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The Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation from Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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Abstract: Improving our understanding of how disengagement and deradicalisation from terrorism and violent extremism occurs has critical real-world implications. A systematic review of the recent literature in this area was conducted in order to develop a more refined and empirically-derived model of the processes involved. After screening more than 83,000 documents, we found 29 research reports which met the minimum quality thresholds. Thematic analysis identified key factors associated with disengagement and deradicalisation processes. Assessing the interactions of these factors produced the Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation which is described in this paper. Also examined are some of the potential policy and practice implications of the Phoenix Model, as are avenues for future research in this area.

Keywords: disengagement, deradicalisation, terrorism, violent extremism, political violence, phoenix model

Move lips, move minds and make new meanings flare
Like ancient beacons signalling, peak to peak,
From middle sea to north sea, shining clear
As phoenix flame upon fionn uisce here.
Seamus Heaney, *Beacons at Bealtaine*

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Introduction

The past twenty years of research on terrorism have largely been dominated by the development of theories and research focused on terrorist engagement and radicalisation into terrorism processes. In comparison, work on disengagement and deradicalisation has been much more limited, though there is growing recognition that the processes and factors involved are frequently distinct from those involved in radicalisation processes (Horgan and Taylor, 2011). There is also growing appreciation that a better understanding of how disengagement and deradicalisation happens has important real-world implications.

Existing theories on disengagement and deradicalisation have been primarily built around push-pull models which incorporate potential factors which could draw people away from life as a terrorist or violent extremist (Horgan, 2009). Related work has also often focused on applying theories on radicalisation to the issue of disengagement and deradicalisation (Moghaddam, 2009). Particularly notable in this regard have been applications of the quest for significance theory to understanding disengagement and deradicalisation processes (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

A number of factors recur in these theories and models. In particular, disillusionment (with other members, the reality of terrorist involvement and/or with tactics and strategy), has been repeatedly proposed as playing a major role, and is often described as the dominant *push* factor suggested for driving people away from involvement in terrorism and extremism (Altier, Leonard Boyle, Shortland, & Horgan, 2017). The most oft-repeated factor *pulling* people away from membership is the role of family and in particular a desire to start a new life with them (Barrelle, 2015).

The major limitation with these earlier models has been that the evidence base around which they were built was often extremely limited. Up until recently, for example, very few studies on terrorist disengagement and deradicalisation involved data collection based on interviews with, or direct data from, current or former

terrorists. The weaknesses found in much (if not most) of the research on disengagement and deradicalisation, were also emblematic of wider research in terrorism studies, and many reviews have highlighted long-running deficiencies with the quality of the evidence base in the area (e.g. Schmid and Jongman, 1988; Reid, 1997; Silke, 2001; Ranstorp, 2007; Schmid, 2011; Schuurman, 2020; Phillips, 2021).

Limitations with the available evidence have had significant consequences in terms of theory and model development, most of which have traditionally been based on very limited empirical evidence. Victoroff (2005) warned there appeared to be more theories proposed than there were empirical studies and that almost none of the theories and models had »been tested in a systematic way. They are overwhelmingly subjective [and] speculative« (pp.33, 38). Borum (2011) agreed with this assessment noting specifically on theories and models relating to terrorist radicalisation that: »each model remains underdeveloped: none of them yet has a very firm social scientific basis as an established »cause« of terrorism, and few of them have been subjected to any rigorous scientific or systematic inquiry« (p.37).

More recently, however, there have been signs that the availability of better empirical data in the area has been improving. Reviews of recent terrorism research have highlighted that compared to previous years, the production of new primary data is increasing considerably and a wider range of data-gathering methods are being employed (Schuurman, 2020). This recent improvement is so noticeable in fact that some have suggested that the field has entered a golden age where »high-impact articles are appearing at a rate never before seen, and the core knowledge of the area is shifting and coalescing around new research and theories« (Silke & Schmidt-Petersen, 2017, p.700). Given such a context the time seems particularly apt for reviews of recent research in the field focused on key issues and themes.

As a result, there is now an opportunity for a systematic review of the recent literature to identify key findings from the more high quality studies and to use that to develop a more refined and empirically-derived model of the processes involved in terrorist and violent extremist disengagement and deradicalisation. Previous research has highlighted that there is often conceptual confusion between how disengagement and deradicalisation as terms are used in research and policy with regard to terrorism and counterterrorism (Braddock, 2019). Some research and policy have used the terms interchangeably (e.g. Grossman & Barolsky, 2019) while in other cases they are used to refer to distinct and separate processes (e.g. Horgan, 2009; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). This paper follows the latter approach and argues that the two terms should be seen as distinct from each other. In this article the two terms are defined as:

> **Disengagement** occurs when an individual is no longer a member of, or active participant in, a terrorist movement or violent extremism. The motivations for such cessation of involvement can vary, but the term essentially reflects changes in behaviour, and does not necessarily extend to fundamental changes in belief or ideology.

> **Deradicalisation** implies more fundamental change than disengagement alone. It requires qualitative change in the attitudes, belief systems and identities of former terrorists and extremists and indicates a substantive change away from ideological commitment to a terrorist movement or cause. Deradicalisation reflects change at a psychological and ideological level and not just at a behavioural level.

Methodology

A systematic review was conducted on recent research on disengagement and deradicalisation from terrorism and violent extremism published between January 1st, 2017 and February 1st, 2020. The following cross-disciplinary selection of databases was used:

- ISI Web of Science
- Scopus
- Lexis Nexus
- PubMed (Medline)
- Google Scholar
- JSTOR
- Wiley Online Library
- International Political Science Abstracts
- Researchgate
- Mendeley
- PsychInfo
- Academia.edu

The above-listed databases were each searched to identify the relevant literature published between January 1st, 2017 and February 1st, 2020. The search strategy consisted of a combination of the following Boolean keywords:

> (disengag*, OR derad*, OR desist*) AND (terror*, OR radicali*, OR extrem*, OR insurg*, OR »right-wing«, OR »far-right«, OR islam*, OR »Irish Republican«, OR »dissident republican«)

> (rehabilit*, OR »exit«, OR »leaving«) AND (radicali*, OR terroris*, OR »right-wing«, OR »far-right«, OR islam*, OR »Irish Republican«, OR »dissident republican«)

(reform*, OR rehabilit*, OR interven*, OR prevent*, OR defect*) AND (extrem*, OR radicali*, OR terroris*, OR insurg*, OR rebel*, OR paramilit*, OR islam*, OR jihad*, OR ideolog*, OR »political violence«, OR »right-wing«, OR »far-right«, OR »Irish Republican«, OR »dissident republican«)

The wide variety of combinations used was designed to identify the most comprehensive list of literature relating to disengagement and deradicalisation for all forms of terrorism and extremism.

Alongside the above systematic search of databases the research team hand-searched core journals in the area of terrorism and counter-terrorism studies. In this search each edition of the selected journals was checked for relevant articles within the specified timeline. The selected journals were:

- Terrorism and Political Violence
- Studies in Conflict and Terrorism
- Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression
- Perspectives on Terrorism
- Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) papers collection
- Journal of Deradicalisation

The final stage of the search strategy included a search of the *Radicalisation Research* repository to ascertain if any key literature was inadvertently missed through the two previous search stages. From this three-stage search a total of 83,536 sources were identified. Of these, 370 items were deemed to be eligible for potential inclusion, after the removal of duplicates and irrelevant sources.

The next stage of the process involved the shortlisting of identified sources for further analysis. This involved two members the research team reading each of the abstracts and executive summaries of the 370 articles and reports. They assessed each for relevance and ascertained if they met the eligibility criteria (see Table 1). From the 370 articles and reports 95 met the eligibility criteria.

Table 1: Overview of the Eligibility Criteria

Focus of the Study	Desistance Disengagement Deradicalisation Terrorism Extremism
Type of Violent Extremism	Islamist and other Religiously-Motivated Nationalist-separatist Right-Wing Left-Wing Lone Actor Single-Issue
Type of Research	Quantitative Qualitative Mixed Methods Case Studies Literature Reviews Programme Reviews
Publication Characteristics	English Language Published Open Source Literature All Types of Reports All Types of Scientific Disciplines All Countries Publication Date Since 2017

Coding and analysis

The 95 papers were coded independently by at least two raters to identify prominent findings. The papers were assessed using an adapted methodological quality checklist with regard to the methodological rigor of the study (e.g. use of language, reported sample size) as well as the major findings with regard to disengagement and desistence. After the completion of the coding the 95 papers underwent a further screening to identify the most relevant and highest quality research. Each paper was scored according to 6 criteria: (1) empirical research, (2) replicability of method and transparency of sample, (3) ethics, (4) relevance, (5) primary data, and (6) analytical approach. 29 research reports met the minimum quality thresholds for inclusion in the review.[1]

The Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation

Eleven major themes were identified in the shortlisted articles. Within these themes it was assessed that actor, psychological and environmental catalysts can play interconnected roles in an individual's disengagement and/or deradicalisation. Within the reviewed literature the themes relating to each catalyst category are as follows:

1 The full list of 29 shortlisted articles is available on request from the authors.

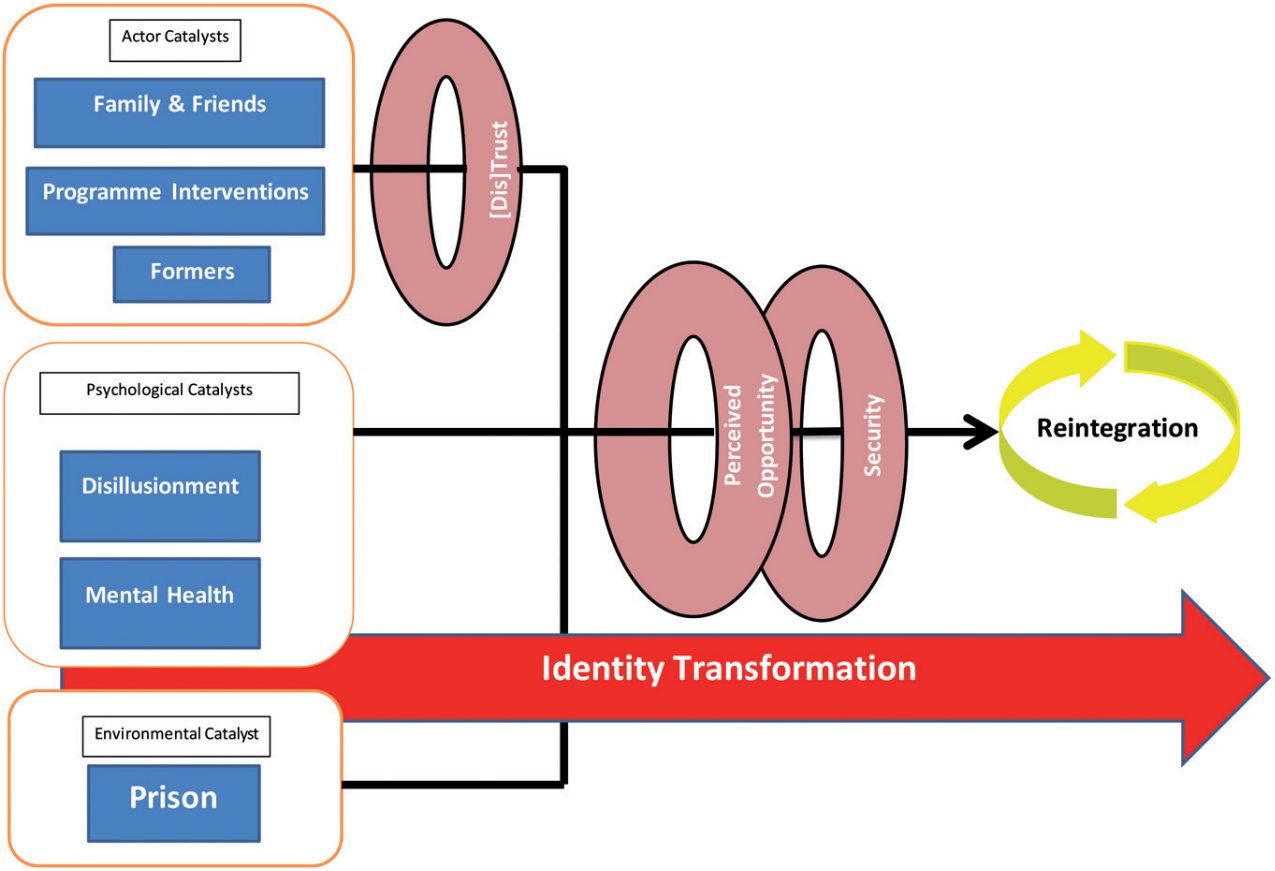


Figure 1: The Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation

Actor Catalysts: Family and Friends, Programme Interventions, Formers
Psychological Catalysts: Disillusionment, Mental Health
Environmental Catalyst: Prison.

Alongside these three catalyst categories are three filters:

[dis]trust
perceived opportunity
security

These filters play the role of refining which individual will successfully go through the disengagement and/or deradicalisation processes. For the actor catalyst(s) to have a positive impact on the possibility of disengagement and/or deradicalisation the influence of the individuals is passed through the filtering variable of [dis]trust. If the individuals promoting and/or supporting disengagement/deradicalisation are trusted, then this leads to a greater likelihood of a positive outcome. In contrast if they are distrusted this can undermine the possibility of successful disengagement/deradicalisation.

Even with positive effects from actor, psychological and/or environmental catalysts an individual will not be likely to disengage and or deradicalise if they do not perceive a credible, positive and sustained opportunity to do so. Further, if there are significant and credible security concerns for the individual the process leading to successful reintegration may be impeded. Finally, a key factor in disengagement and deradicalisation pathways is identity transformation. The literature flags that throughout the whole process the individual is experiencing a gradual process of identity transformation, and this is a central aspect to the Phoenix Model.

While many of these themes have been flagged as significant factors in disengagement and deradicalisation before, this was the first time that a systematic review had identified them as a collection. This allowed further analysis to suggest a new model for understanding the disengagement and deradicalisation processes. Figure 1 incorporates the themes into this model. It is worth noting that we are not arguing that other factors do not a play a role in these processes, but rather than the model directly reflects the major findings from recent research in this area. It is likely that future research will identify some other factors on which there is currently a lack of good evidence and data but which later will be recognised as playing a role.

We have called the model developed from the systematic review the Phoenix Model. This name was selected as identity transformation – particularly in terms of the rebirth of pre-existing elements of identity – provides the foundation of the disengagement and deradicalisation processes. These pre-existing elements of identity had been subsumed or dominated by elements supportive of or embedded with the individual's life as a terrorist or violent extremist. One of the major findings of the review was that the re-emergence of the alternative identities (due to a variety of potential causes) appears to be a fundamental factor in the process of change. How this factor relates to and interacts with the others identified in the review is outlined in Figure 1 and is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Identity Transformation

As already indicated, the foundation process underlying the model is identity transformation. Identity issues have been flagged as a key factor in radicalisation processes (e. g. Hogg & Adelman, 2013), and the systematic review found that identity is also a major theme in disengagement and deradicalisation processes. The role of identity across the studies varied with different issues flagged including (1) the rejection of an existing extremist identity, (2) the search and elevation of an alternative identity, and/or (3) the transformation of a militant identity into a peaceful identity which still embraced many similar values. Overall, the findings strongly suggested a key role for identity dynamics in disengagement and deradicalisation processes, and that the nature of these dynamics and outcomes varies on an individual basis (e.g. Bérubé, Scrivens, Venkatesh and Gaudette, 2019; Joyce and Lynch, 2017). The model flags a central role for identity transformation in the process of change, and the significance of other factors is in relation to how they can catalyse such change, provide opportunities for it to occur or present blockages to its progress.

Psychological Catalysts

The first group of catalyst factors are psychological nature. Two particular factors of this type were identified in the review: (1) *Disillusionment and (2) Mental Health*

Disillusionment

Much previous work had already flagged a significant role for disillusionment in disengagement and deradicalisation processes. The systematic review endorsed those conclusions and found that disillusionment frequently played a role in precipitating an individual's disengagement and/or deradicalisation from a terrorist group. Disillusionment with organisational personnel and organisational strategies are significant push factors facilitating disengagement from the terrorist group. This disillusionment is a comparative process whereby the individual compares their current existence and interactions with their prior experiences and/or expectations (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi and Alexander, 2019). Disillusionment occurs after significant and persistent forms of negative interactions with fellow members. This can act as a significant push factor on the individual to distance themselves from the group. At the same time, positive interactions with acquaintances external from the extremist organisation can act as a pull factor away from the stress of the group. It is worth highlighting that there can be significant tensions but also synergies between push and pull factors involved in disengagement processes.

Mental Health

The potential role that mental health issues can play in radicalisation processes has attracted considerable attention, but its potential role in disengagement and deradicalisation has been much less explored. The review found however that stress and burnout were two mental health issues frequently connected to disengagement and deradicalisation processes from terrorism (Altier, Leonard Boyle, Shortland and Horgan, 2017; Corner & Gill, 2019). For substantial numbers of members, as their experience of both increases or is sustained over prolonged periods, their commitment to remain involved is eroded. The degree of resilience against stress and burnout varies between members, but for a substantial proportion addressing the psychological impact becomes increasingly important. In such a context, avenues out of violent activism become ever more compelling.

Actor Catalysts

The second group of catalyst factors relate to significant others or interventions which explicitly engage with the individual with an intent to draw them away from involvement in terrorism and extremism.

Family & Friends

A key finding from the review is that family can be particularly important with regard to an often key role of re-establishing a family-based identity in the individual (e.g. Hakim and Mujahidah, 2020). This can be especially strongly felt with regard to parenthood. Studies showed that when an individual becomes a parent it does not necessarily facilitate any ideology-based deradicalisation, but can significantly influence the violent decision-making processes, often deterring members from engaging in further violent activity. Separately, friendships external to the terrorist/extremist organisation can provide the opportunity to develop external interests and networks (Simi, Windisch, Harris and Ligon, 2019). This can help develop the potential future opportunity for exit from the movement. It was also found that when the friendships and relationships external from the extremist organisation become more prominent than those within organisation that the desire to leave becomes more intense.

Programme Interventions

A wide range of interventions have been developed in both custodial and community settings to assist with the disengagement and/or deradicalisation of terrorists and violent extremists. A key phrase to note here is »to assist with«. Most of the programmes have relatively narrow aims and objectives which are usually not as ambitious as full disengagement or deradicalisation. For example, Muluk, Umam and Milla (2020) reported on the impact of two different interventions – emotional expression training and cognitive flexibility training – used with 66 terrorist detainees in Indonesia. The study suggested there were positive benefits to both, though the research did not attempt to measure if the detainees were fully disengaged or deradicalised. This was a relatively common approach across the shortlisted studies, where the interventions considered are usually part of a package, though the entire package itself was not assessed or a range of outcomes were measured which did not necessarily include an over-arching disengagement or deradicalisation measure (e.g. Cherney, 2018). This means that there is a patchwork of evidence on this factor, though encouragingly the review found that the available evidence suggests that generally, these intervention programmes seem to work. Most participants reported or showed some positive impacts for most programmes. As a result, they can be a significant catalyst for facilitating change in a substantial number of cases.

Formers

Many interventions involve – or can have – former terrorists and extremists working with individuals to encourage change. In some countries there have been mixed views on the effectiveness or suitability of formers for such work. Among the concerns raised in such cases have been doubts about the motivations and capacity of the formers to carry out disengagement work effectively, and concerns over whether the formers are genuinely disengaged and deradicalised themselves. It is a situation not always helped by the sometimes fierce criticism which has emerged between different intervention providers questioning the competence and suitability of other providers. While such issues have often clouded the use of formers, the results of the review overall emphasised potential benefits rather than reporting problems. Among the advantages that studies highlighted for using formers was the enhancement of knowledge about the exit process, the credibility of formers, and the possibility of formers acting as role models (Christensen, 2020). However, no study has yet provided a clear-cut impact evaluation of the effectiveness of formers. Another often overlooked factor which was highlighted is that involvement in disengagement and deradicalisation work assists the formers themselves with their own reintegration process (Bérubé, Scrivens, Venkatesh and Gaudette, 2019). The general theme then across the different studies was that allowing formers to be involved in such work can be beneficial in terms of cementing and protecting their own disengagement process.

Environmental Catalyst

Physical spaces have been flagged as potentially significant factors in a variety of models of radicalisation. Mosques, madrasas, schools, universities and prisons, for example, have all been have been flagged as being potentially »places of vulnerability« and »gateways« for radicalisation (e.g. Helmus, 2009; Neumann and Rodgers, 2007). The review highlighted that environmental spaces can also play a potential role in disengagement and deradicalisation. Within the systematic review prison was singled out as the significant environmental catalyst in this regard.

Prison

A major finding of the review is that imprisonment is a recurring facilitator of disengagement and deradicalisa-

tion processes. This is particularly noteworthy as prison is more usually portrayed as an environment associated with an increased risk of radicalisation. The disengagement literature paints a different picture, where instead it is a dominant environmental setting for disengagement. The review found that no other environment stands out in a comparable way as a physical space connected to disengagement and deradicalisation processes.

There are a variety of ways in which prison can incubate disengagement and deradicalisation processes. These include: (1) prison provides an opportunity for reflection (e.g. Chalmers, 2017), (2) prison physically distances the individual from the group and/or other extremist individuals (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi and Alexander, 2019), and (3) prison provides an opportunity to engage with disengagement and deradicalisation interventions (e.g. Webber et al., 2018). This is not to argue that prison radicalisation does not occur, or that released prisoners do not re-offend, but overall the review's findings were consistent with results from elsewhere that such re-offending rates are much lower than commonly expected and the model helps to explain a more positive role for prison in disengagement processes.

Filters

In order for the previously identified catalyst themes to have a positive impact on the disengagement and/or deradicalisation processes they must first pass through a variety of 'filters.' The model identifies three central filters which play a role in these processes. They are [dis]trust, perceived opportunity and security concerns.

[Dis]Trust

The review identified a critical dichotomous theme which affects the impact and effectiveness of all of the other actor catalysts – [dis]trust. To have a positive impact, interventions or relationships need to be with trusted individuals or organisations, as judged by the individual(s) disengaging (Milla, Hudiyana and Arifin, 2020). If those individuals and/or organisations administering intervention programmes are trusted, then there is a greater opportunity of success (Christensen, 2020). With that trust in place there is more likely to be a positive attitude towards the programme. This positive attitude is shaped by social relations and relational trust. Knowing who is most trusted, and who is distrusted, and by who, is essential knowledge in understanding the impact of catalyst actors and interventions.

Perceived Opportunity

In order for change to manifest, the review found that the next key element is the individual's perception of a realistic opportunity for exit. Studies have identified that even in situations when an individual no longer believes in the ideology, strategy, and/or tactics of the group, and even if they find involvement highly stressful and psychologically costly, if they cannot perceive a way out they can still remain involved with the terrorist organisation (Horgan, Altier, Shortland and Taylor, 2017). Thus, perceiving an opportunity for change is a key element in conjunction with the presence of other catalyst factors. The opportunity can be either a negative one (e.g., because they are incarcerated in prison and are physically removed from the group (Sikkens, van San, Sieckelinck and de Winter, 2017)) or a more positive one (e.g., starting a new job and meeting new friends unconnected to the extremist movement (Christensen, 2020)).

Security Concerns

Closely connected to the role of opportunity is the issue of security. The review identified security concerns as one of the major factors inhibiting disengagement. Many studies found that individuals felt their physical safety and security could be threatened or at risk if they disengaged from the extremist movement (Taylor, Semmelrock and McDermott, 2019). Such concerns could act as a deterrent for change and also posed a risk for reengaging. Individuals who remained or became vulnerable to threats or violence from former comrades could be deterred from disengaging or coerced later into returning to the movement (Bérubé, Scrivens, Venkatesh & Gaudette, 2019).

Reintegration

For most individuals, the final stage in the model was reintegration. The review identified a variety of challenges faced by former terrorists and extremists with regard to reintegration including (1) stigma associated with past offending, (2) building a new positive identity, and (3) accessing practical, economic and psychological support (Grossman and Barolsky, 2019). Many individuals are highly conscious that their previous terrorist/extremist history will be seen negatively by the community around them and some studies highlight some evidence of stigma experienced by former extremists (e.g. Syafiq, 2019). While successful reintegration is the natural goal for most disen-

gagement and deradicalisation initiatives, it is not a fixed state. The model recognises that there is potential for backsliding to occur due to a range of factors. On a positive note, evidence from the review suggests that in the majority of cases this will not happen though the time taken to reach reintegration can be long and the process choppy and uneven.

Discussion

In mythology the phoenix is frequently a symbol of rebirth and renewal from the ashes of an old life. Such symbolism seemed especially apt for this new model, centred as it is on the concept of identity transformation, where the re-emergence of often old subsumed identity elements or the creation of an entirely new identity provides the foundation for a move away from life as an active terrorist or violent extremist. As highlighted in the model, such transformation can be facilitated by a range of catalyst factors which successfully pass through identified filters; these sometimes work together and sometimes work in isolation. The strength of this new model is that it is solely derived from a systematic review of the strongest contemporary research. Future research may well highlight other relevant factors. This could lead to the significant refinement of our understanding of the role of the factors already identified and incorporated here. For now, however, we argue that these are the factors with the most robust empirical support.

The Phoenix Model offers a range of potential insights and applications in terms of policy and practice. At a fundamental level it highlights the factors which research has found can facilitate disengagement and deradicalisation processes. The model also suggests how these can interact and flags issues which should be considered when designing or assessing the impact of initiatives in this area.

Overall, the model argues for a key role for identity dynamics and that this can be a critical factor in disengagement and deradicalisation processes. Importantly, the nature of these dynamics and outcomes varies on an individual basis. The research suggests though that it is important to consider identity – and what happens to it – when considering the design and evaluation of interventions in this field.

The model also supports the development and use of disengagement and deradicalisation programmes in general with terrorist and extremist offenders. The systematic review found that these interventions generally show some positive impacts in a majority of cases. However, they do not »work« in 100 % of cases and evidence is currently lacking on what elements of such programmes are the most effective. This needs to be a priority for future research.

While there is much to be encouraged about in considering the Phoenix Model, caveats remain. In particular, the quality of the research data in this area – though notably improved in recent years – still lags behind the standards common in many other areas (such as, for example, our understanding of desistance processes with non-terrorist offenders). Though a large number of studies were initially identified as relevant, ultimately very few made the quality benchmark criteria we set. Even among these studies, with a few exceptions, we note that in general, the majority relied on qualitative methodological approaches such as semi-structured interviews, autobiographical analysis and case study analysis. With one notable exception, research rarely made use of comparison or control groups. We are not arguing that these research methodologies are not valuable. However, for our understanding of disengagement and deradicalisation to continue to develop there needs to be greater variety and sophistication in our methodological and analytical approaches. Addressing such concerns is one area that requires significant attention in future research.

There are also a number of important subjects on which data is currently lacking. For example, there is limited information available on the timing of disengagement and deradicalisation processes. Some research presents the length of time which this process can take (e.g. Taylor, Semmelrock and McDermott, 2019). However, we need more in-depth knowledge about this timing. It would greatly benefit those designing disengagement and deradicalisation programmes to have an understanding as to whether there are, for example, significant transition periods or windows for influencing individual exit.

Further, though the initial evidence in this area is encouraging, more assessments are needed of the impact of programmes designed to facilitate disengagement or deradicalisation. Such programmes frequently come in for harsh public scrutiny around their effectiveness. The available evidence however is generally limited and often of patchy quality. In particular, the current state of knowledge is very poor at identifying what elements of the different programmes have the most impact? As most interventions comprise multiple elements this creates uncertainty over what works best and overall there remains a pressing need for robust evaluations of these interventions.

Linked to this, we need to be careful in considering the overall objectives of such interventions. As flagged earlier in the article, disengagement and deradicalisation

are not the same thing. This paper has given distinct definitions to both but we note that the literature in this area does not always follow suit, and there can be conceptual blurring of lines around the use of the terms. Such blurring can also be seen with regard to how practitioner and policy communities view the issue, where there can sometimes be a reluctance to distinguish between the two concepts. This can apply particularly, for example, in terms of explicitly stating which might be the priority objective. As we go forward. we will need to be attuned to the complexity of this often unstated tension in the literature and be particularly alert to how the two concepts are handled in new research and policy.

An additional critical issue which needs more attention is the risk of backsliding. Current research does not provide a great deal of insight into the processes and risks around how apparently disengaged or deradicalised individuals later re-engage with terrorism. Relapse and recidivism occurs but appears to be uncommon. A growing body of research suggests instead that recidivism rates for terrorist offenders are comparatively low, but a more systematic understanding of the factors involved in backsliding is still clearly needed (e.g. Renard, 2020; Silke and Morrison, 2020). An empirically led understanding of why and how individuals reengage with terrorism would allow practitioners to develop more resistant support structures to assist in the development of more sustainable disengagement processes.

Finally, as a closing observation it is important to note that we expect future work will identify important additional factors which can play a significant role in disengagement and deradicalisation processes. The Phoenix Model as it stands here reflects our best understanding of the current available literature. Terrorism and violent extremism however are dynamic subjects and our understanding of the processes involved will continue to evolve and expand. Significant new knowledge will inevitably emerge and we anticipate and welcome that the Phoenix Model will be refined and developed further to incorporate those new insights.

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