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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 previous 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 Tilley (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 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.