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ASSESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF CVE STRATEGIES IN ONTARIO

by

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ABSTRACT

For several years now, countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies have existed as a core component of police agency mandates and governmental policy directed toward reducing radicalism. However, little is known about what specific skills and attributes are necessary for police officers to successfully perform these duties. In this paper, we draw upon in-depth interviews with 6 individuals that have performed CVE-related duties within Ontario to discover which core competencies they perceive to be crucial to effectively work in such an environment. Additionally, an environmental scan is utilized to survey the contemporary CVE landscape in Ontario. The respondents described how CVE work necessitates more than just basic competencies required for frontline officers. The results of this study underscore the need to ensure positive public relations between the police and communities, as well as providing a foundation for developing comprehensive CVE competency lists in the future.

Keywords: policing; radicalism; CVE; extremism; community engagement; Ontario

<u>Introduction</u>

On 22 April 2013, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested two individuals who were conspiring to bomb a portion of the Toronto-New York City VIA Rail train route (Tu Thanh, H, Freeze, C, and Leblanc, D, 2013). The two perpetrators, Chiheb Esseghaier and Raed Jaser, had been under investigation since the previous September, after police services were tipped off by Muslim community members in Toronto (Tu Thanh et al, 2013). As per other news sources, the two men received 'support and guidance' from al-Qaeda personnel based in Iran (Blatchford, 2013). The two suspects had also been seen watching trains and railways in the Greater Toronto Area, such as the New York-to-Toronto route crossing in Jordan Station, Ontario (Bell, 2014).

The arrests were prepared and executed by a special joint task force comprised of CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) and RCMP anti-terrorism divisions as well as municipal and provincial police forces (CBC, 2013). With assistance from the FBI and United States Department of Homeland Security, the RCMP led an investigation coined 'Project Smooth', which began monitoring Esseghaier and Jaser in September of 2012 (Bell, 2014). Previously classified court documents showcase that police continuously received warrants that permitted them to complete various covert tasks such as marking evidence with invisible ink and staging robberies to mask their searches (Bell, 2014). Although there was never an imminent bombing threat, Jaser and Esseghaier clearly communicated 'ideas to commit a terrorist action where the intent is to kill civilians' (Bell, 2014).

The story of Mr. Jaser and Esseghaier highlights how Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategies are extremely critical in thwarting potentially deadly terrorist threats. Had there not been a well-coordinated and preemptive strategy in place to surveil and monitor these two extremist individuals, the consequences may have been much more severe. The

proliferation of recent homegrown terrorist threats such as the shooting at Parliament Hill and the vehicle attack in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec in 2014 have further emphasized the importance of Western counterterrorism efforts (Tierney, 2017). Due to this heightened fear of domestic terrorism, government bodies in North America have started to include counter-extremism measures as a fundamental component of their broader counterterrorism strategies (Tierney, 2017).

Despite the obvious importance of CVE strategies, critics suggest that they fall victim to a frequent policing issue – conflict and friction between officers and vulnerable community members. With contemporary policing placing such an emphasis on enforcement, police often fail in fostering trust, building relationships, and ultimately preventing crime within communities (Sloly, 2016). Strained relationships between community members and officers have severely damaged the reputation of the police, as growing segments of the population are losing faith in the institution (Towhey, 2015). For example, in 2015 Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair stated that "we often will engage with members of the community, and in those engagements there can be mistrust, there can be fear" (Armstrong, 2015). Additionally, there have been several cases where minority community groups have expressed distrust and uneasiness toward engagement initiatives. For instance, The Toronto Police Service's Somali Liaison Unit was introduced following controversial drug raids in Somali communities. Omar Farouk, president of the International Muslims Organization of Toronto stated that Somali community members did not think highly of the new initiative and said that "when you look at the officers, the first impression was these are the bad guys ... you want to stay away from them and that is so wrong, you know?" (Donato, 2017). These

examples highlight one of the key issues surrounding CVE strategies – their impact on public relations and fostering healthy relationships between police officers and minority communities.

The purpose for this study is derived from several key issues that surround CVE work. Firstly, although CVE strategies are highly useful and important police practices, they remain an underutilized tool. Additionally, critics of CVE work have been quick to note that despite there being an abundance of information produced in recent years regarding the drivers and processes generating radicalization, there have been few successful options put forth to inhibit those processes from transpiring (Ackerman and Shachtman 2005; Romaniuk 2015; Tierney 2017). Another reason for writing this paper involves the evaluation and measurement (or lack thereof) of CVE strategies. To this point, a framework that outlines how effective CVE strategies and the officers who perform CVE duties are does not exist. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to pinpoint vital skills and abilities of front line police officers that allow them to successfully perform CVE-related tasks.

The Current Study

This paper draws on information collected from two sources. Firstly, it assesses the current climate of CVE strategies in Ontario through an environmental scan. The data derived from this part of the study is used to determine things such as which agencies are implementing them as well as what the important components of the strategies are. This paper also draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with officers who have performed CVE work to reveal their perceptions of what skills and abilities are considered essential in executing CVE-related duties. Specifically, this study focuses on which 'core competencies' are – in the minds of officers who have CVE experience – required to carry out CVE tasks.

What is clear is that, for officers involved in the study, skills required for CVE work go above and beyond what is required for 'regular' officer duties.

This research paper is comprised of five sections. The first section examines the current literature on the topic of CVE strategies as well as police competencies. The section will begin with a working definition of CVE. Following this, I will review what the literature tells us about CVE strategies. Next, the paper will briefly review the current police competency landscape in Canada.

The next segment reviews the methodology used to collect and analyze the various CVE strategies in Ontario. It includes a discussion on how different agencies with CVE strategies were located and how the personnel involved in the strategies were examined. This section will also review how interview data was used in order to ascertain whether current police competencies could potentially fit CVE frameworks and strategies.

The remaining two sections present the results and conclusion portion of this study. The results section will display the findings of the research. The conclusion segment will outline recommendations that could potentially be incorporated as core competencies within the CVE domain.

Literature Review

The Difficulty in Defining CVE Work

In recent years, CVE has increased in prominence as a core policy objective for both national governments and international bodies. According to the United Nations, the goal of

CVE strategies is to 'prevent the pull of extremist recruitment by establishing resilience among groups who are susceptible to radicalization' (Szmania and Fincher, 2017). CVE strategies can also be described as an assortment of voluntary and non-coercive activities to prevent and interfere in the process of radicalization to violence (Selim, 2016). These initiatives are perceived by scholars and academics to be critical to the process of addressing the persistent need to fight radicalization to violence (Davies et al, 2016). Furthermore, countering the risk presented by violent individuals driven by extremist ideology has emerged as a primary law enforcement and security concern for government and local officials across North America (Alpert, 2015; Cohen, 2016).

Unfortunately, one of the primary issues associated with CVE is simply defining it. Although organizations and services commonly utilize and employ the term, a widely-accepted definition does not exist. Definitions can vary from stopping people from accepting extreme beliefs that may lead to terrorism, to diminishing active support for extremist groups (McCants and Watts, 2012). Rosand (2016) adds that the literature also lacks a common definition for 'violent extremism' – let alone CVE – as each country provides its own definition. Moreover, there does not appear to be a desire to address this definitional deficit, as agencies prefer to focus on the drivers of violent extremism instead (Rosand, 2016). Government and agency officials seem to have conflicting interpretations of exactly what differentiates CVE strategies from broader counterterrorism policies and general community outreach programs (Lanham, 2014). This issue is exacerbated further due to multiple agencies assuming a role in CVE tactics, possibly causing conflict among organizations leading to overlap and gaps (Lanham, 2014). An absence of a succinct definition of CVE leads to counterproductive and contradictory programs as well as making it difficult to assess

whether CVE strategies are effective (McCants and Watts, 2012). Additionally, unclear CVE

descriptions have caused the concept to devolve into a 'catch-all' classification that lacks any

precision or coherence (Harris-Hogan and Barrelle, 2016). Horgan (2014) adds that many

strategies directed under the CVE heading have been unable to outline the specifics of what

they are preventing, and whether they have prevented it. Since CVE strategies deal with issues

that are inherently problematic to measure empirically, it is difficult to evaluate their success

(Macnair and Frank, 2017). This represents an issue for politicians and legislators who count

on tangible outcomes and statistical information to promote their decisions and policies

(Macnair and Frank, 2017).

Ultimately, there are main themes that frequently arise when analyzing the existing

literature on CVE strategies including: 'non-coercive', 'voluntary', 'community', and 'terrorist

groups'. As an example, Cohen (2016) describes CVE strategies as: locally-based prevention

strategies designed to aid authorities in detecting those on the verge of ideologically motivated

violence. For the purposes of this research paper, CVE will be defined as: a collection of

voluntary and non-coercive policies with the intention of reducing terrorist and extremist group

activity.

Different Approaches to CVE Strategies

As the prevalence of CVE strategies has increased, so has the amount of types of

strategies employed by different agencies. For example, some CVE measures entail women,

youth, and religious leaders establishing positive alternatives to becoming a part of a terrorist

organization, while other strategies address the need to reintegrate and reorient extremist

fighters returning from war-torn regions such as Syria and Iraq (Rosand, 2016). Additionally,

CVE schemes can include community counselling services and hotlines for families who

think a family member may be on the verge of becoming radicalized (Rosand, 2016).

One particular type of CVE strategy are those that are community-based. Community policing today is viewed and promoted as an effective tactic towards preventing violent terrorist extremism (Holmer and Deventer, 2014). Specifically, community-based CVE strategies add to pre-existing community-police relationships and mutual ownership of security problems and concentrates on jointly pinpointing and diverting violent extremism threats when they are in their infancy. Community-based CVE strategies demand substantial trust between police officials and community members in addition to a refined information sharing process (Holmer and Deventer, 2014). Several academics agree that the most crucial aspect of a community-based CVE strategy is a shared understanding of the threat. That is, when community members and police officers agree, they can establish collaborative solutions to alleviate the risk while simultaneously producing a more nuanced understanding of the local drivers of extremism (Holmer and Deventer, 2014). The goal of these outreach and engagement activities is to promote greater partnership to enhance detection of potential threats from within those communities (Cohen, 2016). Furthermore, research suggests that religious leaders, parents, teachers, counselors and other community members are perhaps best equipped to identify individuals who are susceptible to radicalization, and to organize resources should the individual become radicalized (Mirahmadi, 2016).

Despite the potential success community-based CVE strategies may have, they are an underutilized tool. The literature suggests that current and past CVE policies focus too heavily on a militarist and police approach, rather than an educational and communal approach (Macnair and Frank, 2017). While these CVE strategies are often promoted to be empowering to the community, a lack of financial commitment, resources, and direction can

inhibit the strategy from flourishing (Mirahmadi, 2016). Moreover, these community-based strategies have been met with some skepticism, as they are sometimes seen as a way for law enforcement to recruit informants or conceal domestic surveillance undertakings (Cohen, 2016).

A sub-category of community-based CVE strategies are those that involve schools and other academic institutions. Schools are considered to be areas where young individuals are observed and monitored daily, and become familiar to their teachers (Nolan, 2016). Additionally, it is believed that a school-based setting allows teachers to identify students who may be on a path toward violent extremism. Schools also create an environment where key identifying factors and behaviours that may suggest an individual is trending towards extremism (Nolan, 2016). Some of these behaviours include: isolation from friends and family, hostile intolerance directed toward others who do not share their own opinions, an increasingly aggressive outlook on religion, politics, and other ideology, and a lack of involvement in social events such as sports (Nolan, 2016).

It should be noted that due to the dynamic nature of CVE work, officers performing these tasks must possess a more refined skillset in order to handle situations involving things such as radicalization and potential recruitment to extremist organizations. The policing domain commonly employs what are referred to as 'core competencies'. According to the Police Association of Ontario, a competency is described as "any skill, knowledge, ability, motive, behaviour or attitude essential to successful performance on the job (PAO, 2018)". Overall, competencies are extremely useful tools that dictate the areas in which police officers must be proficient.

<u>Background on Police Competencies in Canada</u>

Within Canada, an organization known as the Police Sector Council established a list of 'core competencies' for different roles within the policing institution (Huey et al, 2017). In order to perform their assigned tasks, general duty Constables must possess the following primary behavioural competencies:

1. Adaptability
2. Risk Management
3. Problem Solving
4. Stress Tolerance
5. Interactive Communication
6. Teamwork
7. Organizational Awareness
8. Written Skills
9. Ethical Accountability and responsibility (PSC 2013; Huey et al, 2017).

Beyond this baseline list, the literature is largely devoid of discussion on how competencies might change when CVE strategies and initiatives are the focal point of police activity. Unfortunately, a CVE-specific competency framework does not exist within Canada. One of the few publications that references the idea of CVE competencies was released in 2014 by the United States Institute of Peace. Within their report regarding inclusive approaches to community policing and CVE, Holmer and Deventer (2014) make a few suggestions about how to approach CVE competency tools:

1. Ensure there is a mutual understanding of the multifaceted threat of violent extremism to the community

2. Ensure a common understanding of the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism

3. Guarantee a common understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in safeguarding the community

4. Ensure that police services reflect a baseline of reform and accountability

5. Ensure that police emphasize prevention and diversion of individuals on a path to violent extremism rather than pursuit, that is, allow for exit

6. Require enhanced cross cultural skills, flexibility, and innovative approaches for police working with marginalized communities and hard to reach individuals (Holmer and Deventer, 2014).

Since the literature offers relatively little regarding CVE competencies, the remainder of this paper will be dedicated to hashing out which competencies are required for CVE work. To begin the process of establishing a picture of what comprises an effective CVE competency list, this paper relies on in-depth interviews with community engagement police officers as well as CVE strategy policy documents.

Method of Inquiry

The purpose of the current study was to answer the following research questions:

1) What is the current landscape of CVE strategies within Ontario?
2) Do current competencies for investigators and frontline police officers cover the skills required for CVE work?
3) If no, what are the gaps? What other competencies might be useful?

To address these questions, this paper utilizes a two-part, mixed methods approach, blending in-depth qualitative interviews with an environmental scan of policy documents directed toward countering violent extremism programs and strategies.

Environmental Scan

The first part of the study contained an environmental scan of CVE strategies within Ontario. The purpose of this scan was to construct a basic understanding of the current landscape for CVE strategies and programs in Ontario. The information collected for this part of the study consisted of documents relating to specific CVE strategies and any other associated items. The first step in this process involved identifying which police

agencies in Ontario actually utilize CVE-related tactics. From there, the data collected for this portion of the study was comprised of all publicly accessible materials for each agency that employs CVE strategies, including: policy documents, mission statements, and goals and objectives. Other previously collected data such as job descriptions and CVE mandates was also provided to me via my supervisor to assist with the scan. Overall, this portion of the study is designed to help address and answer the first research question.

Research Interviews

The objective for this part of the study was to begin to parse out a more nuanced understanding of how community engagement police feel about and perceive CVE strategies and initiatives in Ontario. Another goal of this section of the study was to ascertain which competencies or skills are considered essential in order to successfully perform CVE work. This collection of interviews involved 6 individuals that have performed CVE-related duties within Ontario. This collection of interviewees consists of superintendents, detectives, and sergeants.

This study was also informed by a second group of previously collected qualitative interviews with 12 police recruiters and 21 senior police officers from 18 services across the province. This second study looked at educational needs of potential police recruits. This other source of data was added so that I could construct what 'ordinary' frontline police officers need in terms of competencies and extend them to develop what additional competencies are necessary for CVE work.

A primary exploratory analysis of all data sources was conducted using inductive thematic coding. Using this method, themes and subthemes were identified.

Data Analysis

Environmental scan: Initial results

   To conduct the environmental scan, this study began by identifying and analyzing various CVE strategies and initiatives within Ontario. Specific CVE strategies that were collected for analysis include: Ontario Provincial Police's (OPP) Provincial Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS), Peel Regional Police's Counter Violent Extremism Initiative (CVEI), Toronto Police Service's Furthering Our Community by Uniting Services (FOCUS), and the OPP's 'Strategy'.

   Low Number of Agency-Specific Programs

   According to the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, there are 53 municipal police agencies in Ontario. Among these services, very few employ their own specific CVE-type strategy. What was discovered, however, is that major police agencies are partnered with provincial initiatives such as the OPP's PATS agenda. This program is intended to conduct multi-jurisdictional strategic intelligence procedures to preemptively address terrorism, radicalization, and extremism in Ontario. So, while several police agencies may be in partnerships that deal with CVE-related issues at a provincial level, there is a lack of institutions who have developed and implemented their own counter-terrorism mandate. For example, York Regional Police currently does not have a defined CVE strategy in place, and are operating on an *ad hoc* basis when it comes to extremism related issues. At this time, only the training component of educating their officers and the community has been formalized, and there are no internal formalized procedures or definitions on CVE.

   Even though there appears to be a lack of agency-specific CVE plans within Ontario,

some police forces have developed their own approaches. For instance, Peel Regional Police

(PRP) established their Countering Violent Extremism Initiative (CVEI) in 2014. This three-

pronged approach entails training of PRP frontline officers, educating within schools, and

community engagement to combat the emerging issues of Islamic extremism, radicalization

and recruitment of youth, and the prevalence of the Islamic State (ISIS). Moreover, Toronto

Police Service instituted its (FOCUS) program. Also known as a 'situation table' program[1],

FOCUS is an initiative that wishes to reduce crime, victimization, and improve community

resiliency and overall well-being. This strategic plan integrates the most appropriate

community agencies in a situation table model to provide a targeted approach to vulnerable

individuals, families and areas that are facing increased levels of threat in a specific geographic

location.

Ultimately, the environmental scan reveals a rather ambiguous picture of CVE

strategies in Ontario. Some agencies have zero CVE-related programs or initiatives, others are

partnered with OPP and provincial schemes, and some of the largest police forces have

established and applied their own agency-specific strategy to deal with violent extremism.

While detachment-specific CVE strategies were irregular, the OPP has recently begun

implementing a province-wide, all-encompassing CVE initiative formally referred to as 'The

Strategy'. This initiative was created in order to mitigate risk to public safety by increasing

awareness of behavioural indicators of violent extremism, which will enable early identification

of individuals susceptible to extremism and intervention in the pre-criminal space (OPP, 2017).

The ultimate goal of 'The Strategy' is to provide a collaborative wrap-

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1 Situation tables involve an alliance of human services such as police agencies and community actors guided by common principles to mitigate situations of risk and threat quickly, usually within 24-48 hours.

around methodology to counter violent extremism, protecting those who are vulnerable to grooming or recruitment, their families and communities and those that may be victim to incidents related to violent extremism. (OPP, 2017). This objective will be achieved through building awareness of behavioural indicators of radicalization, engaging community partners, providing options for intervention, and assisting victims (OPP, 2017). Overall, this extensive initiative constructed by the OPP seems to be a significant part of the core of counterterrorism policy in Ontario, as well as the primary direction of where CVE-related schemes and strategies are headed in the future.

Environmental Scan: Key Themes

Analysis of the environmental scan results uncovers some noteworthy findings important to the first research question, which focuses on the climate of CVE initiatives and policy within the province of Ontario.

Officer Training

Among the strategies that were reviewed, several key themes were consistently represented. Appropriate training of frontline police officers so that they are capable of performing CVE-related duties was crucial. For example, the Peel Regional Police's CVEI has given presentations and seminars to over 1100 of their own sworn officers, as well as an additional 3000 outside officers (PRP, 2016). This training component consists of sections such as teaching frontline officers how to connect with community leaders, providing them with a baseline understanding to allow development of valuable sources in the community who can identify individuals or groups of interest, and instructing them how to recognize behaviours consistent with potential radicalization (PRP, 2016). This element of instructing officers is clearly present in the OPP's CVE strategy too, as officers and community

members learn about CVE through online modules and training via the RCMP.

Community Engagement

Another theme that regularly appeared within the CVE strategies was education within communities. As an example, Peel Regional Police suggest that in many CVE-related cases, there are no better qualified people to interact with members of the community than spiritual and community leaders (PRP, 2016). Moreover, numerous qualified members made up of spiritual, socially active, prominent individuals who are continuously engaged in their respective communities have become active a part of Peel's Muslim Advisory Committee (MAC). Individuals who are recognized as being vulnerable or prone to extremist ideologies (or have demonstrated behaviours that are consistent with this phenomenon) are put in contact with one of the MAC members, in an effort to help the individual to better understand the extremist-religious material they're exposed to (PRP, 2016). Many of these sentiments of community outreach and engagement are echoed in the OPP's CVE strategy, as one of the initiative's main 'pillars' involves mobilizing community partners, liaising, and consulting. For instance, community agencies such as Crime Stoppers, Ontario CONNEX (mental health crisis line) and Ontario 211 (community services referral line) have been provided with information to support call takers when receiving and reporting information related to CVE (OPP, 2017).

Summary

Having reviewed how CVE strategies are set out in Ontario, they are primarily created and implemented by larger agencies, especially province-wide entities such as the OPP. While police forces such as Peel Regional Police and Toronto Police Service have contributed some of their own initiatives toward counter-terrorism, a significant amount of

CVE-related policy has been delivered via the OPP. This is particularly clear when looking at the OPP's 'Strategy', and how it envelops agencies at the detachment level.

Two of the key components of Ontario CVE strategies are officer training and community engagement. Anti-terrorism policy places great emphasis on frontline officers receiving appropriate training so they can properly attend to and mitigate CVE-related issues. Moreover, CVE strategies stress the importance of being active in the surrounding community by establishing trust with local groups, identifying potential community resources, and educating the public on CVE-related matters.

Senior and Recruiting Officer Interviews: Initial Results

Previously collected in-depth interviews with recruiting and senior officers, as well as newly collected interviews with officers who perform CVE-related work offered interesting insights regarding the potential of CVE competencies. In many respects, almost all of the baseline competencies required for a 'regular' frontline officer are also essential for doing CVE work. However, while officers need to possess the baseline competencies, a few additional ones are required for counter-terrorism endeavours.

Essential Competencies Outlined by Senior and Recruiting Officers

According to the previously collected interview data, senior and recruiting officers generally agree on several key competencies that are required for frontline officers. These skills included: communication, problem solving, adaptability, self-control, confidence, working in teams, valuing diversity, and being reflexive or self-aware (Huey et al, 2017). Of these, it was commonly showcased that being able to communicate both in writing and verbally is vitally important (Huey et al, 2017). For example, one participant stated "I find

the most important skill for any recruit, or any police officer, is communication skills ... it's active listening and it's de-escalation in the manner by which they communicate." This extends into the CVE domain, as officers performing anti-terrorism and anti-radicalization work need to be able to interact with vulnerable populations and communities.

Possessing the ability to problem solve and adapt quickly were also outlined as key competencies. These skills are also directly transferrable to CVE work, as officers often face challenging and dynamic situations when dealing with vulnerable or potentially radicalized individuals. As one officer noted, police officers "need to be able to problem solve independently and work on their own". In terms of self-control, the interviews showed that it is crucial for officers to maintain their composure when engaged in scenarios when one may be provoked or taunted (Huey et al, 2017). Considering the volatile nature that CVE-related work can sometimes experience, being able to remain under control would be critical.

Teamwork was also a major component of key competencies laid out, as being able to diffuse tensions and conflicts within a community is paramount (Huey et al, 2017). Considering the importance of community engagement for CVE work, possessing the ability to work in a collaborative manner is also imperative.

Finally – and possibly most importantly for this study's purpose – being able to appreciate and value diversity was ranked as another vital competency (Huey et al, 2017). Senior and recruiting officers suggested that officers who excel are those that can embrace and utilize diverse culture appropriately (Huey et al, 2017). For example, one recruiting officer revealed that they seek individuals who genuinely "embrace diversity", rather than just acknowledging it. Since CVE-related work commonly involves working with different cultures, ethnicities, races, and backgrounds, officers should especially be able to recognize

the value in diversity and employ it throughout their counter-terrorism objectives.

Ultimately, it is clear that all of the competencies considered essential for frontline officers are transferrable to the domain of CVE work and policing. In the next section, the study will review what additional competencies are required in order to successfully perform CVE-related tasks.

CVE Interviews: Initial Results

Theme: Lived Experience

One of the major skills that CVE officers thought is necessary to perform their work is possessing lived experience. What is meant by "lived experience"? This term refers to officers who have gained experience of different cultures, ethnicities, or groups either from growing up in diverse neighborhoods or actual on-the-job-experience. For example, one respondent when asked if they felt they had the appropriate competencies to perform CVE work stated that "yeah…cause my wife … has some Muslim family members, plus I have Muslim friends from all sorts of different backgrounds". Since this individual experienced a very diverse upbringing, they believed that they had the requisite skills to be able to give presentations on CVE, engage with the community, and foster trust between the police and vulnerable groups. This respondent also noted that they joined a specialized Muslim advisory committee within their police force because of the skillset they possessed: "life experiences, knowing the whole picture and not all Muslims are the same type of Muslim and all that stuff so I kind of had a good understanding of that". Building meaningful relationships with the community and having them respond well to CVE initiatives is also impacted by having adequate lived experience, as another officer noted, "when it comes to hate-motivated incidences this is … I think this is the drop off point where we don't do so well and this

separates the good officers from the not-so-good officers. And I've been a not-so-good officer in the past, because you look at it like and you're like your feelings are hurt and you're kind of wasting my time and that's because I didn't understand the big picture, the full picture". Overall, the idea of having been exposed to different cultural experiences was a dominant theme when assessing the ability to perform CVE work.

Theme: Empathy

Another area where officers need to be proficient in to successfully execute CVE work is having empathy and a basic human understanding of others. One respondent alluded to this when asked about whether their policing experience enabled them to develop the skillset that was suited to CVE work: "yeah just using or thinking of empathy, being a human, going down to their level, and actually thinking why are they calling me … maybe it's because they have nowhere to turn, nobody else to speak to … so it's just making them feel like you care and like what happened does matter and you do have someone to turn to". Furthermore, this skill to relate to and treat individuals in vulnerable communities as human beings essentially supersedes the ability of officers to remember every single minute detail of the cultural and diversity training they receive. For instance, one officer when asked about the need to remember all their cultural training replied by saying: "It really doesn't matter … we're all humans, we don't care about the same things we just want to be safe … we don't need to know what is written in the Koran, we don't need to know any of it … they're human just like us". In this case, it appears as though having genuine interactions with individuals is a far more important competency required for CVE-related work. This sentiment was reiterated by another officer who said: "so in policing you're kind of told to turn off your humanity … but to do my role and to do this role, you kinda have to turn it back on and you

kinda have to give a shit … I would say that as long as you're able to turn on your humanity and be there for anyone, then you can get anywhere". Generally, officers who are assigned to CVE-related duties need to be proficient in showcasing their understanding and sense of humanity.

Findings: Do current competencies for investigators and frontline officers cover the skills required for CVE work? What other competencies might be useful?

To reiterate, there exists a generally-accepted list of baseline competencies that are required for police officers. These include skills such as: communication, problem solving, adaptability, self-control, confidence, working in teams, valuing diversity, and being reflexive or self-aware. It was discovered that all the essential core competencies for 'ordinary' police officers are transferrable and necessary for police officers performing CVE-related work. However, this does not mean that the baseline competencies alone are enough for officers to effectively perform their CVE duties.

In terms of what other competencies are useful for officers doing CVE work, there were two main findings. Firstly, it is desirable that officers possess a significant amount of lived experiences. Respondents noted that having been exposed to different cultures, ethnicities, and races both before and after becoming police officers helped enable them to perform their counter-terrorism duties in a productive manner. Additionally, it was found that officers also have to be able showcase their sense of humanity when dealing with CVE-related situations. Showing individuals from vulnerable groups that they do actually care and are not simply going to disregard their concerns has a strong impact on being effective in CVE work.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

In sum, what this research has done is identify the current climate of CVE strategies in

Ontario, as well as whether or not baseline police competencies are sufficient for police officers engaged in CVE-related work. Additionally, it sought to identify any potential competencies that are not included in the baseline list that would be helpful for CVE endeavours. It discovered that police officers who are in CVE roles require all the baseline competencies of frontline officers, as well as some additional skills. Possessing lived experience and having the ability to understand and relate to others while in situations of extremism were found to be essential.

In terms of potential policy implications, this study will aid in the construction of an updated and expanded list of core competencies that are required for CVE-related duties. While police agencies commonly utilize baseline competencies for frontline officer recruitment, competency lists for officers engaged in CVE work are lacking. With the findings from this study, lived experience and understanding will hopefully become integrated into future CVE competency lists.

The results from this study also have implications regarding public relations and relationships between community groups and police. Community initiatives – and CVE strategies specifically – undoubtedly suffer when there is tension among frontline officers and community members. Possessing crucial life experience and showcasing empathy and human understanding can go a long way in building strong ties in communities that may have previously been apprehensive or distrusting of police officers.

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