



THE YOUTH SUSCEPTIBILITY TO RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN TAWI-TAWI

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how susceptible are the youths in Tawi Tawi to radicalization and violent extremism by assessing how they view Islam and identity as a Muslim, and their views on concepts related to radicalization and violent extremism. Specifically, the study would like to verify on the range of factors at different levels (micro, meso and macro) and stages (individual, social and global/national) that pull and push the youths into falling prey to violent extremism. The research employs a descriptive study design, with a mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative approach gathers information on the following: (a) a brief socio-demographic profile of the Muslim youth respondents, (b) their views on Islam and identity as a Muslim and the sources (c) levels of knowledge, beliefs and supportive ideas on the concept of radicalization and VE and the (d) identification of the given sets of numerous factors at different levels of influence posing the risk of susceptibility toward radicalization and VE. The understanding of the youth in the concept of radicalism will affect the performance and response towards recruitment of radical groups. Since the majority of the youth considered it as negative it can be concluded that there are higher chances that they will not join upon recruitment. Therefore, proper education information about it is helpful in empowering the youth.

Keywords: Youth Susceptibility, Radicalization, Violent Extremism, Tawi-Tawi

INTRODUCTION

Concerns for terrorism have been raised in this part of the country given the number of violence already conducted, the latest being the Dawla Islamiyya aka Maute group responsible for the Marawi City siege this year that caused havoc with the death of hundreds and displacement of thousands, as well as destruction of properties. The Maute Group under brothers Ustadz Omar Maute and Ustadz Abdullah Maute were initially allied with the MILF with further ties of affinity and consanguinity among members, organized in 2012 and pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015. In recent years, other extremist groups coming out of Mindanao who have already vowed allegiance to the international terror group, the Islamic State (IS) included the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters (BIFF), the Ansar Dawlah Fi Filibbin, as well as new groups like Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines and Khilafah Islamiyah Mindanao (KIM) (Banlaoi, 2016). The ASG considered the most violent of the extremist groups is operating in the southern Philippines claimed to promote jihadist agenda for an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi provinces). The group currently engrosses terror

activities for financial profit through kidnappings for ransom, bombings, assassinations, and extortion (1). The group continues to operate with a small band of males, mostly young and from the economically depressed islands (2). The Philippines has already been holding a long bid with rebellion since the 1970's and the effectiveness of peace talks with secessionist factions like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) has been challenged (Adam, et al, 2014). The vagueness and deferment in implementing the peace agreements have engendered divisions on the ground which plunders the integrity of mainstream revolutionary armed groups who are now perceived by some to support an endless peace process. This appears to smash the Muslim community away from the track to peace, which, in turn, would offer a fertile ground in cultivating violent extremism and more radical views among distrustful rebels and aggrieved youths for losing confidence on the peace process and the sincerity of leaders to essentially implement the signed peace agreement (Quimpo, 2016). It may become emotionally acceptable as an absolute truth among the young people and capturing the hearts and minds of youths who are in the middle of the conflict which will have tremendous potential to attract and indoctrinate them into joining the terror groups as they inspire a strategic blame on the enemy with deceptive exploitation of the injustices happening worldwide. The sets of emotions could affect an individual and associate one's self with victims of violence and as a result, overtime one identifies and feels the suffering and pain of the victim as his own. This phenomenon of "secondary trauma" is defined as a set of symptoms that are analogous to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which include hyperarousal symptoms such as feeling tense and/or having angry outbursts. In a troubled setting, terrorist groups charm the youths by manipulating their weaknesses as outlet of frustration and providing them with a sense of identity, belonging and cohesiveness. Terrorist organizations may have many ways in which they achieve to entice people to their side with "magnets" fascinating young recruits to join their groups. But it is not yet widely known in the academe, policy-making body, the media and the broader public as to the processes by which young persons are driven to join terror groups. A clear understanding of the pull and push factors are vital for a comprehensive grip of terrorist threats stemming from this group for the formulation of an effective counterterrorism policy. In this ground, the authorities are struggling to counter check the motivation that terrorists have gained in winning over the youths as they continue efforts through hard power as the primary method in dealing with this issue. With the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, as well as the crushing of the Maute Group by Philippine government, their numbers and influence are supposedly reduced yet recruitment to these organizations is allegedly still ongoing. The terrorists can look for them, impart, recruit and exploit them for violence with sensitivity in crafting messages and creatively manipulate the various technological channels in reaching out to them. No studies on VE so far have been done in Tawi Tawi perhaps because it is perceived as relatively peaceful and not a home based to VE groups. It is quite possible, that the next battlefield in the struggle against terrorism will not take place on a physical plane but in the mental and emotional spheres of the youth.

METHODS

The research employs a descriptive study design, with a mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative approach gathers information on the following: (a) a brief socio-demographic profile of the Muslim youth respondents, (b) their views on Islam and identity as

a Muslim and the sources (c) levels of knowledge, beliefs and supportive ideas on the concept of radicalization and VE and the (d) identification of the given sets of numerous factors at different levels of influence posing the risk of susceptibility toward radicalization and VE. The qualitative method will search for facts and information on the accounts and descriptions of (a) knowledge from among the ulama, religious leaders and other influential leaders on Islamic concepts, (b) their own insights and understandings on different factors that motivates and making the youth vulnerable to radicalization and VE, and (c) identification of current and appropriate interventions in countering violent extremism contextualized to local setting.

The data collection team will be composed of the researcher himself with one (1) field team leader and four (4) field enumerators who will be organized to conduct data collection in the eight (8) study sites (3 colleges and 5 barangays). The 4 interviewers will also be task as FGD facilitators, as key informant interviewers and one as a documenter. The researcher will also be assisted by field supervisor in data consolidation. Prior to fieldwork, the team will be given an orientation on the purpose of the study and the sampling design. They will be trained in conducting one-on-one interviews with survey respondents using the survey instrument. They will also be oriented on how to conduct and facilitate an FGD and key informant interviews. The conduct of a focus group discussion will be conducted among the religious leaders in Bongao, Tawi Tawi to be facilitated by the members of the field research team. Key informant interviews with individuals who had extensive knowledge and expertise on VE will also conducted in Bongao, Tawi Tawi. The fieldwork will be done during the whole month of March 2018. The researcher will prepare a letter of request address to the Presidents and Heads of the colleges and Chairman of respective barangay LGUs in seeking permission to conduct the study. Consent letter will be prepared, and all teams will be reminded to get the consent of all respondents of the study before conducting data collection activities in the study sites. Another set of letters will also be provided to participants in FGD and KII.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the survey are presented in a thematic narrative form and are supported by interview details. The results of the interview are presented into three parts that include: the understanding of the youth in the concept of radicalization, the susceptibility of youth on radicalization and the responses of the youth in radicalization despite the promotion of peace in the community. These themes illustrated the insights of the participants on radicalization.

Theme 1: The Understanding of the youth in the concept of radicalization.

Radicalization presently is correlated to the terrorism which is a means of expressing dissatisfaction in the government system and wanted to attain change through violence. It also viewed as a manifestation of a strong will to power by a social movement based on a rigid ideology, which restricts individual freedom in the name of collective goals and is willing to realize their goals by any means, including extreme violence and mass murder (Schmid, 2013). The common themes that emerged based on the research questions were subdivided into the following sub-themes: 1.1 Terrorism and Violence The common answers of the participants when asked how they understand the concept of radicalization revealed it is connected to terrorism and violence. Some of the answers are presented in the following discussions: Youth 10 verbalized: "Refers to terrorism such as bombings and assassination to achieve Islamic goals." Youth 6 described radicalization as: "In my own opinion about the concepts of

radicalization is they are the sectors of different kinds of terrorism who are undermining the civilization on different countries.” Youth 2,12 and 15 all shared: “Radicalization is like terrorism.”

According to Ramakrishna (2017) radicalization is mostly connected with the word terrorism since it is a process that has become strongly associated with inflicting fear to the people as a means to gain attention to seek for a change in the political system. Many reports confirmed that the most effective ways the terrorist recruit their members are targeting the youth since they are often easily convinced that oppression should be stopped, and it is the best way to help the oppressed. The understanding of the youth that radicalization is considered as terrorism act showed they look at it negatively. These views often manifest they are not agreeing that is it correct. Since most of the participants answered this then it can be deemed that radicalization is taken as a wrong act that should be avoided.

1.2 Socio- Economic Related

The second theme formulated based on the common answers of the participants described radicalization as a result of poverty and socioeconomic situations. Some of the discussions are presented in the following conversation: Youth 10 opened up: “In my opinion, it is related to money or financial matter is involved that is if they can’t be sent to school it is now the reason to be radicalized.” Youth 15 shared: “Sa mga mahihirap radicalization and sagot sa problema.” (For the poor radicalization is the answer to problems) Youth 12: “It is because of too much poverty and many families problems.” In the study of United Nations (2015) many of the people connected radicalization to poverty. It revealed that because of oppression of the poor many people reacted to violently to attain a change in the system. This is also expressed as a means to achieve justice for the rights of the poor and oppressed. The idea that many considered it because of poverty is alarming since many of the people are currently experiencing poverty. If the youth will not be provided with guidance this might become the easy means to convince, then to radicalization for this will be the option to overcome the difficulties in life.

1.3 Process for Social Change

The common themes formulated based on the answers of the participants revealed discrimination and oppression in the society wherein the unequal distribution of service results to social injustice. Some of the discussions are presented in the following conversation. Youth 11 discussed: “Radicalization is the action or process of causing someone. To adopt radical positions on political or social issues because of social injustice.” Youth 3 shared: “Marami din po kasing bias sa gobyerno kaya may radicalization.” (There are many injustices in the government system resulting in radicalization)

According to Hug (2013) radicalization is one consequence because of social injustice in the society. The When the government failed to address oppression and problems of providing the needs of the people this results in the feeling of anger that can become violent if something terrible happens in relation to it. This often makes a person highly vulnerable to terrorism and radicalization. The injustices that are occurring in the society triggers for emotional support of the people to the oppressed. This often ignites the desire to help and fight for the rights of this individual. This is the most effective tool that can incite an individual to become a member of the radical group. If the youth look at is a right then often they are easily convinced towards radicalism.

Theme 2: Susceptibility of the youth on radicalization.

Their youths are considered susceptible to radicalization because they are not yet mature enough to figure out if their action is correct or wrong. The contribution of guidance of an adult in the development of the ethical concept of the youth in their actions is significant in the responses they will do in the different situations they will meet in their life.

2.1 Intrapersonal

The common themes formulated when the participants were asked on how susceptible are the youth in radicalization majority answered that it is related to their personal ideology and convictions. Some of the discussions are presented in the following discourse. Youth 5 mentioned: "Radicalization occurs when youth lack spiritual guidance and involve by bad influence and involvement in orientation of the people on international terrorism." Youth 11 verbalized: "A person with a narcissistic personality seeking for an attention." Youth 10 shared: "If he believed it is for the good of others, he will do it." In the study of Wolfber (2012) he concluded that youth as they are growing up develop their personal idea about radicalization. If their moral foundation during their growing up years is good, then they can resist the recruitment. However, if their moral support during early years is not good sometimes it contributes to the vulnerability of being convinced to do what is wrong since they do not know the act is not acceptable in society. The importance of the support for the individual coming from the support of their family develops their moral integrity. This can be the greatest element that can provide an individual in doing good.

2.2 Interpersonal

The common theme that was formulated during interview revealed majority of the youth considered the influence of peers and other people around them makes them highly susceptible to radicalization. Some of the conversations are presented in the succeeding discussions. Youth 9 and other youth shared commonly that: "The youth might have a peer or pressure of the Society they are just hiding from and in the community." Youth 8 said: "Yes youth are susceptible because everybody needs social interaction within the group and they will do what others will say to be accepted in the groups or their friends." Youth 7 revealed: "They are too susceptible because, at the young age, they can be isolated, they feel also they don't belong to the group or them. are not appreciated at home instead they relate to friends who might influence them." Youth 11 opened up: "Youth are susceptible to radicalization because it is at their age they tend to find the sense of belongingness. This is if someone motivates them to join the group, they will automatically say yes just to be "in" or gain more friends." In the research of Orban (2017), he identified the influence of friends and other people in the community as factors in influencing the people who are attracted to radicalism. He further expounded the youth are often easily convinced since they have the characteristics to look for friends and be accepted. This becomes the soft point wherein they are convinced by terrorist to join their group through offering friendship and feeling of belongingness.

The susceptibility of the youth in the influence of others in their needs of social belongingness is the susceptibility that puts them at risk. The society should recognize especially the parents and teachers to always inculcate in the mind of the youth the importance of promoting values anchored in spiritual guidance to lead them in the right way in their decisions in life.

2.3 Situational

Most of the youths answered the susceptibility of the youth is related to the different situation in their community and society. The presence of threat and groups recruiting will expose them to higher risk. The influence of social media is also a big factor in the recruitment of the youth in radicalism. Some of the

discussions are presented in the following discussions. Youth 2 mentioned during the discussion that: "If meron presence of extremist groups like Abu Sayyaf in the Community dapat aware yung mga youth para di sila ma influence." (Youth should be aware of the presence of the extremist group so that they will not be recruited) Youth 14 verbalized: "Teens that are searching for answers through online/ social network and get the message or answer from the jihadist who is motivating him to join them." Youth 10 and 11 said: "We can be easily contacted through websites, because nowadays youth is rampant in social media activities." Youth 14 explained: "Some of the youth are prone to it. Because they believed Jihadis calling the all-out war that they are willing to die for peace to be able to go to heaven and because of the influence in the majority of the total population." In the study of Esmail (2016) many of the youths in Marawi are recruited because of the secret presence of rebel groups who are targeting the problematic and intelligent youths since they are easily recruited. The problems encountered by the youth in their life contributes to their susceptibility. The situation in the environment where the youth interact often becomes the influencing factors in their behavior. The guidance of the family and the significant leaders like the religious leaders, teachers, and local officials to make sure they are provided with the opportunity to know about radicalism will empower them to resist this group.

Theme 3. Responses of the youths to radicalization despite the promotion of peace in the community.

The different activities and support system provided in the youths will result to providing them with guidance in responding to radicalization. The youth will develop higher resistance against the radicalization of the stakeholders will provide them with support in gaining enough knowledge for better understanding of the consequences and effect of radicalization. Some of the significant discussions were presented in the succeeding dialogue.

3.1 Support System Affects Susceptibility

The common answers of the youths on the responses of the youth in radicalization are affected by the presence of advocacy and support system in the community. This improved their capability in resisting recruitment of radicalism. Some of the discussions are presented in the following conversations. Youth 8 agreed by many of the participants shared: "Pagkakaroon ng program seminar thru hosting in Mindanao week of peace; orientation about jobs para awareness of opportunity and potentials; Islamic symposium: maghinang karayawan." Youth 15 said: "We join in the activities that lead to the Peace and Development programmed by the government." Youth 4 and 5 discussed: "Guidance from community leaders especially barangay chair should take a lead to support activities in the community for the youth." Youth 12 mentioned during an interview that: "The support system provides aid to the emotional stake and problems of the youth that leads them in joining radicalization. The support system serves as their helping hand when they feel that they don't have someone to run to." In the study of Tumer (2011) he mentioned that the community and the government have a major role in the susceptibility of the youth to radicalization since they must provide initiatives to empower the youth towards knowing how to promote peace and resist recruitment of radical groups. The provision of opportunity for the youth to be productive like good education opportunities will provide them higher chances of living good that can improve resistance against radicalism. Indeed, the better chances for improving the capacity of the youth in resisting radicalism is through empowering them. The best way to do it is through offering educational and other related activities that

can increase their knowledge towards a culture of peace so that their actions will be guided by it.

3.1 Cooperation of Youth in Promoting Peace in the Community

The common themes formulated when the informants were asked about the cooperation of the youth in peace in the community showed many of them agreed that when youth are provided responsibilities and guided by the leaders and religious teachers to do good, they are cooperative and supportive. This can help decrease their susceptibility to radicalism. Some of the discussions are presented in the following transcriptions. Youth 2 mentioned: "Yes, if the community is engaging youths to promote peace, it is good to motivate the youths not to get themselves involved to radicalization." Youth 5 and 7 shared: "Sports league, seminar workshops, food feedings, clean up drives, these are some of the support systems that involve youth to participate so that they can't be affected by radicalization." All the youth agreed that: "The provision of education is what makes the youth less susceptible to the violent actions of the radicalization or terrorism. Everyone must have the knowledge about the violent effects of the radicalization." Youth 12 mentioned: "Through different community activities, the cooperation of the youths to participate can affect the promotion of peace in the community. It can strengthen the relationship of youth with one another. Harmonious living in the community is well observed." According to Boer (2017), if the community has active programs that involve the youth in sports and other activities, they are less vulnerable to radicalism and terrorism recruitment. The education system that promotes a culture of peace is also a factor in the cooperation and support of the students in peace in the society and the world. The role of the youth in peace promotion had always been considered vital in sustaining peace. The youth will be the future leaders and are often highly important in the development of the country. Thus, the proper guidance of the society in the molding of the characters of the youth is a bridge towards more peaceful society.

Summary of the Findings

The following are the major findings of the study: 1. The common understanding of the youth in the concept of radicalization showed terrorism and violence, poverty and socioeconomic situations and it is a process for social change if there is social injustice. 2. The susceptibility of the youth on radicalization showed reasons for vulnerability such as intrapersonal factors related to personal ideology and convictions. Interpersonal factors are related to the influence of peers and other people around them makes them highly susceptible to radicalization. Situational related to the different situation in their community and society. The presence of threat and groups recruiting will expose them to higher risk. The influence of social media is also a big factor in the recruitment of the youth in radicalism. 3. The responses of the youths to radicalization despite the promotion of peace in the community revealed the support System Affects Susceptibility such as the presence of advocacy and support system in the community. This improved their capability in resisting recruitment of radicalism and cooperation of the youth in peace in the community showed many of them agreed that when youth are provided responsibilities and guided by the leaders and religious teachers to do good, they are cooperative and supportive.

The conclusion of the study

Based on the major findings of the study the following conclusions were formulated: The understanding of the youth in the concept of radicalism will affect the performance and response towards recruitment of radical groups. Since the majority of the youth considered it as negative it can be concluded that there are higher chances that they will not join upon recruitment. Therefore, proper education information about it is helpful in empowering the youth. The opportunities provided and the situation of the youth is a vital component of helping them develop higher resistance on radicalism. The fact that answers showed the presence of recruitment to the youth there is a higher possibility that they will be recruited. Therefore, consideration and focus on the youth development program are essential in helping the youth become peace advocates instead of becoming radicals. The cooperation of the youth through the seminars and sports activities are helpful in diverting the attention of the youth into becoming productive citizens in the community. The weak support in this aspect will increase possibilities for recruitment.

In general, if youth are provided with support and activities the possibilities of recruiting them to become radicals lessen. The family, education and religious leaders as influential persons in the life of the youth have a vital role in developing them to be peace-loving citizens.

Implications

The initiatives implemented by the government through integrating peace education program in the education and other agencies in the government will help mold the characters of the youth who will become leaders in the future. The higher population number of the youth and their role in sustaining peace in the community is an important element in the planning of the government to provide better peace development programs. The cooperation of the youth in the programs provided for them to become peace builders is going to provide stronger chances of resisting the recruitment of radical group. This can be strengthened through the support of the different peacebuilding actors.

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