The Role of Community Policing in Countering Violent Extremism

OVERVIEW

This research investigates the implementation of the U.S. national security strategy to build community resilience to violent extremism and the role that an adapted version of community policing plays in the implementation of CVE programming in Los Angeles, California.

The overall goal of CVE is, "to stop those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists." Generally speaking, CVE can be understood as "a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups." The White House Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for CVE recommends that law enforcement and other agencies "foster community-led partnerships and prevention programming through expanding community-based solutions." This study was designed to better understand and identify how community policing must be enhanced and adapted to further CVE strategy, how such adapted policing works, and how CVE-oriented community policing differs from traditional community policing.

INTERIM FINDINGS

CVE-oriented community policing differs from traditional community policing, both structurally and operationally. In the LAPD, CVE-oriented community policing is centralized in one unit of 25 officers that covers the entire city, rather than traditional community policing staffing, which has Senior Lead Officers in each of 21 divisions. While 21 monthly Community Police Advisory Boards are convened as part of traditional community policing, the CVE unit holds one quarterly Muslim Forum.

CVE incorporates both traditional community policing and enhanced community policing components across seven practice domains. We identified both traditional community policing and CVE-oriented components across seven practice domains (engage, educate, partner, problem solve, risk mitigation, organizational change, measure).

Practice Domains	Traditional CP Components	CVE-oriented CP Components
Engage	• Meet and establish friendly relations with persons of significant influence in their communities	• Focused largely on Muslim American communities, with interfaith involvement • Focuses on willing and cooperative community leaders
Educate	• Promoting knowledge and awareness of crimes, police work, and community resources	• Promote knowledge and awareness of VE & CVE • Based on LE practitioner understanding of historical, political, cultural, and community factors
Partner	• Build mutual trust between LE, community service, & advocacy org • Build interagency collaborations involving LE and non-LE gov	• Address trust undermined by historical and current traumas • Put "money in the bank" for use in addressing future crises
Problem Solve	• Solve citizens' daily problems • Follow through on promises • Defuse conflicts between community and police • Proactive joint problem solving • Hosting events	• Help communities to assess level of risk of persons • Inform communities about when it is appropriate to notify law enforcement about individuals at risk
Risk Mitigation	• Focused on gangs, trafficking, and other urban crime	• Enhance integration of immigrants & refugees • Make the environment hostile to violent extremism • Encourage the development of community-led prevention and intervention
Organizational Change	Build capacities of community orgs./members	• Build capacity among immigrant/refugee orientation
Measure	Lack of emphasis on assessment	• Partner with academics with research and evaluation expertise

ENGAGE (Dialogue & Information Sharing)	PARTNER (Building Mutual Trust)	ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE (Capacity Building)
"I believe in breaking bread. That means just sitting down and just eating together. And that diffuses a lot of issues right there. We work on commonalities versus on differences. Tolerance. Acceptance." (Community leader)	"So I think that's a two-way thing what the LAPD is doing. They are learning about our culture, and we are learning about other things. So there is a kind of mutual trust that's building. I think that's what is needed with the other communities." (Community leader)	"We as organizations that are in our communities should be receiving funding and grant money to work with our communities. All of the people that get grants about us are not us or the organizations of our communities." (Community leader)

METHOD

A study of the LAPD and Muslim-American community in Los Angeles using ethnographic interviews and observations with the LAPD police officers and with community leaders, parents, and youth (n=100), and analysis using grounded theory and Atlas/ti 7.0 software.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Community policing can play a vital role in CVE through engaging the community and forming partnerships that pro-actively and mutually build trust, challenge misinformation, educate, promote transparency, defuse conflicts, open communication channels, solve daily problems, and build community capacities. Though engagement and partnership through community policing is necessary for CVE, it is not sufficient. The SIP calls for other levels of prevention programming, in as much as it aims to strengthen community, family, and institutional resilience. The well-established field of prevention science, as manifest in public health and in crime prevention, argues that prevention programming should be comprehensive and based on evidence of modifiable multilevel risk factors and protective resources. Thus CVE faces additional challenges regarding not stigmatizing communities, developing program models, conducting interventions targeting the most at-risk individuals, addressing the risk environment, gathering evidence of effectiveness, and ameliorating pushback from the community.

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