Influences of Discrimination and Stigmatization on Secondary and Tertiary Level P/CVE Efforts – Insights from German Practitioners into Countering Islamist Extremism

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Abstract

This article uses a qualitative analysis of 25 interviews with experts from German secondary and tertiary level P/CVE programs countering Islamist Extremism to examine the influences of discrimination and stigmatization on deradicalization and disengagement efforts. Drawing on the experiential and interpretative knowledge of the interviewees, we found that both discrimination and stigmatization may have an obstructing influence on the clients' social and socio-economic stabilization. Discrimination, whether manifested in labor market disadvantages, within the education system, or individual racist acts of devaluation, can impede progress in deradicalization and disengagement processes. Further, stigmatization due to a prior association with Islamist groups and ideologies may result in similar experiences of rejection and devaluation across various areas of social life. In this context, most interviewees warn of the consequences of security authority investigations and caution against the dangers of disclosure and exposure to the public, particularly the press. Our findings show that P/CVE programs strive to address the issues of discrimination and stigmatization with multi-layered interventions designed to prevent setbacks in deradicalization and disengagement processes. Common strategies are to raise awareness in the personal reference system as well as on an institutional level to reduce discriminatory and stigmatizing actions. Client-centered approaches encompass counseling methods on the one hand aiming to overcome prejudices against state institutions and respective actors, and on the other hand empowerment measures and help in dealing with challenging situations, such as social grievances that potentially derive from discrimination and stigmatization. Further to this, the article discusses our findings against the backdrop of empirical studies, evaluation reports, and gray literature and analyzes the P/CVE strategies within theoretic process models of deradicalization and disengagement.

Introduction

Islamist radicalization poses a continuing threat, endangering social cohesion and potentially leading to terrorist activities. In Germany, a diverse landscape of programs has developed over the past decade to prevent Islamist radicalization and work towards deradicalization and disengagement (Freiheit et al., 2021; Michaelis & Kemmesies, 2022). Core objectives of

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deradicalization and disengagement efforts are to stabilize clients socially, socioeconomically, and emotionally and to work towards an ideological reappraisal (Rabasa et al., 2010; Koehler, 2013). This is implemented predominantly in case-related counseling work with radicalized individuals, their social reference system, and institutional actors (von Lautz, 2023b).

To date, the focus of research has been on factors that promote deradicalization and disengagement. Disruptive factors have so far been insufficiently explored or evaluated in terms of counseling practices (Kober, 2017; Kober & Junk, 2023). Since discrimination on individual, structural, and discursive levels has been identified in several studies as a risk factor for Islamist radicalization (Aslan et al., 2018; Akkuş et al., 2020; Emser et al., 2022a) and as Baaken et al. (2020b) as well as Emser et al. (2022a) indicate, may continue to affect the relationship with society and the social environment of those who participate in P/CVE programs, the question arises to what extent experiences and perceptions of discrimination impact processes of deradicalization and disengagement, and what strategies counselors employ to deal with this issue. Further, the article extends the perspective to negative attributions under the label "Islamism" and asks to what extent being stigmatized as a (former) Islamist represents a disruptive factor and how to address to this issue in counseling. Drawing on 25 interviews with experts from civil society and state (security) authorities, this article analyzes and discusses the experiences of secondary and tertiary level P/CVE practitioners in Germany. The interviews, as part of the research project "Distanz" (Structural Causes of Turning towards and Distancing from Islamist Radicalization – Development of Preventive-Pedagogical Counseling Approaches), focused on the experiential and interpretative knowledge of the interviewees acquired within the respective institutions and programs, as well as in their actual work with clients.

Outline discrimination and stigmatization

The article analyses discrimination akin to Scherr's sociological definition as a construct of distinction between social groups and categories of persons "which are used to create, establish and justify demarcations and hierarchies, in particular power asymmetries, socio-economic inequalities and unequal opportunities for recognition" (Scherr, 2017, p. 42,

AT[2]). This allows a broad view of discrimination as an overall societal phenomenon that exceeds individual acts of discrimination. Within the study of "Distanz", we refer to the stigma-conceptualization of Link and Phelan (2001) which specifies that stigmatization exists when several interconnected components converge: *Labeling*: "people distinguish and label human differences"; *Stereotyping*: "dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes"; *Separation*: "labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them.""; *Status loss and discrimination*: "labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 367). According to this, we differentiate in our analysis between

a) experiences of individual or structural discrimination based on general traits, such as a migrant background or Muslim identity and

b) stigmatization due to past offending and attributions of an Islamist radicalization.

Discrimination against Muslims in Germany

Today, the 5,3 to 5,6 million Muslim population of Germany (Pfündel et al., 2021) as well as those who are perceived as Muslims experience structural and social disadvantages compared to the non-Muslim majority society. Often first or last names, skin color, or dress types lead to discrimination. Examples are manifold, for instance, evident in the labor market where women with Turkish names, wearing headscarves, encounter challenges when applying for jobs (Weichselbaumer, 2016; Koopmans et al., 2018). Further, Muslim immigrants of the first and second generations face significant disadvantages on the housing market (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018) and there are noticeable asymmetries in social structures of dominance, for example, in the unequal treatment of religious communities when mosques are only rarely allowed to publicly hold their prayer call, while Christian churches are usually allowed to ring their bells every hour (Stoop, 2017). In addition, population surveys carried out in Germany reveal anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiment, which lays the foundation for discriminatory behavior or the acceptance of such (Pickel, 2019; Decker et al., 2022). The latter can be seen in the demonstrations of Pegida ("Patriotic Europeans Against

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[2] All translations except quotes from the interviews are marked with the abbreviation AT (Authors' Translation)

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the Islamisation of the West") and electoral successes of right-wing parties such as the AfD ("Alternative for Germany"), which mobilize anti-Muslim sentiment and call for resistance against Islam, supposed Islamization, and the construction of mosques (Bozay, 2017).

The role of discrimination in processes of radicalization

The data available on the so far more than 1150 individuals who departed from Germany to the civil war zones in Syria and Iraq shows that young adults with a migrant background have been particularly susceptible to jihadi mobilization. Notably, their background is largely from countries that are influenced by Islam and Islamic culture, such as Turkey and North African countries (Bundeskriminalamt et al., 2016, Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2023). This is consistent with the available research on individuals referred to as "foreign fighters" from European nations, many of whom have a migrant background from Muslim-majority countries (Dawson, 2021; Kanol, 2023). Accordingly, an Islamic influence in socialization is likely as well as a physical appearance potentially read as "foreign", "migratory" or "Muslim". Several empirical studies on radicalization processes in German-speaking countries highlight links between a migrant background and (collective) experiences of discrimination as risk factors for a turn towards Islamist groups and ideologies (e.g., Aslan et al., 2018; Akkuş et al., 2020; Emser et al., 2022a).

Commonly referenced radicalization models emphasize the significance of discrimination as a factor within the initial phases of the radicalization process (e.g., Moghaddam, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Waldmann, 2009; Kruglanski, 2014; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). The central argument here is that discrimination produces frustrations or grievances that lead to a cognitive opening to Islamist ideologies and groups that use these discriminations for their purposes. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) note that these grievances can draw on personal experiences or arise from (perceived) threats to a collective or issue that holds significance for the individual, the authors hence differentiate between personal and collective grievances. A distinction between individual experiences and the social status quo, which has discriminatory effects on Muslims and those who are read as Muslim, is also reflected in the concept of group-based collective relative deprivation, which "refers to feelings of discontent that occur when people perceive

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that members of their group have less than what they are entitled to" (Obaidi et al., 2019, p. 2).

However, it is worth noting that in the academic discourse, radicalization is mostly understood as a multi-layered phenomenon that cannot be attributed monocausally to experiences of discrimination based on religious orientation or ethnicity (Borum, 2011; Srowig et al., 2018). In recent years, empirical studies have demonstrated that the vulnerability to radicalization emerges from diverse risk factors potentially leading individuals to engage in extremism and terrorist activities (Clemmow et al., 2023; Ohls et al., 2023). Further, there are also resilience-building protective factors, that prevent radicalization (Lösel et al., 2018; Wolfowicz et al., 2020; Ohls et al., 2023) as well as additional factors that may have moderating or mediating impacts upon the relationship between risk factors, such as perceived group deprivation, and violent extremism (Rottweiler et al., 2022; Rottweiler & Gill, 2022). Further, even though diverse factors may correlate with different outcomes, a typical profile for and against radicalization is not empirically evidenced (Ohls et al., 2023). Research that sheds light on one factor, such as discrimination, therefore runs the risk of overemphasizing the respective aspect. Indeed, the vast majority of German Muslims do not radicalize although experiences of discrimination can be assumed.

Secondary and tertiary level P/CVE practices in Germany

In the scientific discourse pertaining to efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), two categorizations are in use that distinguish temporal points of intervention (primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention) proposed by Caplan (1964) and specifics related to target groups (universal, selective, indicated prevention) outlined by Gordon (1983). Ceylan and Kiefer (2018) have observed that P/CVE practitioners in Germany commonly conflate these tripartite systems of categorization. As this article deals with the practice of action, in the following both categorizations are considered synonymously and grouped accordingly with a focus on the points of intervention. While *primary prevention* measures universally prevent radicalization and therefore do not encompass deradicalization and disengagement measures, *secondary prevention* addresses individuals or groups identified as particularly vulnerable to the risks of Islamist radicalization or exhibit initial signs of early-

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stage radicalization. As radicalization processes are highly individual and do not generally progress linearly (Srowig et al., 2018) the field of secondary prevention may extend to practices associated with deradicalization and disengagement. Some programs continue to work with cases that only show initial risk factors and, on closer inspection, reveal a manifested Islamist radicalization. They somewhat operate in a grey area between secondary and *tertiary prevention*, which is the core area of deradicalization and disengagement practices focusing on people who have radicalized.

The main theoretical perspectives on the paths leading away from extremist ideologies and behaviors revolve around the concepts of deradicalization and disengagement. Horgan (2008) characterizes disengagement as a result of an individual or collective process, bringing about a behavioral refrain from extremist activities. It is important to note, however, that this transformation does not always translate into a reassessment or reorientation of the underlying attitudes. Abstaining from physical terrorist acts does not necessarily indicate a withdrawal from ideological support (Horgan, 2008; Schmid, 2013; Altier et al., 2014; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). On the other hand, deradicalization is understood as a comprehensive cognitive and behavioral process of changing extremist views and courses of action (Horgan, 2008; Schmid, 2013; Braddock, 2014). Rabasa et al. (2010, p. 181) delineate both concepts:

> Disengagement entails a change in behavior—refraining from violence and withdrawing from a radical organization. Deradicalization is the process of changing an individual's belief system. There can be disengagement without radicalization but not deradicalization without disengagement. A person could exit a radical organization and refrain from violence but nevertheless retain a radical worldview.

Even though the preventive objective of disengagement appears to be more tangible (Horgan, 2009), Rabasa et al. (2010) stress the importance of holistic deradicalization efforts for a fundamental change in ideology may reduce the probability of recidivism. This is however not a simple undertaking. Baaken et al. (2019) point out that deradicalization involves more than a mere reversal of the radicalization process. In such cases, the individual in question would revert to the initial point of radicalization that laid the groundwork for his

or her extremist convictions. Koehler (2013; 2016) highlights the complex and often time-consuming nature of deradicalization processes emphasizing that deradicalization is neither a singular moment nor a linear development. His detailed analysis of international deradicalization and disengagement programs shows that these are highly individualized processes and that there is not a "one-size-fits-all"-approach. The implementation of deradicalization and disengagement practices significantly varies from country to country depending on several factors such as government policies and funding conditions, the extent to which programs are evaluated, or if state of the art research is considered (Koehler, 2016).

In the case of Germany, a nationwide network of preventive and interventive programs has been established over the past decade, offering counseling to individuals at risk of radicalization and people who have radicalized as well as to relevant reference persons and institutional actors to support processes of deradicalization and disengagement (Trautmann & Zick, 2016; Freiheit et al., 2021; Michaelis & Kemmesies, 2022). These counseling programs aim to achieve a dissociation from respective Islamist ideologies and groups. Core objectives of secondary and tertiary P/CVE deradicalization and disengagement practices are to break the commitment to Islamist groups and ideologies on an affective, pragmatic, and ideological level. On an ideological level, the counseling of radicalized individuals encourages critical reflection on Islamist world views and actions; on a pragmatic level, radicalized individuals receive support in coping with everyday tasks and in developing career and educational perspectives; on an affective level, emotions and needs are dealt with and social reference systems outside the Islamist scene are established. (Rabasa et al., 2010; Koehler, 2013). Two empirically based systematizations of deradicalization and disengagement practices in Germany, depict in detail that for this purpose, the focus of counseling approaches varies (Waleciak, 2021; von Lautz et al., 2023b). Some programs work rather confrontative towards an ideological reappraisal, focusing on religious and political discussions. Others omit any ideological confrontation, stressing that the clients first and foremost need to experience acceptance (von Lautz et al., 2023b). Common features of these programs are that they provide support in life management (self-organizational, socio-economic, and psycho-social support) and many programs see it as an imperative to apply a systemic approach to

strengthening social, relational, and structural contextual elements within the client's social environment. (Waleciak, 2021; von Lautz et al., 2023b).

Discrimination and stigmatization as disruptive factors in processes of deradicalization

The effects of discrimination on processes of deradicalization and potential implications for casework have not been sufficiently investigated in comparison to the genesis of radicalization. There is still a large lack of empirical findings on how processes of deradicalization and disengagement work and what role P/CVE programs play in this matter (Kober & Junk, 2023). As the results of a systematic literature review of post-2017 research on deradicalization and disengagement by Morrison et al. (2021) show, discrimination due to rather general characteristics such as the individuals' ethnicity or the Islamic faith is usually not explicitly identified as a (disruptive) factor. The same applies to collective grievances. Taking a closer look at deradicalization programs and practices, Kober (2017, p. 249, AT) states, based on a systematic literature review of the evaluation of measures in the field of action, that "there are practically no analyses of the course of problems and processes of failure". This clearly shows an underrepresentation of analyses on how the unchanged discriminatory social conditions, which according to the literature on radicalization may have given impetus to a cognitive opening to Islamist ideologies and groups, are dealt with in deradicalization and disengagement practices. However, concerning stigmatization the review of Morrison et al. (2021) shows that stigmatization related to previous involvement in extremist activities can be a factor that hinders the objective of social reintegration. The stigma is described as a factor that extends to the family, including the children, and represents an obstacle to building a new, positive identity.

Since the systematic review by Kober (2017) only few evaluations dealing with the effectiveness of deradicalization and disengagement practices in Germany have responded to the research desideratum. In an evaluation report of a deradicalization program, Möller (2018) points out that discrimination can be a potential disruptive factor in counseling processes. This is similarly reflected in the research of Emser et al. (2022a) which, based on interview-generated primary data on deradicalization processes, found that during phases of reorientation "setbacks can also be triggered by experiences of discrimination" (Emser et al.,

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2022a, p. 66, AT). Another evaluation report by Karliczek et al. (2023) addresses the issue that experiences of discrimination can come to light in biographical-narrative conversations with the clients, which may require a more in-depth examination. In this regard, also Möller (2018) asserts that existing resentment and ongoing experiences of discrimination in society should be addressed. Shifting the perspective on the environment, counselors may raise awareness of prison staff, teachers, and social workers about the negative implications of discrimination on the target groups of P/CVE programs (Möller, 2018; Emser et al., 2022a).

Taking the stigma of past offending into account, Karliczek et al. (2023) emphasize that it may be necessary to sensitize the environment of those willing to deradicalize

> which helps to ensure that people who on an institutional level have frequent contact with people who are distancing themselves [from Islamist ideologies and groups] do not have a stigmatizing or discriminatory effect, and thus do not set back a distancing process (Karliczek et al., 2023, p. 90, AT).

Further, the results of an analysis based on (group) interviews with counselors (Emser et al., 2022b) indicate that law enforcement and counter-terrorism measures can stigmatize those willing to deradicalize in the long term, for example by assigning them the status of a "potential offender" ("Gefährderstatus") and conducting high-profile investigations against them of which the public might become aware. "If, for example, a raid takes place at the employer's premises or in the home, this also has a massive impact on the client's future" (Emser et al. 2022b, p. 134, AT). Therefore, in addition to sensitizing the environment and relevant actors, the analysis shows that counseling efforts aim to strengthen clients' capabilities in coping with their respective negative experiences (Emser et al., 2022b). Additionally, Möller (2018) points out that even the fact that counselors make contact with the individuals concerned can be interpreted as a form of stigmatization "as some of the clienteles are already exposed to considerable processes of exclusion, such perceptions must be avoided as far as possible due to their counterproductive effect" (Möller, 2018, p. 110, AT).

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Methods

The empirical data for this paper consists of a (n25) qualitative guide-based interview study with experts from secondary and tertiary level P/CVE programs.

Interview guidelines

The interview guidelines were divided into the following general thematic sections:

- The structural framework of the counseling activities
- The process of turning towards Islamism
- The operations of and professional approaches to deradicalization and disengagement

Concerning these sections, the interviewees were asked about the following topics, among others:

- Success factors for deradicalization
- Disruptive factors in deradicalization processes / reasons for an (early) termination of the counseling process

Sampling

The choice of interviewees followed the principle of theoretical sampling, aiming to maximize the potential theoretical knowledge value (Döring & Bortz, 2016). In consultation with the expert advisory board, composed of German social science experts (professors in the fields of social work, sociology, theology, and (religious) education) and P/CVE practitioners who draw on many years of experience in counseling radicalized individuals[3], the field of action was narrowed down to secondary and tertiary prevention and intervention programs (Ceylan & Kiefer, 2018). As a recruitment strategy all relevant programs to be found on the *MAPEX-Platform* (MAPEX, n.d.), which systematically lists prevention and intervention programs in Germany, were contacted via e-mail. The same procedure was applied to the

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[3] Link to the advisory board: https://www.forschungsverbund-deradikalisierung.de/projekt-distanz-1.

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database *Datenbank: Prävention von Islamismus & Beratung* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, n.d.), and in addition, several open online searches were carried out.

Diverse institutional affiliations, professions, and main areas of work were considered in the selection of the interview partners from secondary and tertiary prevention: 16 of the interviewees worked in programs for civil society organizations; four worked in security agency exit programs; three worked in governmental P/CVE programs without any connection to the security agencies. Three experts worked at security authorities, primarily in charge of case coordination.[4] The experts' professions and academic backgrounds were predominantly in the fields of social work, pedagogy, religious studies, Islamic studies, and Islamic theology.

Data collection

The collection was carried out between September and December 2021, with some interviews conducted via video call due to COVID-19 restrictions and some in person. For this purpose, counseling programs were visited throughout the country and on-site meetings were held on the premises. All interviews, ranging from one to three hours, were recorded with a voice recorder and transcribed in accordance with an adapted version of the transcription rules of Kuckartz (2010).

All participants were informed in advance via a written information sheet about the proceedings of the research project and gave their consent prior to the interview. They were also informed that they could revoke their participatory consent at any time without giving reasons and without disadvantages. All meetings followed the respective local health regulations.

Method of analysis

First stage of analysis: For the analysis of the data material, techniques oriented toward the qualitative content analysis of Mayring (2015) and Kuckartz (2016) were adopted. In a first full assessment of the data an initially a-priori deductive category system mainly

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[4] One interview was conducted with two experts. The interviews with the three coordinative security agency actors are not quoted directly with regard to counseling clients, however, they were included as a relevant factor in the contextual understanding of P/CVE practices.

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drawing on the interview guidelines was integrated into a codebook. The categories most relevant to this article "success factors for deradicalization / disruptive factors in deradicalization processes / reasons for an (early) termination of the counseling process", were then supplemented by inductive categories throughout a circular coding process. With regard to the coding unit, it was established as a criterion that its meaning should remain comprehensible even outside of its context. The coding process was then carried out by two of the authors, who had advanced training in qualitative analysis. As a criterion of reliability, a pretest was conducted to strengthen inter-coder agreement. The method of "consensual coding" (Kuckartz, 2016, p. 211, AT) was employed in two full interviews. Both interviews were coded separately, and the researchers then compared them and discussed whether the respective text passages were assigned to the same categories. The same procedure was applied to the entirety of the data based on random samples. Additionally, particularly critical text passages were marked and cross-checked by both researchers. This process led to an extension of the a-priori deductive category system by the inductive (sub)categories "discrimination / stigmatization / counseling approaches taking discrimination and stigmatization under consideration".

Second stage of analysis: For further analysis thematic summaries and abstractions were created for each interview (Kuckartz, 2016). On the basis of interview-related thematic matrices created in this course, category-based analyses were carried out within as well as between main categories and subcategories (Kuckartz, 2016; Mayring, 2015). The aim was to abstract and systematize patterns and contextual factors to decoct the experts' (interpretive) knowledge. By interpreting and comparing the interviews, the subjective dimensions of the experts' knowledge were reconstructed and conceptualizations of implicit and explicit knowledge were elaborated. In addition to technical and experience-based knowledge, interpretive knowledge, including the "subjective relevancies, rules, perceptions, and interpretations" (Bogner & Menz, 2001, p. 484; AT), was of particular interest in the following, analytically attained by abstraction and systematization.

Results

<u>Disruptive Effects of discrimination and stigmatization on processes of deradicalization and disengagement</u>

Regarding the sample, all actor groups interviewed highlighted discrimination and stigmatization as significant challenges in their P/CVE efforts. There were few discrepancies in the general assessment and description of the disruptive effects of discrimination and stigmatization in between the groups. This led us to present the results in a cross-sectional perspective on the thematic domains. However, distinct patterns emerge between the actor groups in depicting certain activities as catalysts for stigmatization. On the one hand, there is a clear pattern among counselors[5] working for civil society and state institutions without links to the security authorities to take a predominantly critical stance towards all security authority investigations and interventions. On the other hand, while problematizing negative effects, the practitioners with security authority affiliation tend to also highlight positive security impacts as well as the importance of pressure deriving from investigations and interventions as a motivating factor to participate in exit programs. Hence, it is important to note that the analysis is focused solely on presenting negative impact factors in a cross-sectional manner, it does not depict positive influences and does not claim to fully capture underlying attitudes towards actions taken by security authorities.

To differentiate the statements of the various actors in terms of institutional affiliation and fields of work, the quotes are categorized as follows:

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[5] Refers to the 23 interviewees who are professionally active in counseling clients within the framework of a P/CVE program.

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Tab. 1

Interviews with counselors from civil society P/CVE programs	Civ_Counselor_ I_ [number of the interview], [number of the passage]
Interviews with counselors from security agency exit-programs	Sec_Counselor_ I_ [number of the interview], [number of the passage]
Interviews with counselors from governmental P/CVE programs without any connection to the security agencies.	Gov_Counselor_ I_ [number of the interview], [number of the passage]
Interviews with security authority case coordinators	Sec_Coordinator_ I_ [number of the interview], [number of the passage]
Note: The translation of the cited interview segments was carried out after the analysis by the authors	

Discrimination as a disruptive factor for social stabilization

In the cross-section of interviews, discrimination is predominantly described in connection with mechanisms of exclusion and devaluation towards Muslims and people with a migrant background. This is predominantly explicated based on the clients' individual interactional experiences and on an institutional-structural level. Perceptions of collective discrimination against Muslims and migrants are also presented as disruptive factors, which are again confirmed by individual experiences. Overall, the interviewees see discrimination as a constant in the lives of people who are read as migrants or Muslims because of their appearance and describe respective negative experiences as a hindering factor and a frequent source of setbacks in the processes of deradicalization and disengagement. Given the persistence of negative social experiences, it is a challenge for the counselors to dismantle Islamist narratives that are linked to experiences of discrimination.

The greatest difficulties arise when addressing the *objective of an ideological reappraisal and dismantlement.* Practical experience has shown that "even if we [...] talked about it before, about discrimination, how you can perhaps deal with it, [...] and such mindsets are somewhat interrupted, but the next day something comes up again, then it goes back again" (Civ_Counselor_I_12, 66). Ideological setbacks may occur

> if the young person encounters things in the process of turning away that serve the old narratives again, for example, that he is disadvantaged, treated differently, feels treated unfairly. These are always obstacles. That happens all the time, of course. You are

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constantly bombarded by negative factors in the exit process that are hindrances (Civ_Counselor_I_19, 85).

On an ideological as well as a pragmatic level perceptions or actual experiences of disadvantage in all matters relating to the socio-economic situation and personal development are described as hindrances. "Of course, socio-economic factors play a role, which also serves this narrative, because as a Muslim you don't get the job or you don't get the apartment or you earn less and so on" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 27). Concerning their personal development, many clients have the impression that they do not get a chance to prove themselves, "for example, if you don't get an apprenticeship opportunity […], this makes it more difficult to question your own worldview when you actually have it confirmed" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 60). With numerous experiences of racism in their everyday life, it is also difficult for clients to differentiate whether they are being discriminated against or rejected for other reasons. In this course, the self-image and self-esteem of the individual are repeatedly damaged, reinforcing the perception that "I am not accepted here as a human being and am not equal to other people. I am not seen, I am not heard, I don't belong, I get less, be it attention, but also money, opportunities, and chances to participate" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 27). On an emotional level "that really adds up, as we can hear from various statements, it is simply an enormous burden" (Civ_Counselor_I_5, 38), which sometimes makes it hard to break away from the Islamist groups' inclusive atmosphere that produces a sense of belonging.

Stigmatization due to past offending

In the cross-section, the interviewees identify stigmatization particularly in two categories of cases: people whose Islamist radicalization resulted in criminal prosecution and possibly imprisonment, and cases of returnees from the civil war zones in Syria and Iraq. The stigma of former affiliation with an Islamist group leads to experiences of rejection in the "personal environment, experiences of discrimination from outside, 'you were once in the scene, you are an Islamist', so stigmatization" (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 117). Associated social anxieties become apparent when clients ask themselves, "if I give it all up now, what am I doing it for? Will society truly give me a second chance? Because the experiences they have

had so far are sometimes negative. So, society is sometimes also an obstacle" (Sec_Counselor_ I_8, 82). Social integration in mainstream society proves difficult "if stigmatization prevails, [...] shame and denial of needs" (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 117) shape the lives of clients. One counselor illustrates this with a case in which the client

> moved to a new city and [X] wanted to go to a mosque there, so, and [X] was also known and it was clear that if [X] went to the mosque now, it would also have consequences for the religious community of the mosque. We spoke to the mosque community, their board, beforehand. And there was a clear attitude that for them it was not desirable that our client enters this mosque, because the community was worried that it could have negative consequences for them. On the one hand, this would result in a high police presence, which in turn would lead to people who live or work nearby, some of whom are already very hostile towards the mosque, also making a lot of Islamophobic statements towards the people who go to the mosque, also verbal attacks, sometimes even attacks against the mosque in the sense of destroying buildings, so that the community said to itself that if everyone found out that this particular person was going to this mosque, it could have negative consequences for the community that are not justifiable (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 16).

The case reveals a lasting stigma, as the religious or spiritual needs cannot be met in a liberal mosque and its respective community. Hostile anti-Muslim and anti-Islam agency in the neighborhood exacerbate the situation, resulting in the unwillingness of the religious community to accept a former extremist, due to external pressure not to appear negatively. This may increase the client's appeal to accessible Islamist actors presenting themselves as religious authorities in the social area or on the internet. Stigmatization also occurs in other areas that are crucial in promoting social stabilization. Challenges in pursuing hobbies, such as joining a sports club, are mentioned. Regarding the cases of (former) jihadis returning from Syria and Iraq, one counselor observed that "a sports club then thinks three times about whether or not to let a returnee from Syria who has been sensationalized in the media play on their soccer team" (Sec_Counselor_ I_8, 74).

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Investigations and interventions of security authorities as a driver for stigmatization

In cross-section, the interviewees highlight the impact of security authorities' investigations and interventions as drivers for stigmatization. Most interviewees recognize the essential need for and rationale behind criminal prosecution; however, a distinct contrast among actor groups emerges in their perspectives on the problematic nature of early interventions. Specifically, when dealing with cases involving mere suspicions of Islamist radicalization, for example, due to critical comments or behavior of adolescents in school, some counselors of civil society P/CVE programs strongly criticize the impact of early interventions. One counselor notes that

> any police intervention or inquiries or any kind of presence in the lives of the young people was super obstructive, of course. So, if they're already seen as conspicuous by the police and then they somehow get visits from the police or something. That backfires completely (Civ_Counselor_I_12, 66).

Another counselor elaborates in this context that the individual concerned might not understand why investigations take place and might contextualize it as an attack on their religious orientation. In some cases, the radicalization process then (re)gains momentum and the individual concerned might "go full-on into this particular [Islamist] group that had already predicted this before" (Civ_Counselor_I _5, 76). Counselors and case coordinators working for security authorities differentiate drivers for stigmatization to a lesser extent oriented upon the time of intervention. In the case of the counselors, this is quite logical, as they work primarily in the field of tertiary prevention. Both do, however, view contacts made by the security authorities, critically against the backdrop of often "bad experiences of discrimination" (Sec_Coordinator_ I _13, 34) on the part of the police. If the individuals concerned now once again experience "supposed arbitrary treatment by the security authorities, [...] then this actually tends to confirm their old patterns of behavior" (Sec_Counselor_ I_8, 126).

According to the interviewees, contact made by security authorities can also have a negative impact on the relationship of trust between the counselors and the clients. One counselor reports

> that we had already worked the case and that disengagement was already apparent. [...] Then the security authorities came and said 'you, you, you, we just want to tell you again that we consider you to be a threat, by the way.' And that, of course, destroyed our work of trust from one moment to the next (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 68).

People with an unsecured right to stay in Germany feel this pressure in particular, as "there have been some discussions about deporting people who don't hold German citizenship. At this point you can't make any further progress with deradicalization" (Civ_Counselor_I_20, 89). In addition, people with a migrant background not only "experience racism more often and have language barriers, but are now also confronted with this very, very high police presence and therefore also everyone around them" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 12).

Risks of disclosure and exposure to the public

As indicated before, the interviewees report of negative impacts of security authority investigations potentially leading to a disclosure and exposure to the public. Three counselors explicitly warn about the effect of security authority investigations on the clients' social environment,

> if from the point of view of the security authorities, a house raid is now necessary, a threat assessment, perhaps even a really big raid, that the nursery has to know, that the school has to know, the workplace, and so on. This can massively jeopardize the process of reintegration (Civ_Counselor_I_20, 23).

It can be inferred from the sequence that the case-related approaches by the security authorities to institutional actors have a far-reaching negative influence on the clients'

educational and professional development. With regard to exit programs connected to the security authorities, one counselor emphasizes that negative implications must be weighed up when making contact "because we are an exit program and [...] a [security] authority, that has a certain weight and then talking to a 14-year-old schoolgirl, you have to think about that" (Sec_Counselor_ I_ 1a, 37). In this context, the interviewee describes that to gain access to potential clients in the school context, they usually work together with other programs that attract less attention.

Five interviewees note that if information on the case is leaked to the press – "sometimes it's handled very, very, very carelessly and […] it leaks out to the press" (Civ_Counselor_I_5, 80) – (re)building a stable social environment for the clients may prove difficult.

> This happened in a small town, and the whole family had the rug pulled out from under their feet, because they were then branded as terrorists throughout the district. It's very typical of Islamism that it's incredibly difficult to start again (Sec_Counselor_ I_ 1b, 100).

Difficulties are thereby evident among those being investigated as well as their families.

Negative implications of disclosure and exposure to the public are also seen in the workplace, "if I'm at work and after three months the boss doesn't want me in the end because he doesn't want to look bad in front of business partners because of my bad press" (Sec_Counselor_ I_ 8, 92). This aspect is explained in more detail by another interviewee with regard to individuals who have participated intensively in deradicalization programs and have made significant progress.

> We do have cases where someone has really put a lot of work into the process and is really on the right track and has finally found a job. And then information on the individual comes out and everything falls apart again. So, stories like that are incredibly frustrating for someone who has really made the effort over the years to

build up a new environment, to deal with their problems and their crimes. They have served their time for their crimes, perhaps they have not even been prosecuted. And then a lot of it is due to an attitude of indignation on the part of those around them […] this makes good exit work difficult because these frustrations then keep coming back" (Sec_Counselor_ I_1b, 90).

The segment shows that, even though the individual's willingness to change is a key step in the deradicalization process, the social environment and how it deals with the client's past is described as a decisive factor for sustainable social stabilization – a factor to which most interviewees ascribe a pivotal role in the process of deradicalization.

How P/CVE programs address the issues of discrimination and stigmatization

This segment specifically pertains to the 23 interviewees engaged in counseling activities related to P/CVE programs.

Raising awareness in the personal reference system and on an institutional level

Considering stigmatization and discrimination as potential disruptive factors for deradicalization processes, raising awareness within the personal reference system (e.g., family, friends, partners) as well as on an institutional level (e.g., schools, sports clubs, social and security authorities) is a common approach with the aim of reducing experiences of discrimination and stigmatization as a push factor towards Islamist groups and ideologies and thus enabling long-term advancement of social, socio-economic and emotional stabilization of the clients. One counselor describes that regarding the personal reference system and institutions it should be analyzed:

Is stigmatization taking place or not? And is it possible to be reintegrated into the family, school, and peer group instead of being further marginalized and finger-pointed at? Are the agents of socialization, for their part, prepared to accept someone back into their midst, to offer support, to offer structures that make it possible to

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develop perspectives and provide orientation? How is the trust [of clients] in the agents of socialization and do they offer a platform for identification as a basis for not having to identify further with extremist groups? In other words, do they offer everything that was perhaps also promised, at least superficially, in the extremist group? Can I find that there again? (Sec_Counselor_ I_ 22, 81).

For the social reference system of the clients, the interviewees name the family environment as the main target group whose awareness of the influences of discrimination and stigmatization should be raised. In the family, "a lot of work on attitudes is also required [...] with the parents" (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 58). In suspected cases of Islamist radicalization, it can be important to deal with Islamophobic attitudes in the family reference system. In some cases, the impetus for radicalization dynamics can be taken away when counselors

talk to the mother of a convert, for example, who is completely freaking out because he has now converted and thinks: 'Oh, he's going to be a terrorist tomorrow, because she has no idea about it at all and was socialized in a very anti-Muslim way herself' (Civ_Counselor_I_12, 52).

In counseling the family reference system, prejudices and Islamophobic attitudes can be reduced and a resulting acceptance of the clients' religiosity may counteract the consolidation of an Islamist dualistic friend-foe mindset. Friends and partnerships are also named by the interviewees as significant influencing factors in processes of turning away from Islamism. However, there are no case-related accounts in the interviews that explain the extent to which the clients' friends can be specifically activated in counseling, in the sense of raising awareness for stigmatization and discrimination.

Institutional awareness-building is predominantly focused on schools, where counselors work preventively to sensitize individuals regarding the potential influence of "attitudes towards religion and right-wing extremism amongst teachers" (Gov_Counselor_ I_9, 64). Teachers are trained in how to deal appropriately with radicalization "instead of falling into fearful demonizing labeling" (Gov_Counselor_ I_9, 88) of their students. In terms

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of content, the focus is partly on "anti-discrimination as prevention of radicalization. So it's very much about Islamophobia. It's also about social contexts. It's also about dealing with our own prejudices and stereotypes" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 4). From a cross-institutional perspective, an interviewee summarizes:

At some point, we started to simply invalidate this highly emotionally charged [...] hegemonic security discourse - being Muslim is seen as radical - [...] to objectify it, [...] to give professionals the confidence to act in the context of [institutional] structures (Civ_Counselor_I_25, 14).

Regarding the risks of disclosure and exposure to the public, an interviewee explains in a case-related account, which factors should be considered in developing strategies in dealing with the associated challenges:

The question is how does the school deal with it when background information about, for example, a child of the index person [the person considered an Islamist extremist or former] becomes known? That affects schools, but also daycare centers. I had a case here in [city] where it was reported anonymously to the daycare […]. Then the relationship of trust between the facility and the mother was ruined. And at the same time, the other parents were in an uproar, they wanted to take their children out of the group or the terrorist child should leave. Then such institutions also need to be strengthened. You have to clarify what is actually true and what is not. You have to work out a kind of plan together, how to talk to the other families – how to talk to family members of the other children, so to speak – how to approach them, how to approach the media if there is media interest, which thankfully wasn't the case. But yes, these are points that you have to go through. Who do you inform beforehand that something like this could happen? Or does the mother want to keep it a secret? Or the parents? Which I personally find difficult because it will come out at some point. But you shouldn't tell the whole school yet. So the range of issues is pretty broad (Civ_Counselor_I_23, 61).

The segment underscores that strategies for addressing post-disclosure stigmatization may involve the restoration of trust among clients, institutional actors, and other social contacts. Clients may benefit from training on effectively presenting their background in public, while institutional actors require assistance in navigating such situations. Other general strategic thoughts might include pre-disclosure considerations of a proactive notification of relevant actors to avert or to a certain extent mitigate the outrage portrayed in the case.

Further, building on the notion that a case-related involvement of security authorities may lead to stigmatization of the individuals concerned, a civil society counselor explains that their program proactively seeks contact with the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (domestic intelligence agency) in order to "explain why the behavior of the police in this case is very difficult for our mission" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 12). The aim is to give the security authorities an understanding of the impact of their investigations and their actions on the social lives of the clients. A counselor with security authority affiliation uses internal communication channels between the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution to discuss the potentially negative effects of pressure through investigations and interventions. The key question here "is always how you confront people and what opportunities do you give them? Both on the part of society and on the part of the security authorities" (Sec_Counselor_ I_8, 126).

Client-centered approaches in counseling

In counseling those willing to engage in the process of deradicalization, emphasis is placed on reducing prejudices against state institutions. A counselor observes that often these are individuals who feel "discriminated against, structurally discriminated against. Although there is no discrimination at all. Simply because they don't know their way around the regular structures" (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 98). Hence, they are supported on a pragmatic level, for example, when submitting job applications or applying for welfare in order to minimize experiences of rejection and disappointment. "Then you look over it and say no, you don't write an application like that or it's the wrong department or something" (Civ_Counselor_I_15, 98). Further, prejudices are dismantled in counseling by seeking

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contact with representatives of institutions that are portrayed as the enemy by Islamist ideologies and groups, in one case the counselor "was able to involve a young man in the police sports association" (Civ_Counselor_I_5, 56) and the client "then suddenly had completely different experiences, [...] completely different relationships [that emerge through] […] contacts and encounters" (Civ_Counselor_I_ 5, 56). In this way, positive counter-impulses to the "fatalism that it doesn't matter anyway and that you have your role in society anyway, you are perceived as such and then fulfill [this role] accordingly" (Sec_Counselor_ I_22, 101) are created through experiences that prove Islamist stereotypes wrong.

With regard to the experiences of discrimination that are frequently expressed in counseling sessions, "comments like, 'yes, it was clear that I would somehow not find an apartment because I am a Muslim'" (Civ_Counselor_I_12, 46), counselors note that they need to be sensitive to the fact that the clients "live in a society that has pronounced anti-Muslim resentment" (Civ_Counselor_I_12, 46). One interviewee states that the objective of deradicalization in itself needs critical examination. "People are supposed to distance themselves, to deradicalize themselves, but at the same time many things are not made possible. So, people are not treated equally, people don't have the same opportunities and yet they are all expected to behave in the same way" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 60). As these circumstances will not change in the short to medium term, the counselor sees it as a central task of deradicalization and disengagement practices "to prepare these young people, to strengthen them, to empower them and not always push them down and make them feel small" (Civ_Counselor_I_16, 60). Putting it more positively, another counselor describes that P/CVE programs should help the clients understand that

> there is a justification for feeling this or that way and that there are disadvantages on the one hand, and on the other, there are also good things. That is roughly the path you have to take to make it clear that you should and can and are allowed to complain about disadvantages, but that doesn't mean you have to be an extremist (Sec_Counselor_ I_1a, 52).

Consequently, taking into account the factor of discrimination, it is a central goal of counseling, according to the counselor, to acknowledge negative circumstances on the one hand and to develop positive views of society on the other. For this reason, six counselors describe that ideological reappraisal is rather achieved through the experience of acceptance than through confrontative religious or ideological discussions. Further comments by the interviewees indicate that ultimately a normatively idealized way of life based on democratic core values does not reflect the social experience of the clients and that a reflection on motives within an acceptance-oriented approach is advisable. Aspects to which Islamist ideologies refer, such as "injustices towards the Muslim world, on the world stage, [...] problems with exclusion" (Sec_Counselor_ I_1a, 71) should be recognized in order to "then gently discuss them further" (Sec_Counselor_ I_1a, 71). This follows the assumption that experiences of discrimination continue to be made during and after deradicalization processes and that clients must therefore gradually learn to "somehow endure this microaggression" (Civ_Counselor_I_25, 36) without falling back into Islamist explanatory patterns. If the clients have committed criminal offenses or their Islamist activities have been reported in the media, some counselors differentiate this perspective once again. Then, the clients should learn "to take responsibility for the crimes and see it as an after-effect" (Sec_Counselor_ I_8, 92) as a means of dealing with setbacks resulting from their own actions.

Discussion

The cross-section of interviews has shown that particularly individual experiences of discrimination and stigmatization hinder processes of deradicalization and disengagement on key ideological, pragmatic, and emotional levels. Influences of collective discrimination driven by anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiment in society are mentioned to a much lesser extent by the interviewees. However, these can have a significant influence on the perception of social belonging (Bozay, 2017; Aslan et al., 2018; Akkuş et al., 2020). In a broader perspective, the example of a former extremist seeking to join a liberal mosque illustrates how a synthesis of individual and collective discrimination builds up social pressure on Muslims in Germany. External threats in the form of social hostility and potential attacks limit the

possibilities of accepting a fellow believer into their community. This indicates a secondary or associative form of stigmatization known from health-related research (Strangl et al., 2019), which in the case of Islam(ism) is driven by individual and collective societal discrimination and stereotypes. A study by Ostwaldt (2020b) shows that Islamic communities often do not participate in P/CVE programs or implement them themselves out of fear to strengthen the narrative that radicalization has its origins in Islam or that radicalization is encouraged in mosques rather than prevented. The study also indicates that some mosques fear that they might become the object of surveillance, if they accept individuals willing to deradicalize among their communities (Ostwaldt, 2020a).

Regarding the security authorities, it is imperative to recognize that the focus on disruptive influences introduces a measure of distortion to a comprehensive assessment of their activities. Although the accumulation of negative influences gives the impression that investigations and interventions by the security authorities are generally viewed negatively, the significance of the statements is only related to the potential for disruptive influences and should be interpreted accordingly. For further assessment of the results, it should be taken into account that the different actor groups have partly different motivations for and against problematizing the activities of the security authorities. Firstly, application-oriented research has shown that civil society programs receive fixed-term project funding while security authority programs are directly linked to the state as a provider of funds. This produces competitive tensions in between the actor groups (Baaken et al., 2020a). Secondly, a previous analysis of the data set which contrasted institutional structures, affiliations, and the resulting perspectives on casework and coordination revealed that civil society programs distinguish themselves professionally from approaches to casework guided by security interests. This delineation is underscored by an emphasis on their professional positioning within the domains of pedagogy, education, and social work. (von Lautz et al., 2023c). As can be seen in the examples of counselors proactively approaching security authorities or colleagues from the police and intelligence communities to caution against the stigmatization potential of investigations and interventions, the value of pedagogical, educational, and social work approaches is negotiated against the primary approaches of security authorities. While civil society counselors in this context observe a trend towards securitization (Baaken et al., 2020a;

Figlestahler & Schau, 2020; von Lautz et al., 2023c), skepticism towards the primary approaches of security authorities appears to be ingrained in their professional attitudes in the nexus of delineation attempts as well as the struggle for recognition, meaning funding and consideration of their approaches. Conclusively, one could critically argue that the sharpness of the problematizations by civil society counselors indicates a bias due to an underlying agenda. This is, however, contradicted by the counselors in security authority programs describing similar stigmatization potentials and thus to a certain degree criticizing the primary approaches of their own institutions.

Considering the manifold pushes and pulls of deradicalization and disengagement (Altier et al., 2017), experiencing discrimination and stigmatization may (re)vitalize pull-effects towards Islamist ideologies and groups by confirming their narratives. Push-effects may revive if the goals of social, economic, and emotional stabilization are jeopardized by experiences of disadvantages, that result in difficulties, such as making social connections, finding employment, a (perceived) lack of opportunities, and damages of self-esteem. In this regard, the introductory outlined insights from empirical studies, evaluation reports, and gray literature clearly intersect with the results presented. Our findings support the conclusions of Möller's (2018) evaluation report that experiences of discrimination can trigger setbacks in the deradicalization process. Furthermore, the findings largely align with the conclusions of Morrison et al. (2021) regarding stigmatization due to past offending as an obstacle to social reintegration. Also, the findings of Emser et al. (2022b) are supported concerning potential (long-term) stigmatization effects deriving from security authority action.

As an Indonesian study on the stigmatization of women of convicted Islamist terrorists shows, respective labeling and social exclusion are also observed in Islamic countries (Rufaedah & Putra, 2018) and are therefore not a particularly German or "western" phenomenon. Taking a differentiated look at the different levels of stigmatization determined within specific target groups, Koller (2021) and Benz (2023) observe that the high level of public attention for the target group of returnees considerably enhances the risk of stigmatization. According to the security authorities, approximately 40 % of the more than 1150 German foreign fighters who took out to Syria and Iraq have by now returned to Germany and are of high interest to security authority investigations as well as those of the

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public prosecutor's office (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2023). Benz (2023) stresses that in such cases coordination and management measures should not only exhibit a high degree of awareness of potential risk situations, but also for the special needs of returnees and their families who, as our analysis indicates, are often affected by secondary or associative stigmatization. Generally concerning individuals whose Islamist radicalization resulted in criminal prosecution an interview study of Moeller & Pelzer (2023) highlights profound experiences of stigmatization and exclusion in the case of Islamist extremist offenders (prisoners and ex-prisoners). Noteworthy, criminological research draws on a long-standing scientific discourse pertaining to the effects of social isolation and stigmatization of ex-convicts (Bazemore, 1998; Maruna et al., 2004). Adjacent to the concept of deradicalization, perspectives on the desistance of criminal offenders – presented here very briefly without a thorough dissection of desistance theories – provide relevant insights into the challenges of working with convicted Islamists. Building on Maruna and Farrel's (2004) dichotomous concept of primary desistance, referring to periods or intervals of nonoffending, and secondary desistance that shifts the behavioral focus to an underlying process of identity change, in which the former offender considers themselves a "changed person" (Maruna & Farrel, 2004, p. 175), McNeill (2016) highlights the dimension of tertiary desistance, which refers to the necessity of social recognition as well as community support and gaining a sense of belonging. Discussing the causes to move away from terrorist groups and behavior against the backdrop of the conceptual framework of desistance, Marsden (2016) argues that institutional actors and communities play a crucial role in the reintegration of former offenders, as the willingness to disengage (compared to primary desistance), the path to a new self-image (compared to secondary desistance), are intertwined with the willingness to accept the former offender into the community (compared to tertiary desistance). Cherney and Koehler (2023) emphasize considering the latter external influences on the desistance from violent extremism that "it must be acknowledged that community rejection and social stigma with being a former extremist, and the spill over affect this can have on other social supports […] can close off many opportunities to action change." (Cherney & Koehler, 2023, p. 7-8). In turn, they see positive potential in signaling the clients that their process of identity change is recognized by formal agents. While this article has focused on the disruptive influence of

security authorities, positive potentials of counselors proactively engaging with security authorities, mentioned only briefly in the results section, should be explored in more depth in application-oriented research – in particular, the question of how the various stakeholders can work together to positively label "change achievers".

Leaving the sphere of criminological discussion von Lautz et al. (2023a) and Gesing (2023) depict that those who have expressed mere sympathy towards Islamist ideologies and groups are also susceptible to facing stigma, as their social circle or institutional actors may not view their participation in P/CVE programs positively. Instead, they might interpret this engagement as proof of them being a threat. The same applies when security authorities have openly investigated an individual, and even though they have not come to negative conclusions, the person is still labeled an "extremist" or "potential terrorist". To mitigate concerns regarding P/CVE programs and, consequently, participation in them, Clubb et al. (2021) suggest that P/CVE programs should proactively engage in communication with the public and media by implementing a compelling public relations strategy.

For practical and process-related considerations on the effects of discrimination and stigmatization, the deradicalization and disengagement models of Barrelle (2014) and Silke et al. (2021) offer relevant points of reference. Barrelle's (2014) *Pro-Intergration Model,* based on 22 interviews with former extremists, encompassing various ideological backgrounds, as well as theoretical literature and further empirical research, is an explanatory attempt to describe how in the long run disengagement and reintegration might be achieved. Following the idea that disengagement is not a linear process, her model names five domains ("social relations, coping, identity, ideology, and action orientation" Barrelle, 2014, p. viii) in which change should occur in the sense of an "identity transformation in which an individual moves from being outside to becoming a part of broader society" (Barrelle, 2014, p. 204). On a thematic sub-level Barrelle (2014) explicates regarding the domain of "social relations" that having positive or neutral relationships with previously despised individuals indicates a sense of pluralism which is considered conducive to disengagement. As our study has shown, this is similarly formulated as an objective in deradicalization and disengagement practices, however, discrimination and stigmatization are identified as potential disruptive factors. In the case of discrimination, only an acceptance-oriented approach (von Lautz et al., 2023b)

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formulates comprehensive answers to the social injustice implied. Regarding the significance of the acceptance-oriented approach adopted in casework, an interview study by Brown et al. (2021) on the (de)radicalization of former extremists indicates that stigmatization and the feeling of being targeted for one's beliefs, may (re-)vitalize radicalization in non-mainstream information environments. Hence, the researchers suggest that addressing alternative viewpoints to extremist beliefs in a nonconfrontational manner appears to be more promising than direct challenges. Intersecting the domain of "coping" clients are supported in learning how to accept and cope with individual and collective discrimination. Additionally, with regard to stigmatization due to past offending, clients are supported in learning to accept and cope with the stigma by taking responsibility for their own actions. For the domain of "identity", Barrelle describes a process of identity transformation and reconnection with society. "A core aspect of disengagement is a realignment of personal and social identity as they reconnect with society" (Barrelle, 2014, p. 107). Our study has shown that generally discrimination and stigmatization can be of hindrance to this endeavor, damaging the clients' self-image and self-esteem. Hence, deradicalization and disengagement practices put a strong focus on raising awareness within the personal reference system and on an institutional level. This is methodologically most adeptly taken up in the systemic counseling approach, which supports the clients within their unique network of connections and communication frameworks by strengthening structurally contextual, social, and relational factors (Waleciak, 2021; von Lautz et al., 2023b).

Another model essentially describing disengagement and deradicalization as a process of identity transformation is the *Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation from Terrorism and Violent Extremism* by Silke et al. (2021). Building on the systematic literature of Morrison et al. (2021), the model conceptualizes disengagement and deradicalization as processes influenced by multiple factors, gradually evolving into a transformed identity shaped by the interplay of "actor, psychological and environmental catalysts" (Silke et al., 2021, p. 3) and filters ("[dis]trust, perceived opportunity and security concerns" (Silke et al., 2021, p. 7)) that influence favorable or unfavorable outcomes. In line with our findings, the interplay of "actor catalysts" (e.g., family, friends, and program interventions), environmental catalysts (e.g., mosques and schools), as well as the filter of "perceived opportunity" (e.g.,

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education and jobs) should be highlighted in dealing with discrimination and stigmatization. Drawing on the phoenix model, raising awareness among the actor catalysts in conjunction with pragmatic support that may lead to an improved perception of opportunities, appears to be an advisable course of action. However, more evaluation of deradicalization programs and practices is needed to arrive at conclusions on their actual impact.

Conclusion

In summary, the study has shown that discrimination and stigmatization may be of hindrance to P/CVE programs' objectives of social and socio-economic stabilization, potentially setting counter-impetus to the detachment from Islamist groups and ideologies. Discrimination in the form of disadvantages in the labor market, the education system, or racist acts can cause setbacks in deradicalization processes by complicating the clients' integration into mainstream society. Further, stigmatization due to past offending or a former affiliation to Islamist groups can lead to experiences of rejection in all areas of social life. This is evidenced by difficulties in joining sports clubs, religious communities, or educational institutions – reservations and fears of being associated with a former extremist are often prevalent. In this context most of the interviewees see investigations and interventions of security authorities as a driver for stigmatization, warning of the risks of disclosure and exposure to the public. Notably, in the cross-section stigmatization occurs particularly in two categories of cases: firstly, returnees from the civil war zones in Syria and Iraq, and secondly, people whose Islamist radicalization resulted in security authority investigations and possibly criminal prosecution/imprisonment. Deradicalization programs address discrimination and stigmatization on several levels. One central approach is to raise awareness in the personal reference system (e.g., family, friends, partners) and on an institutional level (e.g., schools, sports clubs, social and security authorities), to reduce discrimination and stigmatization as influential factors for (re)turning to Islamist groups and ideologies and enable long-term advancement of social, socio-economic and emotional stabilization. Further, client-centered approaches are applied in counseling to overcome clients' prejudices against state institutions by supporting them on a pragmatic level. Here, a core objective is to prevent clients from

perceiving disappointments prematurely as a form of discrimination or stigmatization. This is implemented through support in dealing with governmental institutions, for example, avoiding setbacks due to formal mistakes when applying for social benefits. From another angle, counselors try to reduce prejudices following the contact hypothesis that interaction in a positive setting, for example, sports or hobbies, may change the clients' attitudes towards individuals that represent institutions designated as "the enemy" within Islamist ideologies and stereotypes. As the clients live in a society that continues to discriminate and stigmatize, one of the goals of counseling is to prepare the clients for the associated challenges in life and to empower them. In this context, some counselors argue for an acceptance-oriented approach as some of the content that is taken up in Islamist ideologies addresses real social grievances that affect the clients' daily lives. Hence, clients should gradually learn to somehow endure the social conditions without falling back into Islamist patterns of explanation.

Limitations

Concerning the criterion of reliability, a pretest was applied to identify discrepancies and inconsistencies in the coding procedure drawing on the method of "consensual coding" (Kuckartz, 2016, p. 211, AT). However, with two coders working on the material assigning deductive categories to its content and inductively forming categories, a complete inter-coder agreement cannot be claimed (Kuckartz, 2016). Numerical measurements to test the intercoder reliability were not carried out, which could have provided more detailed information about deviations in the deductive procedure.

Since due to COVID-19 restrictions the interviews were partly carried out by video call, the interviewers might have missed out on non-verbal cues. The translation from German into English was done after the analysis, which limits the risk of changes in content due to translation. Nevertheless, minor distortions of language-specific semantic and interpretive values cannot be ruled out. Further distortions were counteracted by experienced interviewers and interpreters, the use of interview guidelines, and a methodologically sound evaluation method.

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A significant limitation of the article is evident in the ratio of practitioners from civil society (16) and governmental P/CVE programs without security authority ties (3) to the (4) practitioners from security authority exit programs and the (3) coordinators with security authority affiliation interviewed for an additional perspective. Civil society actors are thus clearly overrepresented, which leads to a distortion in the cross-sectional representation. This does, as outlined in the discussion section, potentially influence the narration on negative impacts of security authority investigations and interventions. The expert perspective of the interviewees is subject to further limitations. Conclusions drawn from the interviews are mostly based on knowledge gained from interactions with clients, their social reference system, or case-related coordination tasks. The data is therefore in part second- or third-hand knowledge that gives detailed insights into cross-case experiences from counseling and coordinating casework but does not fully reflect the individual experiences of discrimination and stigmatization. Further research should shed light on the self-referential experience of participants in deradicalization programs in order to obtain a holistic picture of the influences of discrimination and stigmatization.

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