Radicalization and De- Radicalization of the Youth against Violent Extremism in Murang'a County, Kenya

Catherine Wambaire Mbuthia[1,] Dr John Omboto, PhD[2]

[1&2] *Department of Security and Correctional Science,*
Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya;

Abstract

Radicalization of the youth and young adults has been a big problem in Kenya. A study conducted to investigate its causes in Muranga County, also sought to identify de-radicalization initiatives used to combat violent extremism among Al-Shabaab returnees, the hurdles to de-radicalization programmes and the stakeholders involved in the de-radicalization processes. The study was prompted by the current change in de-radicalization techniques that have been institutionalized in Kenyan anti-terror efforts. The study employed a descriptive survey approach, which included the use of questionnaires and interviews. The key informants involved in the de-radicalization programme such as the police officers, National Government Administrative Officers (NGAO), and religious leaders were involved in the study. SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data while thematic analysis helped in extracting meaningful information from qualitative data. The study established that vocational training, rehabilitation, demobilisation and integration, and mentorship programs have all been implemented in Murang'a County to tame the vice. Other initiatives in the county are Uwezo Fund, Kazi Kwa Vijana (KKV), and National Young Service (NYS) that provide critical skills and training to the youth. It was also established that local, regional, and international stakeholders have been critical to the effectiveness of de-radicalization efforts. However, lack of proper financial, technological, and human resources affects de-radicalization process in the County. The programs in place were also found to be insufficient in addressing the fundamental issues that the youngsters face. The study suggests that existing de-radicalization and community reintegration programs should be optimized in order to increase their efficacy and establish public trust in the programmers' goals. This paper presents some of the findings of the study.

Key words: Radicalization, De-radicalization, Violent Extremism, Kenya.

I.   Introduction

Radicalization can be defined as the process by which individuals who are usually young are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages a movement from moderate and mainstream beliefs towards extreme ones. While being radical or even having radical thinking is by no means problematic in itself, it becomes a threat to peace and security when one espouses or engages in violence. On the other hand according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the term violent extremism is defined as "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals (Speckhard & Shajkovci, 2017).

The problem of radicalization and violent extremism is a global threat which affects several countries (Uk et al., 2021). Virtually all planned or actual terrorist attacks which occur globally, are carried out by radicalized youth and young adults with extremist ideas (Kirui, 2020). Traditionally, military strategies have been used in countering terrorism owing to their ability to weaken the military capacity of terrorists. However, the failures of militaristic counter-terrorism strategies that are rooted in a narrow traditionalistic interpretation of security have led scholars and security practitioners to buttress the need for the exploration of non-military strategies.

Such non-military strategies include soft measures such as de-radicalization that are advanced to tackle the underlying push and pull factors engineering terrorism in order to obtain a long-term peaceful outcome (Sahgal & Kimaiyo, 2020). The utility of de-radicalization programs has been hinged upon the rationale that there is a need to deconstruct radical and extremist ideologies in order to open the door for rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists and other agents of violent extremism (Batool et al., 2021).

Prior research on extremism has identified a host of psychological, emotional, material, and group-based factors that are potentially important drivers of individual radicalization (Kirui, 2020). According to

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Speckhard and Shajkovci (2017) poverty, perceived marginalization and the role being played by enablers of radicalization are among the discernible factors explaining radicalization. These factors that are inherent in most societies and usually categorized as „push" or „pull" factors contribute significantly to recruitment especially of vulnerable groups most of which is done in orphanages, learning institutions, on-line platforms, prisons and other recruitment hubs where terrorists tend to target (Kirui, 2020). However, taken on their own, none of these factors have been shown to lead to extremist behaviors. Instead, radicalization is best understood as a set of complex causal processes in which multiple factors work together to produce extremist outcomes (Jensen et al., 2018).

Based on the reasoning of Jensen et al., (2018) and Kirui, (2020), de-radicalization can broadly be understood as the process of changing one's internal beliefs and denouncing radical ideologies. In comparison, some scholars have defined de- radicalization as the process of changing an individual's beliefs and embracing mainstream values by rejecting radical or violence-oriented ideologies (Mmakwe, 2022). De-radicalization seeks to minimize crime and prevent radicalism by implementing understanding through various approaches, behaving in mutual respect, acting according to rights and obligations, and loving peace (Rustan et al., 2018).

At states' level, there are formulated de-radicalization programs aimed at equipping and building capacity of traditional security forces to counter and combat ideological underpinnings and roots of violent extremism and terrorism (Ekanem & Asukwo, 2022). The programs begin by helping less radicalized persons to recant and abandon their violent ideologies. This is achieved through creating doubts and misgiving within the hierarchy of terrorist organization, and rehabilitation of imprisoned and immured terrorists (Gill et al., 2020). Broadly, the de-radicalization approaches can be classified as societal, security, ideological and political with key strategies such as engagement, rehabilitation, peace amity, serenity, tolerance and reconciliation. They also involve acceptance and approval at the level of general masses and community (Ejaz, 2022).

II.   Literature Review: Youth Radicalization and De-radicalization Programs in Kenya

The rapid technological innovation can be cited as one of the key drivers of radicalization particularly among the younger generation (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). Terrorism and extremist groups are extremely reliant on the internet technologies and platforms such as Facebook to influence the process of radicalization (Ejaz, 2022).

Cultural construction is another important factor in radicalization. Researchers have identified a correlation between cultural construction of Islamophobia and radicalization through conventional and traditional media. Islamophobia, or the hatred and fear or prejudice against the Islam religion and Muslims in general has played a role in the radicalization process (Rustan et al., 2018).

However, in Kenya, social factors have largely contributed to radicalization of the youths. According to Kariuki (2019), the growth of home-grown terrorism can be attributed to economic factors such as unemployment and high poverty rates. In addition to this, some youths view the government as a cause of their economic misery, thus they have capitalized on this to join terror groups. In Murang'a County, high poverty levels has encouraged the proliferation of crime in the county as a source of income (Mmakwe, 2022). As such, poverty and unemployment rates in the county are drivers of radicalization of the youths.

Serious de-radicalization programs of terrorist extremists in Kenya can be traced to 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi and the terror attack experienced at Garissa university. These two attacks led to many deaths, and local youths were suspected to have been involved. The Kenyan government thus initiated several programs to de-radicalize the local youths (Sahgal and Kimaiyo, 2020). The government have also issued amnesty to the youth who have return from Al-Shabaab since 2015 (Ekanem & Asukwo, 2022). This is meant to persuade violent activists to desist from their activities. There has also been a campaign by respected clerics to portray Islam as a religion of peace (Ekanem & Asukwo, 2022). 'Sakhima' scheme has also been employed. It entails using trained individuals to get into the internet and raise questions that prompt more positive thinking. The common themes tackled include motivation, financial incentives and support, levels of success and family or social group involvements (Batool et al., 2021).

III.   Theoretical Frame Work

The study employed three theories in explaining the causes and impact of radicalization. First, Social Control Theory which posits that people commit crimes or break the rules and regulations of their society when they have not developed attachments to the society, lack social and self-control, are not heavy involved in conventional activities of the society and when they do not share in the moral beliefs of the society guided the study. Secondly, the study used 3N Model of Radicalization approach which argues that beliefs of an individual significantly influences the groups that they associate with and ultimately the action that they are willing to take. This model was used to illustrate how an individual's pre-existing emotional and psychological well-being are likely to influence their likelihood of being radicalized or willingly join extremist and terror groups. Finally, General Strain Theory was also helpful to the study. The theory argues that factors such as economic and

geographical marginalization, inequality in education, unemployment, poverty, and discrimination are likely to cause stress and ultimately encourage one to participate in criminal activities, including joining extremist groups.

IV.   Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design, and used questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The descriptive survey design allowed the researcher to measure, categorize, compare, analyze, and interpret the acquired data. It also aided the researcher in gathering information on the currency of the phenomena under consideration so reliable conclusions were be drawn from the data acquired. It allowed the researcher to measure, categorize, compare, analyze, and interpret the acquired data. As such, it was crucial in examining the barriers facing Al-Shabaab returnees, de-radicalization and reintegration initiatives in Murang'a County.

Whereas Murang'a County has a total population of 1,056,640 people, according to the 2019 census, only a tiny proportion of the population is affected by the problem of radicalization and recruitment of young persons into terrorist organizations. As a result, the study had sample size of only 12 respondents. The key informants were 4 individuals who are involved in the de-radicalization programme. They were from the police office, National Government Administrative Officer (NGAO), and a religious leader. In total the study had 16 research participants. The research employed non-probability sampling techniques to select the research participants. The 12 respondents were individuals who had been radicalized, they were chosen by convenient sampling technique. This sampling technique, as explained by Ekanem and Asukwo (2022), is a non-probability sampling technique that allows the researcher to engage the participants known to have desired characteristics.

The 4 key informants selected were professionals with experience and knowledge on de-radicalization and re-integration programs adopted by the government of Kenya and the community. Purposive sampling technique was used to select one police officer, one member of National Government Administration Officers (NGAO), one probation officer and one religious leader. Purposive sampling, as explained by (Ejaz, 2022), is used to select participants that are most likely to yield useful and appropriate information.

The participants came from the county's seven sub-counties of Kangema, Kiharu, Mathioya, Kigumo, Kandara, Maragwa, and Gatanga. Thematic analysis was used to extract meaningful information from the qualitative data. While quantitative data was statistically analysed using SPSS and presented in tables, diagrams and percentages.

V.   Data Presentation and Analysis

The following is a discussion of the findings of the study.

### 5.1 Drivers of Radicalization among the Youths in Murang'a County

Parameter	VGE	GE	ME	SE	NE	Mean	Σ
To what extent does unemployment motivate radicalization among youths in Murang'a?	46.7%	33.3%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	**1.73**	0.785
To what extent does social factors motivate radicalization among youths in Murang'a?	66.7%	16.7%	10.0%	3.3%	3.3%	**1.60**	1.037
To what extent do political factors motivate radicalization among youths in Murang'a?	63.3%	16.7%	13.3%	6.7%	0.0%	**1.63**	0.964
To what extent do social institutions such as schools and religious institutions act as the recruitment centers for youths to al Shabaab?	20.0%	20.0%	23.3%	30.0%	6.7%	**2.83**	1.262

(Researcher, 2022)
VGE- Very Great Extent   GE- Great Extent ME- Moderate Extent   SE- Small Extent   NE-   No Extent

The study sought to establish the determinants of radicalization among the youth and young adults in Murang'a County. Responses to survey questions about the motivational causes of radicalization in Murang'a county were sought as shown in the table above. The majority of respondents reported that social institutions such as schools

and religious organizations played little role (30.0%, mean = 2.83) in recruiting adolescents for al Shabaab. Their opinions, however, differed (std dev = 1.262).

Further, the researcher sought to identify the most vulnerable individuals in the population to radicalization/ recruitment into terror groups. The findings reveal that age is an important factor, with those aged less than 35 years most susceptible at 16.66% of respondents.
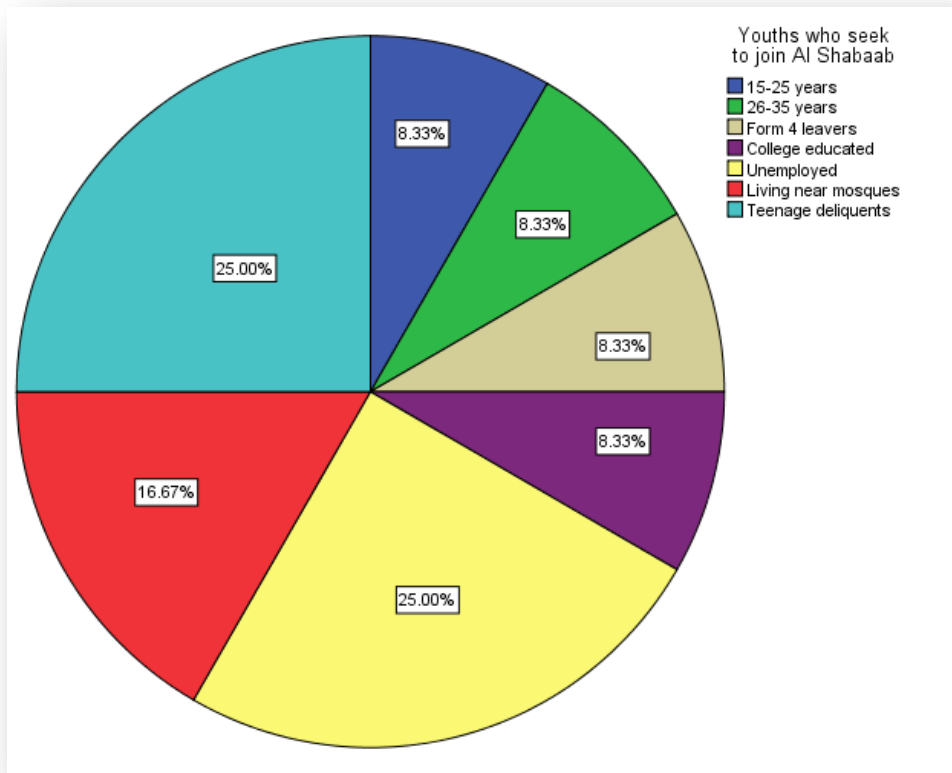
Researcher, (2022)

As shown on the figure above, on education, those with lower education level (below college education are more vulnerable. However, unemployment (25%) and teenage delinquents (25%) are most susceptible to recruitment into terror groups. Also, 16.67% of the participants opined that the youth who live close to the mosques are most vulnerable to recruitment into terror groups.It was also established that the rise of *Mungiki sect* within Murang'a county which substantially discouraged Christianity and other religions influenced individuals to join Islamic religion. From the key informant's perspective, it was clear that youths in Murang'a county (just like elsewhere in Kenya) are mainly forced into joining extremist groups such as Al Shabaab due to economic reasons.

5.2 De-radicalization Programs against Violent Extremism in Murang'a County
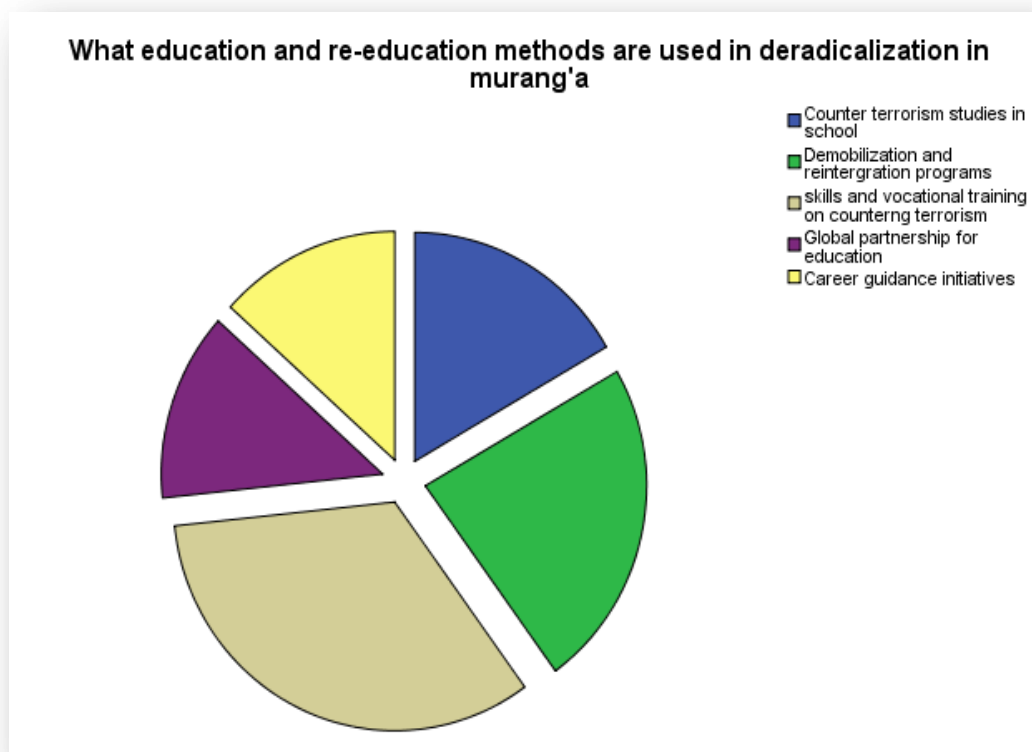
The study established that there are several programs employed in deradicalization in Murang'a County. They include involvement of the youth in educational activities such as engagement in vocational trainings which was rated 41.67% in the table below.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Counter terrorism studies in school	2	16.67	16.67	16.7
	Demobilization and reintegration programs	3	25	25	40.0
	skills and vocational training on countering terrorism	5	41.67	41.67	73.3

	Global partnership for education	1	8.33	8.33	86.7
	Career guidance initiatives	1	8.33	8.33	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	

Researcher, (2022)

Another mechanism is demobilization and reintegration programs (25%). Counter-terrorism education in schools came in third place with 16.67%. while global partnerships and career guidance initiatives came last with a proportion of 8.33% each.

Researcher, (2022)

Further, the study established that there were mentorship programs used as a measure to deradicalize and integrate youths in Murang'a County. The study also established that there are in place community-focused de-radicalization efforts. However, it was established that inadequate execution and lack of a suitable manner of measuring the results are the two main challenges facing de-radicalization projects. This was associated with amnesty programme introduced in 2015. The amnesty programme was however, positively accepted by civil society organizations, returnees, and impacted communities (Downie, 2018).

The other challenges facing de-radicalization of Al-Shabaab returnees in Murang'a County established by the study are lack of   financial, technological, and human resources which delays de-radicalization operations. Other factors include lack of trust towards the security authorities as the Al-Shabaab returnees are afraid of coming forward to lay down their weapons.

VI.   Conclusion and Recommendations

The study recommends that radicalization of the youth in Murang'a can be minimized through proactive steps such as youth empowerment, job creation, poverty alleviation, and rebuilding the social bonds of family groups. There is also a need to tackle the problem of alcohol and substance misuse. The government should also put in place proper re-integration initiatives, and create programs that empower the youth. Further, there should be in place psychological counselling programs for the returnees.

Finally, the de-radicalization initiatives must be evaluated on a regular basis. This will help identify existing bottlenecks, discontinue dysfunctional programs, and introduce new models and procedures that are in

accordance with the requirements of returnees. Furthermore, evaluation allows de-radicalization initiatives to be fine-tuned to the aims, wants, and conditions of stakeholders and local communities.

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