An Analysis of the 2016 Gothenburg CVE Framework

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Professor David Schanzer, Faculty Advisor
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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my faculty advisor, Professor David Schanzer, for his guidance, patience, and support throughout every step of this thesis process. I am also indebted to my DIS Stockholm professor, Steve Turner, for inspiring my interest in Swedish and European security and his assistance, valuable support, and guidance in helping me conduct research in Sweden from June 2019-August 2019.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dean Sarah Russell and the Duke Office of Research Support for supporting my research project in Sweden through the Deans’ Summer Research Fellowship.

Finally, I would like to thank the Duke Political Science department, my friends, and my family for their continual support and encouragement throughout this project.
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore whether or not the (countering violent extremism) CVE agenda of Swedish municipality Gothenburg contributes to Sweden’s overall CVE and counterterrorism strategy. Interviews with Swedish citizens knowledgeable about Gothenburg CVE yielded insights about the goals of prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/disengagement that were drafted in the plan to address radicalization and violent extremism in the city. Then, an interpretative analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted to assess prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/disengagement goals in the city’s CVE agenda and current CVE actions that contribute to Swedish CVE and counterterrorism strategy. Findings revealed that the Gothenburg CVE framework primarily outlined the goals and actions for prevention efforts in the city, but did not state specific goals or actions for intervention and disengagement/deradicalization efforts. Therefore, only Gothenburg’s goals and actions of prevention CVE contribute to overall Swedish CVE and counterterrorism measures.
Introduction

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, most Western democracies have developed strategies to address the threat of terrorism. Counterterrorism is a common strategy that countries adopted to combat terrorism domestically and abroad. Though countries have used hard power counterterrorism tactics (such as surveillance, military action, prosecution and conviction) to prevent terrorist attacks, they struggled to address factors that influenced terrorist acts and recruitment into extremist organizations. Western nations later adopted countering violent extremism (CVE) as a counterterrorism strategy to address domestic concerns about radicalization and violent extremism. Furthermore, most Western nations employed CVE alongside traditional counterterrorism measures to fight global and national threats of terrorism and extremism.

In Sweden, the central government delegates responsibilities of domestic CVE implementation and efforts to municipalities. Moreover, municipal efforts are primarily guided by “Sweden’s national counterterrorism strategy”. In terms of CVE, Sweden advises municipalities to cooperate with civil society organizations and civil actors to develop local initiatives. A municipality’s CVE agenda would enable local officials to plan and implement preventative measures to investigate and mitigate factors that contribute to radicalization and extremism in their communities. Furthermore, the central government believes that CVE preventative efforts build resilience against violent extremism, while developing an awareness of democratic values in the nation. Preventative efforts include funding civil society organizations to promote democratic values, training and educating civil actors, and working with law enforcement agencies to build trust within communities.
Prior studies of CVE have shown an increase in the number of Western nations that have adopted CVE as part of their overall counterterrorism strategy. Countries’ CVE programs are crafted around the principles of prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/disengagement in order to understand and reduce influences of radicalization and violent extremism. Although the use of CVE is becoming widespread, studies and program evaluations have minimal or no empirical evidence of success.

This aim of this thesis is to explore whether or not current CVE plans and actions against violent extremism in Swedish municipality Gothenburg further the nation’s CVE and counterterrorism strategy. This paper will add to the body of knowledge on CVE in general and how Sweden is pursuing its counterterrorism goals by allowing municipalities to develop and implement their plans to combat violent extremism.
**Background**

**CVE Terminology**

Counterterrorism and CVE practitioners define “terrorism” as “a method of violence that has at some time or other been perpetrated in the cause of doctrines (religious, political, single-issue) (Richards 2015, 375). Throughout the changing nature of terrorism from a centralized form to decentralized form of violence, terminology, such as “radicalization” and “violent extremism” were integrated into CVE discourse. “Radicalization” is a process through which people are influenced to use violence against individuals of an out-group or symbolic targets for political motives or behavioral change (Doosje et. al 2016). Practitioners identify common characteristics radicalized individuals or groups share- a perceived problem with society, a dissatisfaction with institutions, and an embrace of ideologies that legitimize acts of violence (Doosje et. al 2016 ). Though definitions of “violent extremism” vary across different governments and intergovernmental organizations, the term is generally defined as an encouragement of violent acts to support political, religious, ideological, or economic objectives (UNODC 2018)

“Counterterrorism” is defined as “actions taken to mitigate the threats and consequences of terrorism” (Sandler 2014). Moreover, governments, international organizations, private corporations, military action, and civilians have adopted counterterrorism tactics to combat extremism. “Countering violent extremism” (CVE) is an element of counterterrorism that focuses on “non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism” in order to reduce the number of individuals motivated to engage in violence based on ideological goals (Harris-Hogan et. al 2015). Though there is not consensus a universal definition of CVE, it is generalized as approaches used to prevent engagement in acts of terrorism.
Global Development of Counterterrorism Strategies post- 9/11

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, nations and intergovernmental organizations prioritized their fight against terrorism. Concerned with potential future attacks against their countries, governments developed counterterrorism measures and changed their legal, political, and social cultures to address concerns about violent extremist acts.

Central governments revised their counterterrorism capabilities and terrorism preparedness after the emergence of global and decentralized terrorism (de Linde, et. al, 2002). Since 2001, over 140 nations have enacted or revised their counterterrorism laws (HRW, 2012). Countries engaged in international agreements with the UN, EU, and NATO to coordinate against attacks. For instance, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) enacted Security Council Resolution 1373, which called on states “to ensure that terrorism and financing terrorism were serious crimes (UNSC 2001). Resolution 1373 also directed states to exchange intelligence with each other to further prevent acts of terrorism. Mindful to preserve individual civil liberties and rights to due process, countries implemented stricter antiterrorism laws. For instance, nations, such as the UK and Australia, began to develop specific laws on terrorism or included them in their criminal code (de Linde, et. al 2002). In nations such as Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, federal government agencies began to work with local agencies to enforce counterterrorism measures.

The European Union coordinated measures to combat terrorism and counterterrorism policies amongst its member states (Zimmerman 2006). In particular, EU nations underwent a “month of transformation” between September 20, 2001 and early December 2001. The EU prioritized member states’ national security concerns and response to terrorism. For instance, there was an increase in multilateral intelligence and security cooperation (Zimmerman 2006).
The EU also began to work with the United States to combat terrorism and expanded its European Union counterterrorism policy into a broader transatlantic policy.

The EU drafted the “EU Plan of Action on Combatting Terrorism” documenting the Union’s counterterrorism strategy in 2004. The document was an inventory of EU counterterrorism activities and an evaluation process for measures implemented by member states (Zimmerman 206). Measures included joint investigation teams, involvement of the European Union Judicial Cooperation (Eurojust) and Europol in counterterrorism intelligence sharing, and creation of the Office of the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism. In a revised EU action plan, nations set goals to build international efforts to combat terrorism. This included sharing best practices to mitigating terrorist activity and prioritizing research to better understand recruitment to terrorist organizations (Den Boer and Wiegand 2015). Additionally, member states cooperated amongst each other to facilitate, provide, and analyze counterterrorism measures that contribute to EU CVE strategy. For example, the 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy prioritized a “collection and analysis of information and intelligence” to strengthening capabilities in member states (Den Boer and Wiegand 2015). Furthermore, states developed central intelligence facilities to disrupt terrorist agendas and to focus on threat analysis.

**Development of CVE as Part of Counterterrorism Policy**

In the early 2000s, countering violent extremism (CVE) emerged as a new form of counterterrorism policy in the Netherland and the United Kingdom. Then, CVE spread to other parts of Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world (Kundnani and Hayes 2016). Traditional counterterrorism tools were used to investigate, prosecute, and imprison radicalized individuals who act with violent intent. However, a rising threat of homegrown terrorism attacks
became a domestic security concern for Western nations (Ingram, 2018, 2). Scholars and policymakers also found that terrorist organizations cited the brutality of western counterterrorism tactics as a tool for recruitment (Selim 2016). Hence, CVE emerged as a preventive approach for global terrorism and a crucial component of a counterterrorism policy. Unlike hard power counterterrorism measures, CVE entails designed policies and interventions that prevent individuals from engaging in violent extremism (Holmer 2013). Furthermore, CVE policies provide practitioners and policymakers an understanding about the purposes and way individuals become involved in violent extremist movements and organizations.

**European CVE Strategy**

General European CVE programs have a three-level approach - prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/ disengagement (Korn 2016).

**Prevention**

Preventive measures are designed to build resilience against radicalization and violent extremism. Furthermore, these efforts target individuals who have a slight ideology and are resentful of institutions that considered “different”. For instance, nations implement public initiatives (such as political and interreligious education) and programs with civil society organizations to promote tolerance and democratic values in society. CVE practitioners (teachers, child specialists, law enforcement) also receive awareness training for early intervention into an individual’s radicalization process (Korn 2016).
**Intervention**

Intervention initiatives target individuals who are at a knowledgeable risk of becoming radicalized. These measures are implemented in various social settings, such as schools, community centers, and the correctional justice system (Korn 2016). Government employees (such as police officers, educators, health professionals, social workers, and prison guards) are trained to recognize risks and causes of radicalization in individuals (Vidino and Hughes 2015). When employees detect at-risk individuals, they refer them to authorities that specialize in interventions. Various countries have different bodies of authority that run work with potential cases of radicalized individuals. For instance, interventions in Britain are run by local coordinators with a police background as part of the nation’s intervention initiative, Channel Programme. In Dutch and Danish municipalities, a team of psychologists, civil servants, and former extremists operate intervention programs. After authorities assess individuals for the severity of their risks of radicalization and violence, they are matched with mentors who can build trust-based relationships with them. Mentors facilitate conversations that challenge radical ideology in order to steer an at-risk person away from violent extremism (Vidino and Hughes 2015).

**De-radicalization and Disengagement**

Nations employ de-radicalization and disengagement tactics for individuals who are radicalized and actively involved in violent extremism. Deradicalization is a process in which a person alters extremist beliefs or radical ideology they hold (Mastroe and Szmania, 2016). Disengagement is a process in which a person physically leaves a terrorist networks or group they were involved in (Horgan 2008). Those individuals may also pose a risk to themselves or
others. Since de-radicalization and disengagement are long-term processes, cities and central
governments have created Exit programs to help individuals re-integrate into society. The
programs are designed to provide resources to those who have returned from conflict zones and
reject extremism. Furthermore, most de-radicalization and disengagement programs take place in
correctional facilities in countries such as, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Singapore,
Malaysia, and Sudan (Mastroe and Suzmania, 2016). These programs offer counselling services
to inmates or promote dialogue with religious leaders.

Information Exchange and the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)

In 2005, EU member states adopted the European Union Counterterrorism Strategy to
“combat terrorism globally while respecting human rights, and make Europe safer, allowing its
citizens in an area of freedom, security, and justice (Council of the European Union, 2018). The
strategy was based on four principles to fight terrorism- prevent, protect, pursue, and respond.
The EU prioritized efforts to stop people from turning to terrorism, to protect citizens and
infrastructure from attacks, to investigate terrorists across the continent and world, and to prepare
for any attack (Council of the European Union 2018). Moreover, the strategy includes a holistic
approach to CVE involving social institutions that promote intercultural dialogue, long-term
integration, and educational policies (Korn 2016). In 2011, the European Commission created
the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) for EU member state experts to discuss CVE
strategies. Practitioners, policy makers, and researchers from various nations share their
experiences with CVE and educate each other on local and national CVE efforts.
CVE in Sweden

Swedish CVE efforts primarily support municipal CVE initiatives (Malmros 2019). The government believes that municipalities are more capable of implementing tailored versions of the EU’s three-level CVE approach (prevention, intervention, and disengagement) within their communities. In Sweden, 134 of 290 municipalities have created CVE policies under the guidance of practitioners and the national government.

In recent years, the nation has adopted policies to strengthen its CVE efforts. For instance, the Swedish Secret Service works with domestic security agencies, such as the Military Intelligence and Security Directorate (MUST) and the National Defense Radio Establishment (FRA) to combat violent terrorism (Counter Extremism Project 2017)., Sweden has also endured terrorist attacks and thwarted plots of homegrown extremists, foreign fighters, and neo-Nazi nationalists. On April 7, 2017, Uzbek-born Rakhmat Akilov hijacked a truck and drove into a crowd of pedestrians outside Athens Mall in Stockholm. Five individuals were killed, and fifteen others were injured. Akilov told police that he carried out the attack on orders from ISIS (Counter Extremism Project 2017). In response to the attack, the Swedish government passed measures to strengthen its anti-terrorism laws. There was an increase in information sharing amongst the nation’s security agencies, additional surveillance of suspected terrorists, and more safety precautions in public areas. Moreover, Swedish municipalities increased their local CVE efforts to help vulnerable individuals. Authorities created a hotline for individuals worried about radicalized relatives who travel to Syria to engage in violent extremism. Cities, such as Malmö, Örebro, and Lund, also developed local initiatives to support the reintegration of returning foreign fighters, because officials were aware that ISIS returnees reside in their municipalities. In
those cities, former fighters and extremists received welfare benefits to prevent them from returning to terrorist networks.

In 2018, the Swedish government created the Swedish Center for Prevention Violent Extremism, as a branch of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). The center operate on the local, regional, and national levels in Sweden to provide need-based support to local CVE actors. Furthermore, it helps communities develop and coordinated effective preventive measures. The center has four main tasks- to promote preventive works at various levels in Sweden, to develop a high degree of coordination in preventive measures, to support the specific needs of municipalities, agencies, and other actors working in CVE, and to research and collection information on CVE practices.

**Gothenburg Municipality CVE Framework**

In September 2016, Gothenburg officials published “City of Gothenburg’s Plan Against Violent Extremism” as a CVE framework for the municipality (Gothenburg City 2016). In addition, an evaluation of the framework’s initiatives and goals titled “Follow-up of Gothenburg City’s Plans Against Violence Extremism” was published in May 2018.

**2016 City of Gothenburg Plan Against Violent Extremism**

The 2016 Gothenburg CVE framework discussed a general importance of local agencies cooperating with municipalities, while also following Swedish guidelines for counterterrorism measures. Municipalities are expected to follow the “The Swedish counterterrorism strategy”, “Action plan to protect democracy against violent extremism”, and “Measures to make society more resistant to violent extremism”, as recommended by the national government (Gothenburg
Furthermore, Gothenburg officials aimed to incorporate crime prevention and promotion of security into the city’s initiatives against violent extremism. Gothenburg’s current security paradigm consists of groups working on local crime prevention and individual cases of violent extremism. An additional group specified for CVE security measures was added to the paradigm. The group consists of local police officers, Swedish Security Police (SAPO), representatives from centers against organized crime, and managers from individual and family care programs in Gothenburg districts (Gothenburg City 2016).

Gothenburg Social Resource Management created an agenda to incorporate various sectors into CVE efforts. The objectives of the agenda included training officials and actors on issues of violent extremism, cooperating with civil society organizations, monitoring social media activities, and mobilizing the support of relatives. Moreover, the municipality is one of three engaged in a pilot program based on a “knowledge house model”. The model specified goals to coordinate preventive resources, to work with civil society organizations, to factor national helpline advice into local initiatives, and to establish training and education on violent extremism, and to promote local democracy.

In the Gothenburg CVE framework, efforts against violent extremism are divided into three categories. The three sections are “prosecution and action to ensure that individuals leave violent movement, measures to identify at-risk individuals, and measures to safeguard democracy and the equal value and rights of all people” (Gothenburg City, 2016, 11).

Additionally, Gothenburg officials adopted twelve national recommendations for municipal work against violent extremism into the city’s actions plan. They are listed below:

1. Relevant stakeholders must be identified for awareness-raising efforts against violent extremism.
2. Measures against violent extremism must be included in the city’s paradigm for security promotion and crime prevention.

3. Establish a working cooperation group against violent extremism.

4. Develop an actual picture of the situation regarding violent extremism in the municipality.

5. Organize responsibilities and roles for CVE efforts.

6. Include relatives in all parts of CVE efforts.

7. Incorporate Gothenburg civil society organizations in work against violent extremism.

8. Facilitate transparency and openness in the municipality’s work against violent extremism.

9. Work with family relatives to mitigate risk of violent extremism at an early age.

10. Municipality officials should conduct individual discussions about violent beliefs and democratic values.

11. Ensure a gender perspective in all interventions and analyses.

12. Create preventive work tailored around the needs of local partners.

Moreover, officials acknowledged risks and challenges in the city’s plan to mitigate violent extremism. First, there is an issue of a higher recruitment rate of Swedish nationals into armed conflicts (Syrian civil war) and terrorist organizations (Daesh and Al-Shabaab). Second, an inability to identify at-risk individuals who interact with violent groups. The municipality has encountered difficulties in engaging at-risk populations (20-30-year-olds) in social services that could steer them away for radical ideology and violent extremisms. A third challenge is the protection of civil liberties and freedom of religious expression. Fourth, the risk of perpetuating a
stigmatization against certain groups. Fifth, a potential risk that CVE efforts become counterproductive. (Gothenburg City, 2016, 12).

2018 Follow-up of the City of Gothenburg’s Plan Towards Violent Extremism 2016-2017


Gothenburg officials found an increased engagement of education, law enforcement agencies, and healthcare stakeholders in CVE efforts. Furthermore, civil society organizations began to coordinate activities and publish reports on the status of CVE in the city. CVE actors, such as the Crime Prevention Council, schools, law enforcement, and social intervention organizations began to work together to promote prevention initiatives. Moreover, local districts support families as part of their work against violent extremism. The report also found that Gothenburg officials communicated with interfaith centers and developed a network of 20-25 faith-based organizations (City of Gothenburg Social Research Management 2018). Religious communities within this network were invited to provide feedback on CVE efforts to city officials. Furthermore, local schools developed a tolerance project oriented on democratic values, while city officials have created initiatives and information sessions for women vulnerable to violent extremism. The follow-up report also mentioned a need to increase cooperation with civil society organizations, especially those within religious communities to connect with younger citizens (City of Gothenburg Social Research Management 2018).
Literature Review

Theoretical Basis for CVE (how, why, what is supposed to achieve according to theorists)

CVE literature from scholars such as Nasser-Eddine, Frazer, and Nünlist, mention the CVE field emerged as a soft power expansion of counterterrorism. During the global war on terrorism post-9/11, nations exercised hard power counterterrorism approaches (such as military action, surveillance, and prosecution) to prevent terrorist attacks (Frazer and Nünlist 2015). In particular, nations employed military strategies and surveillance disrupted the operational capacity of terrorists (Nasser-Eddine, et. al 2011). Though hard power counterterrorism efforts could deter terrorist attacks, they did not delve into factors that contributed to individuals’ radicalization and engagement in terrorism. Furthermore, researchers such as Jordan argue that hard power tactics were counterproductive to national counterterrorism efforts, because they emboldened terrorist organizations to commit violent acts (Jordan 2014). In the mid-2000’s, national governments incorporated CVE policies into their counterterrorism strategies to address the root causes of terrorism and to understand violent extremism (Horgan 2014).

According to theorists, such as Cherney, nations have built their CVE programs and initiatives based on goals of prevention, intervention and disengagement, and rehabilitation and reintegration (Cherney 2018). Most Western nations develop prevention efforts to incorporate disenfranchised communities into society to reduce social marginalization. Governments and local agencies create and implement intervention efforts (such as mental health and religious counseling) to help individuals at risk of radicalization. Government officials also employ disengagement resources to aid radicalized individuals in to reduce their radical ideology and leave extremists groups. For instance, local mental health and religious counseling are types of intervention and disengagement programs provided to vulnerable individuals. CVE stakeholders
develop rehabilitation and reintegration programs to counsel and reform violent extremists (Selim 2016).

CVE literature also mentions different frameworks and theories that CVE programs/initiatives are built upon. Community policing, criminal justice, and public health are three theories that scholars refer to in CVE literature.

Though not as well-theorized, community policing CVE aims to build trust and collaboration efforts between local communities and law enforcement agencies in order to ensure public safety and security (Holmer and van Deventer 2014). Scholars argue that community policing programs developed to prevent violent extremism require a shared understanding between police officers and members about safety threats in the community. Holmer and van Deventer mention that communities and law enforcement must also have a clear understanding of radicalization for a successful CVE program (Holmer and van Deventer 2014). Community policing efforts in CVE have been employed by U.S. law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Boston to build community resilience to violent extremism (Weine et. al 2017). According to Weine, community policing CVE efforts are not as well theorized in as public health and criminal justice CVE efforts (Weine et. al, 2016). He argues that community policing should be based in theory in order to create community policing programs that further achieve the objective of preventing violent extremism.

Weine and members of the Georgetown National Security Critical Task Force (NSCTF), CVE community programs should be framed within a public health framework. The “public health model” is useful for evaluating and understanding various dynamics of violent extremism (Challgren et. al 2016). Traditionally, healthcare professionals apply the model to mitigate medical issues. In a CVE context, practitioners and stakeholders can use the model to employ a
multi-sector approach for understanding and addressing issues of violent extremism (Weine et. al 2016). CVE efforts in the public health model focus is on a reduction of the number of cases of radicalized individuals. It can also be used to evaluate initiatives throughout the radicalization process. The public health prevention model of CVE could also address political, social, economic factors that create the conditions for violent extremism (Snair et.al, 2017, 61). It consists of three levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to categorize services that prevent violent extremism in communities. Different levels of the public health model have been incorporated into CVE initiatives, such as pilot programs in Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis (Challgren et.al, 15,2016).

**Primary Prevention**

CVE primary prevention is a whole-of-society approach. Initiatives in primary prevention include education, health services, cultural awareness, social engagement, and individual development programs. Primary prevention efforts also address community, and sociopolitical factors that contribute to violent radicalization (Challgren et. al 2016). As a holistic approach, primary prevention is effective because it presents a low risk of stigmatizing communities, while addressing basic human needs. Successful primary prevention programs mitigate causes of violent extremism before individuals become at-risk. Examples of CVE primary prevention are listed below by the NSCITF:

1. Education - critical thinking courses, extracurricular programs, scholarships, civic engagement courses
2. Health services - mental healthcare, access to care, affordable healthcare options
3. Social engagement – democracy- building, local governance initiatives, criminal justice reform
4. Cultural awareness – sensitivity training, interfaith dialogue, cross-cultural engagement

5. Personal development - job training, counseling services, language skill development.

Secondary Prevention

CVE secondary prevention is an approach targeted at individuals and groups identified as at-risk for radicalization and violent extremism. In this case, at-risk individuals have some exposure to radical ideologies or extremist networks. Relatives and people who are connected to these individuals are also likely to observe changes in behavior. Law enforcement agencies operate within secondary prevention approaches by building partnerships and trust in communities. This would allow agencies to collect information from people who are connected closely to at-risk individuals (Challgren et. al 2016) Moreover, partnerships would build community resilience and community-led interventions that incorporate law enforcement. Successful secondary prevention programs would stop the progression of individual and group radicalization. The Georgetown NSCTF list the following types of secondary prevention:

1. Intervention – mentorship, counseling, training on warning signs, mediation

2. Community Engagement- trust building between communities and law enforcement, CVE education centers, CVE support hotlines, community resilience programs

3. Counter- messaging- real-time campaigns against extremist messages, undermining the appeal of violent extremists messaging
Tertiary Prevention

CVE tertiary prevention approaches are created for radicalized individuals or groups who actively plan or commit actions for a violent extremist course. Individuals within this category are no longer susceptible to primary and secondary CVE methods. Furthermore, disengagement and deradicalization or law enforcement strategies may be applied to radicalized people who commit crimes. At the tertiary prevention level, law enforcement and intelligence resources are allocated to each individual. Moreover, stakeholder such as psychologists, religious leaders, former de-radicalized former extremists, and community members are involved in disengagement efforts and support prosecution if necessary. Tertiary prevention methods are not multipurpose and are not applied to other social concerns like primary and secondary prevention methods (Challegren et. al 2016). Successful tertiary efforts stop an individual or group’s ability to commit violent acts in the future. Examples of CVE prevention listed by Georgetown NSCTF include:

1. Disengagement and Deradicalization- abandoning radical groups, alerting extremist beliefs, emphasizing mitigation efforts, using threat of imprisonment as leverage to convince radicalize people to pursue deradicalization programs
2. Isolation and redirection- exiling individuals and stopping people from carrying out attacks and influencing others.

Criticisms of CVE Programs and Initiatives

CVE programs have been generally criticized for being no different than a law enforcement approach of combatting extremism to securitize Muslim communities (Macnair and
Frank 2017). Critics, such as Macnair and Frank claim that government agencies tend to manage initiatives and programs.

Furthermore, CVE programs that emerged post-9/11 focused their efforts on Islamic extremism. According to Patel and Koushik, 4,000 people were identified as potential terrorists between 2007 and 2014 thorough CVE related programs (Patel and Koushik 2017). Muslim communities are also suspicious of CVE programs, because other national counterterrorism efforts targeted those communities for suspicions of Islamic extremism (Macnair and Frank 2017). For instance, the UK CVE program, Prevent, implemented ‘integration and social cohesion’ programs in Muslim communities, but also encouraged community members to identify people who are “vulnerable” to terrorism (Patel and Koushi 2017). Law enforcement agencies’ surveillance of Muslims built distrust between those communities and the same agencies involved in local CVE. Moreover, counterterrorism measures led to an increase in Islamophobia (Shirazi 2016). Distrust between communities and law enforcement agencies also contributes to CVE programs’ challenges to obtain the support of stakeholders. Potential stakeholders are skeptical of CVE due to the potential discrimination and criminalization of Muslims.

Furthermore, CVE scholars mention that programs perpetuate the narrative that Muslim communities are involved in terrorist activities. Law enforcement agencies conducted surveillance on communities prior to the emergence of CVE. For instance, the NYPD surveilled mosques, Muslim business, and Muslim college students in New Jersey and other locations between 2006 and 2007 (Elliot 2012). Consequently, incidents of targeted surveillance sent the message to citizens that national government was only interested in Muslim communities, because they may violate the laws. As CVE policies and programs developed, community
members became concerned about the government incorporating informants into local CVE programs.

Critics of CVE also argue that CVE programs are prosecution-driven by federal agencies rather than community-led initiatives to build resilience. U.S federal agencies, such as the DHS, FBI, and DJ tend to lead the development and management of these programs (Aziz 2017).

Another critical issue with CVE initiatives is that “countering violent extremism” has various definitions. Two common definitions of CVE tend to influence stakeholders’ approach to creating policies and programs. Some scholars define CVE as the “soft-power” approach of counterterrorism that supplements hard-power tactics, such as surveillance, prosecution, and conviction. Other scholars define CVE as separate from counterterrorism and focused on developing long-term social services (Aziz 2017). Social services address the challenges communities encounter when their members are potentially prone to joining terrorist groups. Both definitions of CVE imply that the main objective of its approaches is to stop individual radicalization to violent extremism by targeting specific communities.

Furthermore, scholars argue that that there is no empirical evaluation of CVE plans or programs implemented in communities. Scholars who have reviewed CVE initiatives study use various evaluation methods to determine the effectiveness of a program. They also recognize that these evaluation methods are “underdeveloped and largely undefined” (Hirschi and Widmer, 2012 172). A lack of statistical data challenges CVE stakeholders’ and policymakers’ ability to assess prevention, intervention, and deradicalization programs (Vidino and Hughes 2015). It also affects policymakers’ decisions on CVE initiatives.
Methods

Methodology

Methodological Approach

The research question posed in this thesis is whether or not the CVE framework and actions of Swedish municipality Gothenburg contribute to the country’s CVE strategy and counterterrorism measures. Since the research is a case study on Gothenburg CVE, interviews with individuals involved in and knowledgeable of its plan and initiatives were employed as a qualitative method of data collection. As mentioned in the literature review on CVE evaluation methods, scholars argue there are no empirical evaluation of CVE plans or programs. Therefore, qualitative methods of research can be used to gain information and insights about Gothenburg’s CVE framework, goals and initiatives. An interview format was selected to develop an interpretative analysis about ways in which Gothenburg CVE framework is crucial to the broader context of Swedish CVE.

Data Collection

17 in-person and interviews were conducted to gather information about current stance on Gothenburg CVE from June 2019 and August 2019. First, participants were contacted via email and selected based on their involvement and knowledge of Gothenburg’s CVE plan and Swedish CVE. Then, interviewees were provided a written or oral consent from, allowing for an audio recording of the conversation taken via iPhone. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured format to facilitate conversation on the various aspects and current state of CVE and violent extremism in Gothenburg. Each interview was between 60-90 minutes and audio recordings were transferred to Duke Box for data protection afterwards. Each interviewee’s identity also remained
confidential as interviews were later transcribed. Below is a table of the description and number of participants who were interviewed.

*Table 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Type</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CVE Practitioner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration/ Integration Researcher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Member</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Method of Analysis*

The interviews were transcribed through qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, and a thematic analysis was conducted. In particular, all the data was coded before identifying and classifying it into three main themes based on literature about the structure of CVE in general, Swedish CVE, and Gothenburg CVE. Each theme was examined to gain insight on how Gothenburg CVE’s plan contributes to Swedish CVE. The three themes discussed throughout this analysis are CVE efforts in prevention, intervention, and disengagement/ deradicalization. They also provide an understanding of challenges that Gothenburg CVE has and how its initiatives and policy decisions affect national efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism.
Methodology Limitations

Though interviews are the main source of data in this research, there were methodological and data collections limitations. One limitation to the interview approach was the sample size of participants in the study. Since interviews were conducted abroad over the span of eight weeks, sessions were arranged based on each participant’s availability. Therefore, it is also more difficult to replicate findings and generalize them to a larger population. Language barrier is a limitation to transcribing and analyzing transcripts, because even though all interviews were conducted in English, each interviewee’s primary language is Swedish. Transcripts were carefully analyzed to ensure that any Swedish terminology or English translations were understandable to the reader. Furthermore, data collection and interpretative analyses can be affected by a researcher’s subjectivity.
Findings

The following data results are insights obtained from interviews about Gothenburg’s CVE agenda and the current activities and challenges it faces. The information was segregated into three sections in accordance with the objectives and current actions of Gothenburg CVE in prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/disengagement.

Prevention

Gothenburg CVE Objectives

- Goal: Stakeholders shall be identified within the relevant organizations and bodies of age.
  o Measures: Identify actors and get into contact with them. Support actors (politicians, officials, associations, residents) with awareness-raising efforts on violent extremism.

- Goal: The city of Gothenburg should create a current picture of its situation on violent extremism.
  o Measures: Together with the partners within the knowledge house. Develop an up-to-date picture of the situation. Include civil society, housing, children and young people in the situation picture.

- Goal: Civil society (local sports clubs, faith communities, or other non-profit organizations) in Gothenburg should be included in work against violent extremism.
  o Measures: Identify important issues in civil society. Promote the active role and participation of civil society in prevention both locally and nationally.

- Goal: The city of Gothenburg will set up a forum where stakeholders can express their views on the work.
- **Measures** – The city of Gothenburg will set up a forum where stakeholders can express their views on the work. Stakeholders will also be invited to meetings to enable transparency and criticism. Develop a communication strategy for the city of Gothenburg’s work against violent extremism. Develop communication plans for the different target groups at work.

- **Goal:** Violent extremism is to be prevented by working together with relatives of children at an early age.
  - **Measures:** Start pilot program at the school with a focus on human rights and democracy. Investigate the prerequisites for starting mentoring activities.

- **Goal:** Employees in the city of Gothenburg should be able to conduct individual discussions about violent values and democratic foundations based on their profession.
  - **Measures:** Priority professionals shall be trained to conduct talks with groups and individuals on democracy and human rights.

- **Goal:** Ensure gender perspective in all analyses and measures.
  - **Measures:** Included the gender perspective in the situation picture produced. Take into account the gender perspective in actions taken.

- **Goal:** Preventive work should be planned around the needs of partners.
  - **Measures:** A questionnaire to partners shall be carried out to get an idea of the needs and action requested. Conduct a study on local factors for why individuals are radicalized.

- **Goal:** The city’s activities should know how the work against violent extremism is organized based on responsibilities and role.
- Goal: Relatives should be included in all parts of the city’s prevention of violent extremism.
  
  o Measures: Distribute the number of national telephone line in Gothenburg. Disseminate information to the city’s residents on where to address questions about violent extremism. Develop methods to increase the participation of relatives in the work.

- Goal: Work against violent extremism shall be include in the city’s structures for security promotion and crime prevention.
  
  o Measures: The city’s SSPF (schools, social services, police, leisure) work shall include violent extremism as a risk factor. Work against violent extremism should be part of the city’s SIG work. Specific efforts against violent extremism should be made visible in local agreements between administrations/ districts and the police. Violent extremisms should be included as a work area in the concept “Safe in Gothenburg”

  o Measures: The city of Gothenburg’s plan against violent extremisms will be communicated in all activities.

Current Prevention Activities, Challenges, and Problems with Gothenburg CVE Plan

Current Picture of Violent Extremism in Gothenburg

Swedish government officials, CVE and counterterrorism experts are knowledgeable about the current situation of violent extremism and individual radicalization in Gothenburg. When discussing the topic of violent extremism, radicalization, and ISIS returnees in the city, interviewees mentioned the following-

“The official Swedish numbers are that 300 individuals left the country to fight in Syria and Iraq. About 150 of them have returned to Sweden.”
“...I think Gothenburg is the worst. Most people travel to Syria came from Gothenburg.”

“From Gothenburg, I think around maybe a hundred people have traveled to Syria”

“Gothenburg is the worst city in Sweden [for radicalization and individual recruitment into the Islamic State]... Gothenburg is a breeding ground for recruitment.”

Furthermore, interviewees talked about demographics in Gothenburg who had been vulnerable to radicalization and engaged in violent extremism. They specifically mentioned second-generation migrants who were born in Sweden-

“A lot of people were born in Sweden and have grown up here. But, they became radicalized. It is mostly the second generation. A lot of them who were born here travel to Syria to join ISIS.”

“They travelled to Syria. See it’s the second generation. So there is a risk, in which they develop these radical ideologies”

They also discussed societal factors that may contribute to an individual’s radicalization and engagement in violent extremism and their current activities in Gothenburg, such as travelling to Syria, spreading propaganda, and engaging in social media –

“People from Gothenburg who went to Syria joined these radical groups. Most of them, did not succeed in the basics [of education]. But, there were some of them who did finish high school and a few who also had some degree from the state.”

“...in Sweden it is harder to get a job without education. In vulnerable areas like Gothenburg, 60-65% have not graduated from primary school. There is some fault in the education system.”

“The parents don’t understand why their kids went to ISIS. There are very few immigrants who go. Most of them are young and second generation. How can you be radicalized in a democratic country? People don’t understand that segregation makes it even harder.”

“The government and city officials are aware that [extremists] were creating propaganda and were using welfare funds to fund their activities.”

“Yes, [some extremists] were from Stockholm, but their focus was on countries other than Sweden. Sweden was more like a platform for them”
“And a lot of them has been friends before. They were in the same schools and know each other from childhood. It's not only ideology but it's also friends. Some of them may be going to Syria and others will follow in course for an adventure.”

Social Services

In Gothenburg, social service agencies provide citizens tools to integrate, to obtain welfare benefits and to search for jobs. Specific programs, such as “etasblaring” (establishment) are designed for all migrants in order help them search for jobs and become financially stable. Interviewees described the how the programs operate -

“If they don’t have [permanent residency], they have to apply for it. Once the decision is made, they receive a plastic card. Then, they have to apply for a citizen identification number. When they have it, they can apply for kvensight (register at the job center). At this job center, they have a program called etasblaring (establishment)– this is where everything starts – they are registered and meet their officer at the job center. “

City officials in Gothenburg and other cities also encouraged migrants to become knowledgeable in Swedish democratic values, culture, and language services, such as “summereterings” and “Swedish for immigrants”–

“Most of them get the studies (Swedish for immigrants), because if they haven’t worked, then they won’t get the money from the job center. This program is for two years, so they start to study and develop skills for a job. Everyone goes to summereterings (a course to learn about Sweden and culture) for 7 weeks.”

There are also concerns about the effectiveness of social service programs in helping migrants engage in local personal development, education, and social engagement initiatives-“

“I think the etasblarings program at the job center is not working well. Most immigrants go to Sweden for immigrants three hours a day and there’s not much control. I also think that there’s Swedish naïve mentality. Most [Swedes] want them do the right things and we want them to integrate, but we must remember that people are coming here with trauma or not feeling well. I also think most of them need structure and know that if you’re going to live here, you need to work 8 hours a day, because otherwise you can’t afford to buy an apartment after two to four years. It’s like now, we take people here- you can go to school 3 hours a day if you want to, then 2-4 years later- now you’re on your own and there’s no more help. You
can go to social welfare, but I think it should be more clear from the beginning-you must do this to be successful here.”

One CVE consultant mentioned that Gothenburg CVE officials and stakeholders can refer to the Swedish Center for Prevention of Violent Extremism to learn and implement prevention strategies in the city’s communities. The center was created in 2018 and assists all municipalities, such as Gothenburg, in creating tailored strategies to prevent violent extremism. Furthermore, the center consists of practitioners with various background and expertise to assist Gothenburg stakeholders to accomplish prevention CVE objectives. An interviewee mentioned the following-

“We have a “hot line” for everyone who, on a professional basis, works with people that, in one way or another, are involved with violent extremism. The “hot line” is open every weekday and we answer questions about all matters that include violent extremism. We also travel to all municipalities that request our help when it comes to preventive work in the area of violent extremism. And finally, we try to educate and train people working on the ground in municipalities and regions, so that they can develop their skills when it comes to preventive work against violent extremism.”

“On a local level we mainly work with the 290 municipalities and on a regional level we mainly work with the 21 county administrative boards. On a national level we work with all bodies of the society that are involved in the work against violent extremism. That involves everyone from law enforcement to NGOs”

Gothenburg Criminal Networks

A Swedish counterterrorism expert mentioned that criminal gang networks in the suburbs of Gothenburg undermine CVE preventions plans, because they tend to recruit young civilians. Moreover, these networks overlap with the known network of radical extremists in the city-

“In the suburbs in Gothenburg, you know, there’s a really strong criminal network. And also, some of the [individuals] developed extremist values. It's a different network, but sometimes they overlap. And that's absolutely has to do with segregation.”
“Like a lot of people that are involved with the Islamic State, they also have convictions for drug related crimes”

“But in these areas, the criminal gangs. They tried to catch these young people to do a job for them. Instead, you couldn’t do a career in criminality. Well, for these radical imams and preachers also trying to catch these young. They are more vulnerable to criminality in order to gain extra money.”

**Intervention**

**Gothenburg CVE Intervention Objectives**

- There were no specific intervention goals for at-risk individuals stated in the plan.

**Current Intervention Plan, Problems, and Challenges with Gothenburg CVE Plan**

Some local Gothenburg police officers build trust between them and local Muslim communities and organizations in the municipality. As part of local intervention work, they regularly visit local mosques and interact with local community leaders. According to a Gothenburg police officer, imams and community leaders are generally receptive to officers’ communications with them and their members. They go the modern mosques and those that may be considered more radical. Furthermore, they visit religious institutions and to learn about the community and talk to members about violent extremism and ways to support members.

“The small mosques have 20-30 members, while the big ones have over 1,000. I go to them. They are nice and friendly; say “hey please sit down”. When there is a terror attack, I speak to them about them”

Moreover, the interviewee discussed a necessity for more local (or neighborhood) police officers to engage with the religious community in Gothenburg in order to develop partnerships between the community and law enforcement-

“You must have neighborhood police who know everyone. If there was an extremist, he knows it. Embrace modern mosques and they want will want explain Islam and build that trust. They will speak about who is problematic and radical Muslims. We would also be embraced by the community. This intelligence will be the key of reducing radicalization, because then we could help. We must have that system.”
**Disengagement / Deradicalization**

**Gothenburg Disengagement/ Deradicalization CVE Objectives**

- The main responsibility of the city of Gothenburg lies primarily with prevention (measures to safeguard democracy and the equal value and rights of all people) and intervention (measures for identified individuals at risk and relatives).

- In terms of deradicalization and disengagement, police and the judiciary are primarily responsible for prosecution of individuals guilty of crimes. However, the city of Gothenburg also has a responsibility in regards to efforts that lead individuals to leave violent movements.

**Current Disengagement/Deradicalization Activities, Problems, and Challenges with Gothenburg CVE Plan**

Swedish police agencies, such as SAPO, Gothenburg police officers, and the criminal justice system are responsible for deradicalization efforts to deal known violent extremists (such as ISIS returnees). For instance, Gothenburg police officers have made reports about returnees’ identities and taken them into custody to question them about their activities abroad. SAPO officers in Gothenburg also surveil individuals who secretly returned to the city from Syria.

“One a half years ago, I said to the police chief that we reported everyone who came back to Sweden. There’s was possibility to take them in for questioning and figure out the crimes they committed. We made a report on each of them in our area”

“So some cases. There’s a number of Salafist preachers and activists that have been arrested or taken into custody by SAPO. The reason they were taken into custody, is because the security police deemed that a danger to the country.”

Moreover, government and CVE officials and law enforcement acknowledges challenges and problems with deradicalization efforts in Gothenburg communities. For instance, talk about difficulties with prosecuting returnees who pose a risk to others.
“Nothing. There’s not really any policy on prosecution. So, what happens in practical life, is that they go back to wherever they came from. Goes back into whatever they’re doing. There’s already are number of cases where people have been arrested for petty crimes (robbery and beating up people). But, if they that, that is why they are getting arrested. There’s nothing to link them to the fact they have been with the Islamic State.”

“So, there is no official policy here and there has been no attempts to prosecute anyone, because again- you can’t. What are you going to prosecute them is the idea here. There actually are things that can be used, but are not being used.”

Some counterterrorism researchers have discussed potential option to prosecute returnees for joining a terrorist organization or other extremist crimes in Sweden.

“There is an old law that was enacted into law. There is a law to prosecute people for being part of foreign, organized, uniform non-Swedish armed groups- doesn’t have to be an army, but it does have to be an organized group. The Swedish name is Corpslaugen- and you could do that, because you could argue that the Islamic State has a regular force, so you could use that. But, it’s never, but it’s not being used. It was created in the 1930’s to deal with the people going down to Spain during the Spanish Civil War. And to try to prosecute people who went down to fight with other groups in Europe.

“And then, there’s a much more recent things, which covers genocide and crimes against humanity. Because, in 2014 the EU inaugurated and Sweden acknowledged the initiative- that started to come into 2014, which means it covers the years we’re talking about here. And since the IS war against the Yazidis or anyone else is genocide, you could use that. You don’t really have to be prove to participate in and killing people, it’s enough to abetting and helping. So you could used that, but it’s not being used”

“When the European Council, the European Parliament, and the UN decided the war against the Yazidis was genocide, Sweden (neither the parliament nor the government) has acknowledged that. So, even though rest of the planet has, we haven’t. Which means, it’s not on our books. If we don’t recognize that the war against the Yazidis is genocide, then we can’t use this.”

Children Returnees

There is also a major concern about how to deal children returnees, whose parents joined terrorist organizations or engaged in combat abroad. As of now, 37 children have returned to Sweden (some of whom live in Gothenburg)-
“There is a discussion of what to do with the children. I think that depends on the age issue. Many of them are very young, John, but they're all also children aged 12-14 who spent five years in the Islamic state. In that case, it’s much more difficult.”

There are current concerns about providing resources to provide for psychological trauma and reintegration into Swedish society -

“What we are looking upon right now, we have never seen such trauma. Researchers have tracked trauma to 2 years olds and don’t know how to handle them. They don’t have a known language to express this.”

In some cases, local social authority organization or family members who reside in Sweden have taken custody of children returnees. One interviewee described a story of children returnees from Syria who reside with their relatives-

“It’s a Swedish guy who became a Muslim. He traveled to Islamic and took it from talking with his wife and children and from there from Syria. He and his wife were killed in combat and there was a question of what to do with their children who survived. The guy survives father - the children's grandfather, who took the children in once the government welcomed them back to Sweden. And now the social authority is taking care of them too.”
Analysis and Recommendations

The research question presented in this thesis is whether or not the CVE plans and actions of Swedish municipality Gothenburg further Swedish CVE and counterterrorism strategy. The findings from interviews conducted in Sweden indicate that the Gothenburg plan has mention goals and measures for CVE actions in prevention. The plan did not state local objectives for CVE intervention and disengagement/deradicalization efforts to be implemented by city officials or CVE stakeholders. Furthermore, findings from interviews revealed challenges to the Gothenburg’s current prevention plan, which were not specified enough (specifically addressed or included) in the city’s goals to promote local prevention efforts. Moreover, there are current actions of intervention conducted in Gothenburg that are not recognized in the CVE framework, but they can categorized under local intervention efforts. Therefore, Gothenburg CVE goals further Swedish prevention efforts to promote democratic values amongst communities, but they do not contribute to Swedish intervention or deradicalization CVE agenda. Findings from interviews also revealed that there are various challenges to the plan that could undermine prevention, intervention, and disengagement/deradicalization efforts in Gothenburg.

Prevention

Most goals categorized as prevention CVE in the Gothenburg agenda aligned with examples of successful primary prevention initiatives in CVE public health theory. For instance, the city has begun to act upon its goal of employing city employees to facilitate conversations around Swedish democratic values. Findings from interviews identified that educational, financial, and cultural programs in Gothenburg, such as “etasblaring” (establishment), Swedish for immigrants, and summerereterings address some basic human needs that could prevent a
person from becoming vulnerable to radical ideology and violent extremism in the community. These programs can also be categorized with activities of social engagement, education, and personal development mentioned by CVE scholars as part of the public health CVE framework.

Though these services can be categorized under example of initiatives that promote successful prevention in mitigating causes of violent extremism, they do not follow a “whole-of-society” approach as outlined in the public health CVE theory. Interviewees implied in their responses that issues of violent extremism in Gothenburg generally linked to specific communities (particularly immigrants and second-generation immigrants from Islamic countries) in the nation.

In practice, Gothenburg social service agencies provide individuals resources to integrate migrants into Swedish society. Interviewees who worked in social service mentioned that there were courses on Swedish culture and values (summereterings), language classes (Swedish for immigrants), and sessions to establish economic welfare and job searches. A concern that interviewees presented in their discussion about social service programs was the effectiveness of engaging migrants in these programs and successfully integrating them into Swedish society.

Another prevention goal established in the Gothenburg CVE framework was for city officials to gather and publish information about the city’s current situation of violent extremism in order to construct and later implement prevention efforts that would mitigate factors that contribute to violent extremism in communities. Gothenburg officials acknowledged current issues of violent extremism and radicalization in the framework (such as ISIS returnees and individual who to fight in the Syrian Civil War). Interviewees confirmed these challenges and indicated that Gothenburg had one of the worst situations of violent extremisms in Sweden.

Interestingly, the current picture of violent extremism in Gothenburg did not go into detail about
specific demographics in Gothenburg who generally constituted the cases of individuals who left for Syria or were ISIS returnees. Information from various interviewees implied that the members of Islamic migrant communities in Gothenburg (especially second-generation migrants) were vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment into extremist organizations. Furthermore, they mentioned individual in these communities may struggle with a sense of belonging in Swedish society, may not advance through Swedish primary education, and may be influenced to engage in radical ideology by friends and community members who are also at-risk of radicalization. Government, counterterrorism experts, CVE practitioners, and journalists also mentioned a connection between individuals of Gothenburg criminal gang networks engaged in local drug-related crimes and those involve engaged in extremist organization, such as ISIS. The Gothenburg CVE plan did not go into detail about these issues of violent extremism or ways to protect local communities.

Moreover, Gothenburg officials plan to further their CVE efforts by working with practitioners. Currently, CVE practitioners and consultants from the Swedish Center for Prevention on Violent Extremism are an available resource for Gothenburg CVE officials and stakeholders to develop and implement prevention strategies. Consultants educate and train individuals working on local CVE in skills to prevent radicalization and violent extremism in their communities. The Center can also help the city officials involved in local CVE efforts achieve its goal to support awareness-raising efforts for violent extremism.

There were other prevention goals stated in the 2016 Gothenburg CVE plan, such as incorporating a gender analysis into the city’s situation on violent extremism, identifying relevant civil society organizations (faith communities, non-profit organizations, local sports clubs, etc..), establishing a forum for stakeholders to express their views on CVE efforts, and
working with family relatives and schools to prevent violent extremism from a young age. They are examples of CVE prevention under the public health theory that work to address community and sociopolitical factors that contribute to violent extremism. Interviewees did not discuss current measures taken to achieve these goals in prevention efforts, but officials did mention a necessity for education reform and the involvement of civil society organizations, as stated in the Gothenburg plan. Furthermore, the Gothenburg CVE agenda did not specify plans or current efforts for community health services that would address potential issues of violent extremism in the community.

Based on the findings about Gothenburg’s CVE prevention goals and actions, the city should specify local communities (such as the migrant community) that endure prevalent challenges with radicalization and violent extremism, so that CVE stakeholders can develop prevention efforts for those communities. Moreover, city officials should investigate sociopolitical, economic, and educational factors that contribute to issues of violent extremism amongst communities in Gothenburg on order to develop and implement whole-of-society prevention efforts that mitigate case of violent extremism in the city that and further promote Swedish CVE efforts. Gothenburg officials should also implement primary prevention initiatives in accordance to the CVE public health model (such as educational reform, cultural awareness, health services, and personal development).

**Intervention**

There were not intervention goals mentioned in the Gothenburg’s CVE plan that focus on targeting at-risk individuals in the city. None of the goals specified intervention activities (such as mentorship and counseling), community engagement (trust building between community members and law enforcement) and counter-messaging campaigns.
Though it was not mentioned as an intervention objective in the Gothenburg CVE plan, some local police offices are engaging with migrant and religious communities in order to build trust between individuals who are at-risk of radicalization and their relatives or close friends. For instance, the objectives on incorporating relatives in all aspects of CVE measures and incorporation of police officers align with community engagement aspects of the public health CVE theory.

The findings indicate that local Gothenburg police officers have engaged with the local Islamic community to build trust between law enforcement and community members. For instance, officers have visited local mosques to become acquainted with religious leaders and to learn about local religions. They also talk to community members about violent extremism, any terrorist attacks that occur in Europe, and ways to support at-risk individuals. Findings from interviews also indicated a necessity for an increase number of local police officers to engage with the religious community in Gothenburg. One interviewee who works with law enforcement argued that officers who make themselves visible in places of worship can further develop trust with law enforcement and religious communities. Moreover, partnerships with law enforcement would allow officers to interact with community members of family relatives who are concerned about individuals who are at risk for radicalization and potentially involved violent extremism. This would allow officers to intervene in the process and provide or refer individuals to other intervention resources.

Though the Gothenburg CVE agenda mentioned a necessity for the inclusion of relatives in all aspects of the city’s CVE measures, interviewees did not mention any efforts in which relatives were involved in current CVE intervention efforts. Gothenburg CVE intervention plans also did not specify efforts, such as mentorships, counseling, and training on warning signs.
There was no specification of community engagement efforts for at-risk individuals in within local community. Furthermore, the plan did not state any counter-messaging campaigns against radicalization and violent extremist messaging. Interviewees did not discuss any specific counter-messaging plans that are involved in Gothenburg’s intervention CVE agenda.

Gothenburg officials should develop and intervention goals of its CVE framework and work with local CVE stakeholders that could conduct interventions for at-risk individuals. To further Swedish CVE efforts in reducing the number of individuals exposed to radical ideology and inclined to commit acts of violent extremism, Gothenburg officials should also create programs that train and provide local authorities tools to helps those individuals (i.e. counselling resources and mentorships). Furthermore, Gothenburg should incorporate local police officers in the intervention paradigm and provide awareness training. This would allow officers to further build trust in religious communities and to identify at-risk members who can be referred to authorities that can supply intervention efforts.

Disengagement/ Deradicalization

Though the Gothenburg CVE plan states that police and security agencies and the judiciary system are responsible for taking measure against individuals who are guilty of crimes, it does not specify any goals to aid individuals who want to disengage from violent organizations or reduce radical ideology outside the Swedish criminal justice paradigm.

Though Gothenburg officials recognize that radicalized individuals and ISIS returnees are a challenge its CVE efforts, it has allowed law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system to be responsible for those efforts. For instance, Gothenburg police officers and SAPO (Swedish security police) to question, detain, and surveil known radicalized individuals who
have returned from combat abroad and pose a risk to the community. These measures work to stop a person’s ability to commit violence in the future, as mentioned in the public health theory. Findings from interviews also indicated that Gothenburg police officers have taken known ISIS returnees into temporary custody in order to question them about their activities abroad. In Gothenburg, SAPO has also taken custody of known radical Salafist religious figures involved in terrorist activities to question them about extremist activities. These current actions by Swedish law enforcement agencies satisfy activities in tertiary efforts of the CVE public health model to stop an individuals’ efforts to engage in violent acts.

The Gothenburg CVE plan mentioned the city’s responsibly to help individuals leave violent movements, but interviewees did not mention any plans or ongoing efforts to disengage radicalized individuals in the city. There was also no specific mention of stakeholders, such as community members, psychologists, religious leaders who have been involved in disengagement efforts.

Another related issue of disengagement and deradicalization that was discussed in interviews was concerns about child returnees and ways to reintegrate them into Swedish society. There is currently a discussion amongst city officials and the Swedish central government about how to successfully reintegrate them into municipalities, such as Gothenburg. Though family relatives and Swedish social authority have taken custody of them, city officials did not specify to provide social and healthcare resources to address potential psychological trauma or other social issues.

Gothenburg officials also support the prosecution of people who have participated in terrorist organizations, but the central government face a challenge in efforts to prosecute known ISIS returnees. As of now, Sweden is also looking at ways to prosecute ISIS returnees as part of
disengagement and deradicalization CVE efforts. Interviews with counterterrorism experts and government officials indicated potential options that the country could investigate in order to prosecute individuals who left for Syria and returned. For instance, one interviewee discussed options for prosecuting individuals through a law called “Corpslaugen”, which would prosecute a person for joining a foreign organized non-uniform Swedish armed group. In this case, the law would apply to individuals who joined the ISIS. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned another option to prosecute ISIS returnees for participating in a recognized crime against humanity (genocide of the Yazidis minority group).

Gothenburg CVE and city officials should draft and implement goals to create a local Exit program/strategy to help radicalized individual disengage from violent movements and mitigate radical ideology. Officials should also incorporate measures to implement social and health resources to for children who return from Syria in order to address potential psychological trauma they may have endured. These measures would further Sweden’s CVE agenda to stop individuals from potentially radicalizing other citizens or inciting acts of violent extremism. Moreover, SAPO and local Gothenburg police officers should work together to identify and stop extremists in local communities who can pose a threat to domestic security. In terms of prosecution, the Swedish central government can also advance its goals of preventing violent extremism by implementing laws that prosecute ISIS returnees and citizens involved in terrorist organizations.
Conclusion

This aim of this thesis to identify whether or not the CVE plans of Swedish municipality Gothenburg contribute to that nation’s CVE and overall counterterrorism strategy. Based on an interpretative analysis of interviews about the current situation of Gothenburg CVE, this thesis has shown that the city’s goals and current actions in local prevention efforts contribute the nation’s preventative CVE measures. Furthermore, analysis show that Gothenburg’s CVE plan does not contribute to Sweden’s CVE efforts in intervention and deradicalization/disengagement, because there are no stated objectives to implement those efforts in the municipality.

This research adds insights to ways that local CVE efforts in Swedish municipalities can further implement goals and actions in local communities that contribute to the nation’s CVE and counterterrorism agenda of combatting violent extremism.
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