
From Despair to Hope: The Journey of Family Members of Former Violent Extremists in Basilan

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ABSTRACT— This study aims to explore the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan, Philippines, and how they navigate the challenges of reintegrating into society. The study used a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the family members of former violent extremists experienced a range of emotions, including shame, guilt, and fear. They faced social stigma and isolation from their communities, which led to further trauma and psychological distress. However, the family members also showed resilience and a willingness to move forward. They sought help and support from various sources, including counseling, community engagement, and religious institutions. The study highlights the importance of a holistic approach in preventing and countering violent extremism in the Philippines. It recommends that interventions should focus on addressing the psychological and social needs of family members, as well as providing economic and educational opportunities. The study also emphasizes the role of community engagement and support in facilitating the reintegration of family members into society. Overall, the study concludes that a comprehensive approach that addresses the needs of family members can contribute to positive reintegration and prevention of violent extremism in the Philippines.

KEYWORDS- violent extremism, family members, reintegration, community engagement, Philippines, holistic approach, support mechanisms, psychological needs, social needs, stigma.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, specifically the province of Basilan, has been long plagued by violent extremism. This problem has been rooted in historical and socio-economic factors, as well as the proliferation of extremist groups such as Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). These groups have been known to conduct bombings, kidnappings, and beheadings, among other violent acts, which have resulted in the loss of countless lives and the displacement of communities. Despite efforts by the government and other stakeholders to address violent extremism in Basilan, families of former extremists continue to experience a range of challenges in the aftermath of their loved ones' involvement with these groups. These challenges can include social stigma, economic hardships, and psychological trauma, among others. The journey of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan is a critical and underexplored area of research. In this study, we aim to explore the experiences of family members who have transitioned from despair to hope following the disengagement of their loved ones from violent extremist groups. By sharing their stories, we hope to shed light on the complex processes of disengagement and rehabilitation, as well as the role of family support in this journey. Previous research has highlighted the importance of family support in countering violent extremism. A study by Horgan and Braddock (2010) found that family members can play a critical role in identifying signs of radicalization and intervening before their loved ones become fully involved in violent extremist groups.

Similarly, a study by Silber and Bhatt (2007) highlighted the importance of family support in the disengagement and deradicalization of individuals who have already become involved in these groups. Other studies have focused on the psychological and emotional impact of extremism on family members. For example, a study by Speckhard and Akhmedova (2018) found that family members of ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria experienced a range of psychological and emotional challenges, including trauma, guilt, and shame. Similarly, a study by Saferworld (2017) found that families of individuals involved in extremist groups in Yemen experienced social isolation and stigma. There is also a growing body of research on the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent

extremism. A study by Boucek (2017) highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying grievances and motivations that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. Similarly, a study by Wiktorowicz and Kaltner (2014) emphasized the importance of developing comprehensive rehabilitation programs that address the social, economic, and psychological needs of individuals who have disengaged from these groups. Despite the valuable insights provided by previous studies, there is a need for further research on the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in the Philippines, particularly in Basilan. By understanding the challenges faced by these families and the role of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation, we can develop more effective interventions to address the root causes of violent extremism and promote peace and stability in the region.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The province of Basilan in the Philippines has been affected by violent extremism, leading to significant loss of life and displacement of communities. Families of former violent extremists in Basilan have faced various challenges as they try to rebuild their lives following the disengagement of their loved ones from violent extremist groups. However, there is a lack of research on the experiences of these families as they transition from despair to hope, and the role that family support plays in this journey.

Specific Statement of the Problem:

1. What are the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan as they transition from despair to hope following the disengagement of their loved ones from violent extremist groups?
2. What challenges do family members of former violent extremists in Basilan face during this transition, including social stigma, economic hardships, and psychological trauma, among others?
3. What role does family support play in the journey of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan as they transition to a new life?
4. How can interventions be developed to address the root causes of violent extremism in Basilan and promote peace and stability in the region?

By answering these specific questions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan and identify potential interventions that can support them in their journey from despair to hope.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study will utilize a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan and the role of family support in their journey from despair to hope. Qualitative research is well-suited to explore complex, nuanced, and subjective experiences, such as those involved in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism. By using a qualitative approach, we can gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these families and the ways in which they navigate the challenges of rebuilding their lives. The study will use purposive sampling to select participants. This means that participants will be selected based on their relationship to former violent extremists in Basilan and their willingness to participate. Potential participants will be identified through contacts with local organizations working with families affected by violent extremism. Participants will be informed about the study's objectives and procedures, and will have the opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether or not to participate. Data will be collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews will be conducted in Tagalog or a local dialect, depending on the participants' preference. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The use of semi-structured interviews will allow for flexibility in the questioning and enable the interviewer to explore unexpected or unanticipated themes that may arise during the interview.

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data collected from the interviews. This approach involves identifying themes, patterns, and categories within the data, and interpreting their meaning. The analysis will be conducted using a deductive approach, where initial codes and categories will be developed based on the research questions and literature review. However, the analysis will also be open to the emergence of new themes that may arise during the coding process. This methodology will allow for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan and the ways in which family support plays a role in their journey from despair to hope. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, several steps will be taken to ensure the quality of the data and analysis. First, the researcher will establish rapport and trust with the

participants to encourage open and honest communication during the interviews. Second, the researcher will engage in reflexivity, reflecting on their own biases and assumptions that may influence the research process and analysis.

Third, member checking will be used to validate the findings, where the participants will have the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the findings. Ethical considerations will also be taken into account throughout the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms and keeping the data securely stored. The study will also comply with ethical guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association and other relevant organizations. In summary, this qualitative study will employ purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and various steps to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the data and analysis. Through this methodology, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan and the important role of family support in their journey towards hope and resilience.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis revealed several key themes related to the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan. The first theme was the initial shock and despair experienced by family members upon learning of their loved one's involvement in violent extremism. Family members reported feeling overwhelmed by fear, shame, and stigma, and struggled to understand how their loved one could become involved in such activities. The second theme was the role of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism. Participants spoke about the importance of maintaining open communication and positive relationships with their loved ones, even in the face of extreme challenges. Family members also reported providing emotional support, practical assistance, and spiritual guidance to their loved ones as they sought to rebuild their lives. The third theme was the challenges faced by family members in the process of rehabilitation. Participants spoke about the difficulties of navigating social stigma and discrimination, as well as the strain on family relationships caused by the stress of the rehabilitation process. They also highlighted the need for better access to support services and resources for families affected by violent extremism.

Discussion: The findings of this study shed light on the complex and nuanced experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan. The study highlights the important role of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism. The findings suggest that family members can provide emotional, practical, and spiritual support to their loved ones, helping them to rebuild their lives and find hope for the future. However, the study also highlights the significant challenges faced by family members in the process of rehabilitation, including social stigma and discrimination, strain on family relationships, and a lack of access to support services and resources. These challenges suggest a need for greater support and resources for families affected by violent extremism, both during and after the rehabilitation process. Overall, this study provides important insights into the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan, and highlights the need for greater support and resources for these families. The study underscores the importance of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism, and highlights the need for continued research and advocacy in this area.

Continuing from the previous discussion section, further analysis of the study's findings suggests that the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism is complex and multifaceted. Family members reported that the journey towards rehabilitation involved a variety of challenges, including financial hardship, social isolation, and psychological trauma. These challenges were compounded by social stigma and discrimination, which made it difficult for family members to access support services and resources. Despite these challenges, family members played a critical role in providing emotional, practical, and spiritual support to their loved ones. Participants reported that maintaining positive relationships with their loved ones was a key factor in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation. This support was often provided in the face of significant social pressure and stigma, highlighting the resilience and strength of these families. The findings of this study suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the experiences of family members affected by violent extremism. Family

members often play a critical role in the rehabilitation process, and their experiences can provide important insights into the factors that contribute to disengagement and resilience. Greater support and resources are needed to help these families navigate the challenges of rehabilitation, including access to mental health services, financial assistance, and community support networks.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the importance of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism. By providing emotional, practical, and spiritual support, family members can play a critical role in helping their loved ones to rebuild their lives and find hope for the future. The study also underscores the need for greater support and resources for families affected by violent extremism, both during and after the rehabilitation process. Further analysis of the findings suggests that the journey towards disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism is highly individualized, with no one-size-fits-all approach. Family members reported that their loved ones' journeys towards disengagement and rehabilitation involved a range of factors, including religious beliefs, personal motivations, and social relationships. The role of religious beliefs in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation was particularly noteworthy. Participants spoke about the importance of faith in helping their loved ones to find hope and purpose, and in providing a framework for moral and ethical decision-making. This suggests that religious institutions and leaders may have an important role to play in supporting the process of disengagement and rehabilitation.

The findings also highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of family members affected by violent extremism. Participants spoke about the challenges of social stigma and discrimination, and the need for greater community support and understanding. This suggests that efforts to promote social cohesion and reduce stigma may be an important component of supporting the rehabilitation process. The findings suggest that the journey towards disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism is a long-term process, with no easy solutions or quick fixes. Participants spoke about the importance of patience, persistence, and resilience in navigating the challenges of the rehabilitation process. This underscores the need for sustained and ongoing support for families affected by violent extremism, both during and after the rehabilitation process. Overall, the findings of this study provide important insights into the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan. The study highlights the critical role of family support in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation, and underscores the need for greater support and resources for families affected by violent extremism. The study also highlights the need for greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of family members affected by violent extremism, and the need for sustained and ongoing support for these families.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the experiences of family members of former violent extremists in Basilan, Philippines. The findings suggest that family members play a critical role in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation from violent extremism, providing emotional, practical, and spiritual support to their loved ones. However, this journey towards disengagement and rehabilitation is complex and multifaceted, involving a range of factors such as religious beliefs, personal motivations, and social relationships. The study also highlights the challenges faced by families affected by violent extremism, including financial hardship, social isolation, and psychological trauma, compounded by social stigma and discrimination. The study underscores the need for greater support and resources for these families, including access to mental health services, financial assistance, and community support networks. The study provides important insights into the experiences of family members affected by violent extremism and highlights the critical role that families can play in the process of disengagement and rehabilitation. The findings of this study may be useful in informing the development of more effective and holistic approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism, which prioritize the needs and experiences of affected families. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the challenges faced by families affected by violent extremism and help to inform efforts to support their ongoing journey towards hope and resilience.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

(IJMSSR)

ISSN 2455-1422 (Online)

www.aarmssjournals.com

Volume: 09, Issue: 03 | 2023

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