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The critical role of friends in networks for countering violent extremism: toward a theory of vicarious help-seeking

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Who would be the first to notice, and able to intervene, with individuals considering acts of violent extremism? Study 1 found evidence that those best positioned to notice early signs of individuals considering acts of violent extremism might be those individuals' friends: perhaps more so than school counselors, clergy, or family members. Furthermore, participants indicated that the predominant reason underlying individuals' reluctance to reach out to countering violent extremism (CVE)-relevant service providers was fear of the potential repercussions for such actions. Additionally, that fear generalized not only to a reluctance to reach out to law enforcement agencies, but also to others within prospective CVE-relevant networks (i.e. religious officials, or family members). An option for addressing such reluctance (via an evidence-based, anonymous, texting-oriented crisis hotline for associate-gatekeepers) is discussed. Given that reluctance, what factors might affect individuals' willingness to intervene in CVE contexts? Study 2 revealed two extensions to the bystander intervention model [Darley, J., & Latané, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377–383], necessary for it to be applied more accurately, and usefully, to CVE contexts. Specifically, individuals' reluctance to dissuade their friends or family members from committing violence appeared to be moderated by their level of fear that doing so might damage their relationships with them. Furthermore, there was evidence that individuals' level of personal identification with friends or family members might reduce both their willingness to intervene, and their ability to recognize violent extremism in the making.

Keywords: countering violent extremism; CVE; networks; help-seeking; bystander intervention; gatekeepers

Despite its label, countering violent extremism (CVE) essentially refers to a preventative approach to counterterrorism: an approach intended to preclude individuals from engaging in, or materially supporting, ideologically motivated violence (White House, 2015). The fundamental approach to CVE, at least in the USA, is to empower communities to develop means of CVE, by tailoring programs and interventions to local circumstances (White House, 2015). Such variations in local CVE approaches can be seen, for example, among the three US cities – Los Angeles (LA), Minneapolis, and the Greater Boston area – chosen by The White

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House as CVE pilot sites (see Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Minnesota, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, 2015). These three cities, in addition to what has become known as 'The Montgomery County Model' (of metro Washington, DC) are characterized, in part, by robust partnerships between law enforcement, social service agencies, and the communities they serve. Those partnerships are described in their respective CVE framework documents (see Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Minnesota, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, 2015; World Organization for Resource Development and Education [WORDE], 2015).

Despite local variations in approaches to CVE, programs focused on CVE that are designed for secondary prevention¹ can be described as having two basic components. The first is an informal system of CVE-relevant service provider networks. These range from law enforcement agencies, school systems, faith-based organizations, social service agencies, psychological services, and more. The second component is comprised of individuals willing and able to connect potentially at-risk persons to those service providers (see Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Minnesota, 2015; United States Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, 2015). Those prospective helpers (so-called 'gatekeepers') can be comprised of the employees of the aforementioned organizations, but that term also encompasses anyone who may be in a position to make such referrals, including family members and friends of the potentially at-risk person. Ideally, these two components dovetail such that potentially at-risk persons are identified at early stages of their path toward ideologically motivated violence and who are referred, by those who care about them, to services that effectively decompress whatever forces seem to be compelling the person toward such violence.

As the following research (Study 1) describes, however, there appears to be a critical disconnect between local CVE-relevant service provider networks and CVE-relevant gatekeepers who are not directly affiliated with (e.g. employed by) the service provider networks. This finding is vitally important, because – despite their best efforts to counter violent extremism – CVE-relevant service providers, as gatekeepers, cannot be everywhere at all times. Therefore, other 'associate-gatekeepers', for example, friends of potentially at-risk persons, are in a vitally important position to connect potentially at-risk persons to CVE-relevant service providers.

Consequently, it becomes of great importance to understand what might facilitate, or hinder, 'vicarious help-seeking': associate-gatekeepers shepherding their friends to CVE-relevant services. This is a heretofore-unexplored area of theory relative to help-seeking (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). Results from Study 2 lent support to two proposed expansions of Darley and Latané's (1968) well-known bystander intervention model, and represent the genesis of a theory of vicarious help-seeking: tailored to help-seeking, in CVE contexts, wherein offers of help might be unwelcome by prospective help-recipients.

Study 1: the 'critical disconnect'

Based on our original data, from both LA and metro Washington, DC, there was consensus among law enforcement, faith-based community leaders, and general

community members regarding their belief that the most well-positioned gatekeepers, able to notice early signs of persons considering acts of violent extremism, would be associate-gatekeepers of a certain kind: those persons' friends. Indeed, the consensus, regarding that belief, was that potentially at-risk individuals' friends could better help shepherd those individuals to CVE-relevant service providers than school counselors, clergy, or family members. This study also found evidence of a potential, and critical, disconnect between those friends and local CVE-relevant service providers. That disconnect is a barrier to 'vicarious help-seeking,' a barrier hindering individuals from shepherding those in need of help to appropriate services. This study describes that disconnect, in addition to key implications and a prospective part of the solution to bridge that disconnect.

Method

Participants

The aforementioned disconnect was revealed through analyses of our original data collected in both LA (in partnership with the Los Angeles Police Department [LAPD]) and metro Washington, DC (as part of National Institute of Justice [NIJ]-funded research), from 2013 to 2014. These data ($n = 172$) were from the first two of three waves of data, collected as part of an ongoing CVE program evaluation. Participants from LA included members of the LAPD's community liaison unit, leaders from several LA-based Muslim communities, and other adult members of several LA-based Muslim communities.² Participants from metro DC included members of the Montgomery County Faith Community Working Group (FCWG), the Montgomery County Department of Police, and community members from Montgomery County, Maryland (including both adults and youth of diverse ages and faith backgrounds).

The law enforcement sample ($n = 33$) was 21% Female, 79% Male, ages 28–50, with an interquartile age range of 31–42. [Table 1](#) lists the religious composition of this sample.

The sample of LA-based Muslim leaders and members from LA-based Muslim communities ($n = 29$) was 32% Female, 68% Male, ages 18–60, with an interquartile age range of 35–50. The sample of community members from Montgomery County ($n = 76$) was 59% Female, 41% Male, ages 11–68, with an interquartile age range of 14–35. [Table 2](#) lists the religious composition of this sample.

The Montgomery County FCWG sample ($n = 34$) was 30% Female, 70% Male, age 39–75 with an interquartile age range of 50–66. [Table 3](#) lists the religious composition of this sample.

Table 1. Religious composition of law enforcement sample.

Agnostic	3%
Catholic	27%
Muslim	3%
Protestant	15%
Unknown/missing	52%

Table 2. Religious composition of metro DC community sample.

Agnostic	8%
Atheist	5%
Buddhist	3%
catholic	25%
Hindu	7%
Muslim	32%
Protestant	17%
Other	3%

Table 3. Religious composition of the FCWG sample.

Agnostic	6%
Atheist	3%
Buddhist	3%
Catholic	3%
Jewish	12%
Muslim	29%
Protestant	38%
Unknown/missing	6%

Participant recruitment

Los Angeles

Participants, comprised of LAPD community liaison officers, took part in approximately one-hour interviews, during a two-day data collection in the fall of 2013. Leaders from several LA-based Muslim communities also participated in interviews. Contacts were obtained from LAPD’s liaison unit and those participants also were queried for recommendations regarding other prospective LA-based Muslim community leader interviewees (i.e. snowball sampling). Three of those leaders also posted, on their professional organizations’ websites, a promotional notice for the study containing a link to the online survey component. No financial incentives were offered to the above subsamples for their participation.

Participants, comprised of other adult members of several LA-based Muslim communities were recruited via an in-person presentation/recruitment pitch, made by one of the present authors, at an Islamic Center, in greater LA, during one of the LAPD’s semi-annual Muslim community forums. Prospective survey respondents were informed that their participation would qualify them to win a \$250 Amazon gift card.

Metro Washington, DC

General community members. Participant recruitment, in metro DC, was performed through several strategies in cooperation with the WORDE (2015; a Muslim-led, non-profit, educational organization whose mission is to enhance communication and

understanding between communities to mitigate social and political conflict). Throughout the month prior to each of three data collection periods, WORDE program staff broadcast the opportunity to partake in a survey and/or focus group. This was done via in-person announcements (at their community events), their email list-serve, their Facebook page, their Twitter account, through local high-school list-serves that broadcast volunteer opportunities, and phone calls with local school teachers and parents whose students or children (respectively) WORDE's staff believed might be interested in participating.

Participants were informed that the study was sponsored by the NIJ as part of a multi-faceted, community-led effort to promote community cohesion, resiliency, and the prevention of violence. These participants were compensated \$25 to complete an online survey or \$50 to participate in a focus group (paid in the form of Amazon gift cards). Participants completed a brief pre-screening questionnaire that asked them to provide their name, age, race, religion, and email address or phone number, so that they may be contacted by a member of the research team – if selected to participate in the survey or a focus group.

From this participant list, a stratified random sampling procedure ensured data across sexes, races, and religions. Additionally, participants were not selected into more than one data collection wave or data collection modality (surveys vs. focus groups). Parental consent, and minors' assent, were obtained for all minors selected to participate in the focus groups.

Faith Community Working Group. The FCWG is an interfaith group that is part of the Faith Community Advisory Council of Montgomery County, which is within the County Executive's Office of Community Partnerships. Some of the FCWG's purposes are to coordinate interfaith collaborations on initiatives within Montgomery County; to support and expand Montgomery County government initiatives, by including the faith communities' perspectives and participation; and to amplify Montgomery County faith community efforts toward establishing social justice and community service (International Cultural Center, 2013).

WORDE maintains close professional relationships with the FCWG; therefore, WORDE staff sent invitations (via email and phone calls), to FCWG members, for the online survey and focus groups. These invitations included information regarding the purpose and incentives of the study. In the case of the FCWG, incentives were \$25 to complete an online survey, or \$75 to participate in a focus group (both to be paid in the form of Amazon gift cards). Again, efforts to recruit diverse FCWG participants were part of the recruitment process.

Montgomery county police officers. Prospective participants (i.e. officers), from the Montgomery County Department of Police, were informed, by a commanding officer, that their department was partnering with WORDE and the present research team to conduct surveys and focus groups. They were informed of the aforementioned purpose of the study, that their participation would be voluntary (i.e. no incentives of monetary value), and that their commanding officers would remain unaware of who opted in (vs. out) of participating. Recruiting efforts strove for diverse representation of sex, job titles, professional ranks, and years of experience. The overall study was conducted in accordance with the 'Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct' (2002).

Procedure and analysis

Study 1 was a mixed-method study, entailing interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Data from LA were obtained through two means: (a) semi-structured interviews with members of the LAPD, and Muslim community leaders and (b) online surveys of the other LA-based Muslim community members. Data from metro DC were obtained through surveys and focus groups with each subgroup of participants.

Preliminary data (i.e. from fall of 2013 through the spring of 2014), from the above sources, were initially assessed (i.e. bracketed) for emergent themes by one of the three members of the research team. Those themes were subsequently verified by the other two team members. Emergent themes gained further verification, as they continued to emerge through subsequent waves of data (i.e. across two data collections, in 2014) and across each mode of data collection (i.e. across surveys, interviews, and focus groups). Therefore, the following results stem from a triangulation of data, across multiple waves of data, from multiple sources: all of which, in principle, enhance the reliability of the current findings (Jick, 1979).

Results

Best-positioned gatekeepers

Participants were in consensus regarding their belief that those best positioned to notice early signs of individuals considering acts of violent extremism likely would be those individuals' friends: perhaps more so than school counselors, clergy, or family members. Regarding school counselors, one Muslim male high school student expressed that many students 'don't have that level of trust with counselors', and '... a lot of students resent the counselors, just for being kind of impersonal sometimes'. Similarly, an Asian female middle school student stated, 'I met with my counselor earlier this week, and it was a really bad experience. He was really, like, insensitive, and, like, kind of just not really empathetic at all ...' Regarding clergy, and family members, a Pakistani-American father asserted, '... the priest will not know [if youth are getting involved in illegal activities], because when he [the youth] goes to the church, or the mosque, or the temple, he's the finest guy. He's on best behaviors,' and 'the family is the last one to know. They only know when the person is in trouble.'

A critical disconnect

Another common theme was that despite broad, well-established CVE-relevant safety networks, in both major metropolitan areas, and despite robust partnerships between law enforcement, social service agencies, and the communities they serve – still – lay-person participants expressed reluctance to reach out, as gatekeepers, to those safety networks. In exploration of that theme, survey respondents responded to the following question.

Thinking now about your friends or family members, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about committing violence against someone else. What would prevent you *from speaking with someone (e.g. an official from your religion, or another friend or family member) about your concerns?*³ (Emphasis in the original)

The response options and participants' endorsements are depicted in Figure 1, in which participants were instructed to select all that apply.⁴ In addition, participants

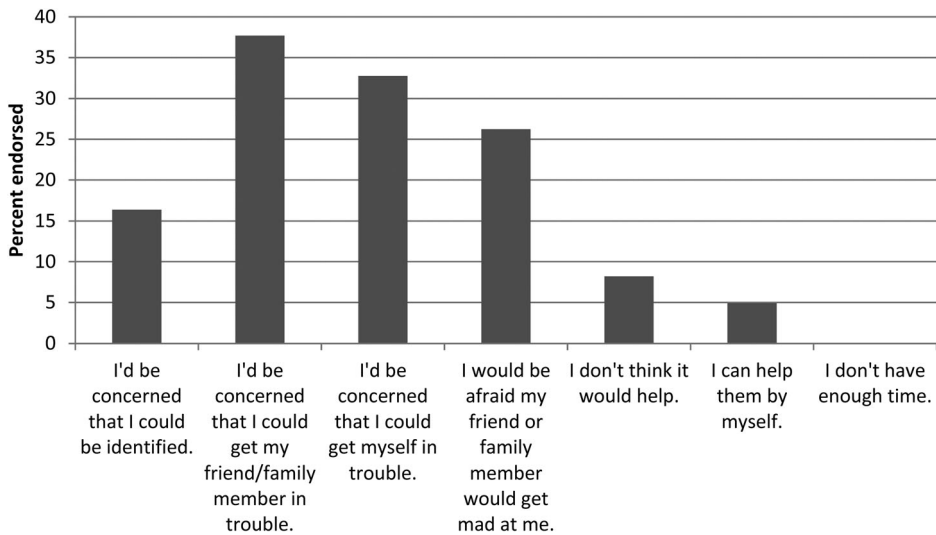


Figure 1. Percentages of endorsed response options, in response to the question 'What would prevent you from speaking with someone (e.g. an official from your religion, or another friend or family member) about your concerns?'

could select an 'other reason' category, in which they could write in reasons beyond the other response options; however, only one participant validly endorsed the 'other' category.⁵

As depicted in Figure 1, the four most-endorsed reasons were the following: 'I'd be concerned that I could be identified,' 'I'd be concerned that I could get my friend/family member in trouble,' 'I'd be concerned that I could get myself in trouble,' 'I would be afraid my friend or family member would get mad at me.'

In comparing the frequencies of those four most-endorsed reasons, Mauchly's test of sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity could not be assumed, $\chi^2(5) = 17.77, p < .05$; therefore, a Huynh-Feldt correction was applied. The omnibus test of those four reasons indicated, indeed, that they differed from one another beyond levels expected by chance: $F(2.65, 159.13) = 3.14, p < .05$. Specifically, the only significant difference was that the least-endorsed reason, of those four ('I'd be concerned that I could be identified'), differed from the two most-endorsed of those four ('I'd be concerned that I could get my friend/family member in trouble,' and 'I'd be concerned that I could get myself in trouble'): $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 6.28, p < .05$, and $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 5.71, p < .05$ respectively. In other words, the least-endorsed reasons differed only from the two most-endorsed reasons which did not differ from each other, $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 0.58, p > .05$.

In further exploration of the disconnect between laypersons and CVE-relevant safety networks, survey respondents were asked the following question:

Thinking now about your friends or family members, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about committing violence against someone else. Thinking about that same person from the previous question, if they were so angry as to consider committing such a crime, what would prevent you *from speaking with the police about your concerns?*⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

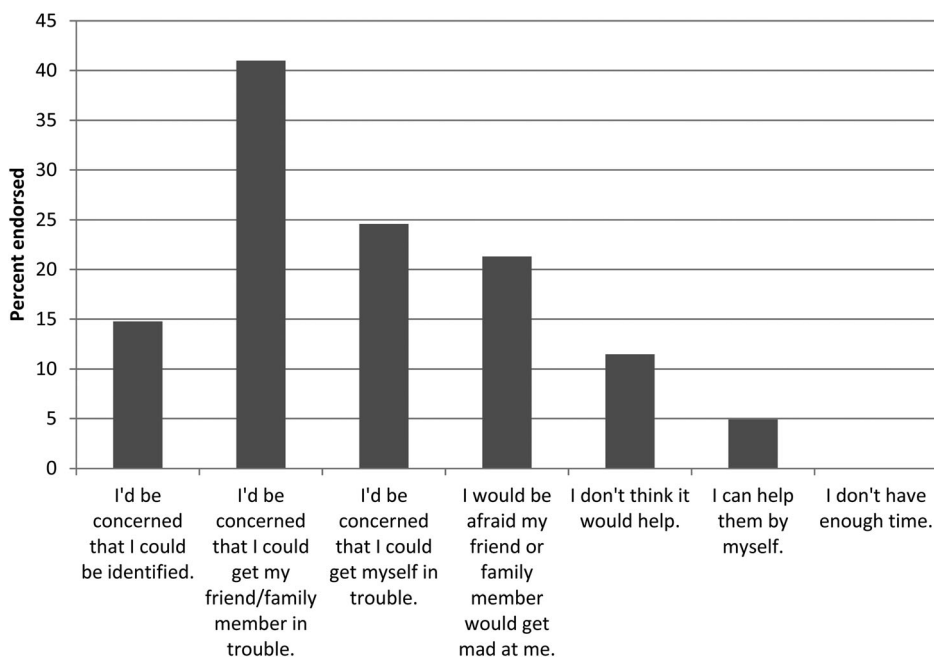


Figure 2. Percentages of endorsed response options, in response to the question 'What would prevent you from speaking with the police about your concerns?'

Response options were the same as the previously discussed question, and participants' endorsements of them are depicted in Figure 2. Again, participants were instructed to select all that apply.

The four most-endorsed reasons were the same as the previously discussed question. Comparing the frequencies of four most endorsed reasons, Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity could be assumed, $\chi^2(5) = 5.58, p > .05$. As before, the omnibus test of those four reasons indicated that they differed from one another beyond levels expected by chance: $F(3, 180) = 4.45, p < .05$. Specifically, the only significant difference was that the least endorsed reason of those four ('I'd be concerned that I could be identified') differed only from the most-endorsed reason ('I'd be concerned that I could get my friend/family member in trouble'), $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 8.47, p < .05$. Readily observable, through visual inspection of Figures 1 and 2, is that the patterns of responses between these respective two questions were strikingly similar. Indeed, none of the response options, depicted in Figures 1 and 2, differed significantly between those two questions ($p > .05$).

Taken as a whole, the top four most-endorsed reasons suggest that the predominant reason underlying prospective associate-gatekeepers' reluctance to reach out to CVE-relevant service providers was fear. That reason was borne out also by statements made by focus group participants. For example, speaking of such fear, one Black, protestant, woman stated, 'I may hesitate due to concern about them [prospective help-recipients] getting in trouble.' Similarly, a White, Buddhist, female stated that her reluctance would be due, at least in part, to 'fear of stigmatizing individuals and getting them a police record/FBI profile, when I'm concerned but not sure'.

Discussion

The finding that school counselors, clergy, and family members might not be best positioned as CVE-relevant gatekeepers does not suggest that such gatekeepers are of little or no importance for CVE. Nevertheless, in contrast to assumptions that school personnel, clergy, or family members are well positioned as gatekeepers, it suggests that there may be unwarranted emphasis placed upon the prospective gatekeeping functions of such people. Similarly, the finding that layperson participants feared reaching out to prospective CVE-relevant service provider networks does not suggest that CVE-relevant service provider networks (including, for example, initiatives such as community-oriented policing) are unimportant. Instead, it suggests that comprehensive CVE-relevant service provider networks, including community-oriented policing initiatives, will fall short of their potential to counter violent extremism to the extent that associate-gatekeepers remain unwilling to engage with such networks.

Recalling the strikingly similar pattern of reasons underlying participants' reluctance (i.e. fear) to reach out to CVE-relevant service providers, findings suggest that even non-law enforcement service providers face challenges similarly large as law enforcement agencies, with respect to overcoming associate-gatekeepers' reluctance to access their services. This is a relatively surprising finding given one might otherwise assume that associate-gatekeepers would be more willing (i.e. less afraid) to reach out to an official from their religions, or another friend or family member, than to reach out to the police. Alternatively, given the hypothetical nature of these survey questions, participants might feel and behave differently, in reality, than reported on these survey items. Therefore, such a counterintuitive finding is ripe for replication, to assess whether it holds either with other samples or if measured by other means.

Circumvent individuals' fears

Despite assumptions that individuals tend to base their decisions upon rational or closely considered criteria, a great deal of research has demonstrated that individuals tend to base decisions on emotional or heuristic criteria (see Ariely, 2008; Haidt, 2001; Zajonc, 1980). Therefore, it should not be expected that associate-gatekeepers will overcome their (perhaps well-justified) fears easily, such that they would be willing to refer potentially at-risk friends to law enforcement agencies or other CVE-relevant service providers: however reasonable, or appropriate, that decision might seem for CVE. Instead, to circumvent associate-gatekeepers' fears, a successful strategy might be to offer associate-gatekeepers control over a means of communication perceived by them to be less threatening, and more supportive, than law enforcement agencies or other CVE-relevant service providers. (See 'Prospective Piece of the Solution,' for one such suggestion.)

Make the solution convenient

Individuals tend to 'follow the path of least resistance', in their choices and behaviors (see Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p. 83). Therefore, prospective communication channels that aim to connect associate-gatekeepers to CVE-relevant service providers should be ones with which gatekeepers (youth, especially) already are familiar with and accustomed to using. Furthermore, it should be a means of communication that is readily available to them.

Prospective piece of the solution

Community-based crisis intervention models developed in Nevada and New York could become a prospective piece of the solution that aims to bridge the divide between gatekeepers and CVE-relevant service providers. These locations have initiated, and promoted, a texting-based crisis service, as supplemental to more traditional phone-in crisis services. Such a service preserves users' confidentiality, and – consequently – reduces prospective users' reluctance to access the service (Evans, Davidson, & Sicafuse, 2013). Indeed, in 2011, a texting service was launched (for crisis/suicide prevention), in Nevada, resulting in a remarkable 38% increase in youth utilization of the crisis service (Evans et al., 2013). That equated to approximately 3600 texts, from 137 unique youth texters, *per month* (Evans et al., 2013). Such texting-based crisis services could be adapted to provide advice, referrals, and emotional support to texters (especially youth) seeking to dissuade their friends who might be considering acts of violent extremism.

Establishing a texting-based CVE-relevant crisis service, however, also should be accompanied by shrewd marketing efforts, including savvy messaging to attract youth associate-gatekeeper service users. (See Evans et al., 2013, for descriptions of relatively inexpensive, effective examples of such marketing materials.) Fortunately, such a service can be relatively inexpensive, and cost-effective, if built into a preexisting crisis prevention phone-in hotline (as was done in Nevada; Evans et al., 2013).

In Nevada, though the texting-based crisis service interconnects with first responders, including law enforcement, it is not marketed as a crime 'tip line', nor is that its intended function. Instead, the texting service – and, by extension, its primary application for CVE, if so adapted – is to encourage proactive help-seeking for associate-gatekeepers who are concerned about their friends who might be considering the commission of ideologically motivated violence.

Study 2: a theory of 'vicarious help-seeking'

Given the disconnect between associate gatekeepers and CVE-relevant service providers, it begs the question: what are the barriers preventing individuals from helping others to seek help for themselves (i.e. what are the barriers to 'vicarious help-seeking'). As mentioned, this is a previously unexplored topic among theories related to help-seeking (Rickwood et al., 2005). Research on barriers to help-seeking has, thus far, focused on hurdles to individuals seeking help for themselves (see Rickwood et al., 2005). For example, one such barrier, among youth, is their relative lack of emotional competence/emotional intelligence: the ability to identify and describe emotions and to manage one's emotions effectively and non-defensively (see Rickwood et al., 2005). Another barrier to help-seeking among youth is the extent to which they hold negative attitudes toward seeking professional help (see Rickwood et al., 2005). Those negative evaluations can result, for example, from unpleasant experiences, or from beliefs that help offered by professionals is relatively useless.

Toward predicting associate-gatekeepers' intentions to intervene, one well known, albeit general, theory of intentional behavior is the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). That theory, depicted in Figure 3, asserts that intentions to behave in a given manner are influenced by norms, one's attitudes, and one's sense of self-efficacy toward performing a given behavior.

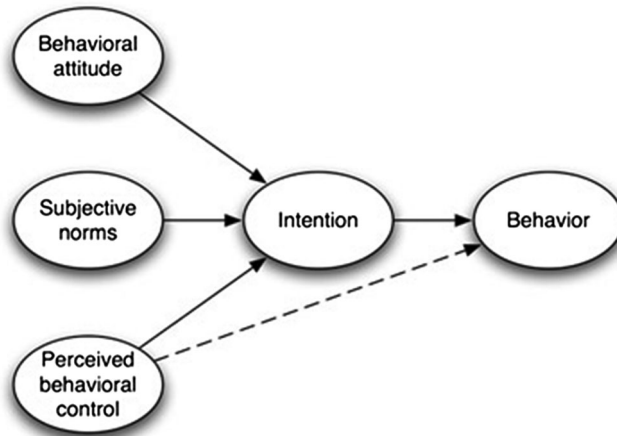


Figure 3. The theory of planned behavior.
Source: Ajzen (1991).

The theory of planned behavior, however, is not especially helpful in predicting vicarious help-seeking behaviors, because each of the antecedents of the intention to help can consist of competing forces: with no way of predicting which force will predominate. For example, regarding subjective norms, it seems plausible that there exist norms both for and against vicarious helping. One such norm is a sense of prosocial pressure to help those in need. A competing norm, however, regarding whether or not to meddle in the affairs others, is that one ought to respect others' autonomy: in other words, 'mind your own business'. Likewise, would-be helpers might hold positive attitudes toward helping, based (perhaps) upon favorable outcomes from their previous helping behaviors. Individuals also might hold negative attitudes toward helping, if they fear that doing so would have an undesirable outcome: for example, breaching the confidentiality (and hence trust) of the person in need of help or somehow stigmatizing that person in the process. Finally, regarding perceived behavior control, one may be physically able to help someone; however, would-be helpers also might feel that they are not in a position to help, if doing so were to risk damaging their relationship with the would-be recipient of that help. These are merely a few of the potentially competing forces that render the venerable theory of planned behavior relatively useless in predicting vicarious help-seeking.

A theory more promising for predicting vicarious help-seeking is the well-known model of bystander intervention, developed by Darley and Latané (1968; Latané & Darley, 1968). That model, depicted in Figure 4, includes five cognitive stages between an emergency and the decision to intervene and offer assistance. Those stages are the following: (a) notice the event, (b) interpret the event as an emergency, (c) assume responsibility for providing help, (d) know appropriate forms of assistance, and (e) implement a decision to help.

This model is especially helpful, because it conceptualizes the developmental steps, and barriers, that individuals process prior to intervening in an emergency. The first two stages – noticing the event, and interpreting it as an emergency – are relatively self-explanatory, and make sense intuitively. The third stage – assuming responsibility – is, in part, what made this model famous. Specifically, Darley and Latané's

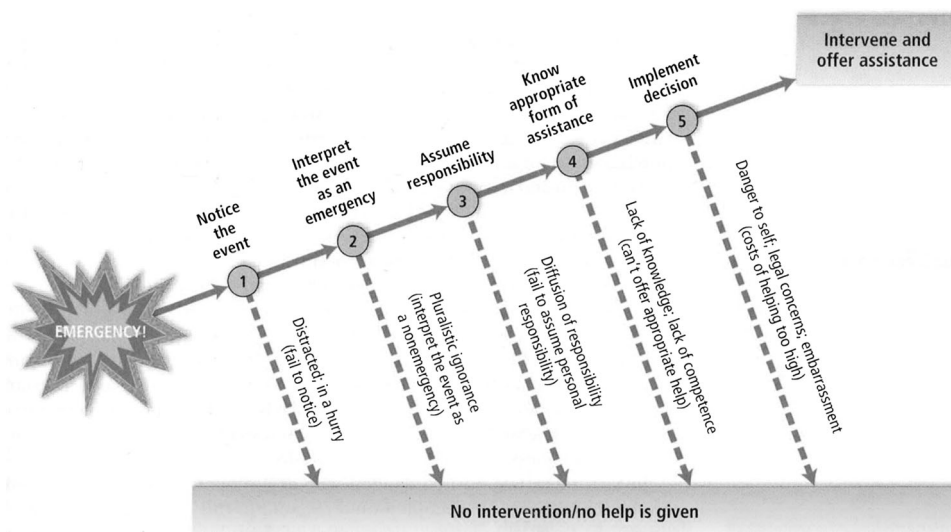


Figure 4. Stages of bystander intervention.

Source: Adapted from Latané and Darley, as cited in Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (2007).

experimental research demonstrated the counterintuitive effect that the presence of multiple bystanders tends to *reduce* the likelihood that any one of them will take enough personal responsibility to intervene during a prospective emergency (a so-called diffusion of responsibility; Darley & Latané, 1968). The fourth stage – know appropriate forms of assistance – is also relatively self-explanatory. The final stage – implement a decision to help – asserts that individuals tend to weigh other factors (e.g. danger to one's self, or possible embarrassment if one is incorrect in their interpretation of the event as an emergency), before leaping to assist someone presumably in need of help (Latané & Darley, 1968).

This model has enjoyed widespread acceptance, including several practical applications: serving, for example, as the basis of certain emergency training courses, and anti-bullying interventions (American Red Cross, 2015; How the bystander effect could promote bullying, 2014). However venerable, and useful, this model may be, it also is incomplete if applied to secondary prevention/interventions in CVE contexts. The bystander intervention model was developed to pertain to in-person, immediate emergencies. Therefore, its applicability is unknown, either in contexts where the emergency (i.e. others' cognitive and behavioral shifts toward violent extremism) may develop relatively slowly or in on-line settings. As the present findings reveal, there are (at least) two extensions to this model needed for it to be applied to such CVE contexts.

Bystander intervention model, extension 1

The first extension to the bystander intervention model, simply put, is that an associate-gatekeeper's *relationship* with the person in need of help is consequential. Specifically, how much an associate-gatekeeper both cares about that relationship (as distinct from caring about the other person's well-being, per se) influences the degree to which associate-gatekeepers fear damaging that relationship, which in turn influences their intent to intervene. Such effects are depicted in Figure 5.

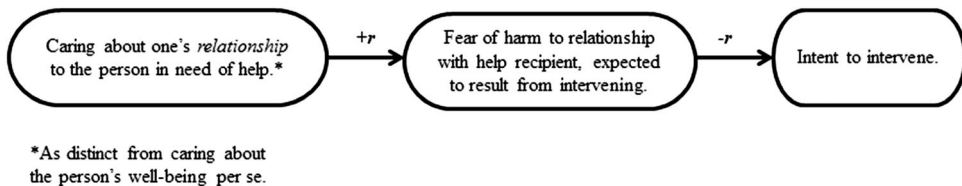


Figure 5. Intent to intervene, as moderated by care for, and fear of harming, one's relationship with a prospective help-recipient.

An interesting, counterintuitive feature of the premises, depicted in Figure 5, is that caring greatly about one's relationship to the prospective help-recipient could result in *less* intent to intervene. Therefore, as an extension of Darley and Latané's model, stage three is influenced not only by caring about (i.e. assuming responsibility) for the prospective help-recipient's welfare, but also by the degree to which one fears damaging their relationship with the prospective help-recipient, should one's help be unwelcomed by that recipient.

Such fears – that prospective help-recipients might not welcome help – are widespread (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra, & Weintraub, 2005). Indeed, it is a mistake to assume that helping processes are entirely positive for help-recipients (Liang et al., 2005). As explicit in Darley and Latané's stages of bystander intervention, offers of assistance entail a judgement, on behalf of prospective helpers, that prospective help-recipients are somehow in need of help. From the perspective of attribution theory, help-recipients will seek to understand (i.e. attribute) the cause motivating a helper's offers of assistance (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). Furthermore, attribution theory asserts that recipients will attribute such help to one of three motives (Kelley, 1967). The first of those assumed motives is that helpers possess a genuine concern for their well-being. The second is that helpers harbor an ulterior motive of some kind, and the third is that helpers are doing so because their roles require it.

In the realm of interpersonal relationships, it is easy to see that the latter two-thirds of those attributions are unlikely to endear helpers to help-recipients. To the contrary, it is easy to understand that the latter two attributions risk harming a relationship that is ostensibly built primarily upon genuine, mutual concern. Even the first attribution (genuine concern) has the potential to upset a relationship, insofar as recipients – though, perhaps, cognizant of helpers' good intentions – might be embarrassed by attempts to help. Furthermore, it seems not only plausible, but also likely, that such embarrassment or other interpersonal fallout could result when the helping domain is one that implies not only that the recipient is in need of help, but that the recipient is exhibiting a stigmatized behavior such as violent extremism.

Arguably, prospective helpers' concerns, regarding interpersonal fallout that might result from their attempts to offers to help, are encompassed by the final stage of Darley and Latané's model. Recall that this stage entails deciding whether to implement help: a stage which asserts that individuals tend to weigh other factors (e.g. danger to one's self, or possible embarrassment, if one is incorrect in their interpretation of the event as an emergency) before offering assistance. Nevertheless, that final stage reduces, theoretically, to a relatively unhelpful 'catch all' for factors that the model did not account for in previous stages that prevent individuals from offering help. As such, the final stage of Darley and Latané's model offers little theoretical guidance on this

point, and – hence – little practical utility. Instead, as with the aforementioned extension of the bystander intervention model, it is prudent – both theoretically, and practically – to specify the conditions that affect individuals’ willingness to help, at a given stage in the model.

Bystander intervention model, extension 2

The second proposed extension to Darley and Latané’s model, to enable it to apply more usefully to secondary prevention/intervention programs in CVE contexts is that associate-gatekeepers’ level of identification with prospective help-recipients can negatively impact both their intent to intervene and their recognition of the problem itself. Consider, for example, parents and their children, or pairs of close friends. In both cases, the parties likely feel a relatively strong sense of identification with one another: they feel the other party’s triumphs (so-called ‘reflected glory,’ Cialdini et al., 1976), along with their sorrows and shame. Therefore, insofar as violent extremism carries a stigma, the degree to which associate-gatekeepers identify with someone, whom they observe engaging in behaviors potentially indicative of violent extremism, the more that such gatekeepers might ‘turn a blind eye’ toward, or otherwise excuse, those behaviors. As displayed in Figure 6, two outcomes of such identification include not only a reduction in associate-gatekeepers’ intent to intervene (related to the final stage of the bystander intervention model), but recognition of the problem itself.

Such outcomes could be due to one or more of a host of reasons, including associate-gatekeepers’ sense of embarrassment for their associates’ behavior, or their wish to prevent getting that associate in trouble with law enforcement agencies. In such cases, it seems that at least one factor, common to those motives, is the degree to which associate-gatekeepers identify with prospective help-recipients. Ironically, according to the aforementioned effects depicted in Figure 6, high levels of identification (on behalf of associate-gatekeepers’ with prospective help-recipients) can result in the counterintuitive effects of both (a) *less* recognition of the problem and (b) *less* intent to intervene. The following methods describe, not an a priori hypothesis test of these effects, but the grounded theory development that resulted in their postulation.

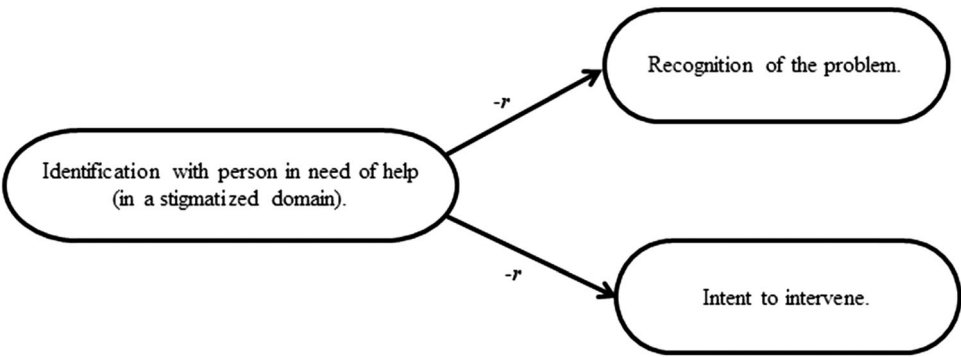


Figure 6. Intent to intervene, and recognition of the problem, as a negatively correlated function of ‘associate-gatekeeper’ identification with prospective help-recipients (in a stigmatized domain).

Method

Data

The data, that served as the bases of this grounded theory development (collected also as part of the aforementioned NIJ-funded research), differed from Study 1, in two respects. First, they did not include participants from LA. Therefore, that difference slightly altered the makeup of Study 2's law enforcement sample, making this sample ($n = 29$) 25% Female, 76% Male, ages 28–50, with an interquartile age range of 31–42. [Table 4](#) lists the religious composition of this sample.

Second, the data ($n = 170$) for Study 2 included a third wave of focus group participants, collected in the spring of 2015, comprised of community members from Montgomery County, Maryland (including both adults and youth of diverse ages and faith backgrounds). This additional sample of community members from Montgomery County ($n = 31$, which brought the total, for this subsample, to 107) was 71% Female, 29% Male, ages 12–31, with an interquartile age range of 13–18. [Table 5](#) lists the religious composition of this sample. Again, all participants were treated in accordance with the 'Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct' (2002).

Procedure and analysis

Study 2 was a mixed-method study, entailing focus groups and surveys. Transcripts of focus group recordings were coded (axial coding) for every instance wherein processes pertaining to bystander intervention were mentioned. Such coding also was performed on the following open-ended survey questions that were collated according to each of the four subsamples (i.e. adult lay-participants, youth lay-participants, members of the Montgomery County FCWG, and Members of the Montgomery County Department of Police).

- Thinking now about your friends or family members, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about

Table 4. Religious composition of law enforcement sample.

Agnostic	4%
Catholic	31%
Protestant	17%
Unknown/missing	48%

Table 5. Religious composition of additional (2015) metro DC community focus group sample.

Agnostic	3%
Catholic	19%
Hindu	7%
Muslim	16%
Protestant	26%
Other	26%
Unknown/missing	3%

committing violence against someone else. What would prevent you *from speaking with someone (e.g. an official from your religion, or another friend or family member) about your concerns?*⁷ (Emphasis in the original.)

- Thinking about that same person from the previous question, if they were so angry as to consider committing such a crime, what would prevent you *from speaking with the police about your concerns?*⁸ (Emphasis in the original.)

Next, those axial-coded materials were organized (selective coding), per subsample, for themes pertinent to an overarching question ‘What seem to be the barriers to CVE-relevant vicarious help-seeking?’

Results

Emergent from the thematic/selective coding process were the components of the first postulated extension to the bystander intervention model. Specifically, those themes demonstrated that associate-gatekeepers’ reluctance to intervene appeared to be moderated by their level of fear that doing so might damage their relationships with prospective help-recipients.

Some of the reasons, illustrative of such fear, included their beliefs that help-recipients would feel ‘looked down upon’, or ‘they [help-recipients] might be embarrassed’, or ‘they [help-recipients] don’t want to be helped and they feel that they can handle it!’ Conversely, some participants expressed that they would be relatively unafraid of damaging their relationships, if they were to intervene with those to whom they are not particularly close. For example, a male high-school student revealed ‘It wouldn’t really bother me that much if the relationship got hurt, because I don’t know them that well; so, it wouldn’t affect me, like, it wouldn’t hurt me that much.’ That sentiment was echoed by a female college student who stated that, in such cases, ‘there’s less at stake’.

Also emergent from the thematic/selective coding process were the components of the second postulated extension to the bystander intervention model. Specifically, those themes demonstrated that many prospective associate-gatekeepers were those whose identities were closely associated with prospective help-recipients, perhaps none more so than parents’ association with their children. Furthermore, there was evidence that such closely identified associations could result in a reluctance to intervene. For example, a member of the police, who also was a parent, highlighted that associate-gatekeepers might refrain from reaching out to law enforcement ‘just because you want to protect your own’.

The data also suggested that associate-gatekeepers, who identify closely with prospective help-recipients, might also be less willing, or able, to recognize violent extremism in the making. For example, in discussing whether parents would be good at identifying whether their children were merely sympathizing with radical views, vs. planning to act out because of them, a school resource officer stated, ‘I can’t really even think of a time when a parent came and said “I have a concern about my kids”.’ Additionally, another member of the police, who also was a parent, stated

... what about, also, the red flags [that are] right in front of our eyes, and then – for whatever reason – you don’t want to deal with it, or admit to what’s going on, and you come up with a reason, or something to say. You know what, ‘no, no, Johnny’s not crazy’. You see the red flag, but you just want to make everything okay, just like ‘no, no, no ...’

Discussion

Study 2 revealed two extensions to the bystander intervention model necessary for it to be applied more accurately, and usefully, to secondary prevention/intervention in CVE contexts. Specifically, the degree to which associate-gatekeepers care about their relationships with prospective help-recipients (as distinct from caring about the other person's well-being, *per se*) appears positively correlated with the degree to which associate-gatekeepers fear damaging that relationship. This, in turn, appears negatively correlated with associate-gatekeepers' intent to intervene. Additionally, there was evidence that associate-gatekeepers' level of identification with prospective help-recipients may be negatively correlated both with their intent to intervene and their recognition of a problem behavior itself.

As mentioned, these findings do not represent outputs from *a priori* hypotheses tests of these effects, but are the results of grounded theory development. Therefore, such findings warrant further testing (Kerr, 1998), ideally via experimental methods. Furthermore, the two postulated extensions to the bystander intervention model are not necessarily exhaustive of factors that could be expected to influence vicarious help-seeking. Again, these extensions remain ripe for experimental tests, and – if other factors can be shown to result in significant effects, after controlling for the factors of this revised bystander intervention model – then the model should be further expanded, or otherwise revised, accordingly (Ajzen, 1991).

Unexplored by this study is whether there might be individual difference factors that affect associate-gatekeepers' intent to intervene. For example, given that associate-gatekeepers' level of fear of damaging their relationships with prospective help-recipients appears negatively correlated with their intent to intervene, it seems plausible that an individual's personality – notably, their attachment style – could be expected to affect their level of such fear (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Specifically, those with insecure attachment, of the so-called 'preoccupied' type, are characterized by heightened concern, or worry, over their close interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Therefore, given such elevated interpersonal concerns, it could be expected that those with preoccupied attachment might be especially reluctant to intervene with prospective help-recipients with whom they have close relationships. Additionally, research suggests that differences in vicarious help-seeking might exist between boys and girls, with girls being more likely to bring to the attention of school counselors the personal or emotional needs of a friend or fellow student (Rickwood, 2002, as cited in Rickwood et al., 2005).

As mentioned, the bystander intervention model was developed to pertain to in-person, immediate emergencies; thus, its applicability is unknown regarding relatively distal emergencies/threats. Therefore, important questions arise from this study, notably: what are the factors, and thresholds for those factors, that associate-gatekeepers mentally process in determining whether someone's behavior is indicative of an emergency – hence, worthy of intervention – in CVE contexts? In other words, how do individuals decide whether to intervene in contexts where the emergency (i.e. others' cognitive and behavioral shifts toward violent extremism) may develop relatively slowly? One could speculate that, in such cases, associate-gatekeepers face an additional challenge of overcoming their habituation to their associates' increasingly disturbing behavior: the challenge of getting associate-gatekeepers to 'wake up and do something' to help their associates to get help for themselves.

Other questions arise regarding what do ‘helping’ and ‘intervention’ mean in technologically mediated contexts, as distinct from face-to-face contexts. Recent research (‘An exploratory examination of the bystander effect in cyberbullying,’ Armstrong, in press) found that on websites, social media platforms, and via texting, individuals were significantly more likely to intervene (or ‘help’) in high bystander settings (50 people) compared to low bystander settings (5 people). Remarkably, those results are the opposite of what has been found in ‘real world’ settings, which suggests the need for more research on bystander intervention and vicarious help-seeking, as they apply to cyberspace and other communication platforms.

General discussion

In summary, (Study 1) participants were in consensus regarding their belief that those best positioned to notice early signs of individuals considering acts of violent extremism likely would be those individuals’ friends: perhaps more so than school counselors, clergy, or family members. Furthermore, participants indicated that the predominant reason, underlying prospective associate-gatekeepers’ reluctance to reach out to CVE-relevant service providers, was such gatekeepers’ fear of the potential repercussions. Additionally, that fear generalized not only to reaching out to law enforcement agencies, but also to others within prospective CVE-relevant networks (i.e. religious officials or family members).

Additionally, Study 2 demonstrated that associate-gatekeepers’ reluctance to intervene appeared to be moderated by their level of fear that doing so might damage their relationships with prospective help-recipients. Furthermore, there was evidence that associate-gatekeepers’ level of personal identification with prospective help-recipients might reduce both their willingness to intervene and their ability to recognize violent extremism in the making.

Generalizability

Strictly speaking, the findings from this study can generalize only to individuals willing to volunteer in research for modest (or no) monetary incentive, from the communities in which these participants were sampled. However, the psychological bases of the present studies (i.e. fear of getting one’s self, friends, or family members in trouble with authorities [Study 1], and caring about one’s relationship to friends and family members; the inclination to help them; the personal identification with close friends and family members; and reflected glory [Study 2]), are not plausibly unique to the present samples.

Furthermore, the demographics of the samples were not unusual in ways that might affect the dependent variables. Therefore, the findings are expected to generalize more broadly to those at least as old as participants in these studies (i.e. over age 11). Additionally, recalling that the questions posed of participants were not couched in terms of a threat of violence from those espousing a specific ideology, it seems plausible that the results would generalize to vicarious help-seeking behaviors applicable to a wide range of violent threats.

Helping the helpers

Given what appears to be the critical importance of associate-gatekeepers in CVE contexts, it seems prudent to discover means of empowering such gatekeepers. Of course, it

is important to discover ways that will inspire associate-gatekeepers to intervene appropriately, but also – in the spirit of providing for the needs not only of help-recipients, but of the helpers (i.e. gatekeepers) themselves – it is important to develop means of socially supporting those helpers. Such support may (and probably should) come in several forms. For example, research by Reid and colleagues describes social support that includes the following four kinds of support (Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989).

- (1) Instrumental support, which encompasses, for example, financial assistance, skills training, health services, and transportation directly to an individual in need;
- (2) Informational support, which encompasses information related to health, or mental health, and referrals to other sources of help;
- (3) Affiliative support, which includes providing individuals with social connections to others who have mutual interests or concerns; and
- (4) Emotional support, which encompasses friends, family members, and professionals who provide for the emotional needs of those in the midst of turmoil.

Both to enable associate-gatekeepers to intervene in CVE contexts, and to develop such interventions into sustainable enterprises, it seems prudent to develop means of supporting associate-gatekeepers through each of those four means.

Conclusion

Although there might be individual-difference variables (e.g. personality characteristics) that predispose some associate-gatekeepers to be more likely than others to intervene in CVE contexts, there is reason to believe that – despite such nuances – associate-gatekeeper interventions could be developed on a large scale. In short, help-seeking is a learned behavior (Barker, 2007). Therefore, it seems that the greatest barrier to vicarious help-seeking in CVE contexts is not *whether* associate-gatekeepers can be trained to help their associates get the help they need. Instead, it suggests that among the next steps – the next challenges – are to develop the curricula and protocols for *how* associate-gatekeepers should respond. As mentioned, the present study's expansions of the bystander intervention model represent the formation of a theory of vicarious help-seeking. Its factors and stages could serve as template for those interested in research on, or development of, CVE interventions. Consequently, it can be hoped that the present research can provide guidance on how to tailor CVE-related curricula and protocols in ways that account for the dynamics of vicarious help-seeking in CVE contexts.

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Notes

1. Primary prevention focuses on protecting normal/healthy people from developing a given problem. Secondary prevention focuses on halting progress toward a given problem among those for whom warning signs have been identified. Tertiary prevention is the remediation of a problem for those who concretely manifest a given problem.
2. The inclusion of Muslim participants, from Los Angeles, served two functions. First, this complemented the sample of Muslims from the East coast (i.e. Metro DC): both samples were part of a broader intention to ensure the inclusion of Muslim voices in the present study. The authors deemed those intentions important, given (as mentioned) that CVE in the USA, is focused on the 'grassroots' prevention of a range of violent extremism, including that which claims Islam as its basis. Second, the LA-based Muslim participants also were party to a concurrent, unrelated research project: an evaluation of the LAPD's 'Chief Charlie Beck's Muslim Forum'.
3. This question was not included in surveys administered to police.
4. Therefore, the endorsement percentages, across response options, could sum to greater than 100%.
5. In all but the aforementioned case, participants erroneously endorsed the 'other' response option, such that their stated reasons either fit squarely within the other response options (e.g. 'I may hesitate due to concern about them getting in trouble') or avoided the question by making statements to the effects that 'nothing would prevent me from doing so'.
6. This question was not assessed in surveys administered to police.
7. These questions were not assessed in surveys administered to police.
8. See note 7.

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