
Research Note on Immigrant Youth Radicalization and Terrorism: Pre- and Post-Migration Considerations

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Abstract

This theoretical paper is based on working experience with newcomer refugee youth in Canada. It calls for an understanding of the refugee pre- and post-migration experience in an attempt to answer why some youth are drawn to radicalization and engagement in terrorism. This comprehension could lead to designing a global refugee youth radicalization and terrorism prevention strategy by creating resiliency within the refugee camps and within the host community of resettlement. The paper presents 12 propositions which need to be tested by future empirical research.

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Introduction

An increasing number of immigrants and refugees continue their migration globally due to violence and conflict. Unfortunately, some are drawn into radicalization and become involved in terrorism. As radicalization is a complex and unique process, it is difficult to create a formula for why this occurs. As noted by Rousseau, Hassan & Oulhote (2017), the current approaches in youth radicalization have focused on youth at risk of committing terrorist acts, thereby neglecting the study of protective or preventative factors. In addition, previous research focused on immigrant youth of the second generation and beyond. This paper focuses on this knowledge gap, by looking exclusively at refugee youth of the first generation; those who are new to their host countries and may have been exposed to radicalized behaviour and terrorism in their home country and after they arrive in their host country. This

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perspective may be beneficial in starting a dialogue on the implementation of radicalization prevention, particularly in regard to youth living conditions in refugee camps and host communities in their country of resettlement. This approach has the potential to serve as a foundation to design a global approach to prevent radicalization.

This paper, while theoretical, can offer a different vision on understanding youth radicalization and engagement with terrorism. It focuses on youth pre- and post-exposure to radicalization in an effort to understand how radicalization affects first-generation immigrant youth rather than second or third-generation immigrants. In a similar position to Eleftheriadou (2018), we argue that newcomer refugees are different from second generation migrants on whom radicalization models are based. With this foundation, we assert that the living conditions in the home and host country, along with national policy, may indicate the potential for radicalization leading to violence.

Previous research has focused on a variety of potential factors causing immigrant youth to radicalize and potentially engage in terrorism. Identity crisis is a common factor used to explain youth radicalization (Robinson, Gardee, Chaudhry & Collins, 2017), along with economic marginalization (Doosje, Loseman & Van den Bos, 2013), mental health issues (Paulussen, Nijman & Lismont, 2017), religious indoctrination (Rink & Sharma, 2018), and global values incongruence (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). Sude, Stebbins, & Weiland (2015) contended an ultimate trigger factor did not exist that could explain or predict refugee radicalization. However, they noted a lack of free movement and access to educational opportunities could increase the risk of youth joining radicalized groups (Sude, Stebbins, & Weiland, 2015).

The conclusions within this paper are based on ten years' work experience with immigrant youth in Canada. This experience includes completion of a Needs Assessment, which is conducted with the youth upon arrival into the school system. The progress of the youth is evaluated on an ongoing basis while the youth is in the school system. Essentially, the assessment provides a plan to integrate the student into the community and society. They

are then directed to programs and resources to assist in the resettlement and integration. These resources are also extended to the family of the student.

During many years of working with newcomer immigrant youth, arriving mainly from refugee camps, we developed programs that created a safe place for sharing pre- and post-migration experiences. The goal was to facilitate informal conversations that led to sharing pre- and post-migration experiences on general life issues, including perceptions of social injustices and worldviews. Through the conversations, we found that the quality of support new immigrant youth receive in their host communities can either reinforce or diminish the pre-departure exposure to radicalization and terrorism. This understudied area adds value to the knowledge about the relation between pre-migration and post-migration vulnerabilities and resilience.

Our theory suggests 12 propositions based on the impact of the following factors on immigrant youth radicalization and terrorism in their host countries:

1. Immigrant youth exposure to radicalization and terrorism in vulnerable conditions before arriving in their host countries;
2. Immigrant youth exposure to radicalization and terrorism in resilient communities before arriving in their host countries;
3. Immigrant youth exposure to radicalization and terrorism in vulnerable communities in their host countries; and
4. Immigrant youth exposure to radicalization and terrorism in resilient communities in their host countries.

Each scenario may help identify factors that allow immigrant youth to resist against radicalization and prevent these youth from committing terrorist acts. Understanding these factors may help develop proactive approaches and policies to help build resilient communities.

This paper begins with the contextual definition of radicalization and terrorism. The second section elaborates on the factors causing immigrant youth to radicalize and become involved in terrorism. The third section focuses on environments pre- and post-migration to identify the dynamics of immigrant radicalization and terrorism. In section four, we present propositions on immigrant youth RT (radicalization and terrorism) in relation to pre- and post-migration environments and suggest the implications for future research and policies to prevent immigrant youth RT.

The Definition and the Causes of Immigrant Youth Radicalization and Terrorism

Before radicalization and terrorism are discussed, it is important to clarify the definition and context in which it is used. These definitions vary widely and remain subjective based on the multiplicities of methodologies, scholar and policy viewpoints, and the academic disciplines including anthropology, political science, and sociology (Neumann, 2013; Sedgwick 2013).

For researchers investigating youth immigrant RT, a common trend is to focus on the identity crisis that is experienced in the host country and use methodology borrowed from anthropology or sociology. The emphasis may be inadvertently placed on the dislocation of the home culture and the complicated process of adoption or exclusion by the host culture. Other theories may suggest the individual traits of immigrant youth are the reason for radicalization and focus on mental health factors as a reason for vulnerability to recruiters. These theories may also describe the process of radicalization and terrorism as a complex interaction of discrimination, economic hardship, perceived global injustices, and media coverage of violence within the home country, with these factors triggering violent action by the youth.

In attempting to identify the root cause of radicalization, which may lead to violence, Veldhuis and Staun (2009) distinguish between radicalization and terrorism in the following terms:

Terrorism is above all a political tool that, irrespective of its success rate, is used in an attempt to bring about political or societal change. Radicalisation, on the other hand, is a process of transformation that in itself does not serve a clearly defined purpose and that does not necessarily have to be related to violence. (p. 6)

Bhui, Dino & Jones (2012) termed radicalization as “a process of adopting extreme religious and political beliefs in order to thwart mainstream ideologies, in the context of perceived injustice and alienation from society and the state” (p. 1). However, radicalization does not always have negative connotations and can lead to change. It is important to note that “radicals,” as perceived in the context of their respective time periods, led important changes within society including Martin Luther King’s civil rights movement, Nelson Mandela’s apartheid resistance in South Africa, and Mahatma Gandhi’s belief in transforming society through radical positions and social movements (Skeggs, 2005).

Drawing on the literature for radicalization and terrorism, the radicalization for this paper’s context refers to the process of emergence, acceptance and adoption of radical views for the use of violence as the sole solution to remediate perceived injustice. Therefore, immigrant youth adopting radical views to promote change without violence is not part of our discussion.

From different studies, numerous factors leading to immigrant youth RT have been identified. These can be grouped into two categories: individual factors and environmental factors, which are also referred to as micro and macro factors. For individual factors, Crenshaw (1998) believed that radicalization and terrorism are caused by youth mental weakness and vulnerability, quest for celebrity, sense of worth and personal choice. The environmental factors often referred to systemic barriers that cause immigrant youth economic deprivation, identity crisis, discrimination and the feeling of local and international injustice (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009).

These approaches do not take into account that these individuals' characteristics interact with and are influenced by the environment. Tremendous efforts are being invested in leading research on immigrant youth RT as a process to be located in their daily living conditions. However, scholars only recently investigated radicalization and terrorism as a dynamic process, stemming from socioeconomic and political conditions (Dzhekova et al. 2016); pre- and post-migration dynamics and relations have yet to be extensively researched. Due to the complexity of radicalization leading to terrorism and the variations of effect among individuals, a predicting process or model is not possible (Dawson, 2017). Dawson (2017) also asserted an ecological approach is vital for comprehending immigrant youth RT because it takes into account the interaction of the person or a group with its environment, assuming that no single factor can explain immigrant youth RT.

The exploration of pre- and post-migration exposure to radicalization has potential to offer new research sites on immigrant youth in new host countries. This includes delving into the socioeconomic and political conditions of immigrant youth and identifying pre-migration exposure to RT prior to arriving in host countries. In addition to investigating pre-migration living conditions, it is vital to explore the youth's daily conditions and exposure to radicalization in their host countries. While this research niche cannot solely explain immigrant RT, it could offer a new exploration into psychological, behavioural, and reinforcement process of radicalization.

Pre- and Post-Migration Environments and Research Propositions

In this section, immigrant youth pre- and post-migration life experiences will be presented, along with suggested propositions that emerged from discussion with immigrant youth and their pre- and post-migration experiences.

Pre- and post-migration environments

Research on immigrant youth RT typically concentrates on second and third-generation families. As a result, research findings have focused on the “homegrown terrorist” narrative. Putting this trend of research into perspective, many scholars try to understand why children of immigrants who were born and raised in Western countries can succumb to radical indoctrination and adopt violence as a means of expressing their anger.

As we focus on new immigrant youth arriving from refugee camps, it is important to incorporate aspects from their home country living conditions and experiences into future research and analysis. It is also vital to acknowledge the youth’s experiences with radicalization and terrorism, as this experience remains after reaching the safety of the host country. In addition, the living conditions in their host countries will influence their potential to radicalize and the likelihood of becoming involved in terrorism.

Immigrant youth may have resided in resilient communities where they had support from extended family, were engaged in a school environment, and felt belonging within their community. In other cases, they may have lived in vulnerable communities where they were treated as a second-class citizen, experienced social exclusion and isolation, and were exposed to radical indoctrination. In a post-migration example, Knapton (2014) highlighted the experience of immigrant youth being ostracized within a community and how youth can be pushed into accepting negative peer influences or groups. Once a youth is shunned from one identity group, including the school, their community, or new identity as Canadian, they will likely seek alternative groups to fill this void. Knapton (2014) also pointed to the need of having multiple identities, so that if one is threatened, another one could fill this void (p. 41). During post-migration, youth are faced with a variety of barriers and obstacles that may cause a loss of identity including forced displacement, confinement in refugee camps, lack of basic necessities, recruitment into extremist groups, and violence.

For experiences within the refugee camps, Martin-Rayó (2011) stated that these zones can provide opportunities for terrorist recruitment, as their occupants struggle to find meaningful employment and freedom of movement in the context of starvation and

confinement. In other research on radicalization in refugee camps, Milton, Spencer & Findley (2013) commented that “some subset of refugees may be radicalized as a result of the harsh conditions in refugee camps as well as poor treatment of the host country” (p. 626) and the international community should address these concerns to prevent terrorism and radicalization within the camp (p. 621). These factors were also acknowledged by Aubrey, Aubrey, Brodrick & Brooks (2016) and concluded young Syrians that experienced lack of economic opportunity, disruptive socialization, violence, and lack of access to education infrastructure influenced their involvement with radicalization and terrorism. After the youth has emigrated to their host country, they may begin to experience similar sentiments if they are segregated from their community and experience financial hardships associated with lack of integration. This social position within society can either result in success or failure in the prevention of radicalization among immigrant youth. Reynolds and Crea (2017) also discussed the importance of social position within the school environment and integration of immigrants. In their writings, they hypothesized that if “immigrant youth occupy similar positions in school social structures to their native peers,” they will have a higher propensity for integration and therefore would be part of a resilient community and identity (p. 503).

During the development cycle of youth immigrants, it is critical for social workers, teachers, and policymakers to provide support and develop proactive actions that can aid in reducing the occurrence of immigrant youth RT. The welcoming process of youth into the host country is equally as important to ensure integration within their new surroundings. Communities should strive to model resilience so that its youth can resist or interrupt the pressures to join an extremist movement or engage in violent behaviours.

For youth radicalization in particular, which has become complex in understanding, the focus needs to change from why youth become radicalized to why they do not engage in these behaviours (Simi & Windisch, 2017; Joose, Bucerius & Thompson, 2015). It is with this lens that immigrant youth pre- and post-migration experiences are analyzed, as this information can provide an understanding of how youth will adopt or resist RT.

Propositions

During the theory development process, the logic replaces data as the basis of theory evaluation. This paper's propositions are based on the concept that immigrant youth arriving in their host countries will interrupt their radicalization if they are provided with the socioeconomic infrastructure that was unavailable in their home country. In other words, despite pre-migration vulnerabilities, if the surrounding milieu of immigrant youth provides them with foundations to build resiliency, they have an increased potential of interrupting or resisting against radicalization and terrorism. If the community is welcoming and integrates newcomer youth, it is theorized that there will be less occurrence of radicalization among this group. Host communities offering a sense of belonging, economic opportunities, friendly schools and counselling to the traumatized may be less prone to radicalization and terrorism. Below are the detailed propositions derived from the above broad proposition:

- 1) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were exposed to radicalism and terrorism and adopted radicalization prior to arriving in their host countries will radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of vulnerability in their host country and are exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT+)
- 2) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were exposed to radicalism and terrorism and resisted radicalization prior to arriving in their host countries will radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of vulnerability in their host country and are exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT+)
- 3) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were not exposed to radicalism and terrorism and adopted radicalization prior to arriving in their host countries will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience in their host country even though they are exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT-)
- 4) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were not exposed to radicalism and terrorism and adopted radicalization prior to arriving in their host

countries will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience in their host country even though they encounter post-exposure to radicalization and terrorism (RT-)

- 5) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability and were not exposed to radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience in their host country despite being exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT-)
- 6) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability and were not exposed to radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host countries will radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of vulnerabilities in their host country and are exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT+)
- 7) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were exposed and adopted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience in their host country (RT-)
- 8) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of vulnerability, were exposed and adopted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience in their host country despite being exposed to radicalization and terrorism (RT-)
- 9) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of resilience, were exposed and resisted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of vulnerabilities in their host country (RT+)
- 10) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of resilience, were not exposed and resisted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of vulnerabilities and exposed to radicalization and terrorism in their host country (RT+)

11) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of resilience, were exposed and resisted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience and exposed to radicalization and terrorism in their host country (RT-)

12) Immigrant youth who lived in conditions of resilience, were not exposed and resisted radicalization and terrorism prior to arriving in their host country will not radicalize and become involved in terrorism if they live in conditions of resilience and were not exposed to radicalization and terrorism in their host country (RT-).

Table A: Pre- and Post-Migration in Summarizing Youth Radicalization and Terrorism

Pre-migration context			Post-migration context		Result
Pre vulnerabilities	Pre exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	No post exposure to RT	RT+
Pre vulnerabilities	Pre exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to RT	RT+
Pre vulnerabilities	No pre exposure to RT		Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to RT	RT+
Pre vulnerabilities	No pre exposure to RT		Post resilience	Post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre vulnerabilities	No pre exposure to RT		Post resilience	No post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre vulnerabilities	No pre exposure to RT		Post vulnerabilities	No post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre vulnerabilities	Pre exposure to RT	Pre adoption of RT	Post resilience	Post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre vulnerabilities	Pre exposure to RT	Pre adoption of RT	Post resilience	No post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre resilience	Pre exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to RT	RT+
Pre resilience	No exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to RT	RT+
Pre resilience	Pre exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post resilience	Post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre resilience	No exposure to RT	Pre resistance to RT	Post resilience	No post exposure to RT	RT-
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre adoption of RT	Post resilience	Post exposure to GI	RT-
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre adoption of RT	Post resilience	No exposure to GI	RT-
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre adoption of RT	Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to GI	RT+
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre adoption of RT	Post vulnerabilities	No exposure to GI	RT+

Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	No exposure to GI	RT+
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre resistance to RT	Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to GI	RT+
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre resistance to RT	Post resilience	No post exposure to GI	RT-
Pre exposure to grievance indoctrination		Pre resistance to RT	Post resilience	Post exposure to GI	RT-
No pre exposure to grievance indoctrination			Post vulnerabilities	No post exposure to GI	RT-
No pre exposure to grievance indoctrination			Post vulnerabilities	Post exposure to GI	RT+
No pre exposure to grievance indoctrination			Post resilience	No post exposure to GI	RT-
No pre exposure to grievance indoctrination			Post resilience	Post exposure to GI	RT-

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research and Policy

This theoretical paper highlights the missing dynamics and interplay between pre- and post-migration living conditions with newcomer youth. Despite immigrant youth living in vulnerable communities prior to arriving in their host countries, they will resist radicalization and terrorism if they live in resilient communities in their host countries. Therefore, immigrant youth living in vulnerable communities in host countries will be prone to radicalization and terrorism even though they came from resilient communities before migration.

This approach emphasizes the importance of the relationship between pre- and post-migration experiences of immigrant youth. It is also sensitive to the socioeconomic and political context in which immigrant youth lived in prior to and after migration. As human beings are a by-product and combination of individuality and environment, the theory suggests that societies are the foundation of radicalization and terrorism rather than individual features. This theory posits that immigrant youth RT is an outcome of individual pre- or post-migration vulnerabilities, and is significantly grounded within the social fabric of the community.

The understanding of pre- and post-migration of immigrant youth can help contextualize and design proactive programs in refugee camps and host communities in Western countries. It allows a simultaneous demonstration of the pre-and post-migration conditions for best practices in welcoming youth immigrants to their host communities as a strategy to prevent immigrant youth radicalization and terrorism. This way, policies should focus on addressing the fundamental needs of immigrant youth.

This paper presents practical implications. When the conditions of refugee youth pre- and post-migration are taken into account to prevent radicalization, a global preventive strategy needs to be implemented. On the pre-migration aspect, the living conditions of youth in refugee camps require close examination. Refugee camps with the potential to become indoctrination sites need to become resilient communities where youth should be engaged in meaningful education, economic prospects and receive protection from oppressive local governments. The international community should deploy efforts to ensure refugee camps are protected from potential extremists and recruiters. Conversely, countries where refugee youth are resettled should be supported by their new communities to prevent conditions that can accelerate potential radicalization.

This theoretical paper also presents some limitations, as it is largely based on subjective observation and based on assumptions. While these assumptions have yet to be proven or tested within research, they are required for foundations of research and the creation of the research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Data collection in this specific area of study may also contain its own set of challenges: access to refugee communities for data collection, biases of the information received on part of the refugee, and reliance on secondary data provided by international organizations providing care for refugees. Therefore, one of the limitations of our theoretical paper is the biases and subjectivity of our direct involvement and work experience with refugee youth. To overcome this, we recognize other perspectives in the explanation of refugee radicalization and potential engagement into terrorism. However, it is important to recognize this work as a theoretical paper, which is the

initial step for empirical research in the future with the goal of testing the suggested propositions.

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