



Tunisia ETTYSAL

Quick Facts

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The project measured youth risk based on 12 factors at the individual, peer, family and community levels.

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The project trained 12 psychologists and sociologists in the family counseling model to help families reduce risk factors among youth.

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After a year of family counseling, 95 percent of youth were no longer at risk of engaging with violent extremism.

In Tunisia, youth are vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist organizations.

High levels of youth unemployment, drug use, grievances with the government and an expected influx of terrorist fighters returning home from foreign conflicts have put Tunisia's youth population at risk of engaging with these violent groups. To build resilience against violent extremism in the face of these converging factors, an intensive, evidence-based pilot project called ETTYSAL used a proven family counseling program with 100 high-risk youth in two communities. The results were impressive.

Strengthening families

ETTYSAL, an Arabic word for “reaching out,” focused on identifying and changing risky behaviors, as well as strengthening protective factors, for youth in vulnerable neighborhoods in the cities of Manouba and Kasserine, two hotspots of violent extremist organization presence and recruitment.

The 18-month pilot project was funded by the U.S. State Department and implemented by Creative Associates International.

During 12 months, a dozen trained counselors worked with youth one-on-one and in conjunction with their families to identify and change those risky behaviors that have been linked to engaging in violent extremism, such as antisocial tendencies, impulsive risk taking and neutralization of guilt.

Counselors also worked to strengthen family cohesion, a sense of belonging and parents’ role in shaping youths’ behaviors,

focusing both on supporting the family within the home and building youths’ connection to older generations.

This family counseling intervention is at the core of Creative’s family systems model for secondary prevention, which has shown significant results in reducing risk of gang joining among youth in Central America. The model views the family as youths’ best asset and strongest support system in building resilience to violence.

Data-driven design and results

To determine which youth were eligible for counseling and measure their risk over time, ETTYSAL adapted the Youth Services Eligibility Tool (YSET), which has been used in Los Angeles, Latin America and the Caribbean to measure youth risk for engaging with gangs. Analyses conducted with support from local university partners

validated that the existing nine risk factors for gang joining used in the YSET still apply in the context of violent extremism. The diagnostic was then further adjusted to fit Tunisian youth, and risk factors including social vulnerability and religious extremism were added to the tool.

An initial pool of 600 youth were tested for risk using YSET, of which 100 presented six or more factors that qualified them to participate in the program. Participating youth were measured again halfway through the counseling and again at the end of the program using the adapted YSET to see if and how their risk levels had changed.

Results showed that religious extremism alone is not a major driving factor of youth joining violent extremist organizations. Rather, a combination of individual behaviors and peer and family influences contribute to radicalization that leads to violence. By addressing these factors, the family systems model allows youth and their families to better resist the draw of violent extremist organizations and pull factors such as a sense of inclusion, identity and purpose.

In its short lifespan, the ETTYSAL project made a significant impact in the lives of these youth and their families. After completing the family counseling, 95 percent of participants were no longer eligible for the program, meaning they showed fewer than six risk factors and were no longer at high risk for engaging with violent extremism.



100

at-risk youth in Manouba and Kasserine participated in a year of family counseling.



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