Preventing Terrorist Recruitment through Early Intervention by Involving Families

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Abstract

Preventing terrorist recruitment is one of the most effective and less lethal methods of countering terrorism, and yet it is often overlooked. This article describes a program designed and administered by the author to prevent terrorist recruitment through early intervention, by promoting the involvement of the families of potential recruits in their children's activities and in a counterterrorism program that was developed and implemented in Sanliurfa, Turkey, for four years, from 2010 to 2014. The article details the concept and structure of the program, provides insights on how it was developed and administered, and presents the data, an analysis, and the findings. In addition, this article reports on the outcomes of the program and offers insights into why the youth in Sanliurfa were struggling to break their ties with terrorist organizations.

Introduction

The Prevention of Terrorist Recruitment Through Early Intervention by Involving Families Program was developed and implemented by the Sanliurfa Police Department's counterterrorism and operations division in Sanliurfa, Turkey. The first phase, the pilot program, was implemented in 2010 and 2011. Its main objective was to prevent terrorist recruitment and radicalization through early intervention during the initial stages of the terrorist recruitment process, by involving the families and parents of potential recruits, seeing that they communicated with their children before the police did and monitored them under the guidance of the team.

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During the first phase in the first year of the program, the families of 371 university and high school students were visited to inform parents about their children's association with known terrorist recruiters or entities and to counsel them on how to help their children cut their ties with terrorist organizations or people associated with terrorist entities. This article provides details of the Sanliurfa prevention program, analyzes the first year's findings, and offers insights into the outcomes of the program, including why the youth in Sanliurfa were struggling to break their ties with terrorist organizations.

Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the program was to prevent terrorist recruitment and radicalization. It aimed to identify societal and individual signs of radicalization, in order to take early steps to thwart radicalization and terrorist recruitment by promoting interactions with the parents and family members of susceptible youth in Sanliurfa, Turkey. For the purpose of the Sanliurfa program, *interaction* refers to involving the families and parents of potential terrorist recruits to promote constructive communication with their children before the police do, with the assistance and guidance of the team.

The program was designed to reach out to and engage young people and their families who were under the threat of terrorist recruitment and radicalization, to convey the message that "violence is not a solution," and to reinforce parents' objections to the radicalization and recruitment of their children. The expected outcome of the program was the successful dissuasion of terrorist candidates by their families, with professional and psychological assistance.

Reaching out for this program meant:
- establishing initial contact with the families of vulnerable youth,
- initiating a positive communication context,

- building mutual trust by explaining "the fact that the program is offering assistance to families to help save their children from the hands of terrorist organizations," and

- reassuring them that they faced no prosecution or investigation.

Concept and Structure

I developed the Preventing Terrorist Recruitment through Early Intervention by Involving Families Program when I was first assigned to the City of Sanliurfa as the chief of counterterrorism and operations in Turkey in 2010. The Sanliurfa program was not developed as a research project; rather, it was implemented as an intervention and prevention program to counter terrorist recruitment.

Sanliurfa is one of the largest provinces of Southeastern Anatolia, with over two million residents. In addition, after 2010, when the conflict started in Syria, over 400,000 Syrian refugees crossed the border to live in Sanliurfa.

Sanliurfa is unique from the perspective of counterterrorism for a few reasons, including its demographics, history, and the current conflict in the region, in Syria in particular. Sanliurfa shares 139 miles of border with Syria, which is a critical issue when it comes to border movements between Turkey and Syria. The city historically has had ethnically mixed demographics; Turks, Kurds, and Arabs have lived there together for centuries. However, in the modern era, terrorist organizations have been very active in the city, including the PKK—which was first established there—the Turkish Hezbollah, al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and ISIS. These groups operate there for two main reasons. The first is that the city serves as a base for recruitment and logistical and other operational support. The second is that Sanliurfa stands right at the border and furnishes ample opportunities for terrorists to cross between Turkey and Syria. It has been labeled the end-point of the so-called

"Jihadi Highway," which alludes to the flow of ISIS foreign fighters through the city on their way to Syria.[2]

I designed the prevention program as part of our ongoing efforts to counter terrorism in the city by reducing the number of youth who were being approached or recruited by terrorist organizations. In the beginning, the concept of the pilot program was to address counterterrorism by preventing the radicalization and recruitment of youth through the involvement of their families, and by giving the youth a second chance to re-think and assess their affiliations with terrorist organizations if they had not yet committed a violent crime in the name of a terrorist organization.

The concept was a new phenomenon in 2010 and involved several stakeholders, including the Central Counterterrorism and Operations Department in Ankara, the general chief of the Sanliurfa Police Department, the governor, the attorney general of Sanliurfa, district attorneys, the mayor, and the director of the Sanliurfa Education Department. The first step in running the pilot program was to present it to the general chief of the Sanliurfa Police Department. After obtaining the police chief's approval, I held a meeting with the governor, explaining to him what our plans were and asking for his administrative approval and financial support. After obtaining his approval, I presented the program to the Central Counterterrorism and Operations Department in Ankara to get the approval of the counterterrorism czar for all of Turkey, as counterterrorism activities are centrally coordinated in the country.

Once the Ankara phase was completed, the main task was to get the judiciary on board, because I had to work with the prosecutor's office in order to be able to promise our subjects that we (the counterterrorism division) were not going to open any investigations and that there would be no arrests or official recordkeeping. I first visited the attorney general (the head prosecutor) of Sanliurfa and presented the concept to him in detail; he approved of the

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[2] Deborah Amos. (2016). A Smuggler Explains How He Helped Fighters Along 'Jihadi Highway.' NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/10/07/354288389/a-smuggler-explains-how-he-helped-fighters-along-jihadi-highway [10/07/2019].

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pilot program in principle and arranged a meeting with all the district attorneys who were involved in counterterrorism investigations. They were briefed on the program details and the proposed concept of not bringing any judicial charges if a participant had not been involved in any violent activities.

Once I had the judiciary on board, I arranged meetings with the governor, the director of the Sanliurfa Education Department (who worked under the governor), and the Mayor of Sanliurfa to discuss their cooperation and support and layout plans, because our future preventive and educational activities would involve different departments and their different structures, and I knew I would need their assistance at certain points.

It was quite challenging to bring all the stakeholders to the table and have them accept the concept of preventing terrorist radicalization and recruitment through family intervention, but in the end, I garnered all of the bureaucratic, judicial, and administrative approvals the counterterrorism division needed to launch the pilot program.

The financing was mostly provided by the Central Counterterrorism and Operations Department in Ankara and the Sanliurfa Police Department; the Sanliurfa Governate contributed as well to the overall budget. We were also able to use various government facilities and means of transportation free of charge. The administration and implementation of the pilot program were assigned to the Counterterrorism and Operations division in Sanliurfa, and as the chief of that department, I ran the program.

This program is an example of a "mesosocial prevention (general and specific) and intervention" program under Koehler's classification[3] of "three distinct methods of counterterrorism." It can be classified as such because of the involvement of local crime prevention activities and federal and state action plans. It is a "mesosocial intervention"

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[3] Kohler, Daniel. (2017). Structural Quality Standards for Work to Intervene with and Counter Violent Extremism. Retrieved from https://www.konex-bw.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/20180202-FINAL-KPEBW-HandbuchExtremismus_A4_engl_04I18_web.pdf [05/27/2020].

program because of the involvement of families, in keeping with Koehler's notion of a "family support" counterterrorism model.[4]

In the past, other scholars have administered programs with the involvement of family members and friends in efforts to counter terrorist recruitment through Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or deradicalization. While programs have varied across countries and target populations, as explained by Horgan and Braddock,[5] their concepts have usually been similar: to reduce the risk of involvement with terrorist organizations. Koehler and Ehrt consider the approach adopted by the Sanliurfa program to be a "first line of defense," engaging families, friends, and colleagues in countering radicalization "without implying the use of emotional relationships for intelligence gathering or policing."[6]

Several other researchers, including Ranstorp and Hyllengern,[7] Sikkens and her colleagues,[8] Vidino,[9] Gielen,[10] and Koehler,[11] have studied the concept of early intervention through family counseling in countering terrorism and the role of families and friends in different forms of counter-radicalization/terrorist recruitment and deradicalization programs. Most of the programs studied, like the Sanliurfa program, focused on countering radicalization and terrorist recruitment with the help of family members and friends.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Horgan, John and Kurt Braddock. (2010). Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programs. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22(2):267–91

[6] Koehler Daniel & Ehrt, Tobias. (2018). Parents' Associations, Support Group Interventions and Countering Violent Extremism: An Important Step Forward in Combating Violent Radicalization. *International Annals of Criminology* 56(1-2):178-197

[7] Ranstorp, Magnus. & Hyllengren, Peder. (2013). Prevention of Violent Extremism in Third Countries: Measures to Prevent Individuals Joining Armed Extremist Groups in Conflict Zones. Stockholm: Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish National Defence College.

[8] Sikkens, Elga., van San, M., Sieckelinck, S. et al. (2018). Parents' Perspectives on Radicalization: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 27, 2276–2284 & Sikkens, Elga., Sieckelinck, Marion, et al. (2016). Parental reaction towards radicalization in young people. *Child & Family Social Work* 22(2):1044-1053.

[9] Vidino, Lorenzo. 2014. CSS Case Study: Foreign Fighters: An Overview of Responses in Eleven Countries. Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich.

[10] Gielen, Amy-Jane. (2015). Supporting Families of Foreign Fighters. A Realistic Approach for Measuring the Effectiveness. *Journal for Deradicalization* 2(Spring):21–48.

[11] Koehler, Daniel. (2016). Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

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Similar programs focusing on individual disengagement from different terrorist groups were also administered in different regions and cities in Turkey. For example, while I was working at the Ankara Police Department Counterterrorism and Operations Division between 2005 and 2010, we ran a similar program, where we targeted students and vulnerable populations as a whole, without explicitly reaching out to individuals or their family members.

Another large city in Turkey, Adana, ran a similar project[12] via its Police Department. While Sanliurfa and Adana project had similarities, the main differences between the two programs involved the objectives and methods. The Sanliurfa program targeted every individual who was approached by, or had connections with, any terrorist organization adopting a "wholesome" approach in an attempt to reach every vulnerable person. Additionally, the Sanliurfa program did not focus on deradicalization efforts unless requested by the family members or prospective recruits who were participating in the program.

Challenges During the Administration of the Program

During the planning, budgeting, and administrative phase of the program, I was lucky enough to work with a police chief and governor who understood the value of the program and extended their full support. The support of top government officials was essential for such a large-scale project, which directly involved the large population of a city with over two million people, especially when there was no previous instance of a program targeting every individual who associated with a known terrorist organization.

While the governor and the top police chief of Sanliurfa, the Central Counterterrorism Department in Ankara, the Sanliurfa Education Department, with the teachers and the head prosecutor in Sanliurfa, were all positive and supportive, front groups and organizations with ties to different terrorist groups were not happy.

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[12] Bastug, Mehmet, F. & Evlek, Ugur, K. (2016). Individual Disengagement and Deradicalization Pilot Program in Turkey: Methods and Outcomes. *Journal for Deradicalization.* 8(Fall):25-45.

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A few associations in Sanliurfa which were known to have ties to different terrorist organizations first tried to undervalue and diminish the effects of the program via press releases and negative articles about the program and myself (as the chief of counterterrorism), claiming that the program aimed to go after youth so they could be recruited as informants. This attempt, although, it caused some confusion among our subjects, did not significantly affect the outcome, because we were very forthcoming about our objectives.

Their next attempt was to visit the governor and pressure him to halt the program, claiming that the families and children were being disturbed by the officers Chief Yayla dispatched to their homes. The governor, in this case, was very supportive and transparent; he told them he was aware of the program and was supporting our efforts.

Realizing that media pressure and reaching out to the governor was not going to help them halt the program, the terrorist organizations filed a judicial complaint and opened a suit against me, alleging that the program was not under my defined duties and that the family visits were illegal and unconstitutional. At that point, we were almost a year into the program, and the results were already positive. The judge overseeing the case requested me to submit the details of the program and report the activities of officers involved in the program during the family visits. Eventually, the judge ruled against the complaint, citing the Turkish Constitution article 58, which is, "The State shall take necessary measures to protect youth from addiction to alcohol and drugs, crime, gambling, and similar vices, and ignorance."

Losing the case in Sanliurfa did not stop the efforts of the terrorist groups. They decided to take the issue to the Turkish Parliament based on the Turkish constitution's article 98, the right to submit questions in writing. They requested the Minister of Interior to get involved in halting the program I was administering in Sanliurfa and reply to their written questions in written form. This request eventually came back to me; I replied in detail and sent my responses to the Interior Ministry. The Minister of Interior, at the time, politically backed the program and used the justifications in my written report to reply, and that was the end of efforts of the terrorist groups to stop the Sanliurfa program, officially and judicially.

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Why Families?

I realized from my previous interactions with youth that, without the supervision and guidance of their parents or family members, such as older siblings, we would have limited success at interrupting the recruitment process. Stopping the radicalization and recruitment of young persons proved to be more difficult and challenging for the police and other stakeholders if the families were not involved. In addition, particularly in the early stages of the terrorist recruitment and ideological indoctrination process, I realized that susceptible youth were highly emotional and isolated, which sometimes caused our direct interactions to backfire, perhaps even further radicalizing the youth we were trying to communicate with. Eventually, I concluded that the police could not continually manage everybody to ensure that terrorist recruitment processes were disrupted. I realized that families are the best protectors and that they can keep a constant eye on their children. Furthermore, I wanted to make sure that through our interactions with the families, we would be able to protect the siblings and close relatives of recruits from also becoming the targets of terrorist recruiters.

The Team

I established a specific office for the use of the program under the Counterterrorism and Operations Division of the Sanliurfa Police Department. A police captain experienced in counterterrorism was assigned to lead the newly established office. Ten police officers, six male and four females, were chosen to work for the office. Police officers were assigned based on specific criteria, including their willingness to work for the program, their communication and language skills, their experience with counterterrorism, and the type of university degree they had. Most of the assigned officers had bachelor's degrees in social sciences, such as psychology and sociology, or had been teaching in these fields as well before training for the police force.

We also made sure that at least half of the officers knew the local languages, including Arabic and Kurdish, because, in some cases, the mothers did not speak Turkish. The officers wore plain clothes, and their police cars were unmarked. A visiting team consisted of three or four members, at least one of whom was always a female officer. Before the program started, the team members were trained on the objectives, on how to approach the families, on the importance of anonymity, and on how to avoid offending the ideologies of the families during their interactions. The training involved the establishment of the concept program; discussion on how to approach family members and subjects; information on the psychology of the youth; and the study of similar best practices. We also made sure that we evaluated the program after every visit and had the officers brief us about their interactions with the families. Based on the feedback we were receiving through the visits, we fine-tuned our approach and continued to discuss and evaluate our procedures.

One of the main reasons we did not include civilians in our visiting teams at the beginning was because of the issue of the trust between the families and visiting teams. In our test runs with civilians, the families constantly raised the question, "How can you guarantee us that the police will not come after our children?" It was very obvious from the beginning that the parents were not comfortable dealing with the civilians without getting a guarantee from the police and judiciary to ensure the safety of their children.

However, after the initial connections, we slowly started to introduce the families and the subjects to the social workers and psychologists from the Sanliurfa school district. In most cases, we handed over the youth to their school social workers and psychologists.

Visits

The family visits took place at the residences of the parents. We called the parents to request appointments. If the teams were unable to reach a family member via a phone call, they would go to the house to try to communicate with one of the parents directly. Visiting officers were

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very careful not to stigmatize the families by appearing in their neighborhood, so they tried their best in public not to reveal themselves as police officers.

The motto of the family visits was, "We are here to help you help your children, to save them from the hands of terrorist organizations." We wanted to show empathy and build a relationship with the family. Team members never tried to counter ideologies or organizations, and always respected the belief systems of the family. Excessive care was taken to avoid offending and alienating the family by talking about its ideology; as part of this strategy, the visiting teams refrained from mentioning the activities of the terrorist organizations in question.

In the beginning, discussions and communications would not involve any deradicalization activities, and our message was simple and clear: "Everyone is free to believe what they would like to believe, as long as their activities do not involve violence." This ideologically non-confrontational and polemic-free approach was essential in our visits, because our main objective for the first step was not to change the ideology of the family members or their children, but to save their children from becoming members of terrorist organizations.

Because the Sanliurfa program was not a deradicalization program, we did not involve ourselves in any ideological aspects of the subjects. In most cases, the families did not request us to work with them on ideological issues. Consequently, we did not collaborate with any authorities, such as the Turkish Diyanet.

Family visits usually lasted about an hour, and sometimes more, depending on the conversations with the family members. Team members did not start to talk about the objective of their visits directly; instead, they would assure the parents that they were not there to carry out any police investigations or to arrest anybody. Then, depending on the psychological and general atmosphere of the visits, officers would explain to the parents that a terrorist organization member was in touch with one or more of their children and that we wanted to intervene, so that we could work with the parents to save their children. At this stage, we offered the following statements and guarantees:

- As the police department, in particular as the counterterrorism police (TEM), we are not carrying out any investigation targeting your child.

- There has not been any official recordkeeping process involving your child.

- There is no ongoing judicial process regarding your child, and we are here specifically to ensure that there is not going to be an investigation.

- We are not here to collect any information or intelligence, and we are not going to ask any questions about the activities of your child or make any requests to acquire information or details about your child's interactions with the terrorist organization members in question.

- We would like to work with you so that we can help you to prevent your child from becoming a terrorist organization member in the future. At this point, your child has not become a member; however, we have indications that he or she might be a target and that the recruitment process might have started.

- This is a voluntary process, and we are not going to ask you to take any action you don't want to. However, we will do our best to assist you to reverse the radicalization and possible recruitment process targeting your child.

As can be seen in the data in the next section, most families volunteered to work with us so that they could get professional help. At this stage, the parents were encouraged not to confront their child and not to carry out any action that would upset their child. We did not want the youth in question, who had associated themselves with a terrorist organization but had not yet carried out any violent activities, to run away from home because of our visits or because they were scared of the reactions of their parents.

Team members worked with the parents on how to deal with the situation for each case and did not attempt to meet with a child unless they were asked to do so, particularly at the beginning of the process. Telephone numbers were exchanged, and parents were invited to

visit the prevention office if they wanted to consult with team members at the Police Department. At this point, only the team members interacted with the families; however, after the initial connections, social workers, psychologists, and teachers were involved in the process, on a case-by-case basis. Consequently, upon the first visit, the prevention process involving family members and parents started, and the team members continued to work with the families to ensure that their children understood what was happening and would consider cutting their ties with recruiters or others associated with terrorist organizations.

Who Were Visited?

This section defines and describes the four categories of youth who were targeted in the program.

The main criterion for including individuals and families in this program was association with a known and judicially recognized terrorist organization in Turkey. The individuals the Sanliurfa program had connections with one of the following terrorist organizations: the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), Turkish Hezbollah, Salafi Jihadist groups (including different al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS), and a small number of leftist terrorist organizations, including the DHKP/C (the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front) and TIKKO (the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist–Leninist). The Sanliurfa program never focused on political opposition groups and had no political agenda. This was one of the reasons the Erdogan government halted the program in 2014 and eliminated the office set up to administer it, as it was deemed not to serve his political agenda.

Prospective Terrorist Recruits

The most frequently visited group consisted of prospective terrorist recruits. The members of this group were identified based on counterterrorism police work and interactions with school administrators. Anyone who knowingly or unknowingly interacted with, or was

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approached by, known terrorist affiliates was considered to be in this group. We did not carry out any special investigations as the counterterrorism (CT) division but took note of the names of youth who came to our attention during CT investigations and operations. Our foremost objective was to reach out to the families in the very early stages of the interactions between the youth and known terrorist affiliates, to interrupt indoctrination and recruitment efforts before the recruiters could establish a strong bond with, or radicalize, the youth.

Youth Interacting with Known Terrorist-Affiliated Organizations

The second group consisted of youth who were already interacting with known terrorist-affiliated organizations. These organizations included foundations, associations, neighborhood study centers, bookstores, and any front organization that terrorist groups would employ to attract recruits. For example, one of the most frequented terrorism-affiliated organizations was a youth center operated by the affiliates of a terrorist organization in Sanliurfa, where they were able to attract high school and university students to a variety of activities, including music concerts, study groups, courses on subjects such as guitar playing, and arts and crafts.

Families Whose Children Were in Prison Due to Terrorism-Related Offenses

The third group comprised families whose children were in prison due to terrorism-related offenses. Our primary focus with these families was to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of the siblings and other relatives of the imprisoned terrorists. Similar visits took place after a youth was released from prison or detention, to convey the message that "we are here to help if you need us."

Families Whose Children Were Foreign Fighters

The fourth group was made up of families whose children were foreign fighters or who were known to be active members of terrorist organizations and who were hiding from the police or had outstanding arrest warrants. We wanted to make sure that the families in this

group were not alienated and that the siblings and other relatives of the recruits were not also under threat of terrorist recruitment.

Family visits covering the last two groups were conducted regardless of known threats of radicalization or recruitment, to make sure that the families did not feel alienated and that the youth were secure from being recruited, because the data presented in the next section, and our experiences, suggested that the siblings and relatives of known terrorists were more intensively targeted for recruitment than others.

After the Visits

Initial family visits were just the beginning of the interaction process with the parents and other family members. In most cases, the families followed up and requested to meet again, and in other cases, the team members re-contacted the families to see if they had any questions or if they needed any assistance. Our interactions with the youth usually started during this phase, and the team members tried to maintain contact with the family members, regardless of their situation. In general, the parents either brought their children to the Counterterrorism Division or encouraged their children to visit the team members. At this stage, the officers never attempted to question the ideology or operations of terrorist organizations, but tried to maintain positive communications with the youth. As most of the youth were students, we began to offer several programs for them as we started to interact. These programs provided us with an opportunity to introduce the families and their children to government- and NGO-affiliated social workers and teachers. Our after-visit activities continued on a year-round basis; they are summarized in the discussion that follows.

Youth activities related to terrorist organizations were controlled on a regular basis by the counterterrorism division. We tried to make sure that the participants in the program were cutting their ties with the terrorist organization members. Our message concerning the importance of dissociating from terrorist organization members and entities was conveyed through the families. Team members did not bring up the issue of associating with terrorists

when they met with the youth after the family visits, unless the youth wanted to talk about it. Instead, we directed them to a variety of activities that would help them in their careers or education and at the same time provide a positive and constructive context in which our team members, social workers, and teachers had opportunities to connect and communicate with the youth. In addition to those who were under the threat of terrorist recruitment, their siblings, family members, and close friends were also invited to these activities, provided they were of the appropriate age.

In the same vein, we arranged free courses and customized training for the youth. The courses focused on helping students get good scores on the central university placement test, and the training courses were available to provide different skill sets, with certifications, so the students would have a better chance of finding a job after graduation. The customized training courses focused on a variety of subjects, which were provided by the Sanliurfa Education Department, and led to certification for the occupations of auto mechanic, electrician, computer repair person, plumber, construction worker, hairdresser, and tailor. After the students graduated from these courses, we helped them to find jobs if they wanted to work.

In addition to the education and training programs, we offered sightseeing outings. Usually, on weekends, we took the students to tourist sites and natural attractions around Sanliurfa. Our team members accompanied the youth during these activities, and all expenses were paid through the program. Furthermore, we started to invite the youth to the police department sports arena and playgrounds, and our team members and other police officers played soccer with them.

All these activities were provided free of charge and on a voluntary basis. Students' parents provided written permission for their children to get involved in the programs. Our team members never attempted to elicit any information from the youth who participated. Our main objective was to provide an opportunity for the youth to observe and to come to understand by themselves through our actions. Issues surrounding terrorism, ideologies, and

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radicalization were only covered if a student wanted to talk about them, and in those cases, the discussions and consultations happened one-on-one and not in the presence of others.

Program Metrics, Data and Method

Data Sources

This section reports on some of the statistics collected during the Sanliurfa program, in order to inform the reader about the subjects, their families and general performance metrics. During the administration of the program, I attempted to learn more about the subjects through observations, evaluations done by the officers in the program, and the metrics that were collected. This section will present some of the reasons for why adolescents in particular might be attracted to terrorist organizations, and correlations between families and regional demographics.

The data for this section were collected from interviews with individuals who were targeted by different terrorist organizations for recruitment purposes and with their family members. The data consist of the results of face-to-face interviews conducted during the first year of the Sanliurfa Family Visits Program between August 2010 and August 2011. While the program continued until mid-2014 and interacted with almost 2,000 subjects, the first phase of the interviews and family visits included 479 different families and potential recruits, and of these contacts, 371 were face-to-face, and 98 were conducted by phone.

This section is based on all of the face-to-face interviews and field observations recorded during the family visits. No sampling was done. An analysis of the results from the second phase of the program, based on data from the 2011-2014 family visits, will also be published, and the results compared to those of this study. The families were openly told that we would anonymously record information about family demographics, including education levels and occupations of the family members. No paperwork or official documentation was filled out or signed, because the program was based on trust between the families and our C/T

department. We also realized at the beginning that implementation of an official recording or bookkeeping process would reduce our chances, since, in most cases, the family members were either illiterate or did not want to fill out or sign any documentation.

Hypotheses

My first hypothesis while designing the project was that most families, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and close relatives would not want their loved ones to become involved in a terrorist organization or become terrorists, even if they shared the same ideology with a terrorist organization, or even if they secretly or openly supported that terrorist organization. If given the opportunity and support, the families would do their best to save their children.

The second hypothesis was that most parents or family members would not be aware of their children's interactions with terrorist recruiters or other entities.

The third hypothesis was that early intervention through families could deter the recruitment of future terrorists, by persuading them to take sides against radicalization and violence. The involvement of families in the prevention of terrorist recruitment, particularly in the early stages of the process, has greater advantages than other forms of counterterrorism tactics, as successful interventions can easily halt radicalization and recruitment, and, in the end, directly and indirectly reduce the threat of terrorism.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data presented in this study were collected during the interviews and included the field notes of the interviewers, who spent hours with the families and their children. Anonymization of the data was ensured from the beginning of the recording phase, real names and addresses were never recorded, private and sensitive information about the families and their children were not included in the data, and the interviews were not video-taped or audio-recorded. The interviewees were provided with the survey questions if they agreed to respond, and the forms were filled out by the visiting teams. In addition to the data provided by the

survey forms, the experts who visited the families recorded their observations and the narratives of their subjects by taking notes.[13]

The families and other subjects who were present during the visits were assured of the confidentiality of the visits and the recordkeeping. To ensure confidentiality and promote rapport, experts explained to the families that their and their children's identities, and any relevant information that could reveal their identities, were never going to be recorded or revealed in any fashion.[14] For example, the recorded data, in addition to not including real names or addresses, did not include tell-tale information such as building or place names, nor the names of terrorist organizations or sub-groups, affiliated centers, associations, foundations, publication houses (which are often frequented by members of terrorist organizations), party buildings, representatives, or known businesses. For this reason, the analysis presented in this study will not reveal associations with specific terrorist organizations, but instead will describe a general approach and examination based on the Sanliurfa region.

Collected Data

The following are the variables and data points we collected through the surveys and through our observations during the visits.

- Residence: city, sub-city or town, region, and neighborhood
- Parents' occupations
- Father's education level
- Mother's education level
- Family income
- Whether the family contained a government employee or civil servant

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[13] Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

[14] Wiles, Rose., Crow, Graham., Heath, Sue., & Charles, Vikki. (2008). The Management of Confidentiality and Anonymity in Social Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11:5, 417-428.

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- Number of siblings (immediate family)

- The parents' approach to terrorist organizations

- Parents' prior knowledge of their children's interactions with terrorist organization members

- Parents' attitude towards the visiting team

- Parents' attitude towards the police in general

- Parents' level of satisfaction with the visits

- Parents' perspective on terrorist organizations.

Findings and Analysis

Residence: City, Sub-City or Town, Region, and Neighborhood

At the beginning of this program, place of residence was considered one of the main factors in terrorist recruitment and radicalization. One of the main reasons we focused on the influence of the neighborhoods is that terrorist recruiters and close family members associated with a terrorist organization could easily approach subjects and establish bonds due to geographical proximity, the fact that they were in the same family, or the fact that they had a variety of opportunities to spend time with the potential recruit. As a counterterrorism professional, I frequently observed during my investigations that terrorist recruiters reached out to their family members or close friends first, simply because they tended to trust them more and had ample ways to reach them for ideological indoctrination and recruitment.[15]

Terrorist recruiters need alone-time with their subjects, and often the suburbs of cities or small neighborhoods (where young people can interact closely on the streets, on playgrounds, in their local schools and mosques, or in their homes) can provide opportunities for ideological indoctrination. Local schools in different neighborhoods also play a critical

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[15] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2001). A Case Study of Leftist Terrorism in Turkey. Retrieved from https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2826/ (05/27/2020).

role in recruitment. High schools and universities, especially, can provide fertile ground.[16] A well-trained and established recruiter can reach out to hundreds of young people during school hours or after school, and often neither the teachers nor the families red flag these connections as a threat if they have no prior knowledge of them.[17]

For example, Eyyubiye was one of the neighborhoods that furnished a high number of interviewees for this study. In one of the Eyyubiye high schools, a fourteen-year-old senior female middle-school student was able to radicalize and recruit up to fifty students in her school, which had a population of over one thousand students. While the police were aware of the situation and were trying to intervene through the school administration, teachers, and more important, the student's family, the process proved to be extremely difficult, and the combined efforts of the stakeholders failed to stop her. Her parents were frustrated and told the officers, "they were unable to stop their daughter, and she was not listening to them." Prior to this incident, the Turkish government had passed a law limiting the police investigation of children until after the age of fifteen, and even the prosecutors lacked the legal power to arrest the student to stop the activity. Given the situation, we had to wait until the student recruiter was fifteen years old, and meanwhile, we visited the families of the students she was interacting with to reduce further damage.

In keeping with this, a previous study conducted by the author in Turkey[18] revealed that a majority of terrorist recruitment took place through former close connections of the recruiters and their subjects. In 2004, when the author asked "through which mediums terrorist recruiters had established initial contact with their subjects," 35% of the respondents indicated it was through their close friends, and 26% responded that it was through one of their relatives.

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[16] De Silva, Samantha. (2019). Role of Education in the Prevention of Violent Extremism. Retrieved from http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/448221510079762554/120997-WP-revised-PUBLIC-Role-of-Education-in-Prevention-of-Violence-Extremism-Final.pdf (05/27/2020).
[17] Coppock, Vicki. (2014). Can you Spot a Terrorist in Your Classroom?' Problematising the Recruitment of Schools to the 'War on Terror' in the United Kingdom. *Global Studies of Childhood*. 4(2):115-125.
[18] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2005). Terrorism as a social information entity: A model for early intervention. Retrieved from https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4800/ (05/27/2020).

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Table 1. Yayla Study: Initial Contact Medium Data (Valid N = 68).

Medium	Initial Contact	%
Friend	24	35.3
Relative	18	26.5
Terrorist Publications	11	16.1
Prison-Related	5	7.4
Terrorist Associations	4	5.9
Social / Mental Problems	2	2.9
Sympathy or Idealism	2	2.9
Demonstration	1	1.5
Loss/Arrest of Close Circle	1	1.5
Total	**68**	**100**

A study analyzing the Sinjar reports of al-Qaeda foreign fighter recruits reached similar results. The study examined how 177 Sinjar recruits had encountered their recruiters. According to the data, 97% of the respondents had connected through a social (84%), family (6%), or religious (6%) affiliation. For instance, the terrorists mentioned "through a brother" (social setting), "through my cousin" (family setting), and "through the mosque" (religious setting).[19]

Table 2. Sinjar Reports on al-Qaeda (Valid N = 177)

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[19] Watts, Clinton., (2008). Foreign Fighters: How Are They Being Recruited? Two Imperfect Recruitment Models. *Small Wars Journal*. Retrieved from http://selectedwisdom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/69-watts.pdf (05/27/2020).

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Recruited through	Frequency	%
Social	149	84.2
Religious	11	6.2
Family	11	6.2
Internet	6	3.4
Total	**177**	**100**

Another important empirical study carried out by Niyazi Ekici[20] in 2008, examining the relationship between the types of contact and the terrorists' status, found similar results regarding the role of friends and family members in terrorist recruitment. The Ekici study found that among convicted terrorists in Turkey, 67% had been recruited by their friends, 12% by a relative, and 14% by organizational associations. Among the prospective terrorists who had not yet been arrested, 35% indicated that it was their friends who had introduced them to the terrorist organization, 26% said it was through one of their relatives, and 22% through a terrorist organization. According to this study, altogether, half of the terrorists had been recruited by their friends, 20% by a relative, and 18% through terrorist associations.

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[20] Ekici, Niyazi., (2009). The Dynamics of Terrorist Recruitment: The Case of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) and the Turkish Hezbollah. Rutgers University. Retrieved from https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=14522598767447562740&hl=en&oi=scholarr (05/27/2020).

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Table 3. The Relationship Between Type of Contact and Terrorist Status

Contact Type (%)	Candidate Terrorists (N = 75)	Convicted Terrorists (N = 70)	Total
Friend	35	67	50
Relative	26	12	20
Org. association	22	14	18
Other	16	7	12
Total			**100**

In the case of the Sanliurfa program, the majority of the families visited lived in the suburbs of the city. The Eyyubiye region accounted for 57% of the families visited, and the Suleymaniye region accounted for 29%. The Sanliurfa city center, where the Yenisehir neighborhood is located, accounted for 12% of the families. The Viransehir, Hilvan, and Bozova regions accounted for only 2%, most likely because those towns are far away from the city center, and there is no municipal public transportation to those locations. Another factor that during the first year of the program, the focus was on the city center; the remote towns were included only during the second year. Eyyubiye and Suleymaniye in Sanliurfa are considered suburbs of the city, and the crime rates are considerably higher in these two regions compared to the rest of the neighborhoods in Sanliurfa. For example, the majority of the murder, aggravated assault, and theft incidents in Sanliurfa in 2011 and 2012 happened in these neighborhoods. In addition to the crime rates, the residents of these neighborhoods have lower incomes and less education compared to those in the center of the city.

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Table 4. City/Neighborhoods of the Family Visits (Valid N = 366)

City/ Neighborhood	Number of Residents	%
Eyyubiye	207	57
Suleymaniye	108	29
Yenisehir	45	12
Viransehir	3	1
Hilvan	2	1
Bozova	1	0
Total	**366**	**100**

Parents' Occupations

Almost all of the mothers of the participants were homemakers, and some of the mothers also worked on farms. One-third of the fathers were workers; around 10% of them were deceased at the time of the program. One of the common characteristics of jobs in the Sanliurfa region is long working hours for laborers, shopkeepers, and drivers. Visiting teams observed during their interactions that sometimes it was difficult to reach out to fathers, due to their working hours and conditions; often, they would leave home early and return late at night, sometimes too exhausted to interact with their children.

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Table 5. Fathers' Occupations (Valid N = 310)

Fathers' Occupations	Number of Fathers	%
Worker	102	33
Tradesmen/shopkeeper	48	16
Deceased	36	12
Unemployed	29	9
Farmer	29	9
Retired	21	7
Driver	17	5
Civil servant/white collar	16	5
Security guard	7	2
Livestock dealer	5	2
Total	**310**	**100**

Parents' Education Levels: Fathers

Only one-third of the families provided data on the father's education level. Among the responding fathers, there were only three university and four high-school graduates. More than one-third of the fathers had never attended school in their lives, and they did not know how to read or write. Forty-three percent knew how to read and write but had not graduated from an elementary school; only 25% had graduated from elementary school. There were no middle-school graduates among the fathers.

Table 6. Fathers' Education Levels (Valid N = 116)

Fathers' Education Level	Number of Fathers	%
Illiterate	34	29
Literate	50	43
Elementary School Graduate	25	22
High School Graduate	4	3
Bachelor's Degree	3	3
Total	**116**	**100**

Among the participants, the fathers' levels of education were significantly lower than those of the general population of Sanliurfa and Turkey. The Turkish Government Statistical Institute (TUIK)[21] publishes the results of countrywide demographic surveys of a number of variables every year. The levels of education for the Sanliurfa city center, where the family visits were conducted, were drawn from 2012 TUIK statistics. The general education levels for Turkey included males and females combined; therefore, it was not possible to distinguish between the females and males for Turkey.[22]

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[21] TUIK. (2013). Secilmis Gostergelerle Sanliurfa 2012. Ankara, Turkey.
[22] Karacadag Development Agency. (2012). İstatistiklerle Şanlıurfa-DiyarbakırŞanlıurfa-Diyarbakır in Statistics. Retrieved from
https://www.karacadag.gov.tr/Dokuman/Dosya/www.karacadag.org.tr_170_CX7I73DS_istatistiklerle_sanliurfa_diyarbakir_2012.pdf (05/27/2020).

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Table 7. Male Education Levels: Turkey, Sanliurfa, and the Research Sample

Education Levels	Program %	Sanliurfa Center %	Turkish Male and Female %
Illiterate	29	4	5
Literate	43	11	21
Elementary School Graduate	22	50	41
Middle-School Graduate	0	3.5	4
High-School Graduate	3	17.5	18
Bachelor's degree	3	9	8
Graduate Degree	0	5	3
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Mothers' Education Levels

The education levels of the mothers who responded to the survey were also significantly lower than those of the general populations of Sanliurfa and Turkey. Two-thirds of the mothers did not know how to read or write. Moreover, some did not even know Turkish, and the visiting officers had to communicate with them in Kurdish or Arabic. Sixteen percent knew how to read and write, and 13% had finished elementary school. Only four of the responding mothers were high-school graduates, and there were no college graduates in the group.

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Table 8. Mothers' Education Levels (Valid N = 116)

Mothers' Education Levels	Number of Mothers	%
Illiterate	79	68
Literate	18	16
Elementary School Graduate	15	13
High-School Graduate	4	3
Bachelor's degree	0	0
Total	**116**	**100**

The levels of education for the Sanliurfa females did not reflect those of the general Turkish population; their was a considerable education gap. The mothers who responded to the survey had significantly lower levels than those of both Sanliurfa and Turkey. For example, while the illiteracy rate for Turkey is less than 5%, it was 19% for the females living in Sanliurfa and 68% for the female respondents altogether, which is at least 3.5 times more than Sanliurfa city center and 14 times more than the average Turkish illiteracy rate. In regard to the other levels of education, the females in our survey scored significantly lower than both the Sanliurfa and Turkey averages, indicating that, in general, the levels of education among the mothers of Sanliurfa Family Visits Program were extremely low.

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Table 9. Female Education Levels: Turkey, Sanliurfa, and the Research Sample

Education Level (Female)	Program %	Sanliurfa Center %	Turkish Male and Female %
Illiterate	68	19	5
Literate	16	22	21
Elementary School Graduate	13	35	41
Middle-School Graduate	0	1.5	4
High-School Graduate	3	9	18
Bachelor's Degree	0	4.5	8
Graduate Degree	0	0	3
Unknown	0	9	0
Total	100	100	100

Family Income

Counterterrorism scholars have studied and debated over the role of income in whether or not one becomes a member of a terrorist organization, often without arriving at significant associations.[23] We also wanted to analyze the role of family income in the lives of the vulnerable youth with whom we were interacting during the Sanliurfa program. A total of 21% of the respondents indicated that they did not have a fixed income, or that their income level was extremely low, even by Sanliurfa standards. Some families had no work and were relying on government aid. Almost half of the respondents were in low-income families that were struggling to support their family members. These families, for the most part, had fathers who were laborers or farmers who worked long hours. Nineteen percent of the responding

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[23] Lee, Alexander. (2011). Who Becomes a Terrorist? Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence. *World Politics* 63(2):203-245

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families had mid-level incomes, and only 14% indicated that they had decent incomes and were comfortably supporting their family members.

Table 10. Family Income (Valid N = 207)

Family Income (in Turkish Lira)	Number of Families	%
No income (0-500)	44	21
Low (501-1,000)	95	46
Middle (1,001-2,000)	39	19
High (2,001 and up)	29	14
Total	**207**	**100**

Whether the Family Contained a Government Employee or Civil Servant

During my interactions with different terrorist organization members over the years, I observed that many of those who joined a terrorist organization did not have a relative who worked for the government in any capacity—as a teacher, an officer in a government or municipal agency, a member of the military, or a law enforcement officer—or in any contracted government job. We wanted to include this question in our survey because we wanted to analyze the effects on terrorist recruitment of having a family member working as a civil servant, either directly or indirectly (e.g., as a contractor). Ninety percent of the responders indicated that they had no relatives or family members working for the government in any capacity.

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Table 11. Participant Families Containing a Civil Servant (Valid N = 352)

Civil Servant in the Family	Number of Families	%
No	317	90
Yes	35	10
Total	**352**	**100**

Number of Siblings

One of the first observations I made when I started to work in Sanliurfa was the fact that the majority of the suspects had many siblings, often more than ten. In fact, it wasn't surprising for our officers to interview suspects who had over twenty brothers and sisters. Once, during an interview, a suspect told me he had twenty-seven siblings from the same father and mother. The number of siblings is important in analyzing terrorist recruitment, for two major reasons. The first is that, as the number of siblings increases, the amount of time and the financial resources a family can dedicate to each child may decrease. The second is based on the previous studies I carried out, which indicated that over a quarter of new terrorist recruits were pulled into terrorist organizations by close family members, often by brothers or sisters.[24]

There are ample examples of family members, often siblings without prior ideological or organizational affiliations, being lured by terrorist recruitment. For example, Salma and Zahra Halane, twin sisters from Manchester, traveled to Turkey from the UK to join ISIS in the summer of 2014. Apparently, their elder brother Ahmed was already in Raqqa; he had joined ISIS prior to their arrival. Ahmed successfully arranged for the twin sisters to move to the caliphate by meeting them at the Turkish border.[25]

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[24] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2005). Terrorism as a social information entity: A model for early intervention. Retrieved from https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4800/ (05/27/2020).

[25] Neumann, Peter R., (2016). Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West. London: I.B. Tauris. P. 120.

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The leveraging of family affiliations does not end with recruitment or direct radicalization; it can provide support for terrorists through a broad array of activities, including lodging them, financing them, harboring group members, or unknowingly and indirectly supporting their organizations. For instance, during an operation against the leftist terrorist organization DHKP/C in 1997 in Ankara, one of the suspects revealed that he had hidden explosives in his older sister's home in the suburbs of Ankara. When the older sister was confronted, she revealed that her brother gave her a package and told her he would come back to pick it up later. When we looked at the package, we realized that it was a manual weight scale. While the scale looked normal from the outside, after careful investigation, we found that several sticks of dynamite were carefully hidden inside.

A more recent incident involving an ISIS commander in Raqqa happened in 2017. Tarek Khayat, an Australian senior ISIS member in Raqqa, reached out to his brothers, Khaled and Mahmoud Khayat, in Australia; they had no prior connections to ISIS and were not known to have any association with ISIS other than their older brother's involvement with the organization. However, Tarek convinced them to carry out a plot in Australia and even shipped the explosives from Turkey to Australia to make sure the attack would succeed.[26]

Earlier in my career, when I started to work in counterterrorism, I realized that family members were under the direct threat of involving themselves with a terrorist organization through their siblings, based on a variety of factors, including trust between siblings, emotional bonds, ideological indoctrination inside the family, or simply an inability to say no to close kin. I have seen younger brothers and sisters being lured into terrorist organizations even without much indoctrination, often because their brothers or sisters had been arrested. On the other hand, while having a sibling associated with a terrorist organization might help with recruitment within a family, the reverse is also possible; that is, if there are disapproving siblings who are not affiliated with a terrorist organization, they can hinder recruitment through peer pressure and social control. For all these reasons, I wanted to analyze the

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[26] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2017). ISIS Airmail: The Bomb Shipped from Turkey to Australia. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-airmail-the-bomb-shipped-from-turkey-to-australia-1502320475 (05/27/2020).

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relationship between terrorist recruitment and the number of the siblings in a family. One important aspect of Sanliurfa is that people there tend to have larger families than the rest of the country.

In fact, the families we visited had considerably high numbers of children. Seventy-three percent had between four and ten. The highest numbers of siblings in a single-family were 21 and 22. Only 15% of the families had one to three children; 15% had five children, 14% had eight, 10% had six or seven, 9% had four, and 8% had nine. Four percent of the families had eleven to thirteen children.

Table 12. Number of Siblings in the Families (Valid N = 337)

Number of Siblings	Number of Families	%
1	10	3%
2	13	4%
3	28	8%
4	30	9%
5	52	15%
6	33	10%
7	33	10%
8	46	14%
9	27	8%
10	24	7%
11	14	4%
12	1	0%
13	12	4%
14	4	1%
15	1	0%

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16	5	1%
17	1	1%
18	1	1%
19	0	0%
20	0	0%
21	1	1%
22	1	1%
Total	**337**	**100%**

The Parents' Approach to Terrorist Organizations

The parents' approach to terrorist organizations was included among the variables for the data collection because I wanted to measure the influences of parents' affiliations with terrorist organizations on their children's radicalization or recruitment. The majority of the families responded that they had had no prior affiliation with any terrorist organization and that they did not support terrorist organizations in any capacity. It would be ambitious to expect family members to reveal any connection to a terrorist organization when responding to a survey being conducted by police officers, yet we also cross-checked to see whether or not any affiliation had existed before the visits.

Ten percent of the families responded that they were sympathetic towards the ideology of a terrorist organization but that they never involved themselves in its activities. These families fell into a category where the children assumed an ideological identification to a terrorist organization and its indoctrination practices through interactions within their family, although the family did not directly support that terrorist organization. Three percent of the families were known to be supporters of terrorist organizations. Their support usually involved attending demonstrations carried out by an organization or promoting its ideology.

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My assumption at the start of the program was that family attitudes towards terrorist ideologies would be a catalyzing factor, and that many of the families we visited would have an ideology close to the terrorist ideologies their children were being pulled into, based on my previous study in Ankara of the members of the leftist DHKP/C terrorist organization. According to that study, over 60% of the arrested DHKP/C members' families believed in some variety of the Marxist and Leninist ideologies adopted by terrorist organizations—a clear indication of how the families' prior connections to an ideology increased the likelihood of terrorist recruitment.[27] However, the Sanliurfa study, which was carried out almost ten years later, indicated that only 13% of the families supported the ideology of the terrorist organization recruiting their children.

Table 13. Parents' Approaches to Terrorist Organizations (Valid N = 357)

	Number of Families	**%**
No affiliation	309	86
Sympathetic	36	10
Supports	10	3
Unknown	2	1
Total	**357**	**100**

Parents' Prior Knowledge of their Children's Interactions with Terrorist Organization Members

Terrorist organizations and recruiters do not want the subjects' families to know about the interactions with their children, in order to ensure that the indoctrination and recruitment process does not get interrupted, and more important, that the families do not go to the authorities to file complaints and reveal the recruiters' activities. Several terrorist

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[27] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2005). Terrorism as a social information entity: A model for early intervention. Retrieved from https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4800/ (05/27/2020).

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organizations adopted similar approaches to preserving the discipline of secrecy from the beginning of the recruitment process. In efforts not to alert the families, secrecy is usually achieved through cover activities; the type depends on the region and age of the targets, and the activities often involve sports, studying, shopping, or sleepovers. For example, the leftist DHKP/C was very keen on the secrecy of their recruiters' interactions with their targets, and they often warned the youth they were approaching to hide their relationships with them. Alternatively, the recruiters used different covers or middle agents so the families would not suspect their intentions, such as neighborhood friends, teachers of study groups, and sports or music instructors.[28]

Similarly, al-Qaeda tends to be very careful during the recruitment process. In addition to applying several layers of secrecy from the beginning of their recruitment, they also teach their new subjects or members the "hear and obey" concept, which requires all members to carry out the orders of their emirs, regardless of the circumstances. The concept of "hear and obey," based on Salafi Jihadi teachings, ensures that new organization members will carry out the orders of their recruiters, which often include "keeping their interactions secret and not talking to anyone, including their family members, about the organization and what they are doing." This concept is based on a saying of the Prophet Muhammed, to pledge "allegiance to the Messenger [sws] to hear and obey [a Muslim ruler] whether it is convenient or inconvenient for us, and at our times of difficulty or ease … ," making it mandatory for every member of the terrorist organization to follow the orders of their emirs as a religious rule, and not to receive them simply as orders.[29] As a matter of fact, followers are forced to carry out the orders of their emirs as though the orders are a religious duty, and those who underestimate this rule or refuse to obey are harshly disciplined.

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[28] Yayla, Ahmet. S., (2001). A Case Study of Leftist Terrorism in Turkey. Retrieved from https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2826/ (05/27/2020).
[29] Abu Amru Al Qa'idy. (2010). Al-Qaeda Recruitment Manual, A Course in the Art of Recruiting. https://ia800300.us.archive.org/32/items/ACourseInTheArtOfRecruiting-RevisedJuly2010/A_Course_in_the_Art_of_Recruiting_-_Revised_July2010.pdf (05/27/2020).

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In addition to ensuring the secrecy of interactions and connections through the teachings of secrecy and the hear-and-obey concept, many terrorist organizations also start a process of "isolation" in an effort to retain new members, allowing them to interact only with their recruiters and like people, so they are not negatively influenced. Terrorist organizations isolate their members from the outside world not only through personal interactions, but also through what they read, watch, or listen to and through those they interact with, similar to reducing the risk of defection or influence by counter-propaganda activities. For example, Salafi Jihadi terrorist organizations, in this manner, often require their new members "not to involve themselves with the teachings and literature of other Islamic traditions and not to communicate or discuss their ideologies with others even if they are family members."[30]

For the reasons listed above, a question was included in the survey of the Sanliurfa program to determine whether the parents had prior knowledge of their children's activities involving terrorist recruiters. The responses of the parents for this variable were not surprising; approximately 88% of the families stated that they were unaware of their children's ties with terrorist recruiters or entities. The responses reaffirmed one of the main hypotheses of the Sanliurfa program, as we suspected that most of the families were unaware of their children's involvement.

Table 14. Parents' Prior Knowledge of their Children's Interactions with Terrorist Organization Members (Valid N = 355)

	Number of Families	%
No	312	88
Yes	43	12
Total	**355**	**100**

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[30] Yayla, Ahmet, S., (2017). Summer of Terror Approaches: What to Do to Counter Martyrdom Attacks? Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/summer-of-terror-approaches-what-to-do-to-counter_us_594dfa54e4b0f078efd981d3 (05/27/2020).

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Parents' Attitude Towards the Visiting Team

Offering hospitality and welcoming the visiting team members, based on the Turkish customs in the region, were good signs of how well the visiting teams were building rapport with the families and how well our communications with the parents were being received. This variable was not among the survey questions; rather, the team members recorded their observations after each visit and indicated in their reports whether or not the families had welcomed them. Based on established Turkish customs, team members offered small gifts to the families they were visiting. The gifts included tricks or toys for the children, live flower arrangements for the house, and refreshments for the adults. Depending on the family's situation, food boxes also were offered.

How they were welcomed was an important indicator for the team, who were able to adjust their tone and approach when communicating based on how they perceived the attitude of the parents.

This variable consisted of four categories or degrees of acceptance. Team members observed a warm and sincere reception from the families 84% of the time. This meant they were welcomed inside the house without any conditions after they introduced themselves and showed their badges. Families in this category also accepted the gifts the teams brought with them. The second category was observed when the families were skeptical as introductions were made, but the teams were welcomed inside, and the families accepted the gifts 10% of the time. Often, as the conversation continued, and the families better understood the objectives of the visit, their skepticism diminished over time. The third category was observed when the families were not welcoming after the initial introductions at the door; however, when the teams conveyed the objective of the visits in a detailed way, the families eventually accepted the officers inside the house, accepted the gifts, and decided to cooperate after understanding the situation. The final category involved families who did not accept the visiting team members and did not invite them in, but turned them away from the door and never accepted the gifts. While there were only five such occasions, accounting for only 1% of the visits, this hostility towards the visiting teams existed because, according to findings

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based on prior police work, the families had close associations with a terrorist organization or its ideology.

Table 15. Parents' Attitude Towards the Visiting Team (Valid N = 354)

Parents' Attitude towards the Visiting Team	Number of Households	%
Warm and sincere	298	84.2
Skeptical and accepted the gifts	36	10.2
Negative manner but accepted the gifts	15	4.2
Negative manner and did not accept the gifts	5	1.4
Total	**354**	**100**

Parents' Attitude Towards the Police in General

This question was included in the survey to measure the attitudes of the families towards the police in general. One of the reasons we wanted to measure this was due to alienation and distancing resulting from the animosity of terrorist organizations towards the government in general and the police in particular. It was a common tactic among many terrorist organizations to distance prospective recruits from the government and portray law enforcement as the enemy, in order to ensure the isolation of the youth and prevent defections. Portraying the government and law enforcement as the enemy reinforces in- and out-group boundaries, which is a requirement for the radicalization process through extremism.[31]

Of the responding families, 82% indicated that they were open to interactions with the police and that they had no biases. Eleven percent of the respondents indicated that they were skeptical about the police, an indication of reduced trust. Five percent of the families indicated that they simply did not trust the police and that they were suspicious about law

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[31] Berger, J. M. (2018). Extremism. Cambridge: MIT Press.

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enforcement in general. And finally, 2% of the respondents indicated that they were completely closed to the police and would not want to interact with law enforcement. The findings for this variable coincide with those for the previous variable, which involved the observations of the visiting teams about the parents' attitudes towards the visiting officers.

Table 16. Parents' Attitude Towards the Police (Valid N = 361)

Parents' Attitude Towards the Police	Number of Households	%
Open	295	82
Skeptical	42	11
Suspicious	17	5
Closed	7	2
Total	**361**	**100**

Parents' Level of Satisfaction with the Visits

With this question, we wanted to determine if the families were satisfied with the visits. The initial responses were important, so that we could gauge how attitudes would change over time, because teams often continued to meet with the parents and invite them to their offices and to programs that were designed to assist both the youth under threat of recruitment and other family members.

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Table 17. Parents' Satisfaction with the Visits (Valid N = 360)

Parents' Satisfaction with the Visits	Number of Households	%
Satisfied	322	89
Undecided	34	10
Unsatisfied	4	1
Total	360	100

Parents' Perspective on Terrorist Organizations

The final question in our survey was asked to measure the parents' perceptions of the terrorist organizations their children were involved or associated with. The names of terrorist organizations were not included in the survey questions, so as not to alienate the family members.

Table 18. Parents' Perspective on Terrorist Organizations (Valid N = 361)

Parents' Perspective on Terrorist Organizations	Number of Households	%
Not supportive	309	86
Sympathetic	36	10
Supportive	10	3
No answer	2	1
Total	357	100

Why Do Youth Struggle to Break Their Ties with Terrorist Organizations?

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During the program, through our interactions with family members and their children, and based on our prior interactions with young terrorist recruits, we were able to determine four main reasons for why the youth were struggling to break their ties with terrorist organizations and their recruiters. These are as follows:

Established friendships: One of the reasons young people could not say no to their recruiters was the bonds and strong friendships they had already established with their recruiters. Many of the high school and university students indicated after our interventions that they knew what they were doing wrong, but they could not say no to their friends for fear of losing their friendship. In addition to engaging in one-to-one friendships, the recruiters introduced their new subjects to a larger network of close-minded, in-group individuals who were already associated with the terrorist organization, so that the prospective recruits would also form bonds and establish friendships within the organization. At this stage, it became even more difficult for the young minds to cut their ties with the larger group they were involved with.

Ideological factors and belief systems: The indoctrination process through ideological education carried out by terrorist organization members played a critical role in our program when we discovered the barriers against breaking one's ties with a terrorist group. The prospective recruits in our program often thought that breaking their ties with an organization was a betrayal of the ideology and cause. If we could not intervene at an early of the recruitment process, or if the subjects had already radicalized themselves through other means, such as the internet and social media, they reached a state where they did not want to become "traitors" and abandon their belief system,

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Psychological factors: After the family visits, as we started to spend time with some of the youth, we realized that several psychological factors were also barriers to cutting ties with an organization. The chief factor was the friendships and group bonds established through the recruiters. Many of the youngsters we interacted with indicated that they did not want to be alone. Their friends were their only outlet for fun outside of the home, and they often cited a lack of other means to have fun. They felt alone, even though the majority had several siblings close to their age.

Another factor often brought up was the desire to avoid being stigmatized and labeled by the in-group or friend circles as "traitor," "fearful" ["chicken" in the slang they were using], or "not man enough." Another critical factor was "honor." The group members who were trying to cut their ties at the beginning of the recruitment process felt that they would be seen as "disloyal" and "unworthy" in the eyes of their friends, which meant a lot in the patriarchal society in Sanliurfa.

In addition, we found that some youth had mental problems and needed help. They were either not able to comprehend the situation they were being dragged into, or they simply did not care and wanted to go with the rhythm, regardless of the consequences. The last common psychological factor was rebellion against one's family, especially against parents if they had had a conflict with their child in the past, or in some cases, if they had discovered their child's interactions with a terrorist organization and tried to cut the ties by threatening them, which eventually backfired.

Supposed prior offenses (non-violent and violent): Among the reasons the youth gave for fearing to cut their ties with the terrorist organization was that they believed they had already committed a crime, and they did not want to go to prison. Terrorist organizations basically embedded the idea that "you are either with us and free, or, if you break your ties, you will go to prison." The supposed crimes often included being associated with a terrorist organization (the social group the recruit had joined), being part of a demonstration supported or initiated by a terrorist organization, or

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distributing brochures and pamphlets containing illegal material at their school or in their neighborhood. None of the youth reported an actual violent crime, and we, as the police, were not aware of any violent offense carried out by the subjects of the program.

Summary of the Findings

This program was unique to the Sanliurfa area, and the findings represent the profiles of families and their children there. There was no sampling of the participants, and everyone who was visited and responded to our surveys was included in the analysis. Among the significant and unique findings of this program are the following:

The majority of our subjects lived in the suburbs. A total of 86% of the families who were visited lived in the suburbs of Sanliurfa. While those neighborhoods were not far away from the center of Sanliurfa, they consisted of underdeveloped sections of the city.

The number of children in the families visited was significantly high. Half of the families had five to eight children, 75% had four or more, 18% had ten or more, and there were families with over twenty children, most of them living as a single household.

Most of the fathers had low-skill jobs and worked extensive hours trying to support their families. Of the fathers, 33% were laborers, 16% were self-employed, 12% were deceased, and 9% were unemployed.

The education levels of the fathers who responded to the survey were significantly low, both compared to Sanliurfa and to Turkey in general. Thirty-four percent of the fathers in the sample were illiterate, only 43% could read and write, just a quarter were

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primary school graduates, and there were only four high school graduates and three college graduates.

The mothers' education levels were even lower; 68% were illiterate, and only 13% were primary school graduates; there were four mothers who had graduated from a high school and none with a college or university degree.

Two-thirds of the families either did not have a stable income or had a very low income, even by Sanliurfa standards. Twenty-one percent of the families had no consistent work or made less than 500 TL per month; 46% had incomes between 500 TL and 1,000 TL, which was not enough to support a small family. Nineteen percent of the families reported incomes between 1,000 TL and 2,000 TL, and 13% reported an income of 2,000 TL, which at the time was less than a new schoolteacher would make per month.

The following were also observed:

- 90% of the families and their close relatives had no one in the family working for the government;
- 84% of the families welcomed the visiting teams openly and sincerely; only five families did not invite the team members into their houses and turned them away;
- 82% of the families indicated that they were open to interactions with the police and had no negative biases against law enforcement; 18% of the families had initial doubts and suspicions;
- 89% of the families stated that they were satisfied with the visits;

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- 86% of the families denied supporting any terrorist organizations; 10% openly indicated that they had sympathy towards a terrorist organization, and 3% stated that they were supporting the activities of a terrorist organization, at least by being present at their gatherings;
- 88% of the families stated that they were not aware that their children were interacting with young members of a terrorist organization, with terrorist recruiters, or with a terrorist organization.

At the end of the first year, the program had 86% success in cutting the ties of prospective terrorist recruits with friends affiliated with terrorist organizations, with terrorist recruiters, or with any terrorist entity. We expected that this percentage might drop slightly over time, due to factors such as the lack or discontinuation of parental supervision, departure from Sanliurfa for a college degree or work, or subjects' being approached and persuaded by a terrorist organization again.

Established friendships, ideological factors and belief systems, psychological factors, and supposed violent or non-violent prior offenses were among the chief reasons why the youth in Sanliurfa had difficulty breaking their ties with terrorist organizations.

Common patterns were seen across the recruitment processes of different terrorist organizations. Although there were minor differences among the organizations and ideologies, most of the terrorist groups followed the pattern described in this study.

The Sanliurfa program lasted for four years. Around 2,000 families were visited under this program between 2010 and 2014. This article includes an analysis of the dataset for the first year of operations. The subsequent phase of the program, which was extended to include the towns around Sanliurfa as well as the suburbs, will be the subject of another article.

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Discussion and Limitations

Before we started the program, one of the issues we discussed considerably was whether we should include civilians—such as social workers, NGO representatives, and teachers—on our visiting teams, or whether we should work only with the civilians and not include any counterterrorism officers. In fact, we tested the idea by asking a few trusted NGO representatives to interact with a number of families, to see their reactions. A few problems arose with these civilian family visits. The first was that, regardless of whatever messages the civilian visitors or intervention teams communicated to the families, they were not able to persuade the families to cooperate. The families kept raising questions, including, "How can we trust you?" "What if counterterrorism officers come and arrest our son or daughter?" "What assurances can you give us?" After a few rounds of visits, we realized that it would be more productive if the visiting teams were plainclothes counterterrorism officers, who could assure the families that their children would not be arrested and that they would not be subject to any investigations if they cut their ties with terrorist organizations. In our case, in Sanliurfa, the families wanted to make sure that they were directly interacting with the authorities and wanted to have direct and open communication lines to the officers who could help them in the long run.

We were aware that some of the families would hide their sympathy towards a terrorist ideology or their connections with a terrorist organization, given the fact that the visiting teams were counterterrorism officers. Moreover, we knew that many families, particularly at the beginning, would have biases against the police and the visiting teams. We understood that these factors would affect the reliability of our surveys, especially when we were trying to measure the families' responses to our visits. However, all these issues were secondary concerns for us, as the objective of the program was not to carry out research, but rather to save the youth. Research and analysis focusing on the findings of the program were essentially by-products.

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We realized that the parents' responses to some of the survey questions, such as when we asked if they had any connections with a terrorist organization or sympathy towards an ideology, might not be reliable and honest, as they knew they were dealing with the police, and obviously they would not have wanted to reveal their affiliations, if they had any. We were fine with that, and the team members tried to emphasize the non-investigative nature of the visits to overcome this problem. However, we knew some families would not be completely open, due to their fear of being investigated by the police or scrutinized by their terrorist associates.

The visiting team's interactions with the families were not audio-recorded. We did not want to cause concern for the families by recording the conversations, and we made it clear during our visits that there would be no recordings. All the narratives, team members' observations, and parents' responses were collected after the visits in written form. A team member took notes to protect the privacy of the family, and these were used later for the reports.

Some families directly stated that they did not want their neighbors to be aware of the nature of the visits, that they were concerned that the appearance of the police at their homes would lead to their being stigmatized as criminals or terrorists, or simply that they wished to remain safe from the scrutiny of neighbors or tribe or family members. In sum, the visiting team members realized that some parents were not comfortable meeting with them in their homes. So, in some cases, the family visits could backfire, and the teams concluded it would be more productive to meet with these families at other locations, including police departments.

The initial program findings were consistent with the first hypothesis. Eighty-four percent of the families welcomed the visiting teams openly and sincerely, and 82% indicated that they were open to interacting with the police and that they had no biases against law enforcement, which was a clear and strong indication of the families' and parents' willingness to work with the police to save their children. This assumption was also supported by the fact that 89% of the families stated that they were satisfied with the visits. Therefore, based on the

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findings and results of the program, we concluded that the majority of the families and parents did not want their children to become involved with terrorist organizations.

The second hypothesis was also supported by the findings of the program. Eighty-eight percent of the families stated that they were not aware that their children were interacting with a terrorist organization or with terrorist recruiters. This indicates a major problem that needs to be closely and carefully studied, as terrorist organizations often direct their new recruits or subjects to be vigilant and secretive about their connections and interactions.

The findings of the program also supported the third hypothesis. Initially, during the first year, 86% of the prospective recruits cut their ties with friends who affiliated with terrorist organizations, terrorist recruiters, or other terrorist entities. We also understood that this was a long journey, and the initial disconnection from the terrorist circles might not inherently prevent terrorist recruitment in the long run. This was also acceptable to us, because we knew that if they had interacted with known terrorists, we would be aware of those interactions, which would prompt us to revisit families. However, due to the political turmoil in Turkey after the December 17, 2013, corruption operations against the family members and close circle of then-Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, the C/T police units all over Turkey were dismantled, new officers were assigned, and all prevention programs were halted. Therefore, we do not have any data to monitor the long-term success of the program.

Finally, there is a need to state that the author was deeply involved in the Sanliurfa program as the creator and administer, and therefore, there are automatically issues of bias involved. This is why the goal of this article is not to "evaluate" the program but to present it from an inside perspective.

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Final Remarks

Terrorist organizations can stay alive only if they keep recruiting new members. Preventing terrorist recruitment may be one of the easiest, least lethal, and most humane counterterrorism tactics. Through this program, we were able to significantly reduce terrorist recruitment among the youth in Sanliurfa, including high school and university students, which resulted in a decrease in the number of terrorism-related incidents, including low-level attacks, such as arson and the throwing of Molotov cocktails, and other types of terrorist activities. While this program was carried out locally in Sanliurfa, it could easily be applied to reduce terrorist recruitment in other locales, with some adjustments based on demographics and specific circumstances.

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