practical interventions such as provision of schooling and housing, as well as interventions aimed at the family level, such as family support. Furthermore, the *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* (*ibid.*) underlines that exit programmes require a multi-agency approach, properly trained staff knowledgeable on the issue of violent extremism and specific competences in terms of, for example, relationship formation and communication skills. These elements are also acknowledged in the empirical pilot study of a deradicalization programme conducted by Hallich and Doosje (2017). These authors emphasized that successful exit depends not only on 'best practices' but also on 'best people'. Establishing

trust-based relationships between the intervention provider, the female and her family and being able to provide support in a multi-agency setting, are crucial elements for exit programme success.

Demant *et al.* (2008) similarly stressed the importance of an integral approach to deradicalization and disengagement. In their opinion, exit programmes for jihadists focus too much on normative factors, concentrating on theological and ideological issues, and as a consequence overlook affective factors such as the family and peer network (*ibid.*: 181). My own professional experience confirms that among females, creating alternative networks both online and offline is essential to compensate for *takfir* (excommunication) or loss of friends and to offer alternative opportunities for sisterhood. The Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service as well as the Office of the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (AIVD & NCTV, 2016) report that most returnees remain active in the jihadist network upon return, because they are welcomed by the jihadist network with open arms and sucked back in the network. Creating an alternative network both online and offline is essential to offer an alternative to the grooming of the extremist network. Particularly because disengagement often leads to *takfir* (excommunication) and the loss of friends and sisterhood. Demant *et al.* (*ibid.*) argued that European exit programmes would benefit from a more comprehensive focus, dealing with all exit factors – normative, affective and practical – without favouring one factor over the others. This argument is also made in more recent studies on exit programmes (Weggemans & De Graaf, 2017; Koehler, 2016). The AIVD (2016) has stated that single interventions, such as only revoking a passport, are ineffective, as individuals are likely to attempt to travel to ISIS territory a second and third time, even without their passport. In sum, the success of an exit programme is dependent on the extent to which the exit programme is integral and holistic and addresses ideological, social and practical issues.

The Dutch local approach

One of the cornerstones of the Dutch CVE approach is involvement of the local level. As noted, municipalities in the Netherlands are responsible for their own CVE programmes. These may consist of community engagement, awareness raising, educating young people and also case management of individuals who have become radicalized or (violent) extremist (NCTV, 2014; Gielen, 2015b). While the NCTV (2014) and the Association of Dutch Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2015) have recommended that

municipalities develop CVE programmes and set up protocols for multi-agency case management, it is not compulsory. Initially only the larger cities in the Netherlands did so, such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. Some of these cities set up their programmes relatively early, in the aftermath of the assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004. These larger cities thus have a relatively longer history of experience with CVE programmes and case management than the many smaller municipalities that initiated programmes later. Indeed, some municipalities long did not feel the need to implement a CVE programme or set up multi-agency case management protocols, because they had not yet been confronted with cases of violent extremism. As a consequence, many municipalities were overwhelmed when young men and women, and sometimes whole families, left to join ISIS. These municipalities then had to start from scratch, developing and implementing their CVE programme and protocols for case management for their residents who were radicalizing or turning to violent extremism. Recent research by the Dutch Inspectorate for Safety and Justice (2017) concluded that 64% of the small and 30% of the mid-sized municipalities still did not have a CVE programme in place. This raises the question of whether having a CVE programme from the outset positively or negatively influences the outcome of municipal actions in exit programmes.

Case management of extremists and potential extremists is done in a multi-agency setting. The municipality works with the police, the public prosecution office, child protection services, the probation services, mental healthcare services and the Office of the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) to do a risk assessment and decide on the best course of action. This may consist of legal and administrative instruments as well as 'soft' measures, such as ideological and psychological counselling, family support, practical support with housing and a job, help in breaking contact with the former extremist network to prevent further grooming, a social media ban to prevent further grooming and involvement of child protection services to enforce necessary changes in troubled family situations (NCTV, 2014; Gielen, 2015b).

5.4 Hypotheses on C-M-Os for exit programmes

These theoretical and practice-based notions on motivation, demographics, roles, recruitment, exit programmes and the local approach help us to discern relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. These can be used

in building our theoretical model, first by describing relevant Cs, Ms and Os, unconfigured, after which a model can be developed proposing how they interact and work in configuration.

Contexts

Social programmes such as CVE are highly contextual. Contexts influence how programmes work, as the conditions in which programmes are introduced are relevant to how the programmes are implemented and their outcomes. Features of contextual significance may relate not only to a physical space (e.g., a prison) or a geographical location (e.g., Amsterdam) but also to the target audience (e.g., demographics and motivational factors of extremists), the individual capacities of key actors (e.g., the training or experience level of the intervention provider), the interpersonal relationships between intervention providers and the extremist and the broader institutional setting (e.g., the infrastructure of the municipality) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 69, 2004: 4). Box 5.1 lists some of the contextual conditions of potential relevance to this research.

Mechanisms

Like any CVE programme or intervention, exit programmes consist of different measures. Mechanisms are not the activities of a programme itself, such as family support or theological guidance. Rather, mechanisms are the aspects of those different measures that might cause change and effect (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 66, 2004: 6). Mechanisms can be understood as theories of change: the set of causal assumptions that implicitly or explicitly underlie a programme or intervention (Weiss, 1995). The list below sets out a preliminary overview of possible exit interventions that can induce specific mechanisms (RAN, 2015; Gielen, 2015a, 2017a):

- Mentoring can promote and enhance empathy, confidence, relationship skills, responsibility and the ability to reflect on one's actions and life history.
- Religious and ideological support can reduce the attraction of the extremist narrative.
- Practical support in establishing a stable environment and daily routine can foster and sustain reintegration and rehabilitation.
- Psychological support and counselling can address struggles with existential questions, mental health issues, making sense of things and finding a meaningful place in society.

- Family support can help parents identify warning signals and stimulate positive parenting styles, reducing the attraction of extremist groups and enhancing protective factors.
- Administrative measures can take away the necessary prerequisites for travel (e.g., passport).
- Legal measures can prevent a person from travelling by taking away their freedom (imprisonment) or invoke specific release conditions prohibiting contact the former extremist network (e.g., a social media ban and prohibition of contact with the former network).

Box 5.1: Hypothetical contextual conditions for exit programmes

demographic and motivational factors

- Age (minor or not)
- socio-economic position
- nationality
- stopped or returned?
- process of radicalization: push and pull factors
- psycho-sociological issues (e.g., broken homes, multi-problem family)
- psychiatric problems? (e.g., limited cognitive abilities, post-traumatic stress syndrome)

gender

- perspective of female self (strong and independent or submissive)
- roles and relationships within networks of family and peers
- roles and relationships within jihadi network (e.g., marriage within a jihadi network)

experience of the municipality

- previous experiences with jihadism?
- presence of a multi-agency meeting (case discussions)?
- existence of CVE policy?
- Awareness training for practitioners?

institutional setting municipality

- specific activities for women and girls (e.g., sports and community centre)?
- religious infrastructure: dutch spoken? traditional or salaf? space for teens and adolescents?

Quality of the municipal multi-agency approach

- is the municipality in charge?
- Was the approach set up before or after the travel of female jihadist(s)?
- Frequency of case meetings (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly)?
- involvement of the national Coordinator for security and Counterterrorism (n Ct V) in multi-agency approach?
- involvement of multi-agency partners such as police, public prosecution of ce, intelligence services, child protection services, youth care, a social work team and mental health carers?
- have partners in the multi-agency approach received in-depth training?

Outcomes

Outcome patterns consist of the positive and negative (unintended) consequences of programmes, which are a result from the activation of different mechanisms in different contexts (Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 217). Though measuring outcomes is often considered challenging in CVE, the focus of this research helps us to formulate measurable indicators. The first indicator for a positive outcome of an exit programme is whether the female in question has attempted to travel again after being stopped a first time. In addition to that indicator, Barrelle's (2015) model can be used to assess the extent that someone has become disengaged. Her five-domain, three-level model of disengagement is called the Pro-Integration Model (*ibid.*). The five domains concern social relations, coping, identity, ideology and action orientation. In each domain, three forms of social engagement are possible: minimal, cautious and positive. For example, in the domain of social relations, someone with minimal social engagement will have no positive interactions with people from the (non-extremist) 'out-group' and no or limited engagement with society (only that which is strictly necessary). This person will mainly have contacts with the (extremist) 'in-group'. People with cautious social engagement levels are on a journey of disengaging from the extremist group and in the process of restoring ties with their family and former (non-extremist) peer network. These interactions can sometimes still prove awkward and uncomfortable. Positive social engagement is the best possible outcome of a disengagement process, with positive relationships with family members and others in the non-extremist network. Participants are able to interact in a positive or neutral way with people who previously belonged to the 'out-group'. There are no longer ties and relationships with people from the former extremist group (Barrelle, 2015: 138–139).

The end result of this first phase of realistic evaluation is a theoretical model that highlights why and how female jihadists radicalize and addresses possible relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes to counter the process, while hypothesizing on how these contexts, mechanisms and outcomes work *in configuration*. Thus, how might the contextual conditions and mechanisms of exit strategies for female jihadists lead to specific outcome patterns?

A hypothesized C-M-O configuration might look as follows:

Exit programmes can be offered to women who have attempted to travel to ISIS (C₁). They can be offered by the municipality (C₂) in a multi-agency

setting (C3). It is important that the exit programme be tailor-made (C4) and draw on the specific personal circumstances (C5) and motivational factors (C6) of the girl or woman concerned. Exit programmes should at least entail individual mentoring to increase relationship skills, empathy, confidence, responsibility and the ability to reflect on one's actions and life history (M1). They should include multiple elements: conversation techniques such as discussion, dialogue and negotiation to reduce prejudices and stereotyping and stimulate critical thinking (M2); social and economic support to establish a stable environment and a daily routine to foster and sustain reintegration and rehabilitation (M3); religious or ideological counselling to reduce the attraction of the extremist narrative (M4); psychological support and counselling to deal with existential questions, make sense of things and find a meaningful place in society (M5); and family support to enhance protective factors (M6). In the short term, an exit programme is aimed at preventing a second travel attempt (O1). The ultimate aim of the exit programme is deradicalization (O2) or disengagement (O3).

5.5 Multi-method data collection and analysis (steps 2 and 3)

The realistic evaluation method does not position itself as positivist or interpretivist, and it does not prefer one data collection method over another. It does, however, stipulate that multiple methods of data collection be used. Evaluation of exit programmes for women could make use of the following data collection methods:

- a questionnaire (conducted face-to-face) among the municipal case managers, focusing on relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes in each case;
- desk research, involving police and municipal registries or child protection services files on cases representing the above-mentioned contexts, mechanisms and outcomes;
- interviews with stakeholders involved in the exit programme (e.g., social workers and intervention providers);
- interviews with or questionnaires among the women who have participated in a municipal exit programme; and
- participant observation throughout the exit programme.

The data that needs to be acquired would be concentrated on the above-mentioned contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Which interventions and

underlying mechanisms led to the successful or unsuccessful disengagement of this particular young female jihadist? What contextual factors made it possible to activate those mechanisms? To what extent did the outcomes fit or differ from the theoretical model developed during the first phase of the realistic evaluation? Data collection should also look at cases of women who did not receive any form of programme support but, for example, only had their passport revoked or only received a criminal sentence, as they can serve as a control group. Cases from exit programmes for female jihadists in other Dutch municipalities should also be sought. However, if one decides to make use of a control group or a comparison between municipalities, one must not fall into the experimentalist trap to compare ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ in the sense that some programmes do work and others do not. Rather, realistic evaluation should concern itself with the ‘make-up’ of the interventions and respondents to address the question why some programmes work better for some than for others (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 40).

Each case should thus be analysed in terms of relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns and how they worked in configuration. Below is an example of a real-life case and its analysis in a realist fashion.

A minor (C₁) with psycho-sociological problems (C₂) and poor family relations (C₃) from a small municipality in the Netherlands (C₃) with no experience with CVE (C₄), no CVE policy in place (C₅) and no multi-agency approach in place (C₆) attempted to travel to ISIS territory but was stopped at the Turkish border (C₇). Her plan was to live in the so-called caliphate with her husband, whom she had previously married online (C₈). She was recruited by some of her friends in the Netherlands (C₉) who were friends with somebody who had joined ISIS a year earlier. Through her friends she also joined a pro-ISIS WhatsApp chat group (C₉) in which Dutch girls and women spoke about their hatred of the Netherlands and their desire to travel to Syria. After she was stopped, she was not prosecuted (C₁₀) because she was a minor, but instead was handed over to a case worker from the Dutch youth services (C₁₁). As she and her parents cooperated voluntarily (C₁₂), the Dutch child protection services was not involved (C₁₃).

Her case was discussed in a multi-agency meeting (C₁₄) which was set up after her travel (C₁₅). At this meeting the municipality, the public prosecution office, the police, the intelligence services and the youth care services set out a multi-agency approach (C₁₆). It was decided that she

and her family needed specialist family support. The minor was to follow an exit programme and her passport was to be temporarily revoked. As no national exit programme existed at the time, the programme had to be tailor-made. The programme was completely voluntary, and tailored to her needs (C17).

The girl in question had indicated that she really wanted to go back to school, but her local school would not have her back due to the social unrest that her travel had caused within the school and the broader community. Not going to school caused her to be isolated and more vulnerable to extremists (C18), so the first intervention as part of her exit programme was getting her back into school in order to establish a stable environment and a daily routine (M1).

Initially her mobile phone was confiscated by the police for investigation. But when she went back to school she also got her smartphone back. Within 48 hours, her jihadist friends within ISIS in Syria and in the chat group started grooming her again, telling her that she should attempt to travel a second time. Together, her exit workers and mother decided to provide her with a new sim card and institute a social media ban for several months to create distance between her and the jihadist network and make her less vulnerable to grooming (M2).

During mentoring she shared her religious questions. It turned out that her knowledge of Salafi jihadism, but also on Islam in general, was very limited (C19). In fact, she did not know the difference between Sunni and Shia. As a consequence, it was not necessary to provide in-depth ideological and religious counselling in order to counter the extremist narrative. Rather, it was important to help her gain general knowledge about Islam to make her less vulnerable to extremist interpretations (M3), something her biological mother, grandfather and stepfather could provide. She also received targeted mentoring to strengthen her self-reflection abilities, as she could not properly explain why she felt the need to travel (M4).

However, it became apparent that as long as she was living in a troubled home situation (C4), she would not be able to develop individually, as she did not feel safe doing so because her biological mother and foster parents constantly argued. This issue needed to be resolved. As the biological and foster parents initially refused to sit in the same room together, this could be realized only under threat of involvement of child protection

services. Getting family members to stop arguing and start parenting together in a positive way, was essential to reduce the attractiveness of travel to ISIS (M5). In the words of the girl, “All my parents did was fight with each other, to the extent I just thought to myself, nobody would even miss me if I travelled to ISIS.” It was not until after this intervention that the mentoring started taking effect.

She now became able to write a short life story about the issues of the past, trigger events and her motivation for travel (O1). This seemed a crucial development, because for the previous ten months, the only explanations she could give were the narratives that were used to recruit her. Creating her own narrative gave her a sense of agency and control (O2). Attempting to join ISIS was no longer something that had just happened to her. She gained insight into her own radicalization process and as such recognized what situations she would be better off avoiding and when to ask for help (O3).

While the psychological assessment revealed no personality disorders or other issues (C20), the girl did display low mood at times, had little energy and was often sick (C21). A doctor’s visit and blood test showed a serious Vitamin D deficiency, because she was veiled (C22). Vitamin D shots and supplements helped her gain the energy so essential for her reintegration and rehabilitation (M6).

Another crucial element turned out to be her social network. Her social network had consisted of jihadists; the sisters in the ISIS chat group had become her friends (C23). As she was no longer allowed to contact them and they could not contact her because of her new sim card, her social network became very limited, which frustrated her immensely: “I have lost all my friends, but I don’t have any new ones (yet).” This was perhaps the hardest part of the exit programme, because a new social network cannot be formed overnight. The combination of a new class at her old school, a part-time job at the local supermarket and joining the school debate team helped her develop a new and positive social network, reducing the attractiveness of her former jihadist network (M7).

The young woman in the above case participated in the exit programme for a year and a half, after which her progress was evaluated with her, her family and the municipality using Barrelle’s (2015) disengagement model. There had been no new travel attempts to ISIS (O4) and the evaluation

showed that she had fully disengaged (O₅), based on positive levels of social engagement on all five domains described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Levels of social engagement in case study based on Barrelle's (2015) Pro-Integration Model

Domain	Positive levels of societal engagement
<i>Social relations</i>	positive relationship with family; friendly relationships with non-muslims and no contact with former extremist network.
<i>Coping</i>	Able to address personal issues, understanding of push and pull factors and trigger events for travel and able to undertake meaningful activities by going back to school and getting a part-time job.
<i>Identity</i>	no identification with extremist group, proper sense of self and life history, no longer categorizes in 'us' and 'them' and no longer uses extremist recruitment narratives for explaining why wanted to join isis.
<i>Ideology</i>	does not hold radical views, respects other (world)views, even gave her intervention-provider a Christmas card, focuses on moderate law school and scholars.
<i>Action Orientation</i>	does not consider violence a legitimate method, no longer want to travel to isis, but focusses on her future in the netherlands and positive action and participation by other means (e.g. joining the debate team at school).

5.6 Conclusion: Refined programme theory (step 4) and reflection

The idea of realistic evaluation research on exit programmes for females is that many more cases are studied and analysed in the above-mentioned fashion. The end result would then be a refined programme theory, answering the question 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists'. The aim is not to make general statements in terms of 'X does not work, but Y does', but rather to contribute to a more refined programme theory on exit programmes for females that provides insight into relevant contextual conditions and mechanisms for exit programmes.

We cannot infer a more refined programme theory based on the analysis of the single case above. However the experience with this case corresponds with my experience in other cases and issues that are highlighted in the previous mentioned literature on female violent extremism and exit programmes. The development of a proposal for how to conduct a

realistic evaluation for exit programmes is helpful in developing additional hypotheses on female violent extremism and exit programmes which in turn can be used for empirical testing:

- Recruitment is done through ‘glocal’ jihadi networks with social media as a catalyst. There are usually existing relationships with peers involved in the jihadist network, either locally or globally (hence ‘glocal’). Recruiters feed into the vulnerabilities of potential recruits, and activate a variety of push and pull factors.
- Exit requires a long-term and holistic approach that takes into account the push and pull factors, combining multiple interventions that activate different mechanisms. For example, such a programme might entail mentoring, practical support, family support, physical and psychological assessment and counselling and theological and ideological guidance.
- The sequence of interventions in the exit programme is important and must be tailored to the needs of the individual. Practical interventions can help participants gain sufficient trust to move forward with other interventions. Creating a safe and stable family environment can be an important precondition to mentoring and learning self-reflection.
- Creating an alternative social network is essential to compensate for loss of friends or sisterhood.
- The success of an exit programme does not seem to be dependent on the size or experience of a municipality. Rather, it seems determined more by the extent to which the exit programme is integral and holistic and addresses normative, affective and practical issues.
- The success of an exit programme is also dependent on the intervention provider. The ability to establish a trust-based relationship with the individual and her family and operate in a multi-agency setting is imperative.
- While a soft approach seems more promising, legal and administrative instruments can be helpful in creating the right conditions for exit. Specific conditions are no contact with the former extremist network to prevent further grooming, a social media ban to prevent further grooming and involvement of child protection services to enforce necessary changes in troubled home situations.

Reflection

This chapter has provided a proposal for how to conduct realistic evaluation to evaluate exit programmes for jihadist women. It thus provides a methodological framework and heuristics that can be used in future

evaluation research. Applying realistic evaluation to a domain as complex as violent extremism and exit programmes does pose challenges. The C-M-O analysis of one real-life case illustrated the multitude of possible contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. In a full-fledged evaluation, multiple cases need to be analysed, to enable us to highlight the most important and relevant C-M-O configurations.

While this chapter focused on the situation in the Netherlands, many of the highlighted patterns of contextual factors, mechanisms and outcomes can be applied in evaluation research on exit programmes in other countries. The end result will be a refined programme theory that answers the question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists’. Another outcome will be contributions to scientific theory on why and how women are radicalized and recruited, because their contexts have been analysed as part of the research. For example, understanding the role of factors like the troubled life histories of many of these girls, their online chat group behaviour and their different roles (not merely as ‘jihadi brides’) helps us to better understand the female foreign fighter phenomenon.

6 Evidence-based Informed Policy Design for Support Groups for Families of Foreign Fighters: Ex Ante Application of Realistic Evaluation and Review¹⁶

Amy-Jane Gielen and Annebregt Dijkman

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters illustrated that realist review and realistic evaluation are suitable methods to deal with the complexity of evaluating countering violent extremism. Those chapters focused on applying realistic evaluation in an ex post situation. In chapter 2, realist review, through which existing evaluation studies are synthesized, was used to develop a conceptual model for CVE. Chapters 4 and 5 illustrated the conduct of realistic evaluation for existing CVE programmes, such as family support and exit programmes.

The introduction to this thesis characterized violent extremism as a complex and intractable policy issue on which different actors hold different views and propose different solutions based on their diverse belief systems. Combined with the very scant evidence base available in the CVE field, this poses challenges not only for policy evaluation but also for policy design. After all, the different actors hold different views on the relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcome measures. As illustrated by the examples from France and the Netherlands in the introduction, actors tend to select those elements of the problem that are best aligned with their own personal, political and socio-cultural belief systems. Often, this results in oversimplification of the problem and thus also of the solution. This poses challenges not only in an ex post situation, where CVE policy has already been implemented and requires evaluation, but also in the first

¹⁶ This is a slightly edited version of a previous published article: Gielen, Amy-Jane and Annebregt Dijkman (2019), "Evidence Based Informed Policy Design for Support Groups for Families of Foreign Fighters: Ex Ante Application of Realistic Review and Realist Evaluation," *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 20, pp. 232 – 271.

stage of the policy cycle, that is, the policy design phase. Ultimately the goal of both realist review and realistic evaluation is to inform policymakers of what works, for whom, in what context, how and why, in order to improve programmes and interventions. This raises the question of whether and how the methods of realist review and realistic evaluation can be applied *ex ante*, to develop more evidence-based and informed CVE policy theory and design.

This question became relevant when the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs sought to set up a support group programme for families of foreign fighters. In the preceding years, various forms of family support had been established in the Netherlands. For example, volunteers provided individual support to families through a civil society organization for Dutch people of Moroccan descent, called SMN (Samenwerkingsverband Marokkaanse Nederlanders). Long-term individual family support was also being provided by a family support contact point (Familiesteunpunt), now called LSE. This is a more professional organization subsidized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security. Both organizations soon realized that parents of foreign fighters would benefit not only from individual family support, but also support in groups, so that they could interact with others whose children had travelled to join ISIS. SMN sought to meet that need by establishing a platform for those left behind (Platform Achterblijvers). The platform organized monthly meetings at which parents could exchange experiences with each other. While this initiative clearly met a need for certain parents, concerns were raised about possible negative side effects, particularly the social, emotional and physical safety of the families involved. For example, situations arose in which parents accused others of recruiting their children. Moreover, the group meetings brought family members face to face with the pain, grief and trauma of other families, and wrong advice was sometimes shared. This did not help to increase participants' resilience and coping skills, and concerns were raised that it might make them more susceptible grooming by violent extremist networks (RAN, 2013; Gielen, 2014). Therefore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security commissioned research into the question of whether parents of foreign fighters wanted a support group and if so, what kinds of group support were preferred in terms of modalities, host organization, ground rules and necessary pre-conditions.

In several European countries such programmes had already been set up, though without an evidence base. Rather, these initiatives were typically

organized bottom-up by parents and civil society organizations. As the situation in the Netherlands was similar, policymakers faced the question of whether they should integrate these support group programmes into their CVE efforts. What could a support group for families of foreign fighters contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism? If policymakers did choose to set up such a programme, how should it be done in terms of content, organization and process?

This chapter examines these questions, illustrating how realist review and realistic evaluation were applied to produce a more evidence-based policy theory on support groups for families of foreign fighters. The chapter expands on previous chapters in that it not only develops an evidence-based policy theory, but it actually tests that theory through interviews and focus groups involving families of foreign fighters, professional and community organizations, and municipal policymakers. The chapter demonstrates that such an *ex ante* approach can contribute to the legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness of CVE policy and prepare the ground for more thorough evaluation research.

6.2 Realist review to develop a theoretical model

6.2.1 Step 1: Scope of the review

The first step in the *ex ante* evaluation was to develop a theoretical model of how group-based support for families of foreign fighters might work, in what contexts, for whom and how. Chapters 2 and 3 illustrated the application of realist review to gain insight into the relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Chapter 3 extensively discussed the particular suitability of realistic evaluation methods for complex programmes. Realist review synthesizes existing evaluation studies, and realistic evaluation assesses a particular programme or intervention. The first step of realist review is providing an argument as to why such a programme should be considered complex, based on the seven features of complexity (Pawson, 2005). Such an argumentation is presented below.

Group-based family support programmes for families of foreign fighters are complex for several reasons. First, at the time of this research (2016), there was no evidence base to support the effectiveness of group-based support for families of foreign fighters. This is because these programmes have

been developed only recently and tried in just a few countries. Moreover, those that do exist have not yet been evaluated. However, the literature on support groups provides a strong evidence base for group support in general (Chien *et al.*, 2004; 2009, Citron *et al.*, 1999 and Distelbrink *et al.*, 2008). The theory behind these programmes is basically that support from fellow sufferers contributes to emotional resilience, social resilience, increased knowledge and a strengthening of the social network (*ibid.*). Transferring this evidence-based theory of change to CVE, family support groups as part of CVE can be thought to be effective because they provide families with a stronger social network, which makes them more emotionally and socially resilient and equips them with better coping mechanisms against violent extremism. Yet, though a support group programme for families of foreign fighters could potentially contribute to CVE, this is still a theory that requires further testing.

A second feature of complex social programmes is that their effectiveness requires the active input of stakeholders and the target group (Pawson, 2005). This feature also seems to apply to CVE. For example, setting up support groups for families requires input from the families, civil society organizations, professional organizations, municipalities and ministries.

The third characteristic of complexity is a long policy chain (*ibid.*). Regarding CVE, this is aptly illustrated by the long route that the issue of support groups for families took before it was put on the policy agenda. Group-based family support was not initially part of the Dutch CVE programme. However, for more than two years, families expressed the need for group-based family support. Because the government, at that time, was not meeting this need, the previously mentioned community-based family support group was set up, that is, Platform Achterblijvers. It wasn't until a year later that the ministries commissioned the research to investigate the possibilities of including group-based family support within the government's CVE programmes. This illustrates the long policy chain from policy idea to policy design. The previous point strongly corresponds with the fourth characteristic of complexity, that is, all the different actors influence and affect implementation. As such, the existing community-based family support group became an important factor to consider in setting up any new form of family support. Also, many organizations expressed an interest in family support. A family support group is highly context-dependent, which is the fifth feature of complexity. Indeed, chapter 4 (Gielen, 2015a) already illustrated that support groups might work better in some communities

than in others. Sixth, the idea of family support groups very much stems from an exchange of ideas. Family support groups had previously been set up in cities like Vilvoorde (Belgium) and Aarhus (Denmark). These inspired the initial idea for the Dutch family support groups. Finally, complexity entails that the conditions and mechanisms that make a group-based family support programme effective can change over time, in both intended and unintended ways. For example, the development of the conflict in Syria and Iraq has affected the needs of the parents in support groups. While most parents initially signed up to share experiences related to a child travelling to join ISIS, other parents wanted to discuss a returned child, a detained child or the birth of grandchildren. This had consequences for the group dynamic, as different types of parents, but also different family members (sisters, grandparents) came to the meetings, bringing different contexts and ideas about what they wanted to exchange.

Therefore, support programmes for families of foreign fighters meet the criteria of complexity, and require a review method that can deal with this complexity: realist review. The next step of the review was to clarify its objective and focus. Normally in cases where ample literature is available, the objective of a review is to test underlying theories. However, in our case no evaluations of group-based family support programmes for foreign fighters were available as yet. This is completely understandable, as family support is a relatively new approach in CVE programmes (Gielen, 2015a; Maher & Neumann, 2016). This meant that we had to branch out to other bodies of literature. In line with the heuristic guidelines for realist review, developed in chapter 3, the aim of our realist review was to develop a theoretical model of group-based family support programmes for foreign fighters that provides insight into the mechanisms and contextual conditions underlying support groups' effectiveness. In other words, the review focused on better understanding what works, for whom, why and how in group-based family support for foreign fighters. But the theoretical model is an end result of the review, not its starting point.

We scoped the literature using the University of Amsterdam's Catalogue-Plus database, which includes all the main databases such as Academic Search Primer, Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, the Social Sciences Index and SAGE Journals. Initially only the Dutch search word for contact with fellow sufferers ('lotgenotencontact') was used, in combination with the search words 'evaluation' and 'effectiveness'. This yielded very few citations (11) and even fewer relevant full texts (2). Those articles,

however, revealed a large body of English literature on fellow patient contact, support groups, family support groups, grief counselling (family) support groups, support groups for bereaved families and mutual help groups. This was helpful in the second step of realist review: searching for primary studies.

6.2.2 Steps 2 and 3: Searching for primary CVE studies and quality appraisal

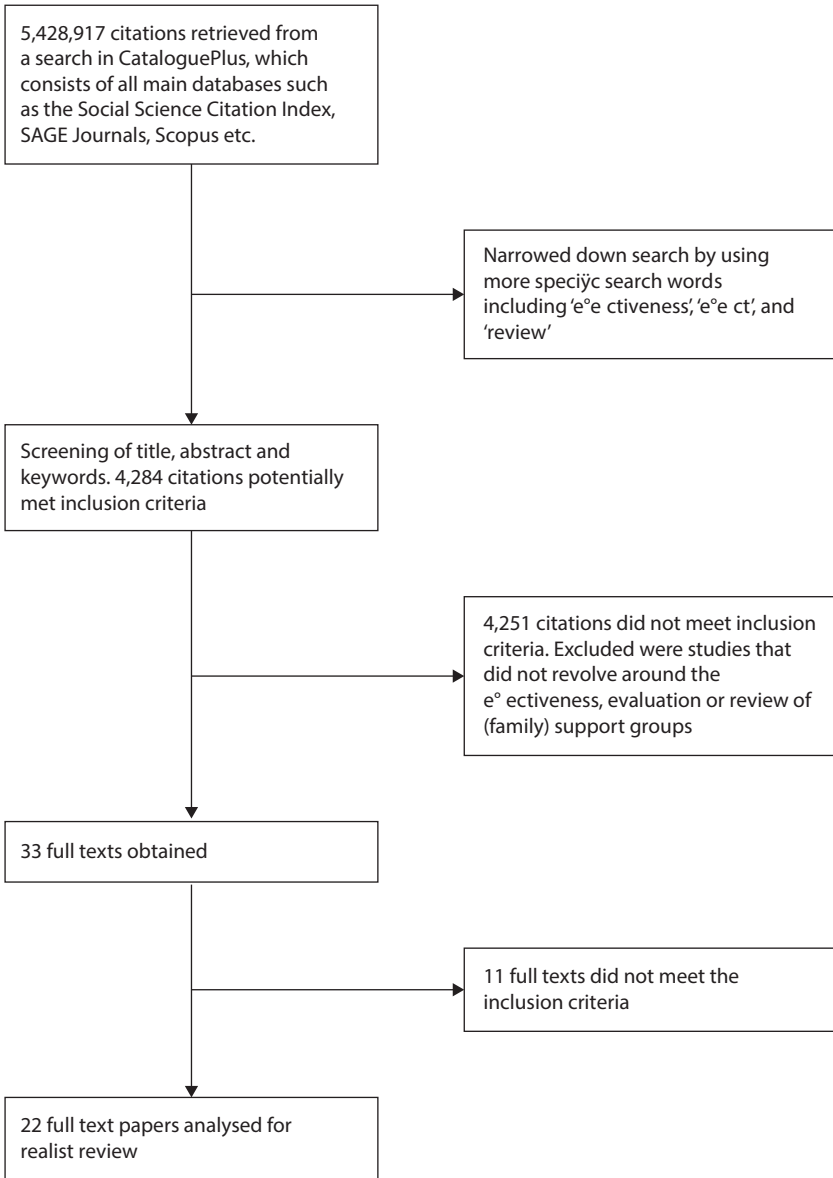
Based on the insights gained in the scoping phase, the above-mentioned search words were used. That search produced 5,428,917 citations. This large volume required us to narrow our search. Thus, the above-mentioned search words were still used, but now in combination with additional search words, such as 'evaluation', 'review' and 'effectiveness'. This reduced the citations to 4,284 studies, before quality appraisal (step 3 of the realist review).

In accordance with the realist review principles, the citations were assessed for relevance and rigour. A number of inclusion and exclusion criteria were formulated. Relevant studies were initially taken as those providing effect evaluations or reviews of group-based self-help, mutual help, family and grief counselling and similar. With respect to the assessment of rigour, the studies were not judged on how much they contributed to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather whether they provided insight into what support groups entail; specifically, what contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are relevant. This produced 33 relevant full texts, which were completely read and analysed. Eleven texts turned out to be less relevant than anticipated, in that they did not provide valuable information on relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of support programmes. Figure 6.1 outlines the search and appraisal process in a flow chart.

6.2.3 Step 4: Extracting the data

The realist review yielded 22 relevant studies addressing a wide range of group-based support programmes. These were, for instance, for people with a chronic illness, the bereaved, the addicted or the terminally ill, both the individuals concerned and their family members. This corroborates the findings from the scoping phase in step 1. The aim and focus of the review, in combination with the diversity of programmes and interventions addressed in the 22 studies, imposed the need for a more systematic approach for extracting the data than the interpretive and non-replicable trail advised

Figure 6.1: Flow chart of screening process for primary studies as part of the realist review



by Pawson (2006). This corresponds with the conclusion of chapter 3 and the revised heuristic guidelines presented in table 3.3.

The following categories were selected for data extraction:

- type of support group;
- aim of the programme or intervention;
- description of the programme or intervention (e.g., target group and theory of change);
- relevant contextual conditions;
- outcome (positive and negative effects, side effects); and
- lessons learnt (by research participants and researchers).

6.2.4 Steps 5 and 6: Synthesizing the support group literature and dissemination

The fifth step of the review is to refine the programme theory that was developed in the first phase: determining what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances (Pawson, 2006). However, as no evaluations of group-based family support programmes for foreign fighters were available, the goal of our review was different. Our review aimed to develop an evidence-based conceptual model of group-based support that might be applicable to the foreign fighter phenomenon. The result was an unconfigured C-M-O model, presented in table 6.2, describing different contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of support groups.

In terms of dissemination, the unconfigured C-M-O model was used as an input for a realistic ex ante evaluation, which is further discussed in section 6.3.

While the mechanisms and outcomes in table 6.2 very much speak for themselves, some contextual conditions require clarification. It is crucial that an appropriate facilitator (C1) be involved in a support group. This should preferably be someone who is experienced in guiding group processes and also has knowledge and expertise on the subject. The organizational context (C2) of support groups is also important. Specifically, a neutral host organization contributes to the effectiveness of the support programme. This is preferably not a mental health organization, but it should be an organization able to provide individual care and support, as well as professional and practical guidance to the group (e.g., a space to meet). From the realist review we also take away that grouping and creating an optimal

Table 6.2: Contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of support groups unconfigured. Derived by authors from the 22 studies which were part of the realist review of support groups

Contexts of support groups		Mechanisms of support groups		Outcomes of support groups	
C1	Composition of the group	M1	Positive social interaction with people with similar experiences and in similar situations can increase feelings of recognition, expand the social network and reduce social isolation	O1	Increased social support
C2	Group size	M2	According to stress and coping theory, positive social interaction with people with similar experiences can increase coping skills and emotional well-being	O2	Decreased emotional stress and burden
C3	Setting & duration & frequency	M3	Optimal matching theory states that similarities and shared needs between people with similar experiences increase coping mechanisms	O3	Increased coping skills
C4	Ground rules	M4	Therapeutic help theory suggests that equality and reciprocity in providing help to people with similar experiences increases self-respect and self-esteem (benefits all)	O4	Increased knowledge
C5	Professional guidance				
C6	Organizational design				

match (C₃) with the target audience is important. Also, support groups (C₄) should have a closed character, meaning that the group should start and end with a fixed membership and no new people be added in-between.

The duration and frequency of support programmes (C₅) can vary from eight weeks to two years. The review revealed a duration of 38 weeks and 316 hours as most effective. In terms of set-up (C₆), small support groups seem to be more effective than larger ones, with the ideal group size being 6–10 people. Finally, the realist review highlighted the importance of formulating ground rules (C₇) that participants and facilitators must abide by.

6.3 Ex ante realistic evaluation: Methodology

We were approached by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security in 2016 to investigate the potential of family support groups. They approached us as independent researchers, knowing of our prior experience providing individual support to families of foreign fighters. We were knowledgeable about these families' situations, had access to them and could easily gain access to relevant others. The ministries wanted to know if the families were interested in participating in a group-based support programme and if so, how such a programme should be formed. Based on our practitioner experience, we could have easily provided the ministries with some ready answers. However, we opted for a thorough scientific investigation, using realist review on general group support programmes for theory development and a realist ex ante evaluation to test the theory.

We advised the ministry to consider not only the family members as stakeholders in the research, but to also include the broader spectrum of actors involved in support programmes, including civil society organizations, experts and policymakers. We further advised the ministries that the research should zoom in on specific contextual and organizational conditions that might be relevant to group support programmes for families of foreign fighters. We had complete autonomy in formulating the research questions and research methodology and in selecting research participants. Furthermore, our role was confined to the research; we would have no part in the execution of any support programme eventually developed.

The realist review of group-based support programmes provided us with a conceptual model of potentially relevant contexts, mechanisms and

outcomes for family support groups. We were then able to test the extent to which these were applicable to families of foreign fighters. To do this we applied realistic evaluation. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, realistic evaluation is used to evaluate a specific complex intervention. However, we applied realistic evaluation *ex ante*, since in our case family support groups had not yet been designed. Applying realist review *ex ante* is unprecedented, so there were no heuristic guidelines or detailed steps to follow. We proceeded by taking the four steps of realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) as our starting point: (1) developing a theoretical model depicting what might work, for whom, how and in what circumstances; (2) multi-method data collection; (3) data extraction; and (4) development of a refined programme theory.

A realistic evaluation always addresses the explorative realist research question of what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances. However, as we are not evaluating an intervention, but rather, applying realistic evaluation *ex ante*, our research question asked what a group-based support programme *might* do, for whom, how and in what circumstances for families of foreign fighters. Specifically, we zoomed in on what might be the relevant mechanisms and contextual conditions in terms of the process, content and organization of a group-based support programme.

The first step of the realistic evaluation was developing a theoretical model. As very little literature was available on families of foreign fighters (Maher & Neumann, 2016; Gielen, 2015a), let alone on group support for families of foreign fighters, the starting point for our theoretical model was the unconfigured C-M-Os derived from the realist review of group support programmes in general, presented in table 6.2. Taken together, those C-M-Os served as a canvas that we could develop further, based on questions we asked our respondents. We asked them, for instance, about their experiences with support groups for families of foreign fighters and also what organizational design, group composition, ground rules and professional guidance they felt were needed, as well as their thoughts on the setting, duration and frequency of support group meetings.

We drew on multi-method data collection to test the applicability of group-based support for families of foreign fighters. The following forms of data-collection were used:

- Document analysis of the limited research reports available on families of foreign fighters. These provided us a better understanding of the specifics of this target audience.

- Interviews with parents and family members of jihadist/foreign fighters ($N=9$). These parents and family members were selected following individual family support that we had provided them earlier. They received our support on a voluntary basis under the auspices of the municipality they inhabited. The family support was provided from the winter of 2014 to the autumn of 2016. We approached families in different situations and with different characteristics:
 - family of an adult male foreign fighter who had been detained or stopped (1x);
 - family of a minor female foreign fighter who had been stopped (3x, including a foster family);
 - family of an adult male foreign fighter (1x);
 - family of an adult female foreign fighter (1x);
 - family of a deceased minor foreign fighter (1x);
 - family of a deceased adult foreign fighter (1x); and
 - family of a deceased adult foreign fighter who had travelled with wife and children (1x).
- Interviews with experts ($N=5$). These experts were selected because they worked in the few organizations in the Netherlands specialized in group-based support and/or families of foreign fighters. They spoke with us about their experiences and lessons learnt from support programmes for foreign fighters. The organizations they represented were the following:
 - *Stichting Sabr*. This is a grassroots civil society organization in the municipality of The Hague, offering contact with families of radicalized individuals/foreign fighters/violent extremist detainees and preventive radicalization training for mothers (Oumnia Works). This was the first organization in the Netherlands to offer family support in relation to radicalization.
 - *Samenwerkingsverband Marokkaanse Nederlanders (SMN)*. This organization initiated a telephone hotline on radicalization (Hulplijn Radicalisering) and is host to the Platform Achterblijvers, the previously mentioned support group for families of foreign fighters.
 - *LSE/Familiesteunpunt*. LSE is a national family support organization offering individual support to families with children who have radicalized. They also provide voluntary exit programmes for violent extremists. The organization is subsidized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security.
 - *Slachtofferhulp Nederland (SHN)*. SHN offers support groups for relatives of traffic accident and sexual abuse victims.

- *Institute for Psychotrauma (IVP)*. As part of the umbrella organization Arq, IVP organized a support group for relatives of victims of the MH-17 and Hercules airplane crashes. It also hosts Centrum '45, which provides individual psychological support for returned foreign fighters and group trauma therapy for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (e.g., army veterans).
- A focus group with families of foreign fighters. We asked the representative of Platform Achterblijvers to approach parents who would be willing to participate in our focus group. We then selected participants who were not already among the respondents interviewed and who represented the diversity of situations of families of foreign fighters. It ultimately included a parent whose daughter had converted and travelled to Syria; a woman whose (minor) sister had travelled to Syria; a father whose children had travelled and whose son was killed; and a woman whose husband had travelled without her and also was killed. The parents could provide us their first-hand experiences with the support group for families of foreign fighters (Platform Achterblijvers), and talk about their needs and desires in relation to support group programmes ($N=4$).¹⁷
- A focus group with policymakers responsible for CVE in so-called 'priority municipalities' ($N=6$). Most of these policymakers had direct contact with families of foreign fighters.¹⁸ Priority municipalities are designated as such by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism because they are viewed as most affected by the foreign fighter phenomenon. In the focus group we asked participants to reflect on outcomes based on the data collected in steps 1 to 4.

The third step of realistic evaluation is data analysis. In this case, we drew out all the potentially relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of group-based support for families of foreign fighters. Section 6.4 presents the data analysis. Following the first three steps of realistic evaluation brought us to a programme theory on how support programmes might work, among whom and in what circumstances for families of foreign fighters. Section 6.5 discusses this programme theory, including scenarios for implementation.

17 Together with $N=9$ (individual family support cases) it brings us to a total $N=13$ on practice based insights of families dealing with foreign fighters

18 Prioritized municipalities are municipalities that have been selected by the Ministry of Justice and Security because they are most affected by the foreign fighter phenomenon. At the time we conducted the research (2016), there were 10 prioritized municipalities.

6.4 Ex-ante realistic evaluation: Relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes for support groups for families of foreign fighters

This section presents our analysis based on the multi-method data collection described above. Our analysis of the data entailed drawing out more specific information on relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes for group-based support for families of foreign fighters. We sought to further specify the conceptual model presented for support groups in general, using results from the data collection and analysis. The aim was to draw up a conceptual C-M-O model for support programmes tailored to families of foreign fighters.

6.4.1 Contexts (C) of group-based support for families of foreign fighters

Based on the realist review of general support programmes, we knew that the conditions of group-based support are very important for their effectiveness. From the realist review, we knew that it is important to think about specific contextual conditions for such programmes: group composition, group size, setting, duration and frequency, ground rules and professional guidance. These contextual conditions are discussed below, tailored to the specific characteristics of families of foreign fighters.

Characteristics of the target audience

As mentioned earlier, there was little research on families of foreign fighters and their needs (Gielen, 2015; Weenink, 2015; Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015; Maher & Neumann, 2016). Maher and Neumann (2016) analysed public documents on 46 families of foreign fighters in 17 countries. They found grief, confusion, fear and shame to be the most important impacts on families. In our interviews and focus group with families of foreign fighters, we found that nearly all these families had particular personal and socio-psychological problems, similar to people who participate in 'regular' support groups. However, additionally we found that families of foreign fighters dealt with very specific problems not mentioned in the general literature on support groups. For instance, all were confronted with consequences of the extremist behaviour of their child/family member, in the form of sometimes severe legal repercussions, administrative measures and public exposure. Table 6.3 provides an overview of problems faced by families of foreign fighters.

Table 6.3: Personal, social and psychological problems and criminal and administrative consequences experienced by families in which a member exhibits extremist behaviour, based on interviews by the authors and the literature on families of foreign fighters.

Personal problems	Social psychological problems	Criminal and administrative consequences	Consequences of extremist behaviour on personal and social level
Addiction (drugs, alcohol) (Previous) trauma	Debts Domestic violence	Arrest of family member Taps from police and intelligence	Mourning and trauma Disrupted family relationships
Serious illness (e.g. cancer)	Divorce	House raids	Fixation on extremist/deceased family member instead of daily life
Anxiety and panic disorders	School drop-out	Police interrogation	Loss of social network due to stigma
Depression	Disturbed family relationships	Detention of family member in terrorist wing	Harassment at school, in the neighbourhood
Agression regulation problems	Physically and/or emotionally unavailable parents	Contact with (community) police, (foreign) security services	New family members (grandchildren, sons and daughters in law)
Disturbed identity development	Engagement in prostitution or groomers	Contact with the Public Prosecutor's Office and probation services	Disappointment and distrust towards government
Low IQ/intellectually disabled	(Multiple) negative experiences with seeking professional help	Involvement of youth care organisations	Tense political discourse on extremism (e.g. hurtful statements by politicians, general public opinion)
		Deregistration in municipal registration system (GBA)	Intrusive national and sometimes international press coverage, including incorrect reporting (e.g. alleged deaths)
		Passport measure	Unethical approach by researchers (e.g., setting up a Facebook 'support group' that is actually meant for research and not to provide support to parents)
		(Threat of) other children being put into fostercare	Intrusive approach by other families and community organisations
			Loss of feelings of privacy and autonomy
			Feelings of stigmatization in the community and in society
			Contact with relatives in conflict areas and thereby being exposed to jihadist propaganda, emirs, extremists/jihadists

Table 6.3 and information on the consequences of public exposure illustrate the huge impact the foreign fighter phenomenon has on the affected families. It impacts them on a personal level, resulting in mental health issues and grief. It impacts them on a social level, as they may be treated like they have an infectious radicalization disease. Friends, family members and even whole communities may not want to have anything to do with them anymore, causing social isolation. They may also be the subject of negative political discourse and face legal and administrative repercussions. In most families, this comes on top of an existing history of psychological and social problems and negative experiences in receiving professional help. In sum, these families' risk of experiencing all kinds of problems is probably higher than for families who, for example, 'only' lose a child in a car accident. Those families don't experience the same stigma as families of foreign fighters, and they aren't confronted with the consequences of their child's extremist behaviour, such as administrative measures (revoking citizenship), media exposure and police investigation (e.g., house raids). The foreign fighter phenomenon thus brings additional layers of complexity to often already vulnerable families. It also puts siblings and other family members more at risk for different types of problems, including being groomed by an extremist network themselves. These additional layers of complexity have to be taken into account as an important contextual condition when designing group-based support for this target audience.

Content of group-based support

Group-based support for families can only be effective if the specific needs of the families are addressed. It must therefore be tailored to this specific target audience. Based on our many forms of data collection, we were able to derive the specific needs and wishes of families of foreign fighters in terms of topics they wanted to see addressed in a support group:

- violent extremism causes, signals, the foreign fighter phenomenon, the modus operandi of violent extremist organizations such as ISIS, recruitment mechanisms, propaganda, roles and functions of extremist networks;
- administrative and legal repercussions such as revoking citizenship, placement on a terrorism watch list and prosecution;
- contact with family members (do's and don'ts);
- talking about the issue within school, family, work and community networks;
- different forms of professional support and grief counselling and trauma therapy;
- contact with the police and government officials; and
- dealing with the media and outside world.

During our focus groups with the families and the municipalities and our interviews with the NGO experts, we asked if the above topics would address the needs, to which they agreed.

Composition of the group

From the realist review we know that the composition of the group is important, as optimal matches need to be created within the target audience. Based on the types of families we interviewed and the focus group participants, we knew that families had different experiences. So, how should different families be matched became an important question. Some experts believed that individual tailoring was needed for every form of contact between fellow participants. Parents from the focus group were more flexible in how they preferred to be matched. For them, having a family member who had travelled to Syria or Iraq was the basic criterion for contact with fellow sufferers. They argued that they shared a similar experience. Whether the family member was alive, had died or returned made little difference in their opinion, because the emotion was the same. One of the participants in the focus group expressed this as follows:

The core of our stories is the same. It does not matter if our children are still in Syria or died there. The emotions and the story are the same. The turning point is the travel to Syria. We recognize the story of family members of returnees, because the common denominator is the traveling part. The fear of getting a phone call about [the] death [of your child or grandchild] applies to everyone.

They had less affinity with parents whose child had been radicalized in the Netherlands and was in detention here or was stopped at the border. Parents in the focus groups argued that there should be separate group for them. This argument was further supported by the policymakers in our municipal focus group. Taking all perspectives into account, we therefore advised that three different groups be created that family members can take part in:

- My relative has travelled (and died).¹⁹
- My family member is radicalized but not detained.
- My family member is being prosecuted for terrorist activities (and detained).

¹⁹ The question is whether – in accordance with the wish of the focus group – family members of returnees must and can be placed in such a group. This target group has their family member 'back' and that leads to awkward situations. The standard procedure for returnees is detention and a stay of at least three months and most often a year on a special terrorist ward in prison.

When asked in our interviews and focus groups, families did not feel the need to be matched based on a specific cultural or religious background. The shared experience of the consequences of radicalization (e.g., travel or detention) is what binds family members, not the fact that they are all of Moroccan, Dutch or Somali descent or adhere to a specific religion. Most family members spoke and understood the Dutch language perfectly, including parents who were first-generation immigrants. However, being able to speak and understand the Dutch language is an important concern during the intake process for the support groups. Our research presents two additional factors that should also be taken into account in composing support groups:

- whether family members have a mental disability that could cognitively prevent them from joining in and following the group or modules and
- family members of converts who are less familiar with daily religious and cultural customs in Muslim families and may therefore feel lost.

Experts suggested that these factors should be kept in mind during the intake and supervision of the group. An intake can consist of a personal conversation with one of the supervisors of a group or another professional. In this regard, it does seem to be important to ensure that participants do not have to go through an ‘administrative paper mill’ first and speak to many different people. These family members are generally already burdened with administrative worries. Alternating contacts at the start increases the chance that crucial information will be lost, compromising group matching and awareness of points of concern in group dynamics.

The literature on families of foreign fighters, our experiences and the interviews with family members and with experts underlined the need to not only think about the affected parents, but also about siblings. Adolescent siblings seem to be particularly affected by the ‘trigger event’ of radicalization, and thus the travel, death or detention of their brother or sister. They fully understand the situation and see and feel their parents emotions about it. These adolescent family members perceive their entire household focused only on the outgoing/radicalized/detained/killed brother or sister. The literature suggests that this trigger event makes them more susceptible to radicalization. In our experience, we see that siblings want to protect parents and avoid ‘burdening’ them with their own concerns. This creates emotional isolation, making them particularly vulnerable to grooming by an (older) brother or sister who travelled to a conflict zone. From a CVE

perspective it is thus particularly important to include this group in the policy design of support groups.

Group size

The realist review of general support programmes (table 6.2) indicated that small support groups are more effective than larger ones, the ideal group size being 6–10 people. In addition, the realist review revealed the importance of support groups having a closed character, in the sense that the group should start and end with a fixed membership, with no new people added in-between. In ‘regular’ support groups, for example, for family members of airplane crash victims, such groups may be relatively easily assembled. After all, there is a large group of relatives who all experienced the same tragedy at the same time. However, the reality of families of foreign fighters is different. The first Dutch foreign fighter in relation to the Syrian conflict dates back to 2012. By the end of 2016, the Netherlands had 270 foreign fighters (NCTV, 2016a). The limited volume, spread out over a period of more than four years and scattered across the country, makes it impossible to continuously set up new groups. Dutch support groups have therefore been organized differently than prescribed by the literature and the interviewed experts. Platform Achterblijvers from SMN had a relatively large and structured central group (meeting every two months), and new people were always welcome. Stichting Sabr opted for a small-scale approach, with individual customization at the local level the guiding principle.

Setting, duration and frequency

From the realist review we learnt that the duration and frequency of support programmes can vary from eight weeks to two years. The review also revealed that a duration of 38 weeks and 316 hours is most effective. Among the current Dutch support groups, we see a difference between professional and voluntary organizations in terms of programme duration and meeting frequency. The professional organizations that provide support groups to other target audiences than families of foreign fighters, determine the duration and frequency in advance. The voluntary organizations already working with families of foreign fighters do not set an end date for family support. They focus on creating a low-threshold welcoming context and continuous tailoring to families’ needs.

Based on our interviews and focus groups, such an open-ended approach is not without risk:

- An organization and its volunteers can become overburdened by family members' sometimes overwhelming needs and requests for help.
- Those receiving support can become dependent on volunteers, as they are 'always available', perhaps also creating an (exclusive) group dynamic.
- There is a risk of a family member not being referred to professional help, such as a psychologist, on time.

Ground rules

The realist review highlighted the importance of formulating ground rules that participants and facilitators of support programmes must abide by. We asked the interviewed family members and experts what important ground rules should be. This produced the following rules:

- no press;
- prior agreements about (psychological) safety;
- prior agreements about sharing information about group members by group members or by the organization with third parties;
- prior agreements about who can retrieve what sort of information, such as what is shared in the group, whether it can be requested by lawyers in a criminal case, or if participants can be asked or called as a witness in a criminal case because they have information about a suspect; and
- use of scenarios and incident protocols (e.g., when PTSD is triggered).

Professional guidance

According to the realist review, it is crucial to obtain professional guidance for a support group. Someone who has experience in guiding group processes and knowledge and experience on the subject is most preferred. The parents and experts we spoke to mentioned additional important criteria, which cannot however all be captured in one specific facilitator. Three roles were distinguished as necessary to organize a good group support programme:

- *Process supervisor*. The process supervisor starts and keeps the conversation between family members going, provides a safe setting and ensures a balance in the group, so that everyone gets the chance to tell their story. This person must have knowledge of the foreign fighter phenomenon, be screened, be culturally sensitive and able to work within a charged political-social context. The process supervisor should not be a volunteer, but a professional paid employee. The process supervisor is as neutral as possible and certainly may not work for police or security services.

- *Trauma/grieving counsellor.* This is someone specialized in trauma and grieving, who is therefore able to recognize mental health issues (e.g., trauma) in a group setting and open up the conversation about it. This counsellor has mainly an observer role during the group sessions and a referral function if a possible mental health issue is detected. This person acts to ensure the psychological safety (e.g., prevention of secondary traumatization) of individual participants and the group as a whole and acts as a sounding board and intervision partner of the process supervisor. The counsellor must therefore be specialized in grief and trauma, culturally sensitive, interested in the subject of foreign fighters and be willing to learn more about the subject.
- *External experts and professional care providers.* External experts and care providers are people who can fulfil the psycho-educational goal of contact with fellow sufferers by providing specific modules. This means they have to be very knowledgeable about the module they deliver and have an affinity with the target group. To guarantee confidentiality and safety, it is important to adequately screen external experts and care providers in advance. Because most family members have feelings of distrust toward professionals care providers (often because of negative experiences in the past), it is important that they are professionally empathic. A very business-like and nine-to-five mentality is not effective for this target group.

Organizational design of family support

The realist review teaches that the organizational design of support groups is important to ensure their effectiveness. A neutral host organization is needed. This should preferably not be a mental health organization, but it should be an organization able to provide individual care and support, as well as professional and practical guidance to the support group (e.g., a space to meet).

During our interviews with representatives of expert organizations we asked them to what extent their organization could meet all the above-mentioned relevant contextual conditions. It turned out that no single organization in its current state would be able to deliver on all counts to provide a support group programme for families of foreign fighters. Some organizations only worked locally, and not nationally. Other organizations were specialized on the issue of violent extremism and families of foreign fighters, but did not have the professional infrastructure needed for professional guidance and individual care.

We also asked parents what they preferred in terms of organizational design. They were very adamant that they wanted the government to provide the support programme. This was an interesting and unexpected outcome, as many also harboured anger against the government because they felt the government was at least partially to blame for the travel of their children to Syria. However, they had more confidence in the government's ability to set up a professional support group, compared to a voluntary organization. However, setting up and executing a support programme for families of foreign fighters does not fit within mandate of the Ministry of Justice and Security or the Ministry of Social Affairs. Rather, it would be more logical for the national government to provide the financial means and set quality standards, and for other professional organizations to implement the support programme based on these. As none of the previously mentioned organizations could at present meet the standards set, an option would be for more than one of at least the following partners to enter into a partnership: Arq (IVP), SMN, Stichting Sabr, LSE/Familiesteunpunt and SHN.

In the Netherlands, the municipalities are responsible for local measures against violent extremism. The family members of foreign fighters are their inhabitants and make use of municipal care facilities. In a focus group we therefore asked policymakers from the 'priority municipalities' what they wanted and needed regarding, in particular, the organizational design of support groups. Their responses can be summarized in several categories: 'proximity', that is, support groups needed to be organized close to their inhabitants, and 'connectedness', referring to their desire to connect the support groups to local CVE approaches and provide additional care if necessary. They also wanted to learn from the support groups, so 'knowledge transfer' was another important requirement of municipalities.

Ultimately, it is up to the national ministries to choose a specific organizational design and partner. Based on our findings from the focus groups with both parents and municipal policymakers, interviews with families and experts and input from the realist review, the organization should preferably be designed with the following criteria in mind:

- a government or government-funded organization as opposed to a community or voluntary organization;
- an organization able to operate nationwide, located centrally in the Netherlands, but with the ability to supervise and facilitate small-scale support groups at the local or regional level;

- knowledge and expertise both on support groups in general and on violent extremism and families of foreign fighters specifically;
- have or be able to access practitioners who can fulfil the three required roles in the support groups (process supervisor, trauma counsellor and experts on the specific modules);
- ability to make referrals to other care providers, which requires good embedding in local and wider care networks;
- ability to strike a good balance regarding the following aspects, which are especially important to families of foreign fighters:
 - neutrality vs. advocacy for family members;
 - professionalism vs. low threshold;
 - setting boundaries vs. accessibility; and
 - guidance on content vs. guidance on emotion;
- ability to offer online support options, such as a properly moderated forum, to provide low-threshold guidance and supplement other forms of care;
- ability to synthesize and transfer of knowledge, including development of route maps and factsheets containing correct information and do's and don'ts and sharing lessons learnt with municipalities;
- proactive communication with fellow practitioners, such as from the police, social district team, municipalities, schools and mosques.

6.4.2 Mechanisms (M) of group-based support for families of foreign fighters

Based on the experiences and needs expressed by families of foreign fighters and the inputs of municipalities and professional and community-based experts, we expanded on theories pertaining to group-based support programmes, but this time with specific reference to the foreign fighter phenomenon. The *social support theory* (Coulson & Greenwood, 2012; Wei *et al.*, 2012) describes an important mechanism of group-based support for families of foreign fighters. Due to radicalization, travel or detention, most families are confronted with social isolation and stigmatization. Being able to share their stories with people in similar circumstances, helps them meet new people and feel less isolated. The mechanism behind the *stress and coping theory* (Wei *et al.*, 2012; Distelbrink *et al.*, 2012) is that group-based family support contributes to better stress and coping for families of foreign fighters. Most families experience some or all of the following mental health issues: trauma, grief, depression, anxiety and shame. In many families this leads to decreased participation in society, to more absence at work and less

emotional availability to other children in the family. The *therapeutic help theory* (Distelbrink *et al.*, 2012) applies to families who feel driven to share their story and are prepared to fulfil a more leading role, to prevent other families and children from making the same ‘mistakes’. With this role they feel they can be of use to others, which boosts their self-esteem and social participation. The *optimal matching theory* (Distelbrink *et al.*, 2012) is very relevant to setting up support groups for families of foreign fighters. There are different types of families of foreign fighters with different experiences. Families whose child is deceased have completely different experiences and support needs than families whose child has returned. Based on the available scientific literature on optimal matching, we can state that it is better to match families with similar experiences. A theory not mentioned in the literature on support programmes, but which does seem relevant to families of foreign fighters, is the *psycho-educational theory* (Ivey, 1976). In our interviews and focus group, families expressed an acute need for more knowledge on the foreign fighter phenomenon and to increase their competencies on topics like the modus operandi of extremist organizations, how to deal with violent extremism and its consequences, and different forms of professional support. The mechanism behind psycho-education is that greater knowledge and competencies increases families’ resilience. Resilience here refers to feeling more in control of the situation, having a better idea of what to expect (and what not to expect), awareness of the risks in relation to other family members and knowledge of when and where to seek professional support.

6.4.3 Outcomes (O) of group-based support for families of foreign fighters

The mechanisms of group-based support for families of foreign fighters are thus sharing stories and experiences with others who are in the same situation and increased knowledge and coping skills. These can lead to the following outcomes, which can prevent radicalization of other family members:

- improved coping skills, reducing feelings of shame, fear, loneliness and despair;
- stronger family members, who can provide mutual support and advice (use of experiential expertise) to boost self-esteem;
- improved knowledge and skills related to violent extremism, for example, families know better what they can and cannot expect, the risks they need to be aware of (grooming of brothers and sisters) and when and where they can go for professional assistance;

Table 6.4: Contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of support groups tailored families of foreign fighters

Contexts of support programmes		Mechanims of support programmes		Outcomes of support programmes	
C1	<p>Content</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Violent extremism (e.g. causes, signals, etc.) 2. Administrative and legal issues 3. Contact with family members 4. Addressing the issue within network 5. Professional support 6. Contact with police and government officials 7. Dealing with media and social discourse 	M1	<p>Social support theory:</p> <p>Due to radicalization, travel or detention, most families are confronted with social isolation and stigmatization. Being able to share their stories with people in similar circumstances helps them meet new people and feel less isolated</p>	O1	<p>Increased social support</p>
C2	<p>Composition of the group</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My relative has travelled (and died) 2. My family member has radicalized 3. My family member has been detained for violent extremism 	M2	<p>Stress and coping theory:</p> <p>Most families experience some or all of the following mental health issues: trauma, grief, depression, anxiety and/or shame. In many families this leads to decreased social participation, to more absence at work and less emotional availability to other (often upset) children in the family</p>	O2	<p>Improved stress and coping skills</p>
C3	<p>Group size</p> <p>6-10 people per group</p>	M3	<p>Therapeutic help theory:</p> <p>Applicable to families that are really driven to share their story and prepared to fulfil a more leading role, to prevent other families and children from making the same 'mistakes'. In this role they feel they can be of use to others, which helps increase their self-esteem and social participation</p>	O3	<p>Increased self-esteem</p>
C4	<p>Setting & duration & frequency</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monthly meetings 2. Clear start and finish date 3. Approx. 8 sessions related to content (C1) 	M4	<p>Optimal matching theory:</p> <p>There are many different types of families of foreign fighters with different experiences. Families whose child is deceased have completely different experiences and support needs than families whose child has returned. Based on the available scientific literature on optimal matching, we can thus presume that it is better to match families with similar experiences</p>	O4	<p>Increased feelings of acknowledgement</p>
C5	<p>Rules</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No press/media presence 2. Agreements about (psychological) safety 3. Privacy and information sharing agreements 4. Use of scenarios and incident protocols 	M5	<p>Psycho-educational theory:</p> <p>Knowledge on the foreign fighter phenomenon and increased (parenting) competencies on topics such as the modus operandi of extremist organizations, dealing with violent extremism and its consequences, and different forms of professional support increases families' resilience in the sense that they feel more in control of the situation, have a better idea of what (not) to expect, are aware of risks to other family members and know when and where to seek professional support</p>	O5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased knowledge about violent extremism (causes, signals) 2. Increased competencies in dealing with a radicalized family members 3. Awareness of risks (grooming, trigger events) of radicalization of other family members
C6	<p>Professional guidance</p> <p>Deployment of experts and facilitators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Process supervisor b. Trauma counsellor c. (Content) experts and care providers 				
C7	<p>Organizational design</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional organization with (government funded) financial means 2. Ability to operate nationally, regional and locally 3. Knowledge and expertise on radicalization 4. (Have access to) practitioners who can fulfil necessary roles 5. Possibilities for referral 6. Balancing between: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Neutrality vs. advocacy for family members b. Professionalism vs. low threshold c. Limitation vs. accessibility d. Guidance on content vs. guidance on emotion 7. Offer online (forum) possibilities 8. Knowledge transfer: route maps/factsheets and sharing lessons learned with municipalities 9. Proactive communication to relevant partners 				

- increased understanding, for example, of any breeding grounds for radicalization within their own family system, so that possible recruitment/radicalization of brothers and sisters can be limited; and
- greater social support, increasing the general well-being of the family and also reducing the breeding grounds for further or new radicalization within the family.

6.5 A realistic ex-ante evaluation method and heuristic guidelines

This ex ante evaluation of support programmes for families of foreign fighters started with a realist review, based on the heuristic guidelines set out in chapter 3. As there was virtually no literature available on families of foreign fighters, let alone on support groups for these families, the realist review drew on studies on group support in general, to draw out potentially relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. This resulted in an unconfigured C-M-O model, providing us a canvas of evidence-based guidelines and theories for support groups from other fields. These were then further developed in line with the specific needs of families of foreign fighters. To test the applicability of these evidence-based guidelines and theories to the situation of families of foreign fighters, additional evaluation and research methods were necessary. Realistic evaluation was therefore applied ex ante. We tested and further developed our canvas for group support programmes through interviews and focus groups with families of foreign fighters, professional and community organizations and municipal policymakers. This exercise yielded an unconfigured C-M-O model for group-based support for families of foreign fighters (table 6.4).

Ex ante evaluation has not yet been applied to CVE interventions and programmes – much less ex ante realist review and realistic evaluation. The above sections illustrated step by step how this could be done. This resulted in a method and heuristic guidelines relevant not only to group support for families of foreign fighters, but also other CVE interventions that need to be designed and for which an evidence base is lacking. Designing CVE interventions by drawing on realist ex ante evaluation should consist of the following steps:

- 1) Conduct a realist review of a similar intervention applied in one or more different fields using the heuristic guidelines developed in chapter 3. The end result is an unconfigured C-M-O model of an intervention or programme in a different context.

- 2) Use the outcome of the realist review as an evidence-based theoretical model to test the applicability of the C-M-O model for a CVE context and the target audience of the CVE intervention.
- 3) Make a stakeholder analysis. Which people and organizations would be involved in or affected by the CVE intervention? Who is the target group of the intervention (families of foreign fighters), in which municipalities and communities, and which expert organizations will be involved?
- 4) Use the stakeholder analysis as an input for multi-method data collection to test and further enhance and specify the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes developed in step 1, for example, by conducting interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.
- 5) Analyse the data in terms of relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Does the data warrant further specification of or additions to the model developed in step 1?
- 6) Develop a specified C-M-O model related to the CVE intervention and target audience that provides answers to questions such as the following:
 - If such an intervention were implemented, what contextual conditions need to be met?
 - What mechanisms underlie the specific intervention?
 - What are the potential outcomes of the intervention?

6.6 Conclusion and reflection

This chapter started by asking if and how realist review and realistic evaluation could be applied *ex ante*, in order to develop a more evidence-based and informed CVE policy theory and design. It then zoomed in on a specific case study: setting up support groups for families of foreign fighters. This led not only to the development of an evidence-based policy theory for group-based support programmes for families of foreign fighters, it also produced a method and heuristic guidelines for CVE policy design.

So we now know *how* to conduct an *ex ante* realistic evaluation, but *why* is such an approach important? In terrorism studies, CVE has been criticised as lacking an evidence base and having counter-productive effects on the target audience of CVE programmes, such as religious and ethnic communities (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018; Van San, 2018). An *ex ante* realistic evaluation seeks to overcome these issues. Realist review contributes to the development of an evidence-based policy theory. The realistic evaluation tests the applicability of the intervention in the context of CVE and its

target audiences. It provides communities, families and/or individuals an opportunity to voice their opinions and express their wishes regarding CVE. It also includes the main stakeholders influenced or affected by the CVE intervention or programme. Finally, it shines light on the experience-based knowledge of experts regarding what can be done and might work – and how. A realistic ex ante evaluation undertaken in this way contributes to the legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness of CVE policy. The legitimacy is further enhanced by taking not only different stakeholders into account, but also the different perspectives these stakeholders might have. It addresses not only the father whose son travelled to Syria, but also the family member whose minor sister travelled to the conflict zone. Moreover, its focus is not limited to the big cities of the Netherlands, but also includes the smaller municipalities that are affected by the foreign fighter phenomenon. Finally, it lays the groundwork for more thorough evaluation research, contributing in turn to a more evidence-based CVE.

In the case of establishing a Dutch support group programme for families of foreign fighters, our ex ante realistic evaluation yielded insights that were not anticipated beforehand. Dutch families of foreign fighters harboured much resentment against the government. So it might have been logical to have a volunteer or community organization set up the support group programme. However, families were adamant that a professional organization should set up the support groups. In their opinion, the government was the only one who could deliver the required professionalism. This was a surprising outcome of the realistic ex ante evaluation. Families' input also provided valuable information about the content of the group sessions.

Some scholars might argue that the value of such an ex ante realistic evaluation is limited to this one CVE case and to the Dutch context, and a specific timeframe (before the defeat of the caliphate), and that it cannot be similarly applied to other geographical contexts and situations. Indeed, the C-M-O model developed cannot be applied one-to-one in Denmark or France, for example. However, the C-M-O model in table 6.4 does provide a canvas that those countries could develop further to understand the contextual requirements, the underlying mechanisms and the potential outcomes of such group support programmes in their situation. The evidence-based policy theory developed here provides a starting point for tailoring support programmes to the specific needs of the families and the infrastructure of the country. It will still be important to conduct interviews and focus groups with stakeholders to test the model's applicability to other contexts and

target audiences. One obvious question is whether the defeat of the caliphate has consequences for the content and set-up of support programmes, as we now know from the *optimal matching theory* that families want to be matched to other families with similar experiences. Once most foreign fighters have surrendered and been imprisoned – in jails or in refugee camps – it seems logical that a separate group would be established for their families.

In sum, ex-ante realistic evaluation provides the tools to help design more legitimate, feasible and effective CVE interventions and programmes.



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7 Conclusion

7.1 Recap

When friends and relatives ask me what my PhD research is about, I usually answer in layperson terms, that I am studying the effectiveness of countering violent extremism (CVE). The immediate response is then generally, “So, does CVE work?” Unfortunately, I have to disappoint those people, and any readers, who were hoping to get a quick answer to that question. Quite simply, we as a scientific community are unable to answer the question of ‘what works in CVE’. CVE is a relatively new and very complex phenomenon. The term itself has become a – contested – catch phrase for a broad array of interventions targeting different populations at different stages in the radicalization process. Most common evaluation methods have proven unsuitable for dealing with the complexity of CVE. As a result, there is a serious lack of evaluations in the field. Those few evaluations that we can draw upon are very heterogeneous, both in terms of evaluation method and the type of interventions that they address. It is therefore impossible to make any grounded statements on the effectiveness of CVE. Academia thus has little theoretical basis for adequately advising the policy and practitioner community on the best course of action.

Moreover, the question of ‘what works’ is too simplistic. The wicked nature of radicalization and violent extremism requires an evaluation method that un.masks too simple problem-solution couplings, looks at the (normative) assumptions underlying CVE interventions and takes the highly contextual nature of (countering) radicalization and violent extremism into account. The field faces a twofold lacuna: (i) we are in need of an evaluation method that can accommodate the complexity and contextuality of CVE, while providing an authoritative basis for new evaluations and at the same time exposing incorrect or too limited, normative assumptions in CVE policy; (ii) we require a ‘meta-analysis’ method for synthesizing the variety of evaluations available to produce generic insights. Addressing precisely these issues, realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and the associated method of meta-analysis, or ‘realist review’(Pawson, 2006), could offer a very relevant and valuable path forward.

The premise of the realistic evaluation method is that evaluation must take into account the contextual conditions and mechanisms that underlie

interventions. As a consequence ‘does CVE work?’ is not the right question to ask. Rather, the question we need to pose is ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in CVE’. Until now, realistic evaluation had never before been applied to CVE.²⁰ However, the realistic evaluation method did appear to be a promising heuristic evaluation model to apply to CVE, because of its ability to take into account the contextuality and (normative) assumptions that underlie this wicked and contested problem. While realistic evaluation offers guidelines on how to use theory to deductively develop a theoretical model in situations where theories and evidence are abundant, it provides no detailed guidelines on how to develop a testable theoretical model in situations where theories and evidence are lacking. Pawson and Tilley (1997) claim that in those situations, what they call ‘folk theories’ can provide valuable insight into relevant C-M-Os. However, as discussed in chapter 1, they offered little guidance on how, for example, policy documents and expert opinion, might be used to develop a theory. This aspect of the realistic evaluation method thus required further development.

Realist review, which synthesizes *existing* evaluation studies, had also never been applied to CVE. Realist review is a method for synthesizing evaluations of complex social interventions, even in fields that are lacking in evaluation studies. This suggests its potential for use in the field of CVE. Yet, Pawson (2005) indicated that the realist review method would require adaptation and innovation for application to a widening range of complex programmes (Pawson, 2006: 93–96, in Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012). This need for further development of the realist review method to accommodate a widening array of complex programmes was also pointed out by Betts (2013). Her realist review of aid effectiveness and governance for developing country reform concluded that broad and diverse programmes and interventions require a more systematic approach for data extraction than provided in Pawson and Tilley’s work (*ibid.*). It seems plausible that in principle, realist review could provide a suitable method for synthesizing the limited CVE evaluation literature, contributing in turn to theory building. It is however, likely that the review method would need adaptation to be applied to CVE.

In sum, realistic evaluation seems a good candidate for meeting the need for more and better evaluation of CVE programmes, as it could address the inherent complexity of these programmes. However, realistic evaluation

20 With the exception of Veldhuis (2012) who applied the first step of the realistic evaluation method for *design* of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for violent extremists.

has hitherto hardly been applied to CVE. Could it be developed into a suitable method, and what adaptation will be required to that end? Also, to what extent and how might it help us gain a better understanding of CVE, contributing to building a theoretical foundation upon which the research community can base its policy recommendations?

This question led to the central focus of this dissertation:

How can realist review and realistic evaluation be employed and developed in the field of countering violent extremism (CVE), and what can realist review and realistic evaluation contribute to the development of CVE policy and to deepening our understanding of violent extremism?

These questions formed the starting point of this dissertation research and are addressed in this final chapter.

7.2 Realist review

As pointed out, realist review is a method for meta-analysis; that is, for synthesizing *existing* evaluation studies rather than for evaluation of single interventions. While traditional reviews often present a matrix of mean effect sizes alongside a form of judgement with respect to the quality of the evaluations identified, the realist review method enables us to synthesize existing CVE evaluations without attributing a hierarchy to the evaluation methods used in the studies examined (Pawson, 2006; Gielen, 2017a). In short, realist review does not favour one evaluation method over others. Its premise is that each CVE evaluation contains valuable insights into relevant contexts and mechanisms, which helps us to answer the explorative question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’. Also, realist review does not provide an overall judgement on the effect of an intervention. Instead, it yields insights into the variety of ways in which interventions might, in a particular context, trigger mechanisms that generate outcomes. These insights can also contribute to theory building, not only regarding an intervention or programme, but also on the phenomenon that the programme or intervention aims to address. This is an opportunity not hitherto noted in the literature on realist review.

Although realist review has been designated in terms of six steps (clarifying the scope of the review, searching for primary studies, appraising quality,

extracting the data, synthesizing the data and disseminating the findings, Pawson, 2006; Gielen, 2017a), due to the realist and iterative nature of the review process, there can be no generic technical manual on how to conduct realist review. Though the realist principles should always be followed, Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) observed that very few reviews labelled realist actually abide by the realist principles, and that the conclusions and recommendations they report might therefore be misleading.

Drawing on the work of Pawson and realist colleagues and fellows, this dissertation has presented heuristic guidelines on how to conduct realist review for complex social programmes and has further explored these by actually applying them to CVE. These heuristic guidelines were then applied to the field of CVE. Chapter 2 presented a realist review of *existing* CVE evaluations, providing a better understanding of what CVE is and dos and don'ts for CVE policymakers and practitioners. Chapter 3 presented methodological reflections, focusing not on the *outcome* of a realist review of CVE measures but rather on the steps toward it and the challenges that arise when applying the method of realist review to a field as complex as CVE.

The realist review of CVE evaluation studies presented in chapter 2 demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of the interventions that fall under the catch phrase 'CVE'. The review confirms that the heuristic guidelines for realist review may require adaption for situations in which (i) the presence of a complex and wicked problem and its contingent solutions imply a nearly endless set of C-M-O configurations; (ii) evaluations are lacking; (iii) heterogeneous primary studies make it impossible to draw out dominant theories and compare; (iv) a more systematic approach is required for data extraction; and (v) the realist review method is novel in the specific field and thus requires much more explanation.

The adapted guidelines were presented in detail in table 3.3 in chapter 3, but the primary adaptations can be summarized as follows:

- The focus of the review should be on getting a better sense of what the wicked and complex issue entails. The research questions then still have an explanatory focus, but are geared toward drawing out relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes instead of testing and comparing different theories.
- With a highly complex problem like CVE, the scoping phase is used as an opportunity to conceptually grasp the issue instead of to draw out programme theories. The results of this scoping phase are relevant to

the search for primary studies as they provide insight into what search words should be used.

- Developing a theoretical model for what works, for whom, how and in what context is an end result of the review instead of the starting point.
- Primary studies should not be judged in terms of how much they contribute to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather if they provide insight into what the complex programme entails and specifically what relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are related to the complex programme.
- If evaluations (primary studies) are lacking, inclusion criteria should be less strict. Besides qualitative and/or quantitative studies, process evaluations and theory-driven studies should also be included.
- Part of the essence of realist review is that it is not replicable. Rather, it is an interactive and iterative process that requires researchers to leave an interpretive trail. However, wicked problems such as CVE require a more systematic approach to analysing and synthesizing primary studies which focuses on what exactly is considered CVE and what its relevant contexts, mechanisms, outcomes and lessons learnt are.
- The continuous development of a field as complex as CVE means that a realist review is never finished. Rather, it is a contribution to systematic knowledge accumulation on the topic and can be used in evidence-based policy theory as an input for future reviews and evaluations.

7.3 Realistic evaluation

Realistic evaluation is particularly helpful for examining specific interventions within CVE, such as family support programmes, resilience programmes for youths in schools and exit programmes for foreign fighters. Realistic evaluation follows four basic steps in developing hypotheses on relevant contextual conditions (C) and mechanisms (M), which may in turn contribute to effective outcomes (O) patterns. Step 1, thus, is hypothesizing on what might work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. By drawing on multi-method data collection (step 2), relevant context-mechanism-outcome patterns can be derived and analysed (step 3). The end result is a more refined theoretical model (step 4) on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

So the crucial first step of realistic evaluation is to develop hypotheses on what might work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. This is

generally done by drawing on an existing, and sometimes extensive, body of literature. However, how does one undertake such an exercise in a field that is lacking in evaluations and thus theory? Pawson and Tilley (1997: 88) provided an alternative for such cases in the form of 'folk theories'. As I observed in chapter 3, folk theories might be better labelled as 'policy theory' (Hoogerwerf, 1990; Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995) or as a 'theory of change' (Weiss, 1995). Policy theories are distinguished from social scientific theories in that these latter are designed to explain and provide generally applicable statements about human behaviour. Policy theories do not intend to explain, but seek merely to support certain (proposed) courses of action, to legitimize policy (Hoogerwerf, 1990). The departure of European fighters to join ISIS and other extremist groups in Syria and Iraq made it crucial for governments to respond. However, policymakers and practitioners could not, and still cannot, turn to science for answers, as there is very limited scientific theory on effective CVE interventions. As a consequence they developed their own theories, based on their own reflections, experience and knowledge regarding CVE; in other words, 'policy theories'. These policy theories reflect ideas about what it is in specific interventions that might generate change in people vulnerable to radicalization (mechanisms) and views on for whom, by whom and in what kinds of circumstances an intervention might be a success (contexts). These, combined, lead to outcome patterns. Ultimately, the combined contexts and mechanisms should lead to the prevention or countering of violent extremism.

Although Pawson & Tilley (1997) suggested that policy theories can be used to develop hypotheses as the first step of realistic evaluation, they shed no light on how precisely this should be undertaken. Where does one find these folk theories? How can one transform these theories into hypotheses on how relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes interact (C-M-O configurations) in order to conduct an evaluation that abides by the realistic principles?

These questions were discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 used the CVE intervention of 'family support' as a case study. Family support, in which counselling is provided to families of (potential) violent extremists, was first introduced in Germany over a decade ago, and in recent years has been adopted by countries, cities and communities from France to the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria. However, different countries, cities and communities have chosen an approach that matches their own specific context. This has led to various forms of family support

across Europe. As family support is such a new intervention under the CVE umbrella, no scientific theory was available for developing preliminary C-M-O configurations that could be used for the first step of realistic evaluation. But the rapid development of family support programmes and telephone hotlines across Europe has produced an abundance of policy theories. These policy theories were found in policy documents underlying the family support programmes and also via expert opinions of practitioners who were already providing family support and whom exchanged their methods, insights and lessons learnt in European networks such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). These sources helped provide a better understanding of what CVE entails at the policy and practitioner levels, while also helping us to extract relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns. By drawing on these policy theories, and further informed by my own experiences, reflections and knowledge as an intervention provider to families of foreign fighters, I was able to develop preliminary C-M-O configurations for family support programmes. These configurations addressed the different contexts and requirements for family support: Who provides family support? In what settings is this done? To what type of families is support provided? What interventions are used, and on what theories are they based? When are they successful? What types of outcome patterns should family support produce? The end result of this exercise was C-M-O configurations that could be tested using realistic evaluation, which may prove them wrong or right, or lead to their adaptation. This building of an exemplary body of scientific knowledge could be partly based on the realistic approach to evaluation.

In chapter 5, I developed a proposal for how to conduct realistic evaluation of exit programmes for female jihadists. Female violent extremism is not a new phenomenon. However, CVE interventions specifically targeted at women are novel. As a consequence, and like family support programmes, there are no evaluations of exit programmes for females that we can draw upon, which is a necessary first step in realistic evaluation. Indeed, realistic evaluation requires formulation of a hypothetical middle-range theory on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists.

Chapter 5 illustrated how realistic evaluation could be used to overcome the lack of scientific theory on exit programmes for females. The chapter differed from chapter 4 in two key aspects. First, it drew on scientific theory, in addition to the policy theories available via documents and my own experiences

as an exit support intervention provider to girls who had attempted to travel to Syria. While there may be no scientific literature on exit programmes for females, there is literature available on female violent extremism, on processes of deradicalization and disengagement and on exit programmes. Thus, in order to formulate hypotheses on C-M-O configurations, we could draw not only on scientific theory and policy theory on female extremism, but also on that pertaining to exit programmes in general and exit policy documents in a specific country or city under review. Second, chapter 5 went beyond the first step of realistic evaluation, to illustrate how each step of realistic evaluation should be conducted. This case illustrated the type of multi-method data collection that can be applied, discerning different patterns of contextual conditions, mechanisms and outcomes relevant to the analysis of the collected data in relation to the case presented. The end result was a step-by-step approach that researchers and policymakers can draw upon to evaluate exit programmes.

7.4 Realistic policy design

Chapters 2 through 5 demonstrated that realist review and realistic evaluation are suitable methods for dealing with the complexity of evaluating countering violent extremism. The focus of these chapters was on how to shape and perform realistic evaluation in an ex post situation. Chapter 1 introduced violent extremism as a complex and intractable policy issue in which different actors hold different views and belief systems on how to solve the problem. Combined with the very scant evidence base available in the CVE field, this poses challenges not only for policy evaluation, but also for *policy design*. After all, the different actors hold different views on the relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcome measures. This is a challenge not only in an ex post situation in which CVE policy has already been implemented and requires evaluation, but also in the first stage of the policy cycle, the policy design phase. Ultimately the goal of both realist review and realistic evaluation is to inform policymakers on what works, for whom, in which context, how and why, in order to help policymakers to improve their (CVE) programmes and interventions. This raises the question of if and how the realist review and the realistic evaluation method can also be applied ex ante, in order to develop a more evidence-based and informed CVE policy theory and design. These questions lay at the heart of chapter 6.

Ex ante evaluation had not yet been applied to CVE interventions and programmes – let alone ex ante realist review and realistic evaluation. Chapter 6 produced a method and heuristic guidelines relevant not only to support programmes for families of foreign fighters, but which can also be applied to other CVE interventions that need to be designed and for which an evidence base is lacking. The design of CVE interventions by drawing on realist ex ante evaluation should consist of the following steps:

- 1) Conduct a realist review of a similar intervention applied in (a) different field(s) applying the heuristic guidelines as developed in chapter 3. The end result is an unconfigured C-M-O model of an intervention or programme in a different context.
- 2) Use the outcome of the realist review as an evidence-based theoretical model to test the applicability of the C-M-O model for a CVE context and the target audience of the CVE intervention.
- 3) Conduct a stakeholder analysis. Which people and organizations would be involved and or affected by the CVE intervention? That is, who would be the target group of the intervention? In which municipalities? Which communities and expert organizations would be involved?
- 4) Use the stakeholder analysis as an input for the selection of multi-method data collection to test and further enhance and specify the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes developed in step 1, for example, by conducting interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.
- 5) Analyse the data in terms of relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Does the data warrant further specification of or additions to the model as developed in step 1?
- 6) Develop a specified C-M-O model related to the CVE intervention and target audience that provides answers to questions such as the following:
 - a. If such an intervention were implemented, which contextual conditions would need to be met?
 - b. What mechanisms underlie the specific intervention?
 - c. What are the potential outcomes of the intervention?

Realist review applied ex ante contributes to the development of an evidence-based policy theory. Realistic evaluation tests the applicability of a policy theory in the context of CVE and its target audiences. It provides communities, families and/or individuals opportunities to voice their opinions and express their wishes regarding CVE. It also includes the most important stakeholders that are influenced or affected by the CVE intervention or programme. Thus, a realistic ex ante evaluation approach will contribute to the legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness of CVE policy. It also creates

the conditions for more thorough evaluation research, which in turn can contribute to a more evidence-based CVE.

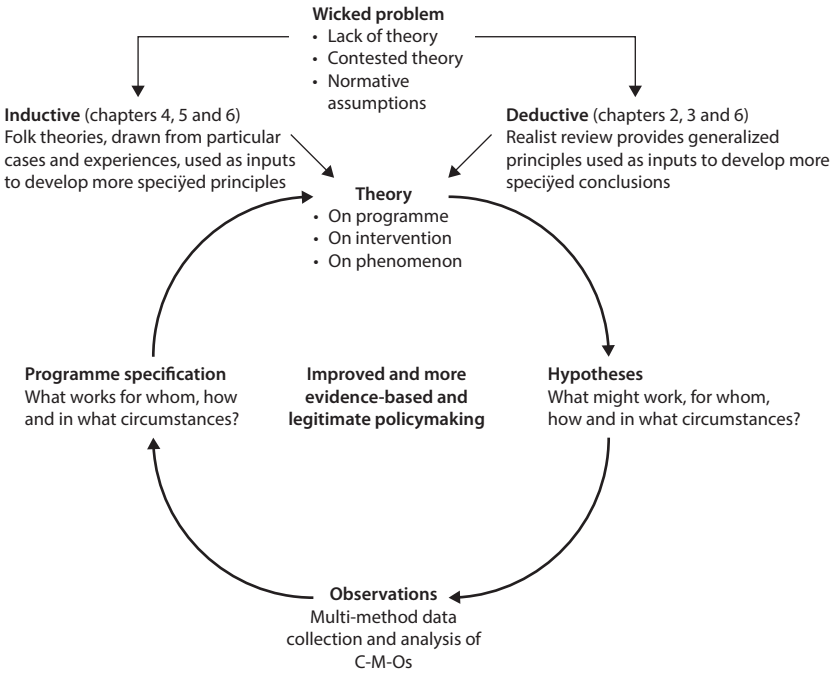
7.5 Methodological contribution

In sum, realistic evaluation and review were developed to provide an evaluation and synthesis method for complex social programmes. While these methods have become established in the healthcare sector (Manzano *et al.*, 2015) they are less common in the social domain and had never before been applied to CVE. In taking a field as complex as CVE as a case study for realistic evaluation and review, this research has essentially provided a guide to conducting realistic evaluation and review in complex social fields that are still emerging and developing, are lacking in scientific theory and have only limited and heterogeneous studies to draw on. For these situations, the current study provides guidance on the following:

- how to make use of folk theories when scientific theory is lacking;
- how to develop hypothetical C-M-O configurations;
- how to collect relevant data and analyse it in a realist fashion;
- how to synthesize limited and heterogeneous evaluation studies in a field that is still developing;
- how to design effective, feasible and legitimate CVE interventions by applying *ex ante* realist review and realistic evaluation.

The methodological contribution of my dissertation research is depicted in figure 7.1. The figure shows that wicked problems such as CVE are more difficult to evaluate, which often leads to a lack of theory. A lack of theory is problematic because theory is not only quintessential for further evaluation, it is also vital for informed policymaking. Thus, other forms of theory development are required. This dissertation presented and developed two options. One is to apply ‘folk theory’ in situations where evidence is lacking. Folk theories, such as expert opinion, participant observation and policy documents, make it possible to inductively develop theory as they provide insight into the CVE programme or intervention; the type of service provider and his/her requirements; specific contextual conditions; the methods used and theories these are based upon; indicators of success; and the types of outcome patterns that should (or should not) be produced. Thus, taking specified instances as a starting point for evaluation, from which hypotheses on relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are

Figure 7.1: The methodological contribution of my dissertation: A further development of the realistic evaluation cycle (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 85). In this dissertation I developed heuristic guidelines for realistic review and evaluation, which enable us to inductively and deductively develop theory in order to evaluate complex social programmes and ultimately contribute to more informed policymaking.



developed, can produce more specified principles. This approach was applied in chapters 4 and 6 of this dissertation. Alternatively, realist review makes it possible to develop theory by drawing on generalized principles, using a realist meta-analysis with the heuristic guidelines developed in table 3.3 of chapter 3, as an input for more specified conclusions. This approach was applied in chapters 2 and 6.

This inductively and deductively developed theory then makes it possible not only to gain more specific insights into how CVE works, but also to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism itself. This was explored in chapters 5 and 6 and is summarized in section 7.5 below. Ultimately, these programme specifications and theory development also make it possible to design more evidence-based and legitimate policy.

7.6 Contributing to the CVE policy and scientific community

While heuristic development of the realistic evaluation method comprised an important part of this research, the current study was not strictly methodological in nature. It aimed, rather, also to deliver a contribution to the CVE policy and practitioner arena by synthesizing the literature currently available via a realist review and developing hypotheses on what works, for whom, how and why in family support and in exit programmes. The review and evaluations will serve both the policy and the practitioner communities, as well as the scientific community. They provide policymakers and scientists a better understanding of relevant contexts and mechanisms in CVE, which will help policymakers further develop their CVE programmes. This will help the scientific community advance toward a better understanding of the programmes and initiatives under the CVE umbrella, alongside contexts and mechanisms that can be employed in future (evaluation) research. The most important lessons learnt are summarized below:

- Chapter 2 found that CVE consists of many different types of interventions that can be offered to different target audiences at different stages. These are best captured using the classification system of primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention (see figure 2.1). Both the scientific and policy community must realize that CVE is more than preventative work or deradicalization and disengagement alone.
- Chapter 2 also demonstrated that ‘increasing resilience’ plays an important role in CVE programmes, as greater resilience enhances protective factors and can thus prevent (further) radicalization. Interventions to increase resilience can be offered to different target audiences, such as vulnerable individuals, vulnerable groups and (diaspora) communities (Weine, 2012; Gielen, 2017a). Mentoring, community outreach and education are commonly used to improve resilience. These efforts often hinge on theories of moral disengagement, bonding and bridging, and value complexity. The most important lesson for increasing resilience is that programmes should be offered to different target audiences simultaneously within a multi-agency setting, preferably bottom-up instead of top-down (Williams *et al.*, 2016b; Mirahmadi, 2016). Research has shown that top-down community engagement, for example, can make communities feel singled out and stigmatized (O’Toole *et al.*, 2012, 2016; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Vermeulen, 2014). So, while the underlying principles of community engagement seem logical and noble, the way it is executed can have unintended and even negative

consequences. This is an important lesson for policymakers. As most research on community engagement concerns the UK, it is time that researchers look at whether unintended negative effects of community engagement also apply in other European countries.

- Chapters 2 and 5 illustrated that exit programmes are aimed at de-radicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation or reintegration. Exit requires a long-term and holistic approach that takes into account push and pull factors and combines multiple interventions which activate different mechanisms. Examples of interventions commonly used are mentoring, practical support, family support, physical and psychological assessment and counselling and theological and ideological guidance. The sequence of interventions in an exit programme is important and must be tailored to the needs of the individual. Practical interventions can help build trust, allowing other interventions to move forward. Creating a safe and stable family environment can be an important precondition to effective mentoring and self-reflection. The forming of an alternative social network is essential to compensate for loss of friends. The success of an exit programme is dependent on the extent to which it is integral and holistic and addresses normative, affective and practical issues (Gielen, 2018a). While Demant *et al.* (2010) previously stressed that exit programmes for jihadists focus too much on the ideological component and not enough on the affective (peer network) component, this lesson seems to have been forgotten. Chapter 5 further underlines the importance of taking the affective factor into account when developing and evaluating exit programmes. The Pro-Integration Model (Barrelle, 2015) has proven an effective tool for measuring the outcomes of exit activities. Future research on exit programmes should apply this model, seeking to establish the levels of (dis)engagement. While both research and practice suggest that a ‘soft’ and voluntary approach to exit is more favourable, chapter 5 indicates that legal and administrative instruments might also be helpful in creating conditions conducive to exit. These contextual conditions should be taken into account both in developing and in evaluating exit programmes.
- Family support is a relatively new intervention in CVE and as a consequence has hardly been studied. At the time of this dissertation research, very few studies had been done on families of foreign fighters and their needs (Gielen, 2015a; Weenink, 2015; Sieckelink & De Winter, 2015; Maher & Neumann, 2016). Maher and Neumann (2016) analysed public documents on 46 families of foreign fighters in 17 countries. They found grief, confusion, fear and shame to be the most important impacts

on families. Chapter 6 confirmed these insights. In our interviews and focus group with families of foreign fighters, we found that nearly all of these families had particular personal and socio-psychological problems, similar to people who participate in 'regular' support groups. However, additionally we found that families of foreign fighters dealt with very specific problems not mentioned in the general literature on support groups. For instance, all were confronted with consequences of the extremist behaviour of their child/family member, in the form of sometimes severe legal repercussions, administrative measures and public exposure.

- While the little research that is available on family support suggests that families are an important target audience for CVE (Sieckelink & De Winter, 2015; Neumann & Maher, 2016), it provides no answers as to what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances. Chapters 2, 4 and 6 extensively described the different forms of family support. Family support in the form of parental coaching, awareness raising and parental support groups helps parents identify early-warning signals and stimulates positive parenting styles in order to reduce the attraction of extremist groups and enhance protective factors against radicalization. Family support can be offered at different stages on the path that can lead to violent extremism. At the primary preventive stage, it can be provided to parents of individuals at risk, to address their concerns and help them work toward (maintaining) a positive family environment in which extremist ideas can be discussed and alternatives provided. If radical or extremist ideas lead to travel to a conflict zone abroad, family support can then be aimed at maintaining contact with the family member abroad, in order to create a positive environment for the family member to return home to. Families can also be supported while a child or relative is imprisoned or afterward, in the reintegration and rehabilitation process, as families are a crucial factor in deradicalization and disengagement. Family support can be provided individually via outreach programmes or collectively in support groups (Gielen 2015a; Gielen, 2017a). Chapter 6 described the case of establishing a Dutch support group programme for families of foreign fighters. Our ex ante realistic evaluation yielded insights that were not anticipated beforehand. Dutch families of foreign fighters harboured much resentment against the government. So it might have been logical to have a volunteer or community organization set up the support group programme. However, families were adamant that a professional organization should set up the support groups. In their

opinion, the government was the only one who could deliver the required professionalism. This was a surprising outcome of the realistic ex ante evaluation. Families' input also provided valuable information about the content of the group sessions. Some scholars might argue that the value of such an ex ante realistic evaluation is limited to this one CVE case, to the Dutch context and to a specific timeframe (before the defeat of the caliphate), and that it cannot be similarly applied to other geographical contexts and situations. Indeed, the C-M-O model developed cannot be applied one-to-one in Denmark or France, for example. However, the C-M-O model in table 6.4 does provide a canvas that those countries could develop further to understand the contextual requirements, the underlying mechanisms and the potential outcomes of such group support programmes in their situation. The evidence-based policy theory developed here provides a starting point for tailoring support programmes to the specific needs of the families concerned and the infrastructure of the country in which they reside.

- Counter-communication in the form of counter-narratives or alternative narratives has become a popular CVE intervention. The rationale behind counter-communication is that it can reduce or dispel the extremist narrative. It is thought to provide a positive alternative to take-down measures for extremist online content. Though the intervention is rather novel, counter-communication is already receiving scrutiny. Chapter 2 provided insights as to why. First, the causal relationship between exposure to extremist content and violent extremism remains unproven (Ferguson, 2016). The few online counter-narrative programmes that have been evaluated do not address the underlying mechanisms of the radicalization process (Davies *et al.*, 2016). This is an important lesson for policymakers, among whom counter-narratives have become a new buzz word and assumed magic solution. Preliminary research suggests that caution should be exercised in implementing counter-narratives. Further research is necessary to test the underlying mechanisms of counter-narratives, alongside the type of content that does and does not appeal to the various target audiences, and whether counter-narratives should be deployed overtly or covertly and by civil society or governments (Gielen, 2017a).
- CVE is still very much in flux. We are constantly learning new things about what causes violent extremism, who are the main gatekeepers to violent extremism and who is most vulnerable to radicalization. Peers seem to be forgotten in most CVE programmes, though as chapter 2 observed, Williams *et al.* (2016a) found that peers may be best

positioned to notice early signs of violent extremism. Williams *et al.* (2016b) suggested peer gatekeeper training as an important element of evidence-based CVE policy. Additionally, chapters 2 and 6 found that those close to (deceased) violent extremists, such as brothers, sisters, cousins and peers, form an at-risk group for violent extremism, as they may be subjected to grooming while in a vulnerable state. CVE programmes, but also the CVE literature, often overlook these groups. Prior to the research by Williams *et al.* (2016a, 2016b), the role of peers had not been noted in the literature at all. Greater support for families and for the broader professional social network of the family (including, e.g., school teachers) could enable practitioners and family members to act upon early-warning signals to prevent radicalization of other family members and peers (Gielen, 2017a).

- Another often-overlooked target audience of CVE is women. Women are typically considered victims of violent extremism and passive agents framed, for example, as ‘jihadi brides’. Chapter 5 illustrated that their threat should not be underestimated and that interventions should be tailored to their needs and circumstances. CVE programmes should thus include extremist women as a specific target group, for example, by offering exit programmes for women. The empirical framework for exit programmes is already very limited (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013), and this is even more so for exit programmes targeted specifically for women. A key task for the scientific community will be adding to our empirical framework on home-grown female violent extremism in general and exit programmes for women in particular (Gielen, 2018a).
- CVE should not be concerned only with ‘best practices’, but also with ‘best people’. Quality standards for CVE intervention providers have not yet received any scientific attention, though chapters 2, 5 and 6 highlighted the importance of the practitioners providing an intervention. Experience, level of training and knowledge on violent extremism; ability to operate in a multi-agency setting; and the extent to which an intervention provider is able to establish a trust-based relationship with vulnerable individuals and his or her family are imperative contextual conditions to successful CVE outcomes (Gielen, 2017a, 2018a). The quality of CVE intervention providers should become a research focus for scholars and be taken into account when evaluating CVE interventions. Policymakers should uphold the same standards for CVE intervention providers as they do for practitioners in sectors such as education and youth work. Ethnicity or religiosity should never be the sole criteria for selecting CVE intervention providers.

7.7 Recommendations for CVE evaluation

The introduction of this dissertation highlighted the fact that CVE is a contested concept. The assumptions underlying CVE and the target audience that CVE programmes aim to address are to this day considered highly problematic and stigmatizing (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018; Van San, 2018; Fadil *et al.*, 2019). This raises the question of whether we should continue with CVE at all and if evaluation of CVE is not in fact merely a legitimization of a highly contested policy. On the basis of my dissertation, particularly chapter 6, which illustrated that *ex ante* realistic evaluation that includes the target audience of CVE, can yield more effective and legitimate policy, I firmly believe that we should continue to evaluate CVE. Only with thorough evaluation can we expose (contested) normative assumptions about CVE policy. Moreover, evaluation can contribute to theory building and help us to achieve more informed policymaking.

While it is quintessential that researchers around the world start to evaluate (more) CVE programmes and interventions, it must be observed that conducting more evaluations requires the active input of policymakers and practitioners. Evaluation should be on the agenda prior to implementation of a CVE programme or intervention. In fact, evaluation should be part of the *policy design* process for CVE programmes. I have therefore sought to develop an approach to evaluating solutions that enables us to scrutinize underlying assumptions (rooted in literature, folk theory or more pragmatic or normative considerations) and to construct better understanding, that could inform future policy design.

On these issues, I have published a set of recommendations for the Flemish and Belgium context on evaluation and CVE (Gielen, 2017b; Gielen, 2018c). Let me close by reiterating here some of them, as they apply not only to Belgian policymakers and practitioners, but in fact to all CVE practitioners and policymakers around the globe.

1. ***Make evaluation an integral part the CVE programme, preferably by embedding the CVE programme in a department where monitoring and evaluation is general practice.*** Research (Gielen, 2018c) shows that municipalities that have integrated their CVE policy into an organization or department with a framework for monitoring and evaluation are more inclined to include evaluation in their CVE policy and practice.
2. ***Organize frequent exchanges between scientists, policymakers, practitioners and civil society actors to share good evaluation practices***

for CVE policy. Many conferences, workshops and meetings revolve around the issue of violent extremism as a phenomenon or CVE as a policy issue. Although evaluation of CVE policy is still in its infancy, there are numerous inspiring practices in Europe and around the globe that could and should be shared during multidisciplinary meetings of policymakers, practitioners, civil society actors and academics.

3. ***Devote 10% of the CVE budget to evaluation.*** Lack of resources is often a reason why it is not possible to organize an evaluation. To overcome this issue and to illustrate that evaluation is an important matter, 10% of the CVE budget should be reserved for evaluation.
4. ***Set up a CVE evaluation database similar to the Cochrane database in the medical field.*** Chapter 3 found that in just one year's time, the field of CVE had developed so rapidly that the number of studies relevant to the realist review had nearly doubled. The rapid development of the CVE field presumably will continue. This does raise questions about how long the findings of such a review remain current and thus relevant for policymakers. Ideally, the academic community should develop a database similar to that of Cochrane in the medical field, to make it possible to take stock of evaluation developments in CVE and use the newest CVE evaluation studies as the input for more refined realist reviews.
5. ***Clearly distinguish a CVE programme from interventions.*** A CVE programme is a combination of interventions that addresses the full spectrum of the prevention continuum: primary, secondary and tertiary. Interventions, on the other hand, are specific activities which are part of a broader CVE programme. Interventions can be diverse, ranging from a theatre production on jihad for high school students to a family support group for parents of foreign fighters. Interventions can be targeted at different audiences, at an individual, group or collective level. For example, vulnerable or extremist individuals can be targeted, or schools, families or communities. When considering evaluation, it has to be clear: Is the CVE programme as a whole being evaluated, or is just one intervention, or set of interventions, being examined?
6. ***Address grievances, causes and risk factors associated with violent extremism, but also protective factors.*** Practitioners and policymakers can draw on different models that have been developed for addressing the grievances, causes and risk factors for violent extremism. Campelo *et al.* (2018) have conducted a systematic literature review of causes of violent extremism in Europe. That review highlights a multitude of risk factors at a personal, micro-environmental and macro-environmental

level. At the individual level, the study identified different traits and psychological vulnerabilities, such as having a depressive nature, experiences with addictive and risky behaviour; early experiences of abandonment; vulnerable family structures; a quest for an ideal; personal uncertainty; perceived injustice; trigger events such as trauma and (near) death; and psychopathological mechanisms that reinforce extremist engagement. Micro-environmental factors include having radicalized peers, a dysfunctional family and sympathy with the sectarian use of dehumanization to justify violence. At the macro-environmental level, they identified the following as risk factors: social polarization; perceived group threat; the role of religious ideology; the geopolitical context; and processes of societal change. Ranstorp (2016) offered a 'kaleidoscopic overview' of nine risk factors related to violent extremism: (i) individual and (ii) social factors such as frustration and alienation; (iii) political and (iv) ideological factors such as dissatisfaction with foreign policies and interference with religious practices; (v) identity crises reinforced by a migration biography or post-traumatic stress disorder; and (vi) group dynamics and recruitment strategies consisting of (vii) groomers and (ix) social media (Gielen, 2017b; Sieckelinc & Gielen, 2018). Although risk factors can provide insight into which risks need to be contained or countered, they cannot offer guidelines for protective policies or for positive action (Sieckelinc & Gielen, 2018). Sieckelinc and Gielen (*ibid.*) therefore developed a kaleidoscopic model based on protective factors and a resilience-based course of action. Any CVE programme should address the different risk factors and protective factors involved in violent extremism. However, one should realize that there are critical schools of thought that question whether it is possible at all to develop overarching theories and models to explain violent extremism.

7. **Formulate goals.** Many CVE policy documents speak of deradicalization of young people via special educational programmes when in fact they mean increasing resilience. Deradicalization requires someone to first be radicalized. It is important to accurately formulate what each CVE intervention aims to achieve and what the overall CVE programme seeks to contribute. What type of prevention – primary, secondary or tertiary – does the intervention aim for? Is the envisaged outcome to increase resilience, or deradicalization and disengagement?
8. **Identify target audiences accordingly.** Alongside formulation of goals for the CVE programme and different interventions, the target audience must be carefully selected and realistic goals set regarding what can be achieved per target group. An educational programme alone will never

deradicalize violent extremists. But an educational programme can increase the resilience of vulnerable, at-risk groups and individuals.

9. ***Formulate a theory of change for each CVE programme and intervention.*** Describe the theory or mechanisms at the heart of each intervention. This might seem difficult for non-scientists. Asking relevant questions can help: Why do you think that the CVE intervention you want to implement will help prevent or counter violent extremism? What specific elements of the intervention might help achieve the goals? Do you know of any practice-based or scientific-based evidence that might support your assumption? If you can formulate the answers to these questions you will have managed to formulate a theory of change.
10. ***Make use of existing theory and evaluations.*** Although CVE evaluations are scarce, the body of literature on CVE and CVE evaluations is growing. Full use should be made of the available knowledge, from peer-reviewed journals to research reports and CVE manuals for practitioners and policymakers, such as the *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* (RAN, 2019). If there is no literature at all available, make use of other bodies of literature. For example, from the long history of crime prevention research we already know that boot camps and re-educational institutions do not work. Is it then likely that these interventions, for example, will work in CVE? If there is very little knowledge available on parental support groups for foreign fighters, why not consult the literature on support groups for parents with a child who is addicted, terminally ill or deceased? Chapter 6 illustrated that using other bodies of literature can provide theories of change and relevant preconditions for increasing the effectiveness of support groups dedicated to families of foreign fighters.
11. ***Formulate smart indicators at three levels.*** Evaluation is only possible if goals and indicators are formulated from the outset for CVE programmes and interventions. An indicator essentially is a goal specification. It details requirements that help evaluators decide if the goals have been met. There are different types of indicators. Structural indicators revolve around essential preconditions that have to be met. For example, a structural indicator for an intervention to increase the resilience of young people via education is the training of educational staff to carry out such a project. A process indicator helps one to make statements on the output of an intervention, such as how many pupils are to be reached with an educational resilience training or how many phone calls a family telephone hotline should receive in order to be considered a success. Process indicators are only indicative of the number of people reached

with an intervention; they cannot tell us anything about the quality or effect of the intervention. For that, we need to formulate outcome indicators. An example of an outcome indicator is that the resilience of high school students who followed a resilience educational programme is increased by X% after the intervention. Or that, for example, 80% of the parents who phoned a family hotline were satisfied with the help they received.

12. ***Make use of existing questionnaires and measurement tools.*** To measure, for example, whether resilience against violent extremism increased after an intervention, we first need to assess the levels of resilience before the CVE intervention was implemented. Mann *et al.* (2015) developed a questionnaire to measure resilience against violent extremism. If such a questionnaire is used prior to and after an intervention, we are then able to say something about the extent that resilience levels did or did not increase. Measurement of deradicalization or disengagement can be done with different measurement tools prior to and after an exit programme. For example, Barrelle's (2015) Pro-Integration Model can be used to assess levels of disengagement. Another instrument is the 'radical belief system' questionnaire by Doosje *et al.* (2013). The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) provides an indicator for fundamentalism and the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment 2 Revised (Vera-2R) (Pressman *et al.*, 2016) assesses the degree of risk for violent extremism.
13. ***Use multi-method data collection.*** We should not lose ourselves in a methodological battle prioritizing quantitative over qualitative methods or vice versa. Rather, the best of both worlds should be combined. While the above-mentioned questionnaires and scales are very useful for assessing the causal relationships between interventions and outcomes, and tell us *if* the intervention worked (or not), they provide no insight into why and how the interventions works. For this, qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviews should be included in evaluations.
14. ***Include researchers or evaluators prior to implementation.*** Often the evaluation of a CVE programme or intervention is unforeseen until the programme or intervention has ended. This seriously limits the options for thorough evaluation and rules out any form of effect evaluation with pre and post measurements.
15. ***Demand a thorough project plan from external partners.*** CVE interventions are often carried out by third parties, commercial or non-profit. This can be a perfect solution if statutory bodies lack the time, human

resources and knowledge to execute CVE interventions. However, at the end of the day governments are still responsible for CVE interventions and should act accordingly by at least demanding that external partners provide a thorough project plan. If the above-mentioned criteria are not part of a project plan, governments should not subsidize it.

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Author contributions and publications

Chapter 2

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Gielen, Amy-Jane (2019). "Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances, and How?," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 31 (6), pp. 1149-1167, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1313736>

Chapter 3

Gielen, Amy-Jane (2019). Lessons from a Realist Review of Countering Violent Extremism: Development of Refined Heuristic Guidelines for Complex Social Programmes.

Submitted

Chapter 4

Gielen, Amy-Jane (2015a). "Supporting families of foreign fighters. A realistic approach for measuring the effectiveness." *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 2, pp. 21-48.

Chapter 5

Gielen, Amy-Jane (2018a). "Exit Programmes for Female Jihadists: A Proposal for Conducting a Realistic Evaluation of the Dutch Approach," *International Sociology*, Vol. 33 (4), pp. 454-472, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918775586>

Chapter 6

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*Gielen and Dijkman developed the research design. Gielen and Dijkman collected and analysed the data for realistic evaluation. Gielen collected and analysed the data for the realist review. They made the final interpretation together. Gielen drafted the manuscript.

Summary Cutting through Complexity. Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

Introduction

As a scientific community we are still unable to answer the question of 'what works in CVE'. That is because of the complex nature of CVE and the lack of an evidence-based culture in our research field. Combined, this has led to a lack of evaluation studies. Those limited evaluations that we can draw upon are very heterogeneous, both in terms of evaluation method used and the type of interventions addressed. It is therefore impossible to make any specified, let alone general, statements on the effectiveness of CVE. Moreover, the question of 'what works' is too simplistic. The wicked nature of radicalization and violent extremism requires an evaluation method that unmasks too simple problem-solution couplings, looks at the (normative) assumptions underlying CVE interventions and takes the highly contextual nature of (countering) radicalization and violent extremism into account. The field faces a twofold lacuna: (i) we are in need of an evaluation method that can accommodate the complexity and contextuality of CVE, while providing an authoritative basis for new evaluations and at the same time exposing incorrect or too limited, normative assumptions in CVE policy; (ii) we require a 'meta-analysis' method for synthesizing the variety of evaluations available to produce generic insights.

Addressing precisely these issues, realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and the associated method of meta-analysis, or 'realist review' (Pawson, 2006), could offer a very relevant and valuable path forward. The premise of the realistic evaluation method is that evaluation must take into account the contextual conditions and mechanisms that underlie interventions. As a consequence 'does CVE work?' is not the right question to ask. Rather, the question we need to pose is 'what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in CVE'. Until now, realistic evaluation had never before been applied to CVE.²¹ However, the realistic evaluation method did appear to be

21 With the exception of Veldhuis (2012) who applied the first step of the realistic evaluation method for *design* of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for violent extremists.

a promising heuristic evaluation model to apply to CVE, because of its ability to take into account the contextuality and (normative) assumptions that underlie this wicked and contested problem. While realistic evaluation offers guidelines on how to use theory to deductively develop a theoretical model in situations where theories and evidence are abundant, it provides no detailed guidelines on how to develop a testable theoretical model in situations where theories and evidence are lacking. Pawson and Tilley (1997) claim that in those situations, what they call 'folk theories' can provide valuable insight into relevant C-M-Os. However they offered little guidance on how, for example, policy documents and expert opinion, might be used to develop a theory. This aspect of the realistic evaluation method thus required further development.

Realist review, which synthesizes *existing* evaluation studies, had also never been applied to CVE. Realist review is a method for synthesizing evaluations of complex social interventions, even in fields that are lacking in evaluation studies. This suggests its potential for use in the field of CVE. Yet, Pawson (2005) indicated that the realist review method would require adaptation and innovation for application to a widening range of complex programmes (Pawson, 2006: 93–96, in Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012). This need for further development of the realist review method to accommodate a widening array of complex programmes was also pointed out by Betts (2013). Her realist review of aid effectiveness and governance for developing country reform concluded that broad and diverse programmes and interventions require a more systematic approach for data extraction than provided in Pawson and Tilley's work (*ibid.*). It seems plausible that in principle, realist review could provide a suitable method for synthesizing the limited CVE evaluation literature, contributing in turn to theory building. It is however, likely that the review method would need adaptation to be applied to CVE.

In sum, realistic evaluation seems a good candidate for meeting the need for more and better evaluation of CVE programmes, as it could address the inherent complexity of these programmes. However, realistic evaluation has hitherto hardly been applied to CVE. Could it be developed into a suitable method, and what adaptation will be required to that end? Also, to what extent and how might it help us gain a better understanding of CVE, contributing to building a theoretical foundation upon which the research community can base its policy recommendations? These questions led to the central focus of this dissertation:

How can realist review and realistic evaluation be employed and developed in the field of countering violent extremism (CVE), and what can realist review and realistic evaluation contribute to the development of CVE policy and to deepening our understanding of violent extremism?

These questions formed the starting point of this dissertation research.

Applying and developing realist review

Realist review is a method of meta-analysis. It is not meant for the evaluation of single interventions, but rather for synthesizing *existing* evaluation studies. While traditional reviews often present a matrix of mean effect sizes, alongside a form of judgement with respect to the quality of the evaluations identified, the realist review method enables us to synthesize existing CVE evaluations without attributing a hierarchy to the evaluation methods used in the studies examined. In short, realist review does not favour one evaluation method over others. Its premise is that each CVE evaluation contains valuable insights into relevant contexts and mechanisms, which help us to answer the explorative question ‘what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances’. Also, realist review does not provide an overall judgement on the effect of an intervention. Instead, it yields insights into the variety of ways in which interventions may, in a particular context, trigger mechanisms that generate outcomes. These insights can also contribute to theory building, not only regarding an intervention or programme, but also on the phenomenon that the programme or intervention aims to address. This is an opportunity not hitherto noted in the literature on realist review.

Realist review is conducted in six steps: clarifying the scope of the review, searching for primary studies, appraising quality, extracting the data, synthesizing the data and disseminating the findings. However, due to the realist and iterative nature of the review process, there can be no technical manual on how to conduct realist review. As a consequence, it is not always clear how realist review works in practice. In fact, Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) observed that very few realist reviews actually abide by the realist principles, and that they may therefore report misleading conclusions and recommendations.

Drawing on the work of Pawson and realist colleagues and fellows, this dissertation has presented heuristic guidelines on how to conduct realist review for complex social programmes and has further explored these by

actually applying them to CVE. These heuristic guidelines were then applied to the field of CVE. The realist review of CVE evaluation studies presented in chapter 2 demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of the interventions that fall under the catch phrase 'CVE'. The review confirms that the heuristic guidelines for realist review may require adaption for situations in which (i) the presence of a complex and wicked problem and its contingent solutions imply a nearly endless set of C-M-O configurations; (ii) evaluations are lacking; (iii) heterogeneous primary studies make it impossible to draw out dominant theories and compare; (iv) a more systematic approach is required for data extraction; and (v) the realist review method is novel in the specific field and thus requires much more explanation.

Chapter 3 presented methodological reflections, focusing not on the *outcome* of a realist review of CVE measures but rather on the steps toward it and the challenges that arise when applying the method of realist review to a field as complex as CVE. Chapter 3 presented and applied adapted heuristic guidelines for realist review (see table 3.3). In essence, it is not possible to formulate a hypothetical middle-range theory on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances from the outset when conducting a realist review of CVE programmes – or any other complex social programmes that display the above-mentioned characteristics. Rather, the review should revolve around getting a better notion of the complex social phenomenon addressed by the programme. To do that, the review must draw out relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes instead of testing and comparing different theories. This makes it possible to develop a more refined model of the complex social programme while at the same time upholding the realist principles. Primary studies should then be judged not in terms of how much they contribute to a specific explanatory challenge, but rather on whether they provide insight into what the complex social programme entails. When evaluations are lacking and very heterogeneous, inclusion criteria must be less strict. Besides qualitative and quantitative studies, process evaluations and theory-driven studies should also be included. Data analysis requires a systematic approach that conceptually focuses on the complex social programme at hand and relevant contexts, mechanisms, outcomes and lessons learnt regarding the intervention.

Applying and developing realistic evaluation

Realistic evaluation is particularly helpful for examining specific interventions within CVE. Examples are family support programmes, resilience

programmes for youths in schools and exit programmes for foreign fighters. Realistic evaluation follows four basic steps in developing hypotheses on relevant contextual conditions (C) and mechanisms (M), which may in turn contribute to effective outcome (O) patterns. Step 1, thus, is hypothesizing on what *might* work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. By drawing on multi-method data collection (step 2), relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns can be derived and analysed (step 3). The end result is a more refined theoretical model (step 4) on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

So the crucial first step of realistic evaluation is to develop hypotheses on what might work, for whom, how and in what circumstances. This is generally done by drawing on an existing, and sometimes extensive, body of literature. However, how does one undertake such an exercise in a field that is lacking in evaluations and thus theory? Pawson and Tilley (1997: 88) provided an alternative for such cases in the form of 'folk theories', which might also be referred to as policy theories. Policy theories are distinguished from social scientific theories in that these latter are designed to explain and provide generally applicable statements about human behaviour. Policy theories do not intend to explain, but seek merely to support certain (proposed) courses of action, to legitimize policy (Hoogerwerf, 1990). The departure and return of European fighters to join ISIS and other extremist groups in Syria and Iraq made it crucial for governments to respond. However, policymakers and practitioners could not, and still cannot, turn to science for answers, as there is very limited scientific theory on effective CVE interventions. As a consequence they developed their own theories, based on their own reflections, experience and knowledge regarding CVE; in other words, 'policy theories'. These policy theories reflect ideas about what it is in specific interventions that might generate change in people vulnerable to radicalization (mechanisms) and views on for whom, by whom and in what kinds of circumstances an intervention might be a success (contexts). These, combined, lead to outcome patterns. Ultimately, the combined contexts and mechanisms should lead to the prevention or countering of violent extremism.

Although Pawson & Tilley (1997) suggested that policy theories can be used to develop hypotheses as the first step of realistic evaluation, they shed no light on how precisely this should be undertaken. Where does one find these folk theories? How can one transform these theories into hypotheses on how relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes interact

(C-M-O configurations) in order to conduct an evaluation that abides by the realistic principles? These questions are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 used the CVE intervention of ‘family support’ as a case study. Family support, in which counselling is provided to families of (potential) violent extremists, was first introduced in Germany over a decade ago, and in recent years has been adopted by countries, cities and communities from France to the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria. However, different countries, cities and communities have chosen an approach that matches their own specific context. This has led to various forms of family support across Europe. As family support is such a new intervention under the CVE umbrella, no scientific theory was available for developing preliminary C-M-O configurations that could be used for the first step of realistic evaluation. But the rapid development of family support programmes and telephone hotlines across Europe has produced an abundance of policy theories. These policy theories were found in policy documents underlying the family support programmes and also via expert opinions of practitioners who were already providing family support and whom exchanged their methods, insights and lessons learnt in European networks such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). These sources helped provide a better understanding of what CVE entails at the policy and practitioner levels, while also helping us to extract relevant context, mechanism and outcome patterns. By drawing on these policy theories, and further informed by my own experiences, reflections and knowledge as an intervention provider to families of foreign fighters, I was able to develop preliminary C-M-O configurations for family support programmes. These configurations addressed the different contexts and requirements for family support: Who provides family support? In what settings is this done? To what type of families is support provided? What interventions are used, and on what theories are they based? When are they successful? What types of outcome patterns should family support produce? The end result of this exercise was C-M-O configurations that could be tested using realistic evaluation, which may prove them wrong or right, or lead to their adaptation. This building of an exemplary body of scientific knowledge could be partly based on the realistic approach to evaluation.

In chapter 5, I developed a proposal for how to conduct realistic evaluation of exit programmes for female jihadists. Female violent extremism is not a new phenomenon. However, CVE interventions specifically targeted at

women are novel. As a consequence, and like family support programmes, there are no evaluations of exit programmes for females that we can draw upon, which is a necessary first step in realistic evaluation. Indeed, realistic evaluation requires formulation of a hypothetical middle-range theory on what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances in exit programmes for female jihadists. Chapter 5 illustrated how realistic evaluation could be used to overcome the lack of scientific theory on exit programmes for females. The chapter differed from chapter 4 in two key aspects. First, it drew on scientific theory, in addition to the policy theories available via documents and my own experiences as an exit support intervention provider to girls who had attempted to travel to Syria. While there may be no scientific literature on exit programmes specifically for females, there is literature available on female violent extremism, on processes of deradicalization and disengagement and on exit programmes. Thus, in order to formulate hypotheses on C-M-O configurations, we could draw not only on scientific theory and policy theory on female extremism, but also on that pertaining to exit programmes in general and exit policy documents in a specific country or city under review. Second, chapter 5 went beyond the first step of realistic evaluation, to illustrate how each step of realistic evaluation should be conducted. This case illustrated the type of multi-method data collection that can be applied, discerning different patterns of contextual conditions, mechanisms and outcomes relevant to the analysis of the collected data in relation to the case presented. The end result was a step-by-step approach that researchers and policymakers can draw upon to evaluate exit programmes.

Realistic policy design

Ultimately the goal of both realist review and realistic evaluation is to inform policymakers on what works, for whom, in which context, how and why, in order to help policymakers to improve their (CVE) programmes and interventions. This raises the question of if and how the realist review and the realistic evaluation method can also be applied *ex ante*, in order to develop a more evidence-based and informed CVE policy theory and design. These questions lay at the heart of chapter 6.

Ex ante evaluation had not yet been applied to CVE interventions and programmes – let alone *ex ante* realist review and realistic evaluation. Chapter 6 produced a method and heuristic guidelines relevant not only to support programmes for families of foreign fighters, but which can also be

applied to other CVE interventions that need to be designed and for which an evidence base is lacking. The design of CVE interventions by drawing on realist ex ante evaluation should consist of the following steps:

- 1) Conduct a realist review of a similar intervention applied in (a) different field(s) applying the heuristic guidelines as developed in chapter 3. The end result is an unconfigured C-M-O model of an intervention or programme in a different context.
- 2) Use the outcome of the realist review as an evidence-based theoretical model to test the applicability of the C-M-O model for a CVE context and the target audience of the CVE intervention.
- 3) Conduct a stakeholder analysis. Which people and organizations would be involved and or affected by the CVE intervention? That is, who would be the target group of the intervention? In which municipalities? Which communities and expert organizations would be involved?
- 4) Use the stakeholder analysis as an input for the selection of multi-method data collection to test and further enhance and specify the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes developed in step 1, for example, by conducting interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.
- 5) Analyse the data in terms of relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Does the data warrant further specification of or additions to the model as developed in step 1?
- 6) Develop a specified C-M-O model related to the CVE intervention and target audience that provides answers to questions such as the following:
 - If such an intervention were implemented, which contextual conditions would need to be met?
 - What mechanisms underlie the specific intervention?
 - What are the potential outcomes of the intervention?

Realist review applied ex ante contributes to the development of an evidence-based policy theory. Realistic evaluation tests the applicability of a policy theory in the context of CVE and its target audiences. It provides communities, families and/or individuals opportunities to voice their opinions and express their wishes regarding CVE. It also includes the most important stakeholders that are influenced or affected by the CVE intervention or programme. Thus, a realistic ex ante evaluation approach will contribute to the legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness of CVE policy. It also creates the conditions for more thorough evaluation research, which in turn can contribute to a more evidence-based CVE.

Methodological contribution

The methodological contribution of my dissertation research is that it has developed heuristic guidelines for inductive and deductive theory development for wicked problems such as CVE. These type of complex problems are more difficult to evaluate, which often leads to a lack of theory. A lack of theory is problematic because theory is not only quintessential for further evaluation, it is also vital for informed policymaking. Thus, other forms of theory development are required. This dissertation presented and developed two options. One is to apply 'folk theory' in situations where evidence is lacking. Folk theories, such as expert opinion, participant observation and policy documents, make it possible to inductively develop theory as they provide insight into the CVE programme or intervention; the type of service provider and his/her requirements; specific contextual conditions; the methods used and theories these are based upon; indicators of success; and the types of outcome patterns that should (or should not) be produced. Thus, taking specified instances as a starting point for evaluation, from which hypotheses on relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are developed, can produce more specified principles. This approach was applied in chapters 4 and 6 of this dissertation. Alternatively, realist review makes it possible to develop theory by drawing on generalized principles, using a realist meta-analysis with the heuristic guidelines developed in table 3.3 of chapter 3, as an input for more specified conclusions. This approach was applied in chapters 2 and 6.

This inductively and deductively developed theory then makes it possible not only to gain more specific insights into how CVE works, but also to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism itself. Ultimately, these programme specifications and theory development also make it possible to design more evidence-based and legitimate policy.

Contributing to the CVE policy and scientific community

While heuristic development of the realistic evaluation method comprises an important part of this research, the current study is not strictly methodological in nature. It aims, rather, also to deliver a contribution to the CVE policy and practitioner arena by synthesizing the literature currently available via a realist review and developing hypotheses on what works, for whom, how and why in CVE. The most important lessons are summarized in chapter 7:

- ‘Increasing resilience’ plays an important role in CVE programmes, as greater resilience enhances protective factors and can thus prevent (further) radicalization. Interventions to increase resilience can be offered to different target audiences, such as vulnerable individuals, vulnerable groups and (diaspora) communities. Mentoring, community outreach and education are commonly used to improve resilience. These efforts often hinge on theories of moral disengagement, bonding and bridging and value complexity. The most important lesson for increasing resilience is that programmes should be offered to different target audiences simultaneously within a multi-agency setting, preferably bottom-up instead of top-down (Gielen, 2017a).
- Exit programmes can be aimed at deradicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation or reintegration. Exit requires a long-term and holistic approach that takes into account push and pull factors and combines multiple interventions which activate different mechanisms. Examples of interventions commonly used are mentoring, practical support, family support, physical and psychological assessment and counselling and theological and ideological guidance. The sequence of interventions in an exit programme is important and must be tailored to the needs of the individual. Practical interventions can help build trust, allowing other interventions to move forward. Creating a safe and stable family environment can be an important precondition to effective mentoring and self-reflection. The forming of an alternative social network is essential to compensate for loss of friends. The Pro-Integration Model (Barrelle, 2015) has proven an effective tool for measuring the outcomes of exit activities. Future research on exit programmes should apply this model, seeking to establish the levels of (dis)engagement. While both research and practice suggest that a ‘soft’ and voluntary approach to exit is more favourable, my research on Dutch municipal exit programmes indicates that legal and administrative instruments can also be helpful in creating the right conditions for exit. These contextual conditions should be taken into account both in developing and in evaluating exit programmes (Gielen, 2018a).
- Family support is a relatively new intervention in CVE and as a consequence has hardly received any scientific attention as yet. Recent research suggests that families are an important target audience for CVE (Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015; Maher & Neumann, 2016). Maher and Neumann (2016) found grief, confusion, fear and shame to be the most important impacts of violent extremism on families. Chapter 6 confirmed these insights. In our interviews and focus group with

families of foreign fighters, we found that nearly all of these families had particular personal and socio-psychological problems, similar to people who participate in 'regular' support groups. However, additionally we found that families of foreign fighters dealt with very specific problems not mentioned in the general literature on support groups. For instance, all were confronted with consequences of the extremist behaviour of their child/family member, in the form of sometimes severe legal repercussions, administrative measures and public exposure. The existing literature provided no answers as to what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances. Family support, in the form of parental coaching, awareness raising and parental support groups helps parents identify early-warning signals and stimulates positive parenting styles in order to reduce the attraction of extremist groups and enhance protective factors against radicalization. Family support can be offered at different stages. At the primary preventive stage, it can be provided to parents of individuals at risk, to address their concerns and help them work toward (maintaining) a positive family environment in which extremist ideas can be discussed and alternatives provided. If radical or extremist ideas lead to travel to a conflict zone abroad, such as Syria or Iraq, family support can then be aimed at maintaining contact with the child or relative abroad and creating a positive environment for the child or relative to return home to. Families can also be supported while a child or relative is imprisoned or afterward in the reintegration and rehabilitation process, as families are a crucial factor in deradicalization and disengagement (Gielen, 2015a; Gielen, 2017a).

- Counter-communication in the form of counter-narratives or alternative narratives has become a popular CVE intervention. The rationale behind counter-communication is that it can reduce or dispel the extremist narrative. It is thought to provide a positive alternative to take-down measures for online content. Preliminary research suggests caution should be exercised in implementing counter-narratives. Further research is necessary to test the underlying mechanisms of counter-narratives, alongside the type of content that does and does not appeal to the various target audiences, and whether counter-narratives should be deployed overtly or covertly and by civil society or governments (Gielen, 2017a).
- Peers appear forgotten in most CVE programmes, though Williams *et al.* (2016a) found that peers may be best positioned to notice early signs of violent extremism. Additionally, my research shows that those close to (deceased) violent extremists, such as brothers, sisters, cousins

and peers, form an at-risk group for violent extremism, as they may be subjected to grooming while in a vulnerable state. CVE programmes, but also the CVE literature, often overlook these groups. Supporting families and the broader professional social network of the family (including, e.g., school teachers) could enable practitioners and family members to act upon early-warning signals to prevent radicalization of other family members and peers (Gielen, 2017a).

- Women are typically considered victims of violent extremism and passive agents framed, for example, as ‘jihadi brides’. My research suggests that their threat should not be underestimated and that interventions should be tailored to their needs and circumstances. CVE programmes should thus include extremist women as a specific target group, for example, by offering exit programmes geared for women (Gielen, 2018a).
- CVE should not be concerned only with ‘best practices’, but also with ‘best people’. Quality standards for CVE intervention providers have not yet received any scientific attention, though both the review and the evaluations analysed highlight the importance of the practitioners providing the intervention. Experience, level of training and knowledge on violent extremism; ability to operate in a multi-agency setting; and the extent to which an intervention provider is able to establish a trust-based relationship with vulnerable individuals and his or her family are imperative contextual conditions to successful CVE outcomes.

Recommendations for evaluation

While it is quintessential that researchers around the world start to evaluate (more) CVE programmes and interventions, it must be observed that conducting more evaluations requires the active input of policymakers and practitioners. Evaluation should be on the agenda prior to implementation of a CVE programme or intervention. In fact evaluation should be part of the *policy design* process of CVE programmes. In this regard, I propose the following recommendations:

1. Make evaluation an integral part the CVE programme, preferably by embedding the CVE programme in a department where monitoring and evaluation is general practice.
2. Organize frequent exchanges between scientists, policymakers, practitioners and civil society actors to share good evaluation practices for CVE policy.
3. Devote 10% of the CVE budget to evaluation.

4. Set up a CVE evaluation database similar to the Cochrane database in the medical field.
5. Clearly distinguish a CVE programme from interventions.
6. Address grievances, causes and risk factors associated with violent extremism, but also protective factors.
7. Formulate goals.
8. Identify target audiences accordingly.
9. Formulate a theory of change for each CVE programme and intervention.
10. Make use of existing theory and evaluations.
11. Formulate smart indicators at three levels.
12. Use multi-method data collection.
13. Make use of existing questionnaires and measurement tools.
14. Include researchers or evaluators prior to implementation.
15. Demand a thorough project plan from external partners.



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Nederlandse samenvatting

Introductie

De eerste vraag die ik krijg wanneer ik vertel dat mijn proefschrift over de effectiviteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid gaat, is meestal: en, werkt het? De mensen en lezers die een dergelijk snel en simpel ja- of nee-antwoord verwachten, moet ik helaas teleurstellen. De academische gemeenschap is op dit moment niet in staat om de vraag ‘wat werkt in antiradicaliseringsbeleid?’ goed te beantwoorden. Dat heeft een aantal oorzaken. Antiradicalisering is een relatief nieuw en vooral complex fenomeen. De term antiradicalisering an sich staat ter discussie, omdat deze veronderstelt dat een eenduidig beeld bestaat over wat radicalisering is en wanneer iemand radicaal is. Daar lopen de wetenschappelijke meningen echter nog steeds over uiteen. Eveneens bestaat discussie over de validiteit van de meetinstrumenten om radicalisering vast te stellen. Divers wetenschappelijk onderzoek laat zien dat er sprake is van meerdere factoren, die zich veelal op persoonlijk, sociaal en maatschappelijk niveau bevinden. Als gevolg daarvan, is antiradicalisering een containerbegrip voor een scala aan interventies. Internationaal wordt antiradicalisering geformuleerd als ‘preventing violent extremism’ (PVE) of ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE). Antiradicalisering heeft ten doel om via ‘zachte maatregelen’ radicalisering te voorkomen en tegen te gaan. Het betreft hier nadrukkelijk geen strafrechtelijke maatregelen, maar bijvoorbeeld een cursus weerbaar opvoeden voor ouders, een theatervoorstelling voor scholieren over jihadisme of een coachingstraject voor een geradicaliseerd individu. Al deze activiteiten vallen onder de brede paraplu van antiradicalisering. Antiradicaliseringsbeleid is daarmee diffuus, aangezien het bestaat uit een breed spectrum van interventies die zich richten op verschillende doelgroepen, zoals individuen, groepen, gemeenschappen of de samenleving, om radicalisering te voorkomen. Dit kan in een vroeg stadium plaatsvinden of op het moment dat daadwerkelijk sprake is van radicalisering. Het evalueren van dergelijk complex en diffuus beleid, brengt verscheidene (methodologische) uitdagingen met zich mee. Als gevolg daarvan is het aantal evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid beperkt. De evaluaties die wel hebben plaatsgevonden, zijn daarbij heterogeen van aard. Er worden verschillende evaluatiemethoden gebruikt, bijvoorbeeld procesevaluaties, planevaluaties, kwalitatieve evaluaties en kwantitatieve evaluatie, voor verschillende soorten interventies. Zo zijn er procesevaluaties van de sleutelfigurenaanpak met gemeenschappen in Engeland, maar ook

effectevaluaties van een deradicaliseringsprogramma in het Midden-Oosten (Gielen, 2017a).

Kortom, de evaluaties die wel beschikbaar zijn, kunnen niet met elkaar vergeleken worden. Als gevolg hiervan is het niet mogelijk om eenduidige uitspraken te doen over de effectiviteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Bovendien is de vraag ‘wat werkt?’ te simplistisch van aard. Of beleid werkt, is mede afhankelijk van de visie op het probleem, de normatieve opvattingen die daarachter schuilgaan en de context waarin het wordt uitgevoerd. Ter illustratie, het antiradicaliseringsbeleid van een burgemeester die, vanwege zijn of haar politieke opvattingen over de scheiding van kerk en staat, de ideologische component van radicalisering bewust buiten beschouwing laat, zal niet succesvol zijn. Dat geldt eveneens voor een burgemeester die in het beleid de volledige nadruk legt op de ideologische component, waarbij vooral ideologische duidingsgesprekken op de voorgrond staan. Radicalisering is een complex fenomeen, dat vraagt om complexe duidingen en veelal maatwerkoplossingen. Het evalueren hiervan vereist een methode die geschikt is voor deze complexiteit, in staat is om te simpele probleemoplossingscombinaties te ontmaskeren, en rekening kan houden met de normatieve assumpties die hierachter schuilgaan en met de context waarin het beleid wordt uitgevoerd. Daarnaast is een evaluatiemethode nodig die van de reeds beschikbare (heterogene) evaluatiestudies een zogenaamde meta-analyse kan maken, om meer generieke inzichten te verkrijgen over de effectiviteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid.

De realistische evaluatiemethode (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) en bijbehorende methode voor meta-analyse, ook wel de realistische synthese of *realist review* (Pawson, 2006) genoemd, claimt een geschikte evaluatiemethode te zijn voor bovengenoemde complexiteit. De essentie van de realistische evaluatiemethode is dat relevante contextuele factoren (‘C’) en mechanismen (‘M’) van een interventie bijdragen aan uitkomstpatronen (‘O’), zogenaamde CMO-configuraties. Daarmee heeft de methode nadrukkelijk aandacht voor complexiteit. De auteurs van de realistische evaluatiemethode betogen dat de vraag ‘wat werkt?’ niet langer centraal zou moeten staan in evaluatieonderzoek naar complexe sociale programma’s en interventies. In plaats daarvan moeten we onze aandacht verleggen naar ‘wat werkt, voor wie, door wie, op welke wijze onder welke omstandigheden?’ Tot op heden is realistisch evaluatieonderzoek nog niet toegepast op

antiradicaliseringsbeleid.²² De methode is echter wel veelbelovend als instrument om antiradicaliseringsbeleid te evalueren, omdat de context van het beleid en de (normatieve) assumpties die schuilgaan achter het complexe probleem van (anti)radicalisering onderdeel zijn van de analyse. De realistische evaluatiemethode bevat richtlijnen over hoe theorie deductief kan worden ingezet om een theoretisch model te ontwikkelen. Dat geldt echter vooral voor de evaluaties van programma's waarin theorie al overvloedig aanwezig is, omdat specifieke situaties (interventies) getoetst worden op basis van algemene theoretische principes. De literatuur over de effectiviteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid is echter beperkt, wat uitdagingen met zich meebrengt voor de eerste stap van een realistische evaluatie, namelijk de ontwikkeling van het theoretisch kader met hypothesen over relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstpatronen. Hiervoor claimen Pawson & Tilley (1997) wel een oplossing te hebben, namelijk het gebruik van *folk theories*. Een folk theory is in feite een beleidstheorie en heeft betrekking op de vooronderstellingen die beleidsmakers, professionals of experts hebben over de werking van een programma. Door beleidsdocumenten te analyseren, experts te bevragen en/of door participerende observaties zouden waardevolle inzichten verkregen kunnen worden over relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstpatronen van het te evalueren beleid. Over de manier waarop de inductieve wijze van theorievorming precies uitgevoerd moet worden, bieden Pawson & Tilley vrijwel geen richtlijnen. Om de realistische evaluatiemethode toepasbaar te maken voor antiradicaliseringsbeleid, zal dit onderdeel dus verder ontwikkeld moeten worden.

Realistische synthese is een methode voor meta-analyse van reeds bestaande evaluatiestudies. In tegenstelling tot de realistische evaluatie, is de realistische synthese nadrukkelijk niet bedoeld als evaluatiemethode voor enkelvoudige CVE-programma's of -interventies. Evenals bij realistische evaluatie, draait het bij realistische synthese niet om de vraag 'wat werkt?', maar om de vraag 'wat werkt, voor wie, door wie, op welke wijze onder welke omstandigheden?' Door deze vraag te stellen, ontstaat niet alleen inzicht in de effectiviteit van het programma, maar ook in de essentiële randvoorwaarden en de theorieën die daaraan ten grondslag liggen. Daarmee draagt deze methode dus ook bij aan de theorieontwikkeling

22 Met uitzondering van Veldhuis (2012), die de eerste stap (van de vier stappen) van de realistische evaluatiemethode heeft toegepast om een programma voor de rehabilitatie en re-integratie van gewelddadige extremisten te ontwerpen. Het ging in deze studie dus om beleidsontwerp en niet om beleidsevaluatie.

over interventies ten behoeve van antiradicalisering en het fenomeen radicalisering en extremisme. Hoewel de methode van realistische synthese nadrukkelijk is bedoeld voor complexe programma's, geeft Pawson (2005) aan dat deze waarschijnlijk om doorontwikkeling vraagt. Die noodzaak tot doorontwikkeling van de methode voor realistische synthese is benadrukt door Betts (2013) die de realistische synthese probeerde toe te passen op programma's voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, een veld dat eveneens wordt gekenmerkt door een diversiteit aan programma's. Zij concludeerde dat de methode van realistische synthese aanpassingen vereist, onder andere door een meer systematische manier van data-analyse toe te passen. Het lijkt dus plausibel dat realistische synthese in beginsel een geschikte methode is om een meta-analyse van de reeds beschikbare evaluatiestudies van antiradicaliseringsbeleid uit te voeren, en op die manier een bijdrage kan leveren aan betere theorievorming. Die theorievorming kan weer als input dienen voor de eerste stap van realistische evaluatie. Het is echter waarschijnlijk dat de realistische synthese, zoals ontwikkeld door Pawson en collega's, aanpassing vereist om deze toe te kunnen passen op complexe en heterogene zaken, zoals evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid.

Realistische evaluatie en realistische synthese lijken dus goede methoden om tegemoet te komen aan de wens voor meer en betere evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Ze zijn hier echter tot op heden niet toegepast op antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Het is waarschijnlijk dat de methoden doorontwikkeling vereisen om toepasbaarheid te verzekeren. Dit leidt tot de hoofvraag van deze dissertatie:

Hoe kan realistische evaluatie en realistische synthese worden toegepast en ontwikkeld ten behoeve van de evaluatie van antiradicaliseringsbeleid en wat kunnen realistische evaluatie en realistische synthese bijdragen aan de theoretische ontwikkeling van antiradicaliseringsbeleid en ons begrip van radicaliseringsprocessen?

Toepassing en ontwikkeling van realistische synthese

Realistische synthese is geen methode om interventies mee te evalueren, maar om een meta-analyse van bestaande evaluatiestudies te maken. In traditionele meta-analyses is het gebruikelijk om meerdere evaluaties van een specifieke interventie met elkaar te vergelijken, waarin met name de gebruikte evaluatiemethoden in iedere evaluatiestudie worden beoordeeld. Kwantitatieve evaluatiestudies die gebruikmaken van een (gerandomiseerde)

controlegroep en een voor- en nameting krijgen in traditionele reviews de hoogste waardering. Traditionele reviews drukken de uitkomstmaat van iedere evaluatiestudie vervolgens uit in een gemiddelde effectgrootte. Realistische synthese beoordeelt evaluaties daarentegen niet op de wijze van dataverzameling, maar heeft als uitgangspunt dat iedere evaluatie – ongeacht of kwalitatieve of kwantitatieve onderzoeksmethoden zijn gebruikt – waardevolle inzichten bevat over relevante contexten en mechanismen die aan de interventie ten grondslag liggen, en over de manier waarop deze contexten en mechanismen bijdragen aan het effect van de interventie.

Realistische synthese wordt uitgevoerd door de volgende zes stappen te volgen: 1) het vaststellen van de bandbreedte van de review; 2) het zoeken naar primaire evaluatiestudies; 3) het beoordelen van de kwaliteit van de evaluatiestudies; 4) het selecteren van relevante data; 5) het synthetiseren van de data, en tot slot 6) de disseminatie van de uitkomsten. Realistische synthese is een iteratief proces. Derhalve is er geen technisch handboek, dat in detail specificeert hoe iedere stap uitgevoerd moet worden. Daarom is deze methode in de praktijk soms lastig toe te passen. Pawson en Manzano-Santaella (2012) hebben de realistische syntheses van andere onderzoekers geanalyseerd en concluderen dat slechts een aantal realistische syntheses daadwerkelijk de realistische principes volgen. Wanneer de realistische principes niet correct toegepast worden, dan kan dit leiden tot misleidende conclusies en aanbevelingen. Daarnaast is realistische synthese nog nooit toegepast op evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Het toepassen van realistische synthese op antiradicalisering vraagt derhalve om verdere richtlijnen.

Hoofdstuk 3 van deze dissertatie presenteert aan de hand van verschillende studies over realistische synthese van Pawson en collega's, een heuristisch kader met richtlijnen voor realistische synthese. De toepassing van dit heuristisch kader op 73 evaluatiestudies in hoofdstuk 1, laat zien dat aanpassingen voor complexe sociale programma's vereist zijn, in het geval dat 1) vanwege de complexiteit van het probleem diverse oorzaken en bijbehorende oplossingen bestaan; 2) evaluaties ontbreken of zeer schaars zijn; 3) de heterogeniteit van de evaluatiestudies het onmogelijk maakt om dominante theorieën uit de interventies te selecteren en te vergelijken; 4) een meer systematische benadering vereist is om relevante data te selecteren; en 5) realistische synthese nog nooit is toegepast en daardoor relatief veel uitleg (en dus tekst) nodig is om te verklaren wat realistische synthese überhaupt inhoudt.

Het hoofdstuk concludeert dat in het geval van antiradicaliseringsprogramma's of complexe sociale programma's met de voorgenoemde kenmerken, het niet mogelijk is om al in de eerste stap van de realistische synthese hypothesen te vormen over wat werkt, voor wie, op welke wijze en in welke omstandigheden. Er dient eerst meer inzicht te ontstaan in het complexe sociale programma an sich door relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomsten in kaart te brengen, in plaats van dominante theorieën onderliggend aan het complexe programma te selecteren en vergelijken. Evaluatiestudies die deel uitmaken van de synthese dienen dan niet beoordeeld te worden op de mate waarin hun onderliggende theorie getest kan worden, maar op de mate waarin ze inzicht verschaffen in het complexe sociale programma. Wanneer evaluatiestudies beperkt zijn en/of zeer heterogeen van aard, dienen bovendien de inclusiecriteria voor evaluatiestudies minder strikt te worden gehandhaafd. Naast kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve evaluatiestudies kunnen eveneens procesevaluaties en theoretische evaluatiestudies worden ingezet, omdat deze op hun eigen wijze inzicht bieden in relevante contexten en/of mechanismen die aan het programma ten grondslag liggen. Normaal gesproken geeft realistische synthese de onderzoeker veel keuzevrijheid bij het (iteratieve) proces van dataselectie en data-analyse. Bij complexe sociale programma's die aan bovengenoemde kenmerken voldoen, is het advies juist om gestructureerder te werk te gaan en met name in te zoomen op wat het complexe sociale programma inhoudt, en op wat relevante contexten, mechanismen, uitkomstmaten en geleerde lessen zijn.

Toepassen en ontwikkelen van realistische evaluatie

In tegenstelling tot realistische synthese is de realistische evaluatiemethode nadrukkelijk bedoeld om daadwerkelijk antiradicaliseringsinterventies en -programma's te evalueren, zoals familieondersteuning voor ouders van Syriëgangers, weerbaarheidsprogramma's voor jongeren op scholen over fake news en deradicaliseringsprogramma's voor terugkeerders. De evaluatie concentreert zich dan niet alleen op de vraag of een interventie werkt, maar richt zich nadrukkelijk op de contextuele randvoorwaarden en werkzame elementen. De realistische evaluatie van een specifieke interventie bestaat uit vier stappen (Pawson & Tilley, 1997):

- 1) Hypothesevorming: op basis van het reeds genoemde literatuuronderzoek is het mogelijk om hypothesen te vormen over de effectiviteit van de interventies. Deze hypothesen draaien om de vraag welke mechanismen in welke context(en) *zouden kunnen* werken.

- 2) Meervoudige dataverzameling: de interventie wordt geëvalueerd door gebruik te maken van meerdere vormen van dataverzameling. Het kan gaan om kwantitatieve en/of kwalitatieve methoden, dus bijvoorbeeld interviews en een vragenlijst.
- 3) Data-analyse: de verzamelde data wordt geanalyseerd door niet alleen te focussen op de uitkomsten (is het effectief?), maar ook op de contexten en mechanismen die bijdragen aan de effectiviteit.
- 4) Theoretische verfijning en beleidsaanbeveling: de laatste stap van het realistische onderzoek is theoretische verfijning. Het onderzoek is gestart met hypothesen over de werking van de interventie en heeft die vervolgens in de praktijk getoetst. Het eindproduct is een meer verfijnde theorie over wat werkt, op welke wijze, voor welke doelgroepen en onder welke omstandigheden, die zowel voor het wetenschappelijke veld als het beleidsdomein toepasbaar is.

De eerste stap van de realistische evaluatiemethode is dus hypothesevorming op basis van reeds bestaande literatuur. In het antiradicaliseringsdomein is dat echter problematisch om de eenvoudige reden dat weinig literatuur beschikbaar is. Er is immers slechts zeer beperkt evaluatieonderzoek verricht. Pawson and Tilley (1997: 88) dragen voor dergelijke situaties een alternatief aan in de vorm van folk theories, ook wel bekend als beleidstheorieën, die gestoeld zijn op de kennis, ervaring en inzichten van beleidsmakers en professionals. Toen veel Europese landen en steden werden overvallen door het vertrek van hun burgers richting Syrië en Irak, konden ze niet wachten totdat de wetenschap hun kon vertellen welke interventies al dan niet effectief zouden zijn. Veel landen en gemeenten zijn derhalve eenvoudigweg aan de slag gegaan met de ontwikkeling van hun antiradicaliseringsbeleid en dito interventies. Deze beleidstheorieën omvatten de aannames en ideeën van beleidsmakers en professionals over welke interventies mogelijkverandering zouden kunnen bewerkstelligen bij mensen die vatbaar zijn voor radicalisering of daadwerkelijk aan het radicaliseren zijn. Deze beleidstheorieën representeren dus een visie van beleidsmakers en professionals op de interventies die onder bepaalde omstandigheden voor bepaalde doelgroepen effectief zouden kunnen zijn. Deze visie is niet uit de lucht gegrepen maar gestoeld op reflectie en jarenlange ervaring van beleidsmakers.

Pawson & Tilley (1997) betogen dus dat bestaand beleid behulpzaam kan zijn als middel om hypothesen te vormen over relevante contexten, werkzame elementen en uitkomstmaten. Ze bieden echter geen inzicht in

de manier waarop dat moet plaatsvinden. Waar zijn deze beleidstheorieën te vinden? Hoe kan een dergelijke beleidstheorie getransformeerd worden in een werkbare hypothese over relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstmaten en de manier waarop deze interacteren? Deze vragen staan centraal in hoofdstuk 4, 5 en 6 van deze dissertatie.

In hoofdstuk 4 wordt de interventie familieondersteuning gebruikt als een casestudy om te illustreren hoe beleidstheorie kan bijdragen om hypothesen te vormen, die vereist zijn als eerste stap van realistisch evaluatieonderzoek. Familieondersteuning wordt aangeboden aan ouders wier kinderen zijn geradicaliseerd of dat dreigen te doen. Het principe van familieondersteuning voor deze doelgroep vindt zijn oorsprong in Duitsland, waar het concept ruim tien jaar geleden werd ontwikkeld. Inmiddels is het een veelvoorkomende interventie als onderdeel van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Landen als Frankrijk, het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Nederland en Oostenrijk hebben gedurende 2013 en 2014 allen een vorm van familieondersteuning ingevoerd (Gielen, 2015a). De vorm verschilt echter per land, per gemeente en zelfs per gemeenschap. Door heel Europa is deze relatief nieuwe interventie dus op verschillende manieren ingevoerd op een moment dat hiervoor wetenschappelijk gezien nog helemaal geen aandacht bestond. Om familieondersteuning op realistische wijze te evalueren, zal gebruikgemaakt moeten worden van folk theories, die te vinden zijn in onder andere beleidsdocumenten en projectplannen die ten grondslag liggen aan de verschillende Europese vormen van familieondersteuning. Deze bevatten namelijk de vooronderstellingen van beleidsmakers, die weer geworteld zijn in hun ervaringen en reflecties over waarom en op welke wijze deze interventies zouden kunnen werken. Deze beleidstheorieën zijn eveneens te achterhalen via netwerken van beleidsmakers en professionals, waarin Europese ervaringen worden uitgewisseld. Het bekendste Europese netwerk is het *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (RAN), dat de Europese Commissie heeft opgericht als een netwerkorganisatie van duizenden professionals en beleidsmakers uit het antiradicaliseringdomein waarin zij hun ervaringen en goede voorbeelden met elkaar uit kunnen wisselen. Hun ervaringen en praktijken dragen bij aan beter inzicht krijgen in antiradicalisering en de bijbehorende contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstmaten. Door gebruik te maken van de beleidstheorieën die zijn uitgewisseld binnen RAN en onder andere zijn vastgelegd in de *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* (2014; 2015; 2017; 2019), aangevuld met mijn eigen ervaringen als familieondersteuner van ouders van Syriëgangers, was het mogelijk om hypothesen te ontwikkelen over relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstmaten voor familieondersteuning. Deze hypothesen betroffen antwoorden op vragen als:

wie verleent de familieondersteuning? In welke institutionele setting gebeurt dat? Wat voor families ontvangen deze ondersteuning? Welke interventies worden aangeboden en welke theorieën liggen daaraan ten grondslag? Wanneer zijn deze interventies succesvol en op welke uitkomstmaten is het eventuele succes gebaseerd? Het eindresultaat van deze exercitie zijn hypothesen over de antiradicaliseringsinterventie familieondersteuning, die vervolgens getest kunnen worden met behulp van de vier stappen van realistische evaluatie.

In hoofdstuk 5 worden eveneens beleidstheorieën toegepast, ditmaal op exitprogramma's voor jihadistische vrouwen. Exitprogramma's omvatten alle interventies die erop gericht zijn om radicalen en extremisten te deradicaliseren, te laten uittreden uit het extremistische netwerk of te laten re-integreren in de maatschappij na een eventuele gevangenisstraf. Gewelddadig extremisme onder vrouwen is geen nieuw fenomeen. Interventies om radicalisering te voorkomen en tegen te gaan, die speciaal gericht zijn op vrouwen, zijn dat echter wel. Het gevolg is dat, evenals bij familieondersteuning, geen evaluaties van exitprogramma's voor vrouwen voorhanden zijn. Daardoor is het niet mogelijk om op basis van (uitgebreide) bestaande wetenschappelijke kennis hypothesen voor jihadistische vrouwen te vormen over wat werkt, voor wie, op welke wijze en onder welke omstandigheden. Dat is echter wel de cruciale eerste stap van realistisch evaluatieonderzoek. Hoewel weinig empirisch onderzoek naar exitprogramma's voor vrouwen beschikbaar is, heeft wel theoretisch en empirisch onderzoek plaatsgevonden naar exitprogramma's in het algemeen en radicaliseringsprocessen van vrouwen. Die onderzoeken kunnen gebruikt worden als aanvulling op de beleidstheorie over exitprogramma's. Daarnaast gaat dit hoofdstuk, in tegenstelling tot hoofdstuk 4, verder dan de eerste stap van realistisch evaluatieonderzoek. Het presenteert een voorstel voor de manier waarop niet alleen de eerste (theorievorming), maar ook de tweede (dataverzameling), derde (data-analyse) en vierde stap (specificaties en beleidsaanbevelingen) uit de realistische evaluatiemethode toegepast kunnen worden op de evaluatie van exitprogramma's voor jihadistische vrouwen. Beleidsmakers en onderzoekers kunnen deze stapsgewijze benadering rechtstreeks toepassen ten behoeve van de broodnodige evaluatie van exitprogramma's.

Realistisch beleidsontwerp

In de hoofdstukken 2 tot en met 5 komt naar voren dat realistische evaluatie en realistische synthese geschikte methoden zijn om te kunnen omgaan met

de complexiteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. De focus van deze hoofdstukken ligt op het uitvoeren van een realistische evaluatie in een ex post-situatie, dus nadat de interventie reeds was geïmplementeerd. Hoofdstuk 1 laat zien dat radicalisering een complex en hardnekkig beleidsprobleem is, waarbij verscheidene actoren verschillende opvattingen en waardensystemen hebben om het probleem op te lossen. In combinatie met het geringe aantal beleidsevaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid, vormt dit niet alleen een uitdaging voor de beleidsevaluaties, maar ook voor het beleidsontwerp. De verschillende actoren hebben immers verschillende opvattingen over de relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomsten. Dit vormt niet alleen een uitdaging in een ex post-situatie, waarin antiradicaliseringsbeleid al is geïmplementeerd en geëvalueerd moet worden, maar ook in de eerste fase van de beleidscyclus: de beleidsontwerpfase. Uiteindelijk is het doel van zowel realistische synthese als realistische evaluatie om beleidsmakers te informeren over wat werkt, voor wie, in welke context en op welke wijze, opdat zij hun programma's en interventies kunnen verbeteren. Dit werpt de vraag op of en hoe de realistische evaluatiemethode ex ante kan worden toegepast om een meer empirisch onderbouwd en geïnformeerd beleidsontwerp te ontwikkelen. Deze vragen staan in hoofdstuk 6 centraal.

Realistische evaluatie is nog niet ex ante toegepast, laat staan dat het is toegepast op antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Hoofdstuk 6 biedt hiervoor een methode en heuristische richtlijnen. Deze methode en richtlijnen zijn niet alleen toepasbaar op programma's voor familieleden van Syriëgangers, maar zijn nadrukkelijk ook bedoeld om andere interventies te ontwerpen die ten doel hebben om radicalisering te voorkomen en tegen te gaan, maar waarin de noodzakelijke wetenschappelijke kennis en evaluaties ontbreken. Realistische ex ante-evaluatie ten behoeve van het ontwerpen van antiradicaliseringsprogramma's, dient te bestaan uit de volgende stappen:

- 1) Voer een realistische synthese uit van evaluaties van vergelijkbare interventies uit een ander domein, waarbij gebruikgemaakt wordt van de heuristische richtlijnen, zoals ontworpen in tabel 3.3 van hoofdstuk 3. Het eindresultaat is een ongeconfigureerd CMO-model van een interventie of programma in een andere context.
- 2) Gebruik de uitkomsten van de realistische synthese om een wetenschappelijk onderbouwd theoretisch model te ontwikkelen en de (potentieel) relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomsten te toetsen binnen de context van antiradicaliseringsbeleid en de daarbij behorende doelgroep.
- 3) Voer een stakeholdersanalyse uit. Welke mensen en organisaties zouden betrokken moeten zijn of worden door de interventie? Met andere woorden,

- wie is de (intermediaire) doelgroep van de interventie? Welke gemeenten, gemeenschappen en/of organisaties zouden betrokken moeten worden?
- 4) Gebruik de stakeholdersanalyse als input voor de selectie van multi-methodische dataverzameling om zodoende de relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstpatronen, zoals ontwikkeld in stap 1, nader te kunnen specificeren en ontwikkelen. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld plaatsvinden door interviews en focusgroepen met relevante stakeholders te organiseren.
 - 5) Analyseer de data in termen van relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomsten. Vraagt de data-analyse om een verdere aanscherping en specificatie van het ontwikkelde theoretische model in stap 1?
 - 6) Ontwikkel een gespecificeerd CMO-model dat is toegespitst op de specifieke antiradicaliseringsinterventie en doelgroep, dat antwoord biedt op de volgende vragen:
 - a. Als de interventie wordt geïmplementeerd, aan welke contextuele voorwaarden moet deze voldoen?
 - b. Welke mechanismen liggen ten grondslag aan de specifieke interventie?
 - c. Wat zijn de potentiële uitkomsten van de interventie?

De toepassing van ex ante realistische synthese draagt bij aan de ontwikkeling van een evidence-based beleidstheorie. Ex ante realistische evaluatie test vervolgens de toepasbaarheid van die beleidstheorie binnen de context van het antiradicaliseringsbeleid en de desbetreffende doelgroep. Het biedt gemeenschappen, families, individuen en experts de mogelijkheid om hun visie en voorkeuren op het te ontwerpen beleid te geven. Deze manier van beleidsontwerp voorkomt daarmee contraproductieve neveneffecten, omdat de doelgroepen van het beleid de gelegenheid krijgen om mee te denken en hun visie en voorkeuren duidelijk te maken. Een ex ante realistische evaluatie en synthese dragen daarmee bij aan de legitimiteit, haalbaarheid en effectiviteit van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Een dergelijke werkwijze creëert bovendien de mogelijkheid voor meer gedegen evaluatieonderzoek, omdat het beleid gestoeld is op een wetenschappelijk onderbouwd kader, waarbij daadwerkelijke toetsing mogelijk is. Daarmee draagt het ook bij aan meer evidence-based antiradicaliseringsbeleid.

Methodologische bijdrage

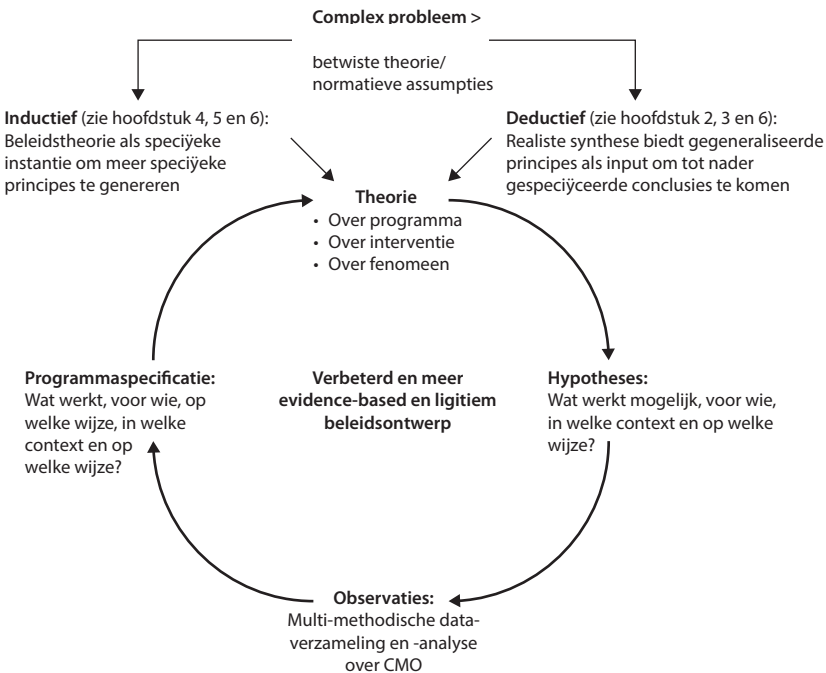
Uit het voorgaande is duidelijk geworden dat realistische evaluatie en realistische synthese zijn ontwikkeld voor complexe sociale programma's.

Deze methoden zijn inmiddels geaccepteerde onderzoeksmethoden in de gezondheidszorg (Manzano *et al.*, 2015). De toepassing van deze methoden in andere sectoren, en met name in het antiradicaliseringsbeleid, is echter beperkt. Dit proefschrift heeft antiradicaliseringsbeleid als casus genomen om te onderzoeken of en hoe realistische evaluatie en synthese toepasbaar zijn op een complexe zaak als antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Dat heeft geleid tot richtlijnen om deze evaluatiemethoden toe te passen op complexe problemen in beleidsvelden die nog in ontwikkeling zijn en waarbij (uitgebreide) wetenschappelijke kennis ontbreekt en/of heterogeen is. Dit proefschrift biedt richtlijnen voor de volgende situaties:

- hoe gebruik te maken van beleidstheorieën op het moment dat wetenschappelijke kennis ontbreekt;
- hoe een hypothetisch theoretisch kader met relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomstpatronen te ontwikkelen;
- hoe relevante data te verzamelen en op realistische wijze te evalueren;
- hoe een synthese te maken van beperkte en heterogene evaluatiestudies in een relatief nieuw beleidsveld dat nog volop in ontwikkeling is;
- hoe effectief, haalbaar en legitiem antiradicaliseringsbeleid te ontwerpen door realistische synthese en evaluatie *ex ante* toe te passen.

De methodologische bijdrage van dit proefschrift is visueel weergegeven in figuur 1. Het laat zien dat complexe problemen, zoals antiradicalisering, moeilijk zijn te evalueren, waardoor gedegen wetenschappelijke kennis ontbreekt. Het gebrek aan deze kennis is problematisch, omdat kennis niet alleen noodzakelijk is voor evaluatie (het formuleren van een gedegen theoretisch kader), maar ook cruciaal is voor een gedegen beleidsontwerp. Dat betekent dat het theoretisch kader op een andere wijze ontwikkeld moet worden. Deze dissertatie heeft daartoe twee opties gepresenteerd en nader uitgewerkt. De eerste optie is om folk theory, ofwel beleidstheorie, te benutten, indien weinig wetenschappelijke kennis beschikbaar is. Beleidsdocumenten, participerende observaties en/of input van experts dienen als bronnen om inductief een theoretisch kader te ontwikkelen. Dergelijke vormen van data bieden inzicht in wat een antiradicaliseringsprogramma of -interventie inhoudt, wie het aanbiedt, aan welke eisen de uitvoerder moet voldoen, de specifieke contextuele voorwaarden, de methoden en achterliggende theorieën waar de interventie op is gebaseerd, en het potentiële effect hiervan. Specifieke interventies dienen dus als startpunt voor de realistische evaluatie, omdat het op basis hiervan mogelijk is om hypothesen te formuleren over relevante contexten, mechanismen en uitkomsten, die uiteindelijk kunnen leiden tot meer gespecificeerde principes.

Figuur 1: De methodologische bijdrage van mijn dissertatie: een doorontwikkeling van de realistische evaluatiecyclus (Pawson en Tilley, 1997: 85). In deze dissertatie zijn heuristische richtlijnen ontwikkeld voor zowel realistische synthese alsmede realistische evaluatie. Hierdoor is inductieve en deductieve theorievorming mogelijk, een essentiële voorwaarde om complexe sociale programma's te evalueren. Dit leidt uiteindelijk tot meer geïnformeerd beleid. Dit is de Nederlandse vertaling van figuur 7.1 uit deze dissertatie.



Deze inductieve werkwijze is toegepast in hoofdstuk 4, 5 en 6 van deze dissertatie. De alternatieve methode, namelijk deductieve theorievorming, is toegepast in hoofdstuk 2 en 6, en methodologisch uitgewerkt in hoofdstuk 3. Deze hoofdstukken tonen aan op welke wijze realistische synthese een meta-analyse van bestaande (maar soms heterogene) wetenschappelijke kennis mogelijk maakt. Indien de beschikbare wetenschappelijke kennis erg heterogeen is, kan gebruikgemaakt worden van de heuristische richtlijnen uit tabel 3.3 van hoofdstuk 3 uit deze dissertatie.

Geleerde lessen over (anti)radicalisering

De heuristische doorontwikkeling van de realistische evaluatiemethode en deze toepasbaar maken voor de evaluatie van complexe sociale programma's,

zoals antiradicalisering, vormt een belangrijke component van deze dissertatie. De dissertatie is echter niet puur methodologisch van aard. Het is nadrukkelijk ook de bedoeling om bij te dragen aan theorievorming over (anti)radicalisering om zowel het beleidsveld als het wetenschappelijke veld verder te brengen. Dat is immers ook een doelstelling van de realistische evaluatiemethode. Door bestaande evaluatiestudies van antiradicalisering-beleid en -interventies te synthetiseren, is het mogelijk om hypothesen met betrekking tot antiradicaliseringsbeleid te vormen en deels te toetsen over wat werkt, voor wie, op welke wijze en onder welke omstandigheden. Dat levert een aantal belangrijke inzichten en lessen op, die staan samengevat in hoofdstuk 7 van deze dissertatie.

Hoofdstuk 2 presenteert een realistische synthese van bestaande antiradicaliseringsevaluaties met als doel om inzicht te krijgen in wat antiradicaliseringsbeleid precies inhoudt en om beleidsaanbevelingen te doen voor beleidsmakers en professionals. De synthese laat zien dat evaluatieonderzoek naar antiradicaliseringsbeleid en -interventies nog steeds schaars is. Van de 73 gevonden evaluatiestudies kunnen er slechts veertien als een effectevaluatie worden beschouwd. De meeste studies zijn theoretisch in plaats van empirisch van aard. De synthese geeft wel inzicht in het containerbegrip antiradicalisering, en toont aan welke interventies onder deze paraplu vallen, voor welke doelgroepen ze worden toegepast, wat de werkzame elementen en mechanismen zijn en welke belangrijke contextuele randvoorwaarden nodig zijn. De synthese laat zien dat antiradicalisering als een preventieclassificatiemodel kan worden gepresenteerd. Dat type classificatiesysteem vindt zijn oorsprong in de gezondheidszorg en wordt tegenwoordig nog gebruikt in de criminologie, met name in de criminaliteits- en geweldpreventie. Het uitgangspunt van een preventieve aanpak is een focus op de oorzaak van de aandoening, het misdrijf of de radicalisering in plaats van op de gevolgen. De aanpak heeft tot doel om de risicofactoren die tot ziekte, misdaad of radicalisering kunnen leiden te beperken en de beschermingsfactoren te versterken. Toegepast op antiradicalisering ziet het classificatiesysteem voor preventie er als volgt uit (Gielen, 2017a; Gielen, 2017b).

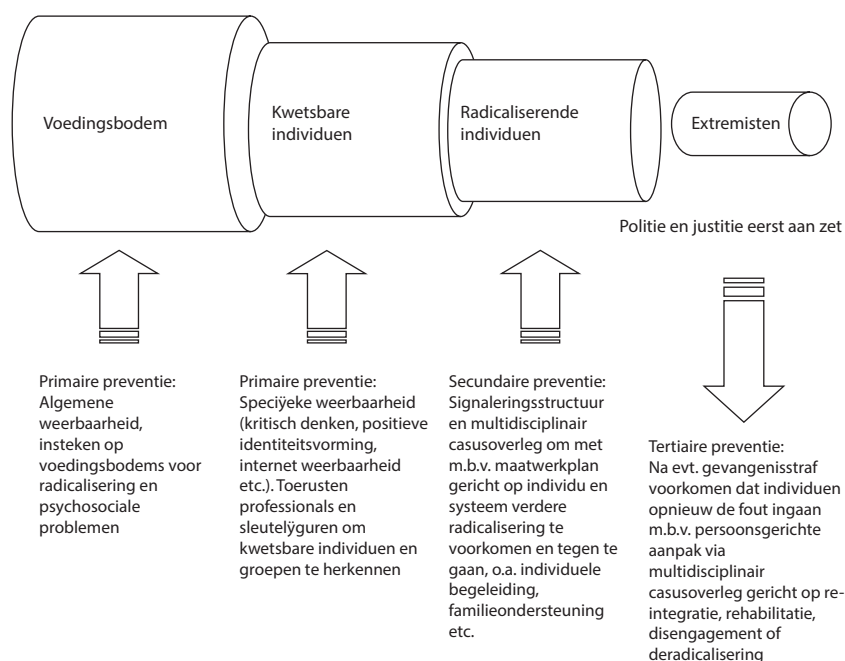
- Primaire preventie: deze vorm omvat brede preventieactiviteiten, die erop zijn gericht om de voedingsbodem en de oorzaken voor radicalisering weg te nemen en de beschermingsfactoren te versterken. Dit gebeurt meestal via groepsactiviteiten, in het bijzonder via het onderwijs of via sleutelfiguren uit de gemeenschap. Deze activiteiten zijn veelal gericht op het bevorderen van burgerschap, (digitale) mediawijsheid, het versterken van de weerbaarheid en positieve identiteitsvorming. Voor

- dit type preventiewerk is het essentieel dat eerstelijns werkers en peers goed opgeleid zijn om kwetsbare individuen en groepen te herkennen.
- Secundaire preventie: deze vorm is individueler van aard, met een focus op individuen die al in een radicaliseringsproces verwickeld zijn. Deze personen hebben echter (nog) geen strafbare feiten in relatie tot extremisme gepleegd, maar begeven zich online en/of offline wel in een extremistisch milieu, hebben een radicaal maatschappijbeeld en/of zijn zich sociaal aan het vervreemden. Interventies in deze fase van secundaire preventie zijn gericht op het voorkomen van extremistisch gedrag, om ervoor te zorgen dat radicale attitudes en milieus niet leiden tot strafbare feiten. Vaak wordt in deze fase gebruikgemaakt van coaching in combinatie met interventies om de sociale context van het individu te beïnvloeden, zoals familieondersteuning en/of het zoeken van een alternatief netwerk. Dit vereist dus integrale samenwerking tussen verschillende ketenpartners.
 - Tertiaire preventie: bij dit type ligt de nadruk eveneens op het individu, maar hier gaat het om personen die al tot gewelddadig extremisme zijn overgegaan, zoals teruggekeerde jihadistische strijders of de aanslagplegers van de moskee in Enschede. In eerste instantie is het zaak om deze mensen aan te houden en te vervolgen. Hiervoor ligt de verantwoordelijkheid bij politie en justitie. Echter, deze mensen zullen na een (eventuele) gevangenisstraf moeten re-integreren in de maatschappij. Het doel van tertiaire preventie is om te voorkomen dat mensen opnieuw de fout ingaan. Dat kan door middel van verschillende methoden en met diverse doeleinden worden bewerkstelligd. Re-integratie en rehabilitatie focussen meestal op het bereiken van een 'normaal leven' via opleiding of werk. Interventies kunnen er ook op gericht zijn om het extremistische gedrag te veranderen, om het geweld te staken (disengagement), om extremistische overtuigingen te wijzigen, en om de gewelddadige extremistische ideologie te verwerpen (deradicalisering).

Visueel is het preventieclassificatiemodel van antiradicaliseringsbeleid weergegeven in figuur 2.

Het vergroten van weerbaarheid vormt een belangrijk onderdeel van antiradicaliseringsbeleid, omdat dit de beschermingsfactoren tegen radicalisering en extremisme bevordert. Interventies om de weerbaarheid te verbeteren, kunnen op diverse doelgroepen worden ingezet, zoals kwetsbare individuele jongeren of specifieke groepen en gemeenschappen.

Figuur 2: Preventieclassificatiemodel van antiradicaliseringsbeleid toegepast op de Nederlandse context (gebaseerd op Gielen, 2017a; Gielen, 2017b)



Coaching, onderwijsprogramma's en programma's voor gemeenschappen en sleutelfiguren zijn veelvuldig toegepaste interventies om de weerbaarheid te vergroten. Onderliggende mechanismen bij deze interventies zijn de theorieën van de morele onthechting (*moral disengagement*), sociaal kapitaal (*bonding en bridging*) en waardencomplexiteit (*value complexity*). Bij het vergroten van de weerbaarheid is het van belang om in acht te nemen dat weerbaarheid een wederkerig en iteratief proces is op zowel individueel, sociaal als gemeenschappelijk niveau. Het is onvoldoende om alleen een educatieprogramma aan te bieden op scholen of een opvoedondersteuningscursus te geven aan ouders om te leren omgaan met mogelijke signalen van radicalisering. Het is juist van belang om verschillende doelgroepen gelijktijdig te bereiken. Als ouders bijvoorbeeld een opvoedingsondersteuningscursus volgen, moeten hun kinderen parallel daaraan een voorlichtingsprogramma op school krijgen. Initiatieven die van onderaf uit de gemeenschap komen, lijken effectiever dan initiatieven die vanuit de lokale of landelijke overheid worden opgelegd. Sterker nog, bij top-down benaderingen lopen overheden het risico om specifieke gemeenschappen te stigmatiseren (Gielen, 2017a).

Activiteiten die erop zijn gericht om het extremistische gedachtegoed af te zweren (deradicalisering), het geweld om extreme idealen te bereiken af te wijzen (*disengagement*) en weer deel te nemen aan de maatschappij (re-integratie en rehabilitatie), staan ook wel bekend als exitprogramma's. Hoofdstuk 2 en 5 bieden inzicht in de voorwaarden waaraan exitprogramma's moeten voldoen. Ze vereisen een holistische langetermijnbenadering, waarin de verschillende factoren die tot radicalisering hebben geleid worden meegenomen. Dat vraagt dus om maatwerk, waarbij een combinatie van interventies wordt ingezet. De meest voorkomende interventies zijn individuele coaching, praktische sociaaleconomische ondersteuning, familieondersteuning, psychologische assessments en ondersteuning, en theologische of ideologische ondersteuning en gespreksvoering. Aangezien exitprogramma's het best lijken te werken in een vrijwillig kader, is de volgorde waarin interventies worden ingezet van groot belang. Praktische sociaaleconomische ondersteuning, zoals schuldhulpverlening of hulp om terug te keren naar school of werk, kan eraan bijdragen om vertrouwen bij het individu te ontwikkelen. Het creëren van een veilige, stabiele familierelatie is, met name voor minderjarigen, een essentiële randvoorwaarde voor coaching, zelfreflectie en psychologische hulpverlening. Het is cruciaal om een alternatief sociaal netwerk te ontwikkelen als compensatie voor het eventuele verlies van het extremistische netwerk en als buffer tegen de druk vanuit het extremistische netwerk op het moment dat iemand probeert uit te treden. Het *Pro-Integration Model* (Barrelle, 2015) blijkt een goed instrument te zijn om vast te stellen in hoeverre iemand daadwerkelijk is gederadicaliseerd (Gielen 2017a; Gielen, 2018a).

Familieondersteuning is een relatief nieuwe interventie in antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Als gevolg daarvan was ten tijde van de totstandkoming van deze dissertatie slechts een beperkt aantal studies beschikbaar. Het onderzoek dat op dat moment wel voorhanden was, suggereert dat families een belangrijke doelgroep (moeten) zijn van antiradicaliseringsbeleid (Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015; Maher & Neumann, 2016). Maher and Neumann (2016) brachten in kaart dat families van extremisten voornamelijk te maken hebben met gevoelens van rouw, verwarring, angst en schaamte. Het gepresenteerde onderzoek in hoofdstuk 6, naar de wensen en behoeften van lotgenotencontact voor families van Syriëgangers, ondersteunt dit inzicht. Bijna alle families hebben te maken met diverse psychosociale problemen. Hun problematiek is vergelijkbaar met die van andere gezinnen die worden geconfronteerd met het verlies van een dierbare. Echter, additioneel is een aantal andere problemen geconstateerd dat tot dan toe

niet voorkwam in de literatuur over lotgenotencontact noch over families van extremisten. Gezinnen zien zich geconfronteerd met de gevolgen van het extremistische gedrag van hun kind in de vorm van ernstige wettelijke gevolgen, administratieve maatregelen (bijvoorbeeld uitschrijving uit de gemeentelijke basisadministratie) en – veelal ongewenst – in de publiciteit komen (Gielen & Dijkman, 2019). Positieve familierelaties zijn een cruciale beschermende factor bij radicalisering en een belangrijke factor in het deradicaliseringsproces. Het is dus erg zinvol en vaak hard nodig om deze families te ondersteunen en begeleiden, zoals hoofdstuk 4 en 6 aantonen. Familieondersteuning kan op verschillende manieren en in verschillende fases van het (de)radicaliseringsproces worden geboden. Als onderdeel van primaire preventie kunnen opvoedondersteuningscursussen families helpen om signalen van radicalisering te herkennen en tevens kunnen zij een positieve, zogenaamde autoritatieve opvoedingsstijl (liefdevol begrenzen), promoten. Uit onderzoek is namelijk gebleken dat dit een beschermingsfactor is tegen radicalisering. Bij secundaire en tertiaire preventie kunnen, middels deskundige informatieverstrekking en ondersteuning aan families (individueel of in groepsverband), hun kennis, competenties en vaardigheden omtrent het onderwerp radicalisering worden vergroot, zodat ze meer grip op de situatie krijgen, beter weten wat ze wel en niet kunnen verwachten, begrijpen op welke risico's ze moeten letten en weten waar en wanneer ze terecht kunnen voor professionele hulpverlening. Het is in deze fase ook van belang om het inzicht van families te vergroten met betrekking tot hun eventuele eigen rol in de problematiek (bijvoorbeeld als sprake is van voedingsbodems in het eigen familiesysteem), zodat de risicofactoren voor radicalisering in het gezin kunnen afnemen en de kans op eventuele ronseling of radicalisering van andere gezinsleden beperkt kan worden. In het geval van detentie of uitreizen van een gezinslid is het ook van belang om middels sociale steun de copingmechanismen van het gezin te vergroten, zodat het gezin in staat is om steun te bieden aan het gezinslid in een eventueel deradicaliseringsproces (Gielen, 2015a; Gielen & Dijkman, 2019).

Veel landen maken gebruik van zogenaamde *counter narratives* of *alternative narratives* als onderdeel van hun antiradicaliseringsbeleid om tegenwicht te bieden aan extremistische (digitale) propaganda. Het doel van deze 'tegenverhalen' is om de extremistische boodschap ongeldig te verklaren of te deconstrueren. Hoofdstuk 2 toont aan dat steeds meer studies het effect van dit soort maatregelen betwijfelen. Sterker nog, het causale verband tussen het bekijken van extremistische content en radicalisering moet nog worden aangetoond. Als desondanks voor dit type interventies wordt

gekozen, dan moet een aantal randvoorwaarden in acht worden genomen, zoals de afzender van de boodschap. Deze verantwoordelijkheid kan het best liggen bij het maatschappelijke middenveld en bij sleutelfiguren binnen de gemeenschap. De overheid lijkt geen geschikte partij om dit soort tegenverhalen te ontwikkelen of te verspreiden, en al helemaal niet via heimelijke operaties (Gielen, 2017a; Gielen, 2017c).

Peers zijn vaak een vergeten doelgroep in het antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Dat is kwalijk, omdat in hoofdstuk 2 de synthese van de studie Williams *et al.* (2016a) laat zien dat peers juist het best gepositioneerd zijn om signalen van radicalisering vroegtijdig te herkennen. Daarnaast hebben de hoofdstukken over familieondersteuning aangetoond dat peers en jonge familieleden, zoals broertjes, zusjes, neefjes en nichtjes, veel risico lopen om te worden geronseld op het moment dat een familielid of iemand uit hun sociale netwerk al is geradicaliseerd (Gielen, 2015a; Gielen & Dijkman, 2019). Het is dus van groot belang om zowel preventief als curatief in te zetten op peers en het gezinssysteem.

Vrouwen blijken eveneens een vergeten doelgroep in het antiradicaliseringsbeleid te zijn. Ze worden vaak geportretteerd als slachtoffers en als 'jihadbruiden'. Hoofdstuk 5 van dit onderzoek wijst echter uit dat de rol van vrouwen zeker niet mag worden onderschat, aangezien zij terroristische netwerken vaak op zijn minst faciliteren en soms zelf actieve rollen in deze netwerken vervullen. Dat kan variëren van het ronselen van anderen tot het voorbereiden en uitvoeren van (zelfmoord)aanlagen (Gielen, 2018a). Exitprogramma's moeten dus niet beperkt worden tot mannen, maar zeker ook aan vrouwen worden aangeboden. Daarnaast is het van belang ook preventieve activiteiten voor (jonge) vrouwen te organiseren.

Binnen het antiradicaliseringsdomein is weinig aandacht voor onderzoek, en het bestaande onderzoek richt zich vooral op het ontwikkelen van *best practices*. Dit onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat de focus niet enkel moet liggen op *best practices* en op welke wijze, voor welke doelgroepen en onder welke omstandigheden deze effectief zijn, maar ook op degenen die deze interventies uitvoeren: *best people*. Er bestaan op dit moment geen kwaliteitsstandaarden voor mensen die in het antiradicaliseringsdomein werkzaam zijn en er vindt ook nog geen wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar plaats. Desondanks is uit de beperkte hoeveelheid aan beschikbare evaluaties gebleken dat de ervaring en kennis van de professional, het vermogen om een vertrouwensband met geradicaliseerde individuen en hun familieleden op te

bouwen en het vermogen om te acteren op een complex politiek schaakbord van verschillende organisaties, cruciale randvoorwaarden zijn voor de effectiviteit van beleid en interventies (Gielen, 2017a; Gielen 2018a; Gielen & Dijkman, 2019).

Aanbevelingen bij beleidsontwikkeling en evaluatie

In de introductie van deze dissertatie is stilgestaan bij antiradicaliseringsbeleid als *contested concept*. Aan antiradicaliseringsbeleid ligt een aantal assumpties ten grondslag, onder andere radicalisering als proces dat door voortijdig ingrijpen kan worden voorkomen. Dat wordt in sommige academische kringen als problematisch en stigmatiserend beschouwd, in het bijzonder voor moslimjongeren en -gemeenschappen, omdat veel van het antiradicaliseringsbeleid zich op deze groepen richt (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018; Van San, 2018; Fadil *et al.*, 2019). Dat leidt in sommige, met name wetenschappelijke, kringen tot de vraag of het antiradicaliseringsbeleid überhaupt moet worden gecontinueerd en of evaluatie van dergelijk beleid niet bijdraagt aan een verdere legitimatie van (mogelijk) stigmatiserend en problematisch beleid. Op basis van deze dissertatie en in het bijzonder hoofdstuk 6, blijf ik een groot voorstander van de evaluatie van antiradicaliseringsbeleid. Hoofdstuk 6 heeft bij uitstek aangetoond dat realistische evaluatie ex ante juist kan bijdragen aan een meer effectief en legitiem beleid, zeker op het moment dat de doelgroep van het (te ontwerpen) beleid bij de evaluatie betrokken wordt. Uit hoofdstuk 6 is bijvoorbeeld gebleken dat ouders van Syriëgangers behoefte hadden aan lotgenotencontact. Sterker nog, ze wensten dat dit contact vanuit de overheid georganiseerd zou worden. Ik ben van mening dat evaluatie juist bijdraagt aan effectiever en legitiemer antiradicaliseringsbeleid, omdat evaluatie het mogelijk maakt om (problematische) normatieve assumpties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid bloot te leggen. Bovendien draagt het bij aan verdere theorievorming, waardoor meer geïnformeerd beleidsontwerp mogelijk is.

Kortom, meer evaluatie van antiradicaliseringsbeleid is nodig. Dat is echter niet alleen een verantwoordelijkheid van de wetenschappelijke gemeenschap, maar nadrukkelijk ook van professionals en beleidsmakers. Evaluatie moet namelijk een standaardonderdeel worden van beleidsontwerp en -uitvoering. Hiertoe is een aantal aanbevelingen voor de Vlaamse en Belgische context geformuleerd (Gielen, 2017b; Gielen, 2018c). Deze aanbevelingen zijn nadrukkelijk ook relevant voor beleidsmakers en professionals

wereldwijd die zich bezighouden met antiradicalisering en worden daarom hier nogmaals gepresenteerd:

1. ***Maak evaluatie een standaard en integraal onderdeel van het antiradicaliseringsbeleid, bij voorkeur door het onder te brengen binnen een afdeling of beleidskader waarin evaluatie gemeengoed is.*** Onderzoek in Belgische gemeenten heeft uitgewezen dat gemeenten wiens antiradicaliseringsbeleid onderdeel is van een beleidskader of afdeling waar evaluatie standaard is opgenomen, meer geneigd zijn om te evalueren (Gielen, 2018c).
2. ***Organiseer systematische uitwisseling tussen wetenschappers, beleidsmakers, professionals en maatschappelijke actoren om goede evaluatiepraktijken en voorbeelden met elkaar uit te wisselen.*** Op landelijk, Europees en internationaal niveau zijn er diverse gremia waar ervaringen en kennis over radicalisering en antiradicaliseringsbeleid met elkaar wordt uitgewisseld. Deze gremia zouden meer en structureler moeten worden benut om ook goede ervaringen met evaluatie en voorbeelden uit te wisselen.
3. ***Reserveer standaard tien procent van het budget voor antiradicaliseringsbeleid voor evaluatie.*** Het gebrek aan financiële middelen is vaak een argument om niet te evalueren. Om dit te voorkomen, dient bij het vaststellen van het budget voor antiradicaliseringsbeleid standard tien procent gereserveerd te worden voor evaluatie. Hiermee wordt tevens de nadruk gelegd op het belang van evaluatie.
4. ***Richt een database op, vergelijkbaar met de Cochrane-database in de medische sector, waarin alle evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid zijn opgenomen.*** Hoofdstuk 3 heeft aangetoond dat het aantal evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid in slechts een jaar tijd is verdubbeld ten opzichte van de voorgaande jaren. Deze snelle ontwikkeling zal naar alle waarschijnlijkheid de komende jaren doorzetten. Dat is een positieve ontwikkeling, maar brengt wel uitdagingen met zich mee. De vraag is hoe lang de resultaten van evaluaties en meta-analyses actueel en daarmee relevant blijven voor beleidsmakers. Idealiter ontwikkelt de academische gemeenschap een database die vergelijkbaar is met die van Cochrane²³ in de medische sector, om zo de ontwikkelingen op evaluatiegebied in de antiradicaliseringsector bij te houden en zodoende

23 Cochrane is een internationale en onafhankelijke organisatie met als doel om zorgverleners, beleidsmakers en patiënten te informeren over de effectiviteit van de gezondheidszorg middels systematische literatuuroverzichten. Zodoende kunnen zij op basis van de best beschikbare wetenschappelijke kennis handelen (evidence-based werken).

beleidsmakers en professionals te kunnen adviseren op het gebied van evidence-based werken.

5. ***Maak een duidelijk onderscheid tussen antiradicaliseringsprogramma's en interventies.***

Een antiradicaliseringsprogramma bevat meerdere interventies, die gericht zijn op verschillende doelgroepen in verschillende stadia van preventie (primair, secundair en tertiair). Interventies zijn specifieke activiteiten, zoals een theatervoorstelling, een training of coachingsessies. Het moet dus duidelijk zijn of het alleen om een specifieke interventie gaat of dat het programma als geheel geëvalueerd moet worden.

6. ***Ga in antiradicaliseringsbeleid en de evaluatie daarvan niet alleen uit van voedingsbodems, risico- en triggerfactoren, maar nadrukkelijk ook van beschermende factoren en zaken die bijdragen aan weerbaarheid en veerkracht.*** Hoofdstuk 2 van dit proefschrift heeft laten zien dat het voor de effectiviteit van een antiradicaliseringsprogramma van belang is om in te grijpen op de voedingsbodems en risicofactoren voor radicalisering. Hierbij kan geput worden uit divers (systematisch) onderzoek. Zo hebben Campelo *et al.* (2018) een systematische literatuurstudie uitgevoerd naar de oorzaken van radicalisering bij Europese individuen. Uit hun systematische analyse blijkt dat een veelheid aan factoren op persoonlijk niveau, microsociaal niveau en macrosociaal niveau radicalisering veroorzaken. Op individueel niveau betreft het specifieke karaktereigenschappen en psychologische kwetsbaarheid, zoals een depressieve inslag, verslavings- of risicogedrag, ervaring met verlaten op jonge leeftijd, gevoelens van onzekerheid, een trauma of een sterftegeval. Op het microsociale niveau spelen geradicaliseerde peers, problemen in het gezin en sympathieën voor dehumanisering als legitimatie voor geweld een rol. Op macrosociaal niveau doen zich risicofactoren voor als sociale polarisatie; ideeën dat de eigen groep bedreigd wordt; de rol van ideologie en religie; de geopolitieke context en maatschappelijke veranderingen. Hoewel dit soort risicofactoren inzicht verschaft in de risico's die ingedamd of tegengegaan moeten worden, biedt het geen richtlijnen voor een beleid dat gericht is op beschermingsfactoren, weerbaarheid en veerkracht. Sieckelincx en Gielen (2018) hebben daarom een kaleidoscopisch model ontwikkeld als tegenhanger van beleid, dat alleen is gericht op risicofactoren. Kortom, beleid dient in te grijpen op zowel risicofactoren als beschermende factoren. De keuze voor een bepaald model moet expliciet gemaakt worden, waarbij het van belang is om te beseffen dat geen *one-size-fits-all*-model bestaat om ieder individueel geval van radicalisering te verklaren.

7. **Formuleer heldere doelstellingen.** In menig beleidsdocument wordt gesproken over deradicalisering, terwijl het in wezen gaat over het bevorderen van weerbaarheid onder jongeren via een burgerschapsprogramma in het onderwijs. Deradicalisering veronderstelt dat een reeds geradicaliseerd individu daadwerkelijk deradicaliseert. Het is daarom van belang om helder te zijn over de precieze doelstelling bij iedere interventie en over de uiteindelijke doelstelling van het antiradicaliseringsprogramma als geheel. Het gaat erom of de interventie is gericht op primaire, secundaire of tertiaire preventie. Daarnaast is van belang of de uiteindelijke beoogde doelstelling het bevorderen van weerbaarheid van een bepaalde groep of gemeenschap betreft, of dat het eerder om kennisbevordering van professionals of deradicalisering van een bepaald individu gaat.
8. **Identificeer de doelgroepen dienovereenkomstig.** Naast het formuleren van doelen voor antiradicaliseringsprogramma en de afzonderlijke interventies, is het zaak om de doelgroepen zorgvuldig te selecteren, inclusief realistische doelen om per doelgroep te bereiken. Alleen een educatief programma zal gewelddadig extremisme nooit voorkomen of tegengaan; een educatief programma kan daarentegen de veerkracht van kwetsbare groepen, risicogroepen en individuen wel vergroten.
9. **Formuleer een *theory of change* voor het antiradicaliseringsprogramma en iedere afzonderlijke interventie.** Beschrijf de theorie of mechanismen die ten grondslag liggen aan de interventie. Dit lijkt wellicht lastig voor mensen zonder wetenschappelijke achtergrond of een specialisatie in evaluatie. De volgende vragen kunnen daarom behulpzaam zijn bij dit proces: waarom denkt u dat de interventie die u wilt implementeren een bijdrage kan leveren aan het voorkomen of tegengaan van radicalisering? Welke specifieke elementen uit de interventie kunnen helpen om de doelen te bereiken? En, welke bestaande kennis uit de ervaringspraktijk of wetenschap ondersteunt uw vooronderstelling? Als iemand antwoorde op deze vragen kan formuleren, dan is deze erin geslaagd om een *theory of change* te formuleren.
10. **Maak gebruik van bestaande kennis en evaluatie.** Hoewel evaluaties van antiradicaliseringsbeleid nog steeds schaars zijn, groeit het aantal studies wel. Maak gebruik van de beschikbare kennis in (wetenschappelijke) vaktijdschriften, onderzoeksrapporten en handleidingen voor professionals en beleidsmakers, bijvoorbeeld de collectie van het *Radicalisation Awareness Network*, met relevante benaderingen en praktijken om radicalisering te voorkomen en tegen te gaan (RAN, 2019). Als helemaal geen literatuur beschikbaar is, maak dan gebruik van

aanpalende literatuur uit andere vakgebieden. Uit de lange historie van onderzoek naar misdaadpreventie, is bijvoorbeeld duidelijk geworden dat heropvoedingskampen niet werken (Uitermark *et al.*, 2012). Het is dan ook onwaarschijnlijk dat deze interventies radicalisering kunnen voorkomen. Ter illustratie, bij het opzetten van lotgenotencontact voor ouders van Syriëgangers, kan literatuur worden geraadpleegd over lotgenotencontact voor ouders met een verslaafd, terminaal ziek of overleden kind. Hoofdstuk 6 illustreerde hoe waardevol een dergelijke benadering kan zijn om inzicht te verkrijgen in onderliggende mechanismen en belangrijke randvoorwaarden die de effectiviteit van dergelijk lotgenotencontact kunnen verhogen.

11. **Formuleer SMART indicatoren op drie verschillende niveaus.** Evaluatie is alleen mogelijk als doelstellingen en daarbij behorende indicatoren vanaf het begin worden geformuleerd. Een indicator is in feite een meetbare specificatie van de doelstelling. Er zijn verschillende soorten indicatoren. Structurele indicatoren draaien om institutionele en organisatorische voorwaarden, waaraan moet worden voldaan. Een structuurindicator voor een interventie om de veerkracht van jongeren via onderwijs te vergroten, is bijvoorbeeld het opleiden van onderwijspersoneel om een dergelijk project uit te voeren. Een procesindicator geeft informatie over de output van een interventie, zoals het aantal leerlingen dat moet worden bereikt met het weerbaarheidsprogramma of het aantal telefoontjes dat een hulplijn voor radicalisering zou moeten ontvangen. Structuur- en procesindicatoren kunnen echter geen informatie geven over de kwaliteit of het effect van de interventie. Daarvoor zijn effectindicatoren nodig. Een voorbeeld van een effectindicator is dat de weerbaarheid van jongeren die een weerbaarheidsprogramma hebben gevolgd met X% is toegenomen.
12. **Maak gebruik van bestaande vragenlijsten en meetinstrumenten.** Een veelgebruikt argument om niet te evalueren, is dat geen geschikte meetinstrumenten zouden bestaan. Er zijn echter wel degelijke (gevalideerde) meetinstrumenten en vragenlijsten om een beroep op te doen. Om bijvoorbeeld te meten of de weerbaarheid van jongeren na afloop van de interventie is toegenomen, is het eerst nodig om het weerbaarheidsniveau van jongeren voorafgaand aan de evaluatie vast te stellen (nulmeting). Mann *et al.* (2015) hebben een vragenlijst ontwikkeld om de weerbaarheid te meten. Door een dergelijke vragenlijst voor en na de interventie toe te passen, is het mogelijk om inzicht te verkrijgen in het effect van de interventie. Het meten van deradicalisering of disengagement (uittreding) kan ook plaatsvinden met bepaalde risicotaxatiemodellen, voorafgaand

aan en na afloop van een exitprogramma. Zo is het *Pro-Integration Model* van Barrelle (2015) geschikt om de mate van disengagement vast te stellen. Een ander instrument is de vragenlijst van Doosje *et al.* (2013) om inzicht te krijgen in de voedingsbodem voor radicalisering. De *Violent Extremist Risk Assessment 2 Revised*, ook wel bekend als de *Vera-2R*, kan ook worden ingezet om het risico op gewelddadig extremisme te meten (Pressman *et al.*, 2016). Er zijn dus diverse instrumenten, die passend zijn bij verschillende interventies, om inzicht te krijgen in het effect.

13. **Maak gebruik van multimethodische dataverzameling.** In plaats van te verzanden in een methodologische strijd tussen kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve methoden, is het verstandig om het beste van beide (methodische) werelden te benutten. Hoewel de bovengenoemde vragenlijsten en schalen relevant zijn om de causale relaties tussen interventies en uitkomsten te beoordelen en ze aantonen of de interventie al dan niet werkt, geven ze geen inzicht in waarom en op welke manier de interventies werken. Hiervoor moeten kwalitatieve methoden, zoals interviews en observatie van deelnemers, worden opgenomen in de evaluaties.
14. **Betrek onderzoekers voorafgaand aan de implementatie.** Evaluatie is veelal niet ingebouwd in het programma of de interventie. Dikwijls ontstaat na afloop pas het idee om inzicht te verkrijgen in de behaalde resultaten. Dat beperkt de mogelijkheden voor grondig evaluatieonderzoek aanzienlijk, omdat een effectevaluatie met een voor- en nameting bijvoorbeeld niet meer mogelijk is. Een procesevaluatie is dan het hoogst haalbare, waarbij de kwaliteit in sterke mate afhangt van de data die bewaard is gebleven. Is bijvoorbeeld het aantal deelnemers geregistreerd? Is de inhoud van het desbetreffende programma ergens vastgelegd en toegankelijk?
15. **Eis een grondig projectplan van externe partners.** Veelal voeren externe partijen (commercieel of non-profit) antiradicaliseringsinterventies uit. Dit kan een goede oplossing zijn, wanneer binnen de eigen organisatie geen kennis of capaciteit aanwezig is om de interventie uit te voeren. Echter, aan het eind van de dag is de preventie van radicalisering een verantwoordelijkheid van de (lokale) overheid, die verantwoording moet kunnen afleggen of belastinggeld effectief en doelmatig is besteed. Beleidsmakers moeten daarom een grondig projectplan van hun uitvoerders eisen. Hiervoor kunnen zij onder andere gebruikmaken van gratis beschikbaar gestelde formats in de Toolkit Evidence Based Werken ter Preventie van Radicalisering (www.toolkitevidencebasedwerken.nl). Opdrachtgevers moeten van hun opdrachtnemers in ieder geval eisen dat zij het volgende opnemen in het projectplan van de interventie:

- De doelstellingen die ze willen bereiken.
- De interventies die ze daarvoor in willen zetten.
- Welke methodieken daaraan ten grondslag liggen en in hoeverre deze methodieken evidence-based zijn?
- Een beschrijving van de manier waarop deze werkzame elementen bijdragen aan het behalen van de doelstellingen en de randvoorwaarden die daarvoor nodig zijn.
- De manier waarop dit succes op zowel proces- als effectniveau gemeten kan worden. (Op welke indicatoren mag de opdrachtnemer worden afgerekend?)

Dankwoord

Na mijn studie politicologie werd mijn masterscriptie als boek uitgegeven. Naar aanleiding daarvan heb ik van diverse universiteiten aanbiedingen ontvangen om in dienst te komen met als doel om te promoveren. Na lang wikken en wegen heb ik om een aantal redenen besloten om dat niet te doen. In de eerste plaats was ik tijdens mijn studie ernstig ziek geworden. Een fulltime promotietraject was op dat moment geen haalbare kaart. Een andere belangrijke reden was dat het niet in mijn aard zit om jarenlang met hetzelfde project bezig te zijn. Ik heb continu uitdaging en afwisseling nodig. Het leek dan ook niet voor mij weggelegd om vier jaar lang, dag in dag uit, aan hetzelfde project te werken. Het ondernemerschap voelde daarom als een betere optie, omdat dit me de vrijheid gaf om mijn eigen tijd in te delen en verschillende, afwisselende opdrachten uit te voeren. Een van de personen die mij een baan aanbod en momenteel deel uitmaakt van mijn promotiecommissie, zei toen: "Amy-Jane, daar ga je spijt van krijgen. Nu kan het nog, maar straks ben je dertig en dan gaat het knagen: was ik maar gepromoveerd. En dan heb je een gezin en verantwoordelijkheden en dan doe je het niet meer." Daar kon ik me op mijn 23^e weinig bij voorstellen, maar ik heb de afgelopen jaren vaak aan die woorden teruggedacht.

Hoewel ik veel plezier beleefde aan het ondernemerschap, ging het zeker knagen. Ik was in de veronderstelling dat een gastaanstelling aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam, het geven van onderwijs en het zo nu en dan schrijven van artikelen en boekhoofdstukken voldoende zou zijn om tegemoet te komen aan mijn behoefte voor academische verdieping en reflectie, maar dit was niet het geval. Toen ik van mijn voormalige hoogleraar John Grin het aanbod kreeg om parttime te promoveren, heb ik die kans met beide handen aangegrepen, omdat het de ideale manier was om het beste van mijn verschillende werelden te combineren: wetenschap, beleid en praktijk. Dat het zwaar zou worden, wist ik van tevoren. Ik was immers net moeder geworden en zou als kostwinnaar nee gaan verkopen tegen opdrachtgevers om de vrijgekomen tijd te benutten om te werken aan mijn proefschrift. Maar, hield ik mezelf voor, het zou slechts voor twee jaar zijn, want ik opereerde al lang in het antiradicaliseringsveld, had veel onderzoeksmateriaal op de plank liggen en was gewend om academisch te publiceren. Dat klusje ging ik dus wel even klaren. Inmiddels moet ik hard om mezelf lachen, aangezien ik niet twee maar vijf jaar aan het werk ben

geweest. 'Even' promoveren, het moederschap, een eigen bedrijf en behoorlijk wat privétegenslagen bleken de afgelopen jaren veel ballen om in de lucht te houden. Op dagen dat ik weer eens tot 03.00 of 04.00 uur 's nachts had zitten typen en een paar uur later om 07.00 uur met mijn dochter moest opstaan, heb ik vaak gedacht aan het wijze advies om niet te promoveren als je een gezin hebt. Daarom ben ik nu extra trots op het proefschrift dat er ligt. Tegen alle adviezen, verwachtingen en strubbelingen in, heb ik het voor elkaar gekregen.

Dit proefschrift was niet tot stand gekomen zonder de steun van een aantal belangrijke mensen en organisaties. In de eerste plaats wil ik de Universiteit van Amsterdam, de Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), de afdeling politicologie, de programmagroep *Transnational Configurations, Conflict & Governance* en in het bijzonder de directeuren van de programmagroep John en Marieke bedanken. Zonder jullie (financiële) steun en vertrouwen was dit proefschrift niet tot stand gekomen.

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kan het iedereen van harte aanbevelen om urenlang niet gestoord te worden door telefoon, e-mail of sociale media, en aan de slag te gaan!

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het moment dat je het allerliefst de handdoek in de ring wilt gooien, moet je jezelf soms herpakken en doorzetten, want uiteindelijk is dat waar je sterker en beter van wordt. Sterk zijn betekent echter niet continu je grenzen opzoeken en er overheen gaan. Sterk zijn is ook je grenzen aangeven en de regie terugpakken als anderen jouw ritme of inhoud willen bepalen.

Amy-Jane Gielen

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