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Lessons learned from dual site formative evaluations of Countering violent extremism (CVE) programming co-led by Canadian police

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on lessons learned from recently completed formative evaluations of police co-led CVE programming in Toronto, Ontario and Calgary, Alberta, this research aims to underscore the importance of, and provide technical guidance on, evaluation and reporting standards in the context of multi-agency CVE programming – which ultimately will help to facilitate the identification and replication of good practice. The results of the evaluative process highlight the need for greater articulation regarding intended program outcomes as well as program theorising regarding the underlying mechanisms that connect program activities and outputs with said intended outcomes. Both evaluations also demonstrated the importance of prioritising collaboration at both the evaluation-level and the program-level to facilitate successful and robust program implementation. As such, this study also yields findings that speak to the beneficial role that the evaluative process itself can play in facilitating the evolution of CVE programming.

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Introduction

The term countering violent extremism, or CVE, is used to describe a 'policy spectrum' (Harris-Hogan, Barrelle, & Zammit, 2016) of approaches that seek to prevent and reduce terrorism/violent extremism by using non-coercive methods to address the underlying drivers. Often, local police services play a role in the design, implementation, and maintenance of CVE programming (Thompson & Bucerius, 2020; Thompson & Leroux, 2020; Waxman, 2008). This gets at the notion of the 'local turn' in national security work (Coaffee & Wood, 2006). Police and other agencies are increasingly taking carriage of prevention and intervention-based efforts. Police services are often among the small number of local agencies with the requisite operational capacity and knowledge to design, implement, and maintain CVE programming. Yet localised police responses to CVE, as with other forms of violence prevention (see Brady, Balmer, & Phenix, 2007; Brunson, Braga, Hureau, & Pegram, 2015; Leroux & McShane, 2017) generally rely on partnerships with community agencies. At the same time, however, many of the community agencies

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and institutions that are willing to partner with police to implement CVE programming often do not have extensive experience with radicalised violence, or with the design and implementation of intervention-based CVE programming. This can present challenges for prevention/intervention activities and underscores the importance of evidence-based guidance on *how* to facilitate police-community partnerships, as well as rigorous evaluation to ensure that such partnership-driven programming is robust and efficacious.

While CVE has become a policy priority in many Western nations, 'programs have proliferated … more rapidly than has the understanding of these programs' (Lauland, Moroney, Rivers, Bellasio, & Cameron, 2019; p. ix). Though they share similar goals, CVE programming across Western nations is diverse, at different stages of development, and operationalises different approaches involving different combinations of government and non-government partners and stakeholders (Kubicek & King, 2020).

The sheer breadth of CVE programming and the nascent stage of CVE program evaluation have presented challenges for assessing the efficacy of this programming. This has prompted some critics to argue that CVE is 'bad policy' and that there is 'no evidence' that can speak to its efficacy (e.g. the Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). Such claims, however, fail to acknowledge the important evaluative work that has been conducted to date (e.g. Cherney & Belton, 2021; Gielen, 2018; Noordegraaf, Douglas, Bos, & Klem, 2017; Savoa et al., 2016, 2020; Weine, Eisenman, Glik, Kinsler, & Polutnik, 2018; Williams, 2021; Williams, Horgan, & Evans, 2016). They also belie the complexity of the evaluative process, particularly in a context where '[t]here is no defined set of practices, methods, or approaches used to evaluate the impact of programs that have the goal of preventing or countering violent extremism … reflecting the nascent and diverse nature of the field' (Holmer, Bauman, & Aryaeinejad, 2018, p. 4).

Our aim is to assist police and other local agencies tasked with designing and implementing police led/co-led, multi-agency, intervention-based CVE programming by providing an overview of key 'lessons learned' about the core constituent parts of programming gleaned from recently completed developmental evaluations of two multi-agency CVE programs currently in operation in Toronto, Ontario and Calgary, Alberta, Canada (Thompson & Leroux, 2020). We proceed in six sections. The first provides background information on CVE programming in Canada. Section two provides an overview of the current research. Section three includes a description of the CVE-specific programs evaluated and the situation table model that serves as the base program framework for these initiatives, while section four describes the evaluation methodology. The fifth section presents select findings related to the evaluative process, with an emphasis on program assumptions and logic models, information feedback loops, the composition, quality and strength of collaborative partnerships, the importance of clinical oversight, and how the evaluative process served to facilitate greater partner buy-in for the program models under examination. A short concluding section offers final thoughts regarding the benefits of early evaluation for long-term program success.

CVE programming in Canada

The implementation of CVE programming in Canada occurred later than in many other nations, due in part to Canada's distinct history of terroristic and extremist events

(Kubicek & King, 2020; Littlewood, Thompson, & Dawson, 2020). More specifically, though there is a long history of such violence in Canada (for a detailed overview see Clement, 2020; Littlewood et al., 2020; Tishler, Ouellet, & Kilberg, 2020), these incidents have, on the whole, been fewer and less lethal than in other nations, which for some time precluded the development of a 'felt need' for prevention/intervention-based programming. This changed, however, with two lone actor events inspired by so-called jihadist ideology in Saint-Jean-sur-Richlieu (2014), and Ottawa (2014), vehicle ramming attacks in Edmonton (2017) and Toronto (2018), a mass casualty attack at an Islamic cultural centre in Quebec City (2017), and more than 100 Canadians who travelled abroad to support and/or fight with terrorist/extremist groups. In the wake of these incidents came a realisation that 'traditional counterterrorism measures were not enough to counter this multidimensional terrorist threat' (Littlewood et al., 2020, p. 5) – and CVE programming became a policy priority in Canada, with a somewhat piecemeal approach to program design, implementation and evaluation that began in 2015 (for an overview of influential developments regarding Canadian CVE initiatives, see Kubicek & King, 2020).

As in other nations, programming that falls under the banner of CVE in Canada can be mapped onto the public health framework of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (for an overview of how the public health model has been applied in the context of CVE, see Eisenman, Weine, & Lashley, 2019; Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Weine, Smith, Braniff, Erdemandi, & Day, 2019). While there is active CVE programming at the primary and tertiary levels in Canada, intervention-based programming in keeping with the notion of secondary prevention – the bulk of which is co-led by local police and community-based organisations has received significant federal funding (Public Safety Canada, 2019), and is the focus of the current research.

The current evaluations

The purpose of the current study is to apply a flexible, expert-derived evaluation framework to two CVE programs implemented in different local jurisdictions across Canada. It is important to note that we do not provide an in-depth discussion of our evaluative methodology or report program-level findings (i.e. program outcomes; see Thompson & Leroux, 2020). Rather, the results of the evaluative *process* are presented to provide empirically generated guidance to support the design and implementation of future CVE evaluations. In doing so, the current study contributes specific guidance towards CVE evaluation reporting standards, which ultimately will facilitate the identification and replication of good practice. The current study is also the first we are aware of that brings a Canadian lens to the extant literature on CVE program evaluation.

Description of evaluated programs

One common approach that has emerged in many nations involves case management models of service delivery, which involve referring individuals to local multi-agency assessment teams/panels for the purpose of designing and deploying individually tailored intervention plans (Noordegraaf et al., 2017). Two such programs were chosen to be evaluated for the current study: FOCUS Toronto, located in Toronto, Ontario, and ReDirect, located in Calgary, Alberta. These programs were chosen because they

offered examples of two common approaches to implementing CVE programming discussed in the literature: FOCUS Toronto leveraged a pre-existing community violence prevention program to 'layer-in' a CVE mandate, whereas ReDirect is implemented as a standalone, CVE-specific program. FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect were also implemented in two different cities with distinct urban contexts and that experienced high-profile incidents of radicalised violence (a 2018 vehicle ramming attack that killed 10 and injured 16 in Toronto, and two clusters of young men who were radicalised in Calgary and left Canada in late 2012 to take up arms with Daesh). This offered a unique opportunity to assess the potential generalizability of the evaluative methodology, and identify best practice approaches that, theoretically, would be nimble enough to be relevant to a range of CVE programs and local contexts. While FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect are distinct programs implemented in different local community contexts, they both utilised a situation table model as their base program framework.

The situation table model

The Canadian situation table model was influenced by a collaborative risk-driven model originating from Govanhill, Scotland (see Ekos Limited, 2011), and influenced the design and implementation (in 2011) of a similar initiative in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada (see McFee & Taylor, 2014). The Canadian version of the situation table model (also called the 'hub' model in some Canadian jurisdictions) is, however, *not* a replication of the Scottish model. Rather, though inspired by the demonstrated ability for diverse human and social service practitioners to work together in Scotland, the architects of the Canadian model built-in significant additional structure, discipline, data collection and information sharing protocols and principles (for an overview of core differences between the Scottish and Canadian situation table models, see Bhayani & Thompson, 2016; Nilson, 2016).

The Canadian situation table model is characterised by multi-agency response teams made up of representatives from local police services (both models under examination in this study were co-led by the local police service in their respective jurisdictions), social and human service agencies, schools, corrections, housing, health, and other locally relevant community partners. The collaborative process involves regular meetings wherein deidentified 'situations' (i.e. referred potential clients) are introduced to the table by representatives of participating agencies. In general, situations are cases of individuals identified by table agencies who are at 'acutely elevated risk' (AER) of victimisation and/or the perpetration of harm – meaning, an immediate multi-agency response is required to mitigate a potential community safety threat; the initial element of the intervention is intended to take place within 48 h of an AER designation. Table responses are considered successful when the immediate threat to community safety is addressed, usually as a consequence of the individual being connected to appropriate resources, services and/or supports.

FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect

FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect are the first CVE programs that invoke the situation table model to be evaluated in Canada. Canadian situation tables apply the public health framework's notion of secondary level of prevention. (i.e. intervention). As it relates to the domain of CVE, situation tables offer an opportunity for early intervention for individuals

who may be especially vulnerable to, or in the early stages of, the radicalisation to violence process by providing a host of individually tailored supports (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Weine et al., 2018; Weine, Younis, & Polutnik, 2017). We describe how each program adopted the situation model with a CVE mandate below.

FOCUS Toronto

FOCUS Toronto is a joint initiative on the part of the City of Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto and the Toronto Police Service (TPS) to address community safety and wellbeing issues across the city. To achieve this, FOCUS Toronto implemented four tables in high-priority neighbourhoods in the north, south, east and west quadrants of the city. The guiding principle of FOCUS Toronto's approach to CVE is that radicalisation to violence is more alike than it is different from other forms of community violence, and consequently can be addressed through more general prevention/intervention efforts (Ellis, Miuller, Schouten, Agalab, & Abdi, 2020; Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Weine et al., 2017). Approximately 25–55 human and social service agency representatives met at each of the situation tables each week. Deidentified CVE 'situations' are referred by the TPS and involved community partners, and upon referral each case is vetted by the table, so that only cases meeting the 'acutely elevated risk' inclusion criteria are brought forward. Unlike ReDirect, which is a stand-alone CVE-specific program, radicalisation to violence is one of a series of potential harms that the FOCUS Toronto situation tables attend to. More specifically, following the provision of extensive upskilling and training opportunities to partner agencies affiliated with FOCUS Toronto, the CVE function was 'layered in' to FOCUS Toronto table operations over the period of examination. While the current evaluation examined the FOCUS Toronto model in general, we paid particular attention to assessing the layering-in of a CVE pilot function, and it is this aspect of the research that we report on here (for an in-depth overview of the 'layering in' of CVE to the FOCUS Toronto model, see Thompson & Leroux, 2020).

ReDirect

Calgary's ReDirect program is a joint initiative implemented by the Calgary Police Service's Community and Youth Services Section (CYSS) and is based on a multi-agency approach involving four 'foundation partners': Calgary Neighbourhoods, the Calgary School Board, Calgary Separate Schools Division, and Alberta Health Services. ReDirect is a standalone, CVE-specific model that works to prevent radicalisation to violence through community education and awareness, as well as prevention and intervention activities that take place at the situation table itself. At the time of evaluation, ReDirect was in the pilot stage of implementation, with the table meeting monthly to design and deploy multiagency interventions for clients deemed to be at acutely elevated risk of radicalising to violence.

Evaluation methodology

North American subject matter expert workshop/roundtable on CVE evaluation

The sheer diversity of primary, secondary and tertiary CVE programming in operation precludes the application of 'one size fits all' methodological and analytic approaches to CVE program evaluation. During the formative stages of the current study, in March 2017, the

principal investigator invited a number of international subject matter expertsinvolved in evaluations of police co-led CVE programming to attend a workshop on CVE evaluation in Ottawa. The purpose of this workshop was to develop a rigorous, yet flexible, program evaluation framework and instruments that could be applied across two distinct programs. The evaluation, design, and methodological approach ultimately employed was therefore shaped by recent progression in the field of CVE evaluation.

Expert-based evaluation framework

Two pillars were identified during the expert workshop that make up the presented evaluation framework. The first pillar is to conduct a *formative* evaluation.[1] As per the Canadian Evaluation Society's adopted guidelines (Graham, 2018; Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011), it is best practice for a new program to undergo a formative evaluation when it is being developed, as was the case with ReDirect, and/or when an existing program is being modified, as with the layering-in of CVE operations to the FOCUS Toronto model. The purpose of a formative evaluation is to provide feedback to stakeholders about program functioning and some short-term outcomes (also known as proximal outcomes), to ensure the program is operating as intended, and that the intended outcomes align with program activities in such a way as to reasonably expect change on the intended metrics. The data gathered over the course of a formative evaluation helps stakeholders improve and refine program delivery early-on in its implementation and keep it on track by monitoring and supporting program fidelity. Formative evaluations are particularly salient in the context of CVE programming due to the current stage of the broader CVE field. It remains unclear what outcomes are needed to reduce and/or eliminate radicalised violence. There is a limited body of research theorising the mechanisms underpinning radicalised violence, and even less work has been done to empirically identify etiological pathways toward radicalised violence, especially in the North American context (Borum, 2017; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Knight & Keatley, 2021). It also remains largely unclear if frontline practitioners, law enforcement or otherwise, have the requisite expertise, training, skills, and comfort-levels to design and implement CVE programming. Within the developed evaluation framework, the primary role of the researcher is therefore to inform process and guide the implementation of multifaceted initiatives involving stakeholders of diverse backgrounds, skillsets, and areas of expertise (Savoa et al., 2020).

The second pillar of the evaluation framework identified in the workshop was to explicitly integrate considerations regarding multi-agency partnerships, with an eye toward identifying conditions that increase the model's intervention capacity potential – that is, the collective capacity of partner agencies to 'effectively, legitimately and resiliently contribute to the goals of the strategy' (Noordegraaf et al., 2017, p. 398). The CVE programming under examination here involves the literal localisation of national security intervention, meaning that by virtue of their design, the FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect programs include both law enforcement and community-level partners. A key message from the expert workshop was that it should not be assumed a multi-agency approach to community safety will necessarily be characterised by robust collaborative relationships and capacity. Instead, there is generally an enormous amount of relationship-building associated with standing-up a collaborative, multi-agency effort, and an equally enormous amount of work associated with nurturing and maintaining these collaborative efforts

over the long-term, particularly when said collaborations involve criminal justice actors and frontline workers from community-based agencies who may not necessarily regard the police and other agents of the criminal justice system in an altogether positive light (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2008; Dobchuk-Land, 2017).

Implementation of the evaluation framework

The evaluations of FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect were framed by the two pillars identified above: a formative evaluation methodological approach and a particular focus on the nature and quality of collaboration. FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect were the ideal programs in which to implement this evaluation framework, as they were premised on the Canadian situation table model, which enabled the research team to examine *how* to conduct a collaboration-focused evaluation.

Table 1 presents the core characteristics of generalised formative evaluations adapted from Graham (2018). These characteristics were integrated into our methodology to achieve the objective of evaluating FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect using a formative evaluation.

To achieve the objective of implementing a collaboration-focused evaluation, the research team was comprised of individuals from various research backgrounds, including criminology, forensic psychology, social work, public health and political science (for an overview of the benefits of multidisciplinary evaluation methodologies in the CVE space, see Noordegraaf et al., 2017). The principal researcher met with key stakeholders and representatives from the Toronto Police Service, the City of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto (for the FOCUS Toronto portion of this research), and the Calgary Police Service and Calgary Neighbourhoods (for the ReDirect portion), during which the research rationale, objectives and proposed methodology were presented. Stakeholders involved with both models agreed to participate and facilitated access to their respective situation table members and meetings.

The specific evaluation methodology for FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect, respectively, involved triangulating several data sources, another best practice highlighted in the extant literature (Gielen, 2018). First, the research team conducted a review of all sources of existing data for both models, including program policies and procedures, and data compiled by program staff (e.g. information sharing agreements between agencies, organisational staffing charts and funding reports).

Table 1. Key characteristics of a formative evaluation.

What is it? An evaluation of whether a program is producing expected outputs and select short-term outcomes; it may also provide information about unintended outcomes.
When is it conducted? At early stages of program implementation; while a program is still being developed/modified.
What questions can it answer? Are key aspects of the program functioning as intended? Are early outcomes moving in the right direction?
What outputs and outcomes are measured? Select key outputs and short-term outcomes only.
How often is it conducted? Often repeatedly.
Who are the results shared with? Primarily program stakeholders.
How many cases/participants should it include? Small sample sizes are acceptable; tests of statistical significance are generally not necessary.
Why is it useful? It allows for modifications to be made to the program before full implementation begins. Maximises the likelihood that the program will succeed.

Source: Adapted from Graham (2018).

Second, observational data were collected from FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect table meetings. Due to its larger scale, FOCUS Toronto meetings were observed over a four-month period (1 January 1 to 30 April 2018, for a total of 64 meetings) by six research assistants who documented meeting dynamics on a revolving schedule and using a standardised template form. The authors observed three ReDirect meetings, which occurred less regularly and were less formalised than FOCUS Toronto meetings due to the stage, scope and size of the program.

Third, FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect table members, including representatives from the Toronto and Calgary Police Services, were asked about the conceptualisation, implementation, and overall experience of their respective programs. Again, due to the larger scale of FOCUS Toronto, an anonymous survey was administered to all table members ($n = 83$). The survey was designed to align with the objectives of the evaluation framework (i.e. it emphasised process-related and collaboration-related questions to facilitate calibration of the layering-in process as per formative evaluation principles, as presented in Thompson & Leroux, 2020). ReDirect is, by comparison, a smaller program, involving substantially fewer participating agencies and table representatives; therefore, instead of surveying ReDirect members we interviewed them using an interview guide that covered comparable information. For completeness, a sub-set of FOCUS Toronto members ($n = 34$) also participated in an interview.

Participation in the evaluations was voluntary. The research team attended a series of FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect table meetings prior to data collection to introduce ourselves and the evaluations, to answer questions, and to solicit participation. The evaluation protocol was reviewed by the Institutional Research Ethics Board, and written consent was obtained from all study participants who were informed they could withdraw their participation at any time. Participants were also compensated for their time completing the survey (if applicable) and the interviews. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, participants' names and organisational affiliations were not attributed to their survey (if applicable) or interview responses.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and ranged in length from forty-five minutes to over two hours. We established a coding scheme capturing key themes that emerged in the data. In coding the first ten interviews according to our coding scheme, we used three different coders; this helped to establish and maintain inter-coder reliability and make final adjustments to our coding scheme. From there, we used a qualitative data analysis software tool, NVIVO 10, to code and organise the remaining interview data.

Preliminary evaluation findings were shared back with FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect leadership respectively, as part of an ongoing feedback loop. Over the last several decades, formative evaluation methodologies have incorporated techniques that have proven efficacious in other approaches to evaluation, including the integration of feedback loops, which can 'help bridge the gap between program theory and implementation context … [and] modif[y] a strictly linear model to address barriers to implementation and thereby improve the likelihood of positive program outcomes' (Katz et al., 2013, p. 46). Recent research also specifies that 'ongoing and on time delivery of findings' is a crucial condition to include in CVE evaluation to ensure the timely communication of results, to engage evaluation stakeholders, and to increase the likelihood of more robust intervention capacity (Noordegraaf et al., 2017, p. 402). One objective of the

current study was therefore to test the feasibility and utility of integrating feedback loops into CVE-specific program evaluations. *How* feedback was delivered varied between FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect due to differences in program size and stage of implementation. Because FOCUS Toronto is a larger operation, and the CVE mandate was layered-in to a pre-existing robust program model, the evaluation findings fed back to the program had to be considered by multiple levels of stakeholders, including the FOCUS Toronto co-leads (i.e. three representatives from the Toronto Police Service, the City of Toronto, and the United Way of Greater Toronto) and their respective organisations' senior-level management. As such, those stakeholders working closest with the evaluation team did not have the flexibility to integrate program changes in response to the evaluation feedback in real time. The feedback loop in the Toronto context therefore consisted of several formalised preliminary finding presentations delivered by the evaluation team. Preliminary findings and recommendations were then taken under consideration and implemented independently from the evaluation team by program stakeholders.

In contrast, the evaluation team played a more active role in facilitating program changes in response to preliminary evaluation findings in the ReDirect context. By virtue of being a stand-alone program, the leadership of ReDirect had the autonomy to implement feedback changes in direct consultation with the evaluation team. For example, the evaluation feedback loop for ReDirect involved a facilitated one-day workshop to re-articulate the program's logic model and underlying theory. The findings derived from the implementation of feedback loops as part of the evaluative process undertaken are presented below. Detailed and specific methodologies, data collection instruments and findings from FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect are available elsewhere (see Thompson & Leroux, 2020).

Evaluative process findings

The results from the evaluative process implemented across FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect align with the considerations specified in the expert workshop. Both evaluations highlighted the need for greater articulation regarding the intended program outcomes, and theorising regarding the underlying mechanisms that connect program activities and outputs with said intended outcomes. Moreover, both evaluations reconfirmed the need to prioritise collaboration at both the evaluation-level and program-level to facilitate successful program implementation.

Program assumptions and logic model

FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect both exemplify how gaps in the CVE literature are reflected in the real world. The evaluative process in Toronto and Calgary found that the general lack of conceptual clarity regarding radicalised violence in the literature leads to an inability to operationalise CVE program outcomes. A theme that emerged from the FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect stakeholder interviews was hesitancy among program members to bring forward individuals to participate in the interventions due to unclear expectations about intended outcomes. One program partner in Calgary reported: '*I can't articulate what they [ReDirect] are doing. I can't tell you who their clients are … I can't tell you what specific strategies they use in case management planning*.'

While stakeholders across both programs were supportive of the broader goal of reducing radicalised violence, when asked what this meant at the individual-level, few stakeholders could articulate what measurable outcomes they expected.

The evaluative process also identified poor conceptual clarity as adversely affecting relationships between the current CVE programs and the broader community. For example, a case worker from FOCUS Toronto stated:

> … the police is [*sic*] a sign of … it's a symbol of oppression and, you know, someone who's at risk and in need and probably in trouble, they're […] always being arrested by the police or harassed or whatever. And then, you know, the police trying to be friendly with them now [laughs]. There's no trust there and then they may not want to trust the organizations that are trying to help them who are working with the cops, right? I've seen that happen.

The underlined portion of the above quote captures the hurdle many CVE programs face by being implemented by and/or alongside police services. These programs need to overcome pre-existing police stigma, mistrust, and community resistance to be successful, all of which is made more difficult without clear program objectives. This theme is also discussed by a case worker from the ReDirect program:

> People don't, like, have the best relationships with the CPS [Calgary Police service], like, if you talk to people from minority communities, they don't really have a great, like, view or perception of CPS at all … So I don't think [CPS's lead role in ReDirect] is the best way.

CVE programs are further vulnerable to community-level scepticism due to a history of targeted initiatives that disproportionately stigmatise Muslim communities (Abdel-Fattah, 2020; Lenard & Nagra, 2020; Spalek, 2010). In Canada, the socio-political context regarding radicalised violence tends to centre on problematic assumptions about Muslim communities, although shifts to include other forms of radicalised violence are occurring. The current evaluative process found poor conceptual clarity regarding radicalised violence *and* program outcomes contributed to community-level resistance to the programs. This was compounded by pre-existing scepticism and mistrust of the police and CVE more generally. These negative effects were, however, mitigated in the Toronto context because FOCUS Toronto was a well-established program prior to integration of the CVE mandate. By contrast, ReDirect was implemented as a new, standalone CVE program. Key stakeholder interviews from the ReDirect table members identified '*unclear program activities and intended outcomes*' as barriers to buy-in because they contributed to misinformation and misunderstandings about the program.

ReDirect offers a good example of how well-intended goals and outcomes do not necessarily facilitate robust program activities and evaluation. Specifically, an initial intended outcome of the ReDirect program was 'decreased violent ideology'. On the surface, this seems intuitive: reducing radical ideology will lead to a reduction in radicalised violence. However, this is a problematic assumption. Violent ideology is not a measurable outcome and the evidence regarding the direct causal pathway from violent ideology to radicalised violence is tenuous, especially in North American contexts. The original ReDirect logic model also did not have program activities aimed at changing ideology, thus the underlying theory of change for the program was non-existent. Without measurable outcomes, evidenced-based program assumptions, and evidenced-based theory of change, the program's ability to track client progress and evaluate program effectiveness is restricted.

In response, the evaluation of ReDirect included a re-conceptualisation of the program's original logic model to support the re-branding and re-launch initiative that occurred during the evaluation timeframe. First, the program assumptions were redefined to not include violent ideology as a core program target. Instead, the program assumption was redefined as: increasing social bonds will reduce radicalisation to violence. Until the field of CVE and radicalisation research empirically identifies a causal mechanism between ideology and action, including ideology in an evaluation framework may dilute the potential effectiveness of CVE programs. In line with this, program outcomes were re-defined to reflect increased social bonds (e.g. improved coping skills, increase in constructive use of time, increased feeling of community, increased independent living). Finally, program activities were aligned to achieve the newly defined outcomes, as per the new theory of change. For example, a core ReDirect activity is now to facilitate access to structured community spaces and activities, may in turn contribute to an increase in constructive use of time and increased sense of community. This leverages the assumption that increased social bonds will reduce the likelihood of engage in violence.

Feedback loops

The results of the evaluative process also demonstrate the need for CVE program evaluations to integrate feedback loops as part of their evaluation methodology. CVE programming remains largely untested due, in part, to poorly operationalised definitions of radicalisation and poorly conceptualised program outcomes, both of which necessitate an ongoing process of program refinement and re-development at multiple points of program implementation (Scriven, 1997; USCDC, 2011). To support this process, Savoia et al. (2020, p. 7) argue:

> … [formative] evaluation is an approach that combines the work of assessment with a simultaneous effort to support and inform innovation. Because design and evaluation take place simultaneously, new elements are added and tested in an on-going feedback cycle. Innovations may thus be kept or discarded in an iterative process that facilitates trial, error, and adaptation; they may also be kept or discarded depending on whether they contribute to the emergence of the desired outcome.

Feedback loops also mitigate some of the knowledge mobilisation delays associated with lengthy academic research timelines in the context of applied research (Gielen, 2018); we therefore built-in information feedback loops so that when areas for improvement were identified, that information was communicated to stakeholders in more or less real time. In this way, up to date insights and information could be acted upon immediately, enabling the research team and program stakeholders to attend to issues before they became potentially systemic in nature.

Following the data collection and analyses, the research team prepared short written reports that provided overviews of the findings and leveraged these reports to form the basis of workshops with stakeholders to discuss and implement recommendations. Overall, the feedback delivered to FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect stakeholders identified areas for improvement and gave insights into what the program's priorities should be, which can assist program managers to determine areas of concern and focus. In this way, the current evaluations helped make early improvements to the programs and

helped to maximise the likelihood that the program will ultimately succeed (Katz et al., 2013; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

A key consideration for future evaluations is the variation in the method of feedback delivery across programs, depending on program context. The feedback loop for FOCUS Toronto was more formalised because the program was larger and included a greater number of key stakeholders. By contrast, ReDirect's smaller size did not necessitate as much of a formalised process, but instead relied largely on regular and informal briefings between the principal investigator and ReDirect leadership.

Partnerships

Calibrating program partners

Several findings emerged from the current evaluations regarding the role and importance of partnerships in the implementation and evaluation of CVE programs. Our findings indicate the need for built-in program mechanisms to calibrate program partners to ensure the program can effectively respond to the needs of program participants, thereby achieving intended outcomes. Arguably, this is true of all multi-agency partnership programs whereby integrating a process to assess the degree of matching between the expertise available in the program, the intended outcomes of the program, and the needs of program participants are required for program success. For example, a multi-agency program intended to reduce truancy among at-risk youth should be calibrated to include partners from relevant school boards.

While the above may seem intuitive and obvious, calibrating program partners for CVE-specific initiatives is challenging as programs continue to refine themselves in response to the ever-evolving CVE landscape and knowledge base. Our own findings highlight the need for conceptual clarity regarding CVE-specific programs – an objective that can only be achieved through an ongoing process of re-articulating program assumptions and intended outcomes in response to emerging best evidence. It therefore follows that, where necessary, programs should engage in a process of re-calibrating their partners to align with their re-articulated program models. The ReDirect program provides an example of *how* this process can unfold. Specifically, the ReDirect evaluation yielded a re-designed program logic model, which in turn enabled ReDirect leadership to clearly identify program partners with expertise that aligned with intended program outcomes. ReDirect also integrated a case review procedure, whereby the demographics and needs of program participants are reviewed on a semi-regular basis by the case planning team to assess whether additional program partners are needed, essentially undertaking an internal program audit. Based on our evaluation findings, such a process requires a robust logic model and underlying program theory. Otherwise, there is no framework against which to audit and self-monitor.

Our evaluation of the FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect models also highlighted the need to improve the quality of partnerships at the tables, which has important implications for individual and collective intervention capacity. There is extensive literature on cross-sectoral, multi-agency partnerships that highlights the significant formative and ongoing work required to foster robust collaboration. Simply put: merely bringing diverse stakeholders to the tables with a common intervention goal does not (necessarily) result in strong partnerships. Instead, collaborative efforts have been shown to be undermined

by a variety of 'inhibitors' (Harkins & Egan, 2012) that include differences across agencies in terms of organisational cultures, mandates, entrenched interests, language and terminology (Harkins & Egan, 2012; Prothrow-Stith, 2004), as well as 'efforts to protect one's turf', competition for funding (Prothrow-Stith, 2004), and, more generally, 'the competitive and combative nature of local politics' (Harkins & Egan, 2012, p. 22). The literature further demonstrates the inclusion of police personnel into multi-agency partnerships can be particularly challenging in terms of building relationships and establishing trust and group cohesion (see, for example, Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee, Ontario, 2011; Pardo, Gil-Garcia, & Burke, 2006; Prothrow-Stith, 2004), and that distrust can 'corrode the creative process' that is crucial to cross-agency integration and information sharing (Braga & Winship, 2006). Differences that can divide human/social service and police agencies and that can undermine the establishment of trust include historical tensions in a given jurisdiction related to, for example, perceptions that police agencies want to be 'in charge' of collaborative efforts, are driven by glory seeking motivations, and that the police talk 'at' and not 'with' community agencies (Dobchuk-Land, 2017; Mangan, Thomas, Davies, & Gasper, 2018; McCarthy, 2013). Legal and ethical concerns over information sharing can also pose challenges – for example, concerns that police agencies might use information on criminally involved individuals for intelligence gathering and/or enforcement purposes. Community organisations that work with vulnerable groups may also be dissuaded from working with the police, due to concerns about the perceived lack of neutrality among police officers (Dobchuk-Land, 2017; Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, & Bannister, 2008; Thacher, 2001). Establishing a culture of trust between police and community agencies is imperative to the mitigation of such perceptions. These and other challenges can reduce the likelihood of sustained and committed participation, thereby hampering multi-agency collaboration and diminishing the potential of a cohesive team (Russell, 2016).

Factors that promote multi-agency collaboration include strong leadership, shared ownership of cross-cutting issues, clear and continuous communications, and significant and ongoing efforts to build relationships and trust across partners (CAMH, 2019; De Carolis, Southern, & Blake, 2007). Early in the data collection process at both sites, however, table representatives reported they were not altogether satisfied with the nature of collaboration at table meetings, which was variously attributed to some combination of: (a) a preponderance of newer agencies/members at some tables; (b) a lack of communication between table co-chairs and agencies, and among agencies themselves; and (c) mistrust and perceived power imbalances between new and more senior table representatives, and between police and non-police practitioners. The research team used the feedback loops to communicate these preliminary findings to stakeholders, who were diligent in addressing issues related to communication, trust and perceived power imbalances.

It takes time and effort to cultivate relationships and trust, key antecedents to robust collaboration across diverse community partners. Our data demonstrate growth and improvement over time in this regard at both sites, which appears to be a function of deliberate relationship and trust building efforts on the part of stakeholders, including introducing chair/co-chair training to ensure consistency in table operations; recalibrating communications strategies; information sharing to increase familiarity about participating agencies' mandate and scope at the tables, particularly for smaller and/or newer agencies;

and a host of educational and training opportunities provided to agency representatives (training that they would likely not receive from their home agencies and that increased their competency to 'do CVE', but that also increased exposure to partner agencies). As we will argue below, the evaluative process itself helped to facilitate more and better relationships among and between table representatives.

It also appears that when it comes to CVE interventions in Toronto and Calgary, table members came to see the Toronto and Calgary Police Service representatives as important to program success. While table representatives in both cities articulated concern about police participation, sustained exposure to police representatives in a broader context of relationship and trust building appears to have assuaged many of the reported concerns. Indeed, the multi-agency collaboration at the FOCUS Toronto tables has also developed appreciable levels of trust between table members and police officers, a process that respondents indicated was facilitated by the emphasis on bolstering collaboration at the tables. In fact, it was clear that across both sites, table members were '*happy*' with the police officers at their respective tables and felt their involvement contributed to them understanding the social issues that vulnerable communities face. Furthermore, police presence at the tables was reported to help table members understand the role of the police, access information, and connect them with people who can benefit from their services.

Respondents also reported that the personalities of the police officers involved with FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect contribute positively to table operations, which underscores the importance of so- called 'talent management' when it comes to assigning police officers to these roles. Indeed, most table members in both cities agreed they could tell that the police officers who are at the tables want to be engaged and make a positive impact in the community. Respondents also reported having police present during 'door knocks' (i.e. attending the residence of potential CVE clients, usually the first step in the intervention process) made them feel safer and increased the likelihood that participating organisations felt comfortable to take part in addressing situations, particularly those that may involve high-risk potential clients:

You know, at the end of the day there's always a safety measure when you're dealing with someone in the community, and those are the calls that often the police will be involved in. Just because we are working on a case doesn't mean that we can't have the police with us sometimes. Sometimes that's the need, right? Because you don't know when you're knocking on someone's door, you don't know how you are going to be received, so it's always safety first and I'm grateful that the police are involved.

Clinical oversight

Our evaluations identified the need for CVE-specific programs to integrate clinical oversight. FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect provided two examples of *how* this can be done, depending on program context. For example, a central intended proximal outcome for FOCUS Toronto is to connect individuals identified as at-risk for radicalised violence to appropriate *generalised external* services (i.e. services targeting general needs versus radicalisation-specific interventions). In this way, FOCUS Toronto itself does not provide individual-level intervention, but rather implements a brokerage system between multisectoral partners. This proximal outcome flows directly from the conceptualisation of radicalisation adopted by FOCUS Toronto (i.e. radicalisation to violence is analogous to other

public safety issues). Clinical oversight in this type of brokerage context is achieved by including table members whose home agencies and scope of practice are clinical in nature. By contrast, based on recommendations made by the research team, ReDirect integrated clinical oversight by hiring in-program staff with clinical expertise (i.e. a clinical social worker). This was appropriate as ReDirect offers direct individual-level intervention; it therefore follows that those implementing the intervention should have the requisite expertise and experience for interventions of this type.

Partner buy-in. The evaluations of FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect resulted the re-articulation of the respective program models, facilitated by the integration of feedback loops, with more extensive changes made to ReDirect (e.g. full re-design of logic model) as it was not embedded in a pre-existing and robust program model, as was the case with FOCUS Toronto. In addition, the evaluative process facilitated greater buy-in among FOCUS Toronto and ReDirect program partners. Key stakeholder interviews from both sites converged to demonstrate program stakeholders appreciated and valued their respective programs participating in an evaluation as it signalled to them a commitment to improvement, oversight, and transparency.

Concluding thoughts

The field of CVE programming in North America continues to evolve as new empirical and practice-based evidence emerges regarding the nature and trajectories of radicalised violence. CVE programs are tasked with the challenge of demonstrating 'success' while CVE-specific outcomes largely remain a moving target. These challenges become even greater when the definition of radicalisation itself shifts and changes. Our findings demonstrate that applying a formative evaluation approach that emphasises the core feature of multi-agency CVE-programs (i.e. partnerships), can mitigate these challenges and yield robust program models that are nimble and adaptive.

The benefits of early evaluation for will be most apparent over the longer-term; research demonstrates that a rigorous formative evaluation, followed by a process-based evaluation[2] are central to program design, refinement, maintenance and sustainability (Evans, Scourfield, & Murphy, 2015; Graham, 2018; McShane, 2015). Ultimately, program efficacy can be assessed using an impact evaluation – though the low base rate associated with CVE programming means that such evaluations generally cannot be undertaken until the program has been in operation for some time. In the interim, program stakeholders would be wise to conduct early evaluations of CVE programming that will assist not only in bolstering the model under examination, but that will also position it for success at the impact evaluation stage and over the long term.

Notes

1. The research team conducted two types of evaluation on the FOCUS Toronto model – a process evaluation of broader table operations, and a smaller, more focused formative evaluation of the layering-in of CVE situations. Here, we report on the latter and on findings from the formative evaluation of the ReDirect program in Calgary.
2. This refers to evaluative methodologies that examines the delivery of a program and focuses on how things unfold – that is, how the program was implemented, how it is delivered and how it currently operates. As such, process evaluations offer a valuable means of modelling

changing program needs, by documenting casual mechanisms, by identifying significant contextual influences, and by monitoring/facilitating program adaptations (Evans et al., 2015); Overall, process evaluations should extend the scope of a program evaluation and enable researchers to reassess the responsiveness of existing methodologies and frameworks as they are being used (Evans et al., 2015).

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