

TEN WAYS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY REPORTING FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TARGETED VIOLENCE

BACKGROUND

In three out of four cases of violent extremism or other targeted, mass attacks, the perpetrator makes their intention known beforehand, often to family members, friends, or co-workers. Yet these persons do not come forward in time to prevent the attack. Delays in sharing information matter both in terms of stopping a potential attack and also offering diversion and support options to a person before they commit a crime. The January 6th, 2021 attack on the Capitol and the rising and ideologically diversified threat of extremist violence in the U.S. makes understanding and addressing these matters more urgent. To understand what is needed to help such friends and family members share information on potential acts of violent extremism or targeted violence as early as possible, we conducted qualitative interviews with 24 law enforcement and community practitioners in California and Illinois. In this brief, we describe common barriers and facilitators to community reporting and provide 10 recommendations for improving community reporting based on our findings.

“It's the trust of that community in whoever they're going to for support and help or putting in a report. And if you haven't built that trust, you're never going to get that report” (Community health worker)

“They're afraid to be wrong, that's number one. You don't want to be the whistleblower and everybody comes down and investigates your brother and you find out that he wasn't really doing anything and now you have the fallout from reporting.” (Law enforcement)

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

BARRIERS

Participants said community reporting was **impeded by**:

- Not knowing what behavior or statements may precede violence
- Not knowing how law enforcement will respond to a report
- Not knowing who to report to besides the police, and how information sharing, referrals, and diversion work
- Low trust in law enforcement due to racial disparities in policing
- Fear of a report being incorrect, being a “snitch”, or being punished by law enforcement
- No clear definition of extremist and targeted violence among community practitioners
- Lack of including the community in improving the reporting process
- Lack of knowledge about how violent extremism is similar or different from mental illness

FACILITATORS

Participants said reporting would be **improved by**:

- Increasing the awareness and knowledge of reporting processes for potential reporters
- Providing community-based services to support those who make reports and those who are being reported
- Improving policies and procedures for receiving reports
- Building capacity and training community leaders who can take reports

- Having accessible and safe reporting methods
- Developing trust between community members and law enforcement agencies

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community reporting for both violent extremism and targeted violence in the U.S. can be improved by collaboratively strengthening law enforcement and community capacities for violence reporting and prevention. All recommendations should be based on sound theory, best practices, and monitored and evaluated.

FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT (with community collaboration)

1. Expand the range of options for community reporting of potential violence, including both in person and remote (e.g. on-line) options, and reporting to non-law enforcement professionals and community-based organizations.
2. Train law enforcement in racial equity and dismantling racist policing practices to remedy inequities and increase community trust.
3. Train law enforcement in better understanding and responding to diverse cultural practices of the communities they serve relevant to reporting.
4. Include training in facilitating community reporting in community-law enforcement forums.
5. Clarify for community members how the reporting process works, including information sharing, referrals, diversion and support.

FOR COMMUNITIES (with law enforcement collaboration)

1. Conduct campaigns to educate communities about what, how, why, and where to report about potential violent extremism and targeted violence.
2. Develop and disseminate a clear statement of how authorities are accountable to community members who make a report.
3. Identify and train community advocates and organizations to receive reports.
4. Train mental health and health professionals, social service workers, and educators who may receive reports in threat assessment.
5. Provide supportive services to community members who may fear or face difficulties as a result of making reports.

NEXT RESEARCH STEPS

We are interviewing community members regarding their views on sharing information on a friend or family member planning a violent extremist or targeted violence attack.



This project was conducted by David Eisenman (UCLA), Stevan Weine (UIC), Michele Grossman (Deakin University), Paul Thomas (University of Huddersfield), Chloe Polutnik Smith (UIC), Nicole Jones (UCLA), and Nilpa Shah (UCLA) under award [2018-ZA-CX-0004](#) from the U.S. National Institute of Justice.

Version 1.0, March 18, 2021