EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION. AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION:

Evidence-based evaluation refers to a systematic approach to assessing the appropriateness, implementation or impact of the initiatives such as policies and strategies, long-term programmes, short-term actions and ad hoc interventions related to the single cases. It aims at integrating the best available evidence, professional expertise, and stakeholder values, needs, preferences, and circumstances in all stages of the evaluation process (INDEED E-Guidebook 1: 8, at https://online.fliphtml5.com/ckcrs/axvx/). Taking inspiration from the notion of Evidence-based Practice (EBP), which has been widely applied in various fields, including healthcare, education, public policy, and social services, evidence-based evaluation seeks to ensure that initiatives are grounded in solid and reliable evidence.

Figure 1. Principles of Evidence-based Evaluation.
Source: Own Elaboration

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Evidence-based evaluation emphasizes transparency, accountability, and a commitment to using the best available evidence to make informed decisions. It aims to optimize outcomes by systematically assessing the evidence and applying it to improve initiatives.

Evidence-based evaluation can be distinguished from opinion-based and rigid evaluations. While opinion based-evaluation relies on intuition, convention, or individual knowledge, evidence-based evaluation is informed by a rigorous review of the best available knowledge. On the other hand, a rigid evaluation is usually pre-determined and based primarily on the evaluator's views, while an evidence-based evaluation is informed by and sensitive to stakeholder preferences, needs, values, and circumstances.

CENTRAL PILLARS OF EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION

Evidence-based evaluation is essentially an approach to planning and conducting evaluations that builds on the principles of evidence-based practice. These principles enumerated above commit the evaluation process to a high standard of quality and engagement.

Best available evidence refers to the most up-to-date and rigorous knowledge in the field in which the evaluation takes place. For evaluations of initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE), the best available knowledge may include studies on the root causes of extremism and crime, risk factors associated with radicalisation, effective interventions and programs for preventing and countering violent extremism, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches for individuals who have been radicalised or involved in criminal activities, community engagement strategies, law enforcement tactics, and the evaluation of different initiatives.

Professional expertise refers to the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience possessed by professionals who are tasked with assessing the effectiveness and impact of policies and strategies, long-term programmes, short-term

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actions and ad hoc interventions aimed at addressing various forms of extremism and crime. The expertise involves:

- **Understanding of Theory and Practice**: Professionals in this field should have a deep understanding of the underlying theories, concepts, and dynamics related to radicalisation, violent extremism, and crime. They should be familiar with the range of approaches and initiatives used in PVE/CVE, De-radicalisation and crime prevention efforts.

- **Research Skills:** Professionals need strong research skills to design and conduct evaluations. This includes proficiency in qualitative and quantitative research methods, data collection, and analysis.

- **Reviewing Skills:** In view of the principles of evidence-based evaluation, it is also important that evaluators develop skills which enable them to efficiently review, assess the best available evidence, utilise their professional expertise and effectively integrate stakeholder values, needs, preferences, and circumstances.

- **Evaluation Methods:** Knowledge about different evaluation frameworks and methodologies tailored to assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability of PVE/CVE, De-radicalisation as well as crime prevention initiatives. This might involve process evaluations, outcome evaluations, impact assessments, or cost-benefit analyses.

- **Contextual Understanding:** Understanding the local, national, and global contexts in which extremism and crime occur is crucial for effective evaluation. Professionals need to be aware of cultural, social, economic, and political factors that influence radicalisation and criminal behaviour.

- **Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations are paramount in evaluating PVE/CVE, De-radicalisation and crime prevention efforts, particularly concerning participant confidentiality, informed consent, and potential risks to individuals and communities.

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- **Communication and Reporting:** Professionals should be able to communicate, collaborate and coordinate in a gender sensitive, ethical, legal, and social competent way (GELSA) both in the process of evaluation, as well as in the communication of findings and final reporting. The latter should be effectively communicated to various stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, funders, and the public. This involves preparing clear and concise reports, presentations, and recommendations based on rigorous analysis.

Stakeholder vales, needs, preferences, and circumstances refers to the importance of involving and considering the perspectives, priorities, and concerns of various stakeholders and communities when assessing the effectiveness and impact of policies and strategies, long-term programmes, short-term actions and ad hoc interventions related to the single cases.

Figure 2. Examples of Stakeholders

Source: INDEED E-Guidebook 2 on How to Design PVE/CVE and De-radicalisation Initiatives and Evaluations According to the Principles of Evidence-based Practice, pg. 10. Available on https://online.fliphtml5.com/ckcrs/nmpm/#p=10

I. **Stakeholders**: Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that have an interest or stake in the outcomes of a particular initiative. This can include government agencies, NGOs, community organisations, funders, beneficiaries, and experts in the field. The INDEED Guidebook 2 on How to Design PVE, CVE, and De-Radicalisation Initiatives and Evaluation

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(https://online.fliphtml5.com/ckcrs/nmpm/) breaks down the most important stakeholders to be considered. In the context of evaluation, engaging stakeholders means involving them throughout the evaluation process, from planning and design to data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Their input helps ensure that evaluation efforts are relevant, meaningful, and responsive to the **needs** of those affected by the initiatives being evaluated. Stakeholders can be further distinguished between internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include, for example, the personnel of an organisation whose initiative is up for evaluation. External stakeholders may include external donors and sponsors, as well as the direct recipients or communities indirectly affected by initiative, under evaluation.

II. **Values** encompass the fundamental beliefs, principles, and ethical standards of stakeholders and communities or individuals targeted by initiatives. When evaluating them, it's important to consider these values throughout the preparation, design, implementation and utilization phase. Therefore, gender, ethical, legal, and social considerations (GELSA) must be part of the entire evaluation process.

III. **Preferences** refer to the choices of stakeholders regarding the design, implementation, and outcomes of initiatives. Understanding these preferences can help tailor initiatives to better meet the **needs** and aspirations of the target population. Preferences may relate to aspects such as delivery methods, communication strategies, cultural sensitivity, and desired outcomes.

IV. **Circumstances** refer to the specific requirements, challenges, and priorities of the stakeholders targeted by an initiative. These needs can vary widely depending on factors such as demographics, socio-economic status, cultural background, gender, and geographic location. In evaluation, it's essential to understand and assess whether an initiative is effectively addressing these needs and whether adjustments are needed to better meet community requirements.

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Bibliography & Resources

INDEED Guidebook 1 on Evidence-based Evaluation of PVE/CVE and De-radicalisation Initiatives. Principles, Challenges, and Methods.

INDEED Guidebook 2 on How to Design PVE/CVE and De-radicalisation Initiatives and Evaluations According to the Principles of Evidence-based Practice.

INDEED Toolkit on Evaluation of P/CVE and De-radicalisation Initiatives.

INDEED Model for Evidence-based Evaluation of PVE/CVE and De-radicalisation Initiatives.

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