Communities in Radicalisation and Disengagement
A Comparison between Islamist and Right-Wing Community-Engagement

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Background

A community-based approach to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has become a well-accepted norm in the world of counterterrorism. Communities have therefore become an integral part of P/CVE efforts throughout the entire lifecycle of radicalisation. However, questions remain around what exactly is understood to be "a community" and what role are they expected to play in P/CVE.
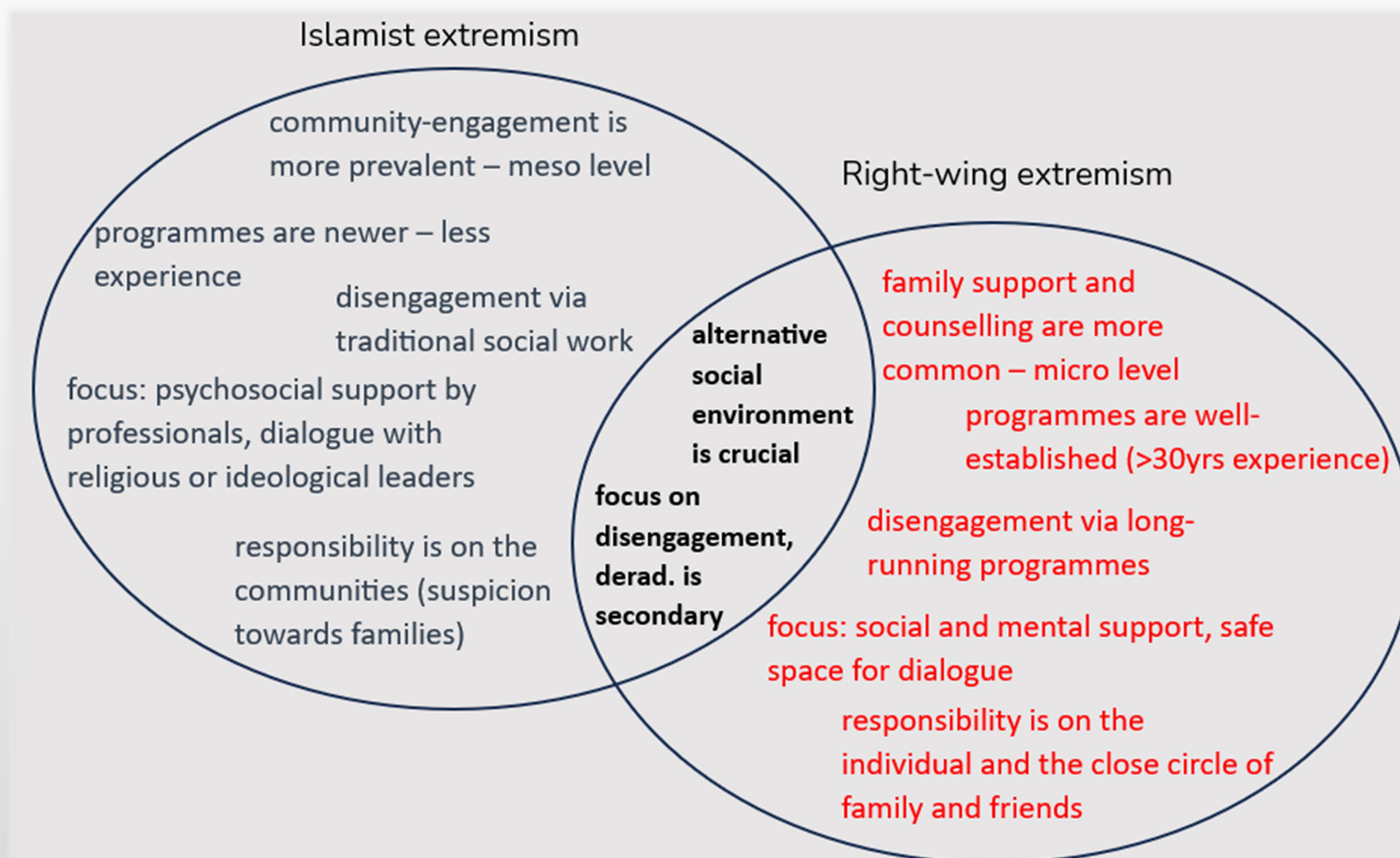
Research has been predominantly focused on Islamist radicalisation and the role the social environment plays in it, making communities, specifically Muslim communities both objects and subjects of the same measures. Community-engagement in P/CVE policies is therefore based on the assumption that these communities are ethnically and/or religiously different from mainstream society. This poses the question: in the case of radicalisation into racially and ethnically motivated or right-wing violent extremism, who do we understand to be the "community"? What communities, if any, do P/CVE policies aimed at disengagement target in this case?

Key actors in community-engagement

Level	Actors	Mechanisms
Micro	Family	Social and mental support
	Friends	Safe space for dialogue
Meso	Ethnic or religious groups	Psychosocial support and counselling by trained practitioners from comm-based organisations
	Neighbourhood	
	Colleagues/classmates	
	Leasure/sports clubs	Reconciliation mechanisms
	Community-based organisations	Safe space for dialogue
		Dialogue with religious or ideological leaders
		Employment
		Administrative and logistical support
Macro	Specialised government agencies	Employment
	Society	(Re)education
		Administrative and logistical support

In order to summarise who are the actors involved under community-engagement, it is useful to refer to the different levels where push, pull and personal factors affect radicalisation: the micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (societal) levels. When it comes to disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration, certain protective factors can aid the process that function on the same levels. P/CVE via community-engagement builds on these factors and with the help of key actors supports the radicalised individual in disengaging from violent extremism.

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Difference in approach to Islamist and right-wing extremism

Islamist extremism
- community-engagement is more prevalent – meso level
- programmes are newer – less experience
- disengagement via traditional social work
- focus: psychosocial support by professionals, dialogue with religious or ideological leaders
- responsibility is on the communities (suspicion towards families)

alternative social environment is crucial
focus on disengagement, derad. is secondary

Right-wing extremism
- family support and counselling are more common – micro level
- programmes are well-established (>30yrs experience)
- disengagement via long-running programmes
- focus: social and mental support, safe space for dialogue
- responsibility is on the individual and the close circle of family and friends

What is a community?

Tightly clustered groups of people surrounding the individual, who are often bound together by the same ethnic, religious or socio-economic status, and share or at least understand the individual's motivations and grievances, and can therefore aid in their disengagement and reintegration. These communities can include family, friends, schoolmates, work colleagues, sports and other recreational clubs, religious and ethnic groups and neighbourhoods. A community is therefore physically present, and geographically limited for the same reason. It is important that the community is understood as the group of people who are capable of affecting the individual's life directly, though this does not limit the size, but rather the type of relationship they have with the individual.
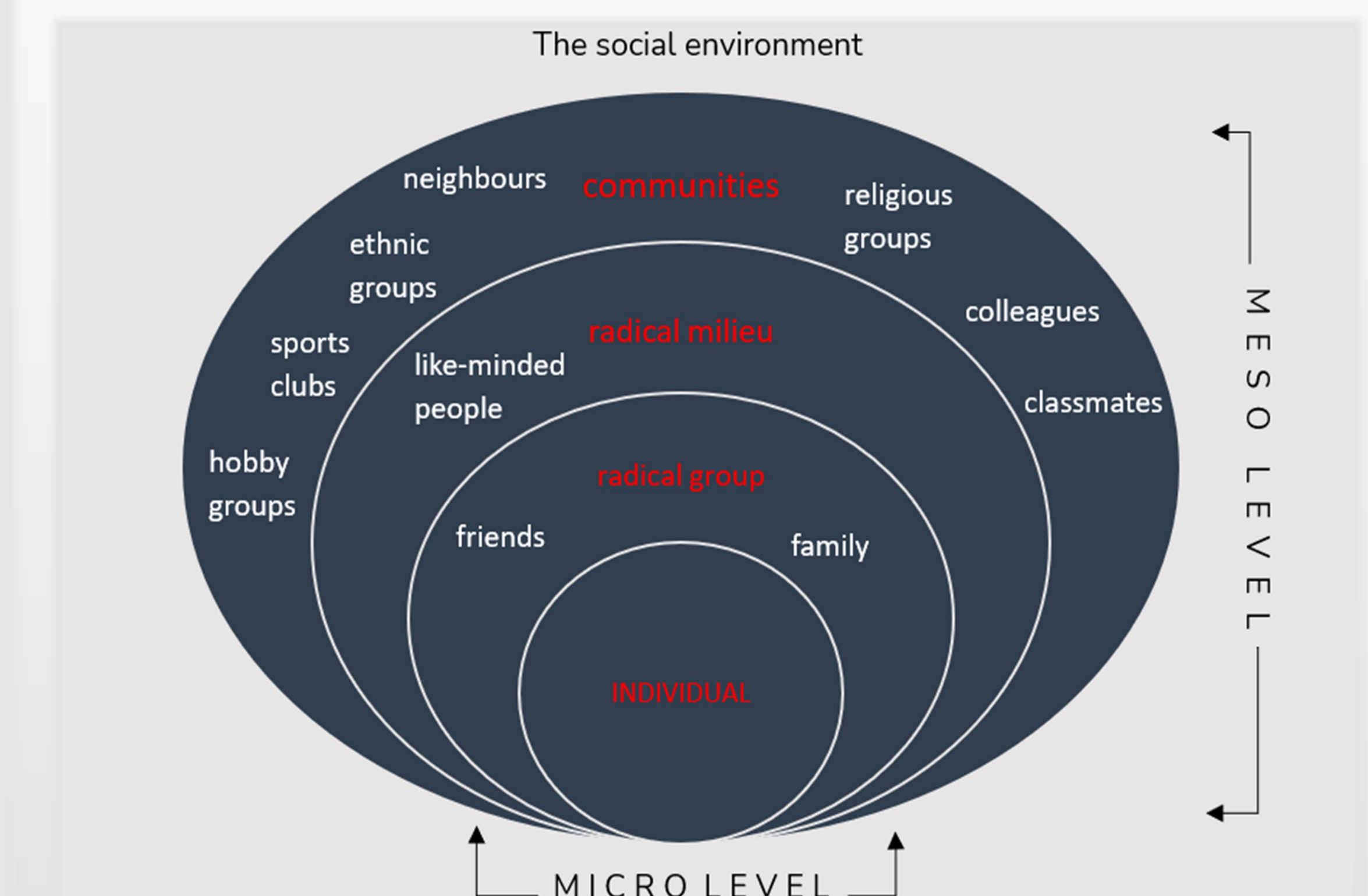
Communities:
- play an important role in both radicalisation and disengagement;
- are the setting of most of the deradicalisation-disengagement-reintegration process;
- have the biggest influence on this lengthy and often non-linear process.

Communities can:
- act as a bridge to wider society and help the individual build new relationships outside of the radical milieu they used to belong to;
- provide support throughout the reintegration process, both emotional or mental support, as well as logistical;
- model pro-social ways of responding to grievances and frustration radicalised individuals often experience, often the very reasons they joined a violent extremist group in the first place.

The role of communities in both radicalisation and disengagement

The social environment — neighbours, communities, religious groups, ethnic groups, radical milieu, colleagues, sports clubs, like-minded people, radical group, classmates, hobby groups, friends, family, INDIVIDUAL — MESO LEVEL / MICRO LEVEL

Conclusions and recommendations

- There are similarities in both the radicalisation and disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration processes into Islamist and right-wing violent extremism.
- The focus of disengagement efforts (informal or formal) seems to be on different levels.
- Difference in approach could be due to the fact that a "community" is more difficult to delineate around a right-wing extremist, while Muslim communities are often relied upon in the fight against Islamist violent extremism.
- Possible explanation: lower level of contextual knowledge on Islam, Muslim communities and radical Islamism within mainstream society and practitioners carrying out P/CVE work.
- More research is needed into the differences between disengagement efforts regarding different extremisms and the effectiveness of such programmes.

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