



*Improving the Health and
Welfare of Young People and
Communities through Grassroots
Approaches*

Advancing Community Cohesion Conference: 21-22 November 2017

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Our work is grounded on the notion that youth interventions must be embedded within activities that engage and support communities, and that trusted partnerships are essential to the success of the longer-term goals of community safety and harmony

Research Methods

- ▶ Community-Based Participatory Research:
 - ▶ with a range of Muslim communities in Melbourne, Sydney and the ACT
- ▶ Participated in youth camps, sporting activities, lectures, family events, community conferences, celebrations, and *Shura* meetings
 - ▶ *Shura* is an Arabic word for "consultation". *The Quran encourages Muslims to decide their affairs in consultation with those who will be affected by that decision*
- ▶ Our consultations have included community leaders, Sheikhs, Imams, youth/gangs, parents, and other community representatives

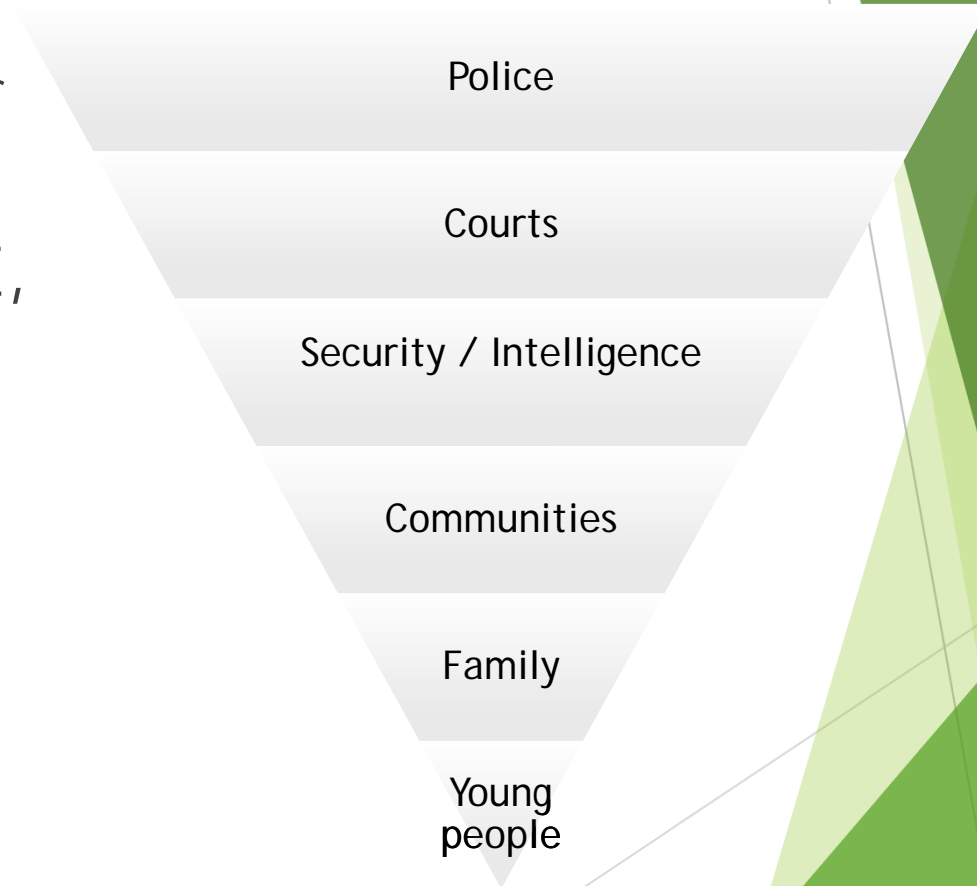
Current Challenges

- ▶ Youth interventions aimed only at countering violent extremism (CVE) (and not other youth issues) tend to lack evidence-base, efficacy, and ecological validity
- ▶ Understandings of key concepts seem flawed:
 - ▶ What is radicalisation and when is someone radicalised?
 - ▶ What is de-radicalisation and when is someone de-radicalised?
 - ▶ What is 'CVE' and what are we actually countering?
 - ▶ What does community engagement mean?
 - ▶ What are grass-roots approaches?

Current Interventions - Risk-Based and often Police-Led

Western models of interventions, particularly in CVE, are generally top-down, risk-based (or deficit-based)

Muslim youth are seen as a risk, rather than at-risk



Current Challenges

- What is 'best practice' for youth interventions, i.e. what works? what doesn't? How can we do things better?
- Current programs are often only CVE focussed and rushed through without much efficacy or transparency
- ▶ There are no silver bullet solutions or universal models
 - ▶ Individual pathways to committing crime are seldom the same, i.e. need to address individual or criminogenic needs
 - ▶ Need to vary in type, duration and intensity
 - ▶ Must be locally driven as there is a need to factor in specific social, cultural and religious dimensions

Current Challenges

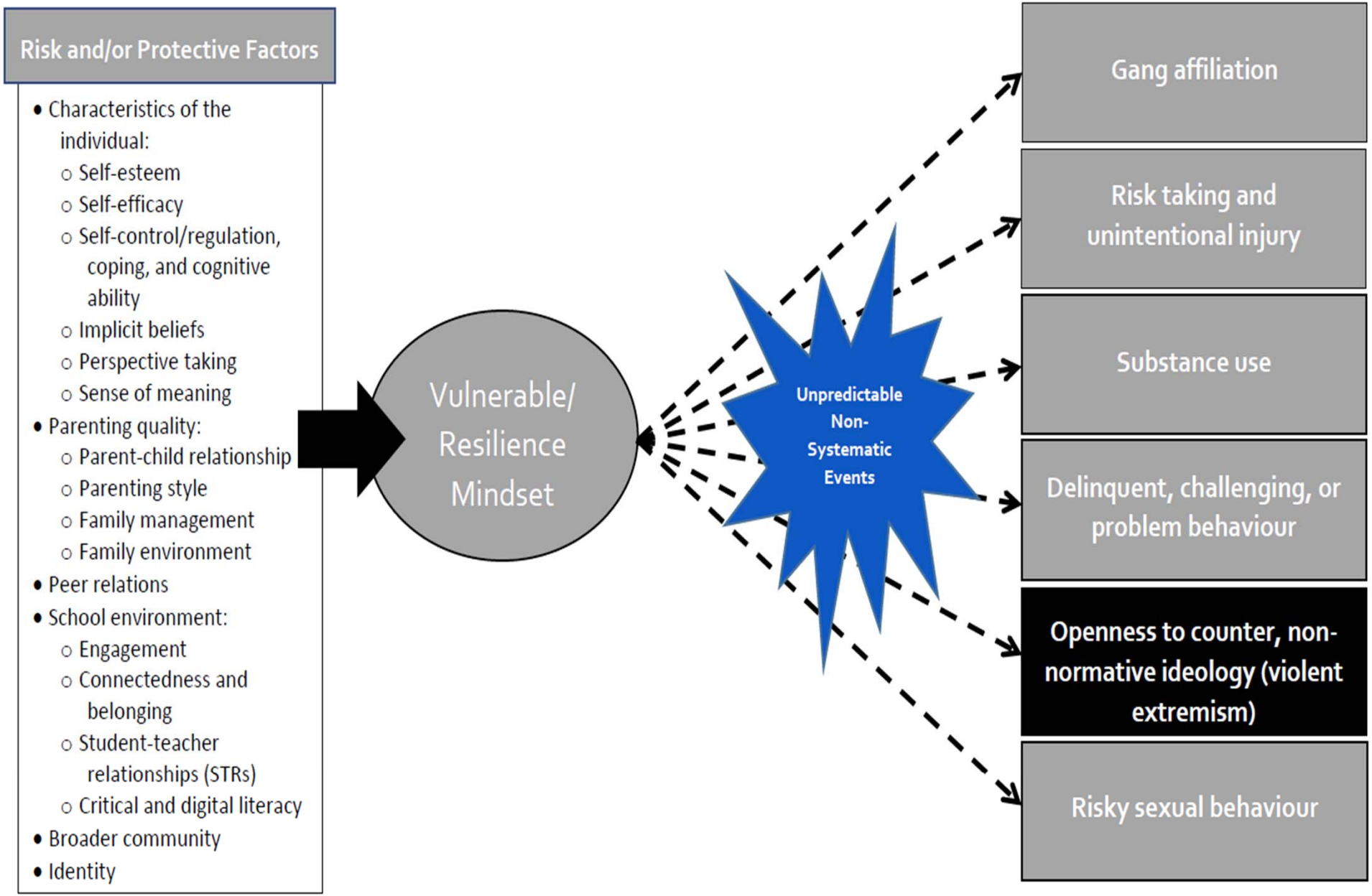
- ▶ Current government (CVE) strategies are often not reaching their full potential because they lack ecological validity:
 - ▶ No real connection to the actual problems experienced by young people, their families and communities
 - ▶ Developed away from target audience and therefore don't make sense on the ground
 - ▶ Lack genuine grassroots consultation in program formulation, application and validation
 - ▶ Lack the cultural/ethnic and religious nuances required to adequately address underlying social issues
 - ▶ Do not or can not address the multiple levels surrounding offending, i.e. individual, family and community dysfunctions
- ▶ There is a lack of community buy-in and trust, therefore, there is limited uptake by disaffected youth

Issues Affecting Uptake of Current Interventions

- ▶ Muslim communities can be reluctant to engage police/ government interventions because:
 - ▶ Muslims are only seen in the light of violent extremism / terrorism
 - ▶ Linked with efforts to conduct surveillance or collect intelligence
 - ▶ Perceived bias in the criminal justice system
 - ▶ Other social / political issues, such as treatment of refugees, racism/ discrimination, etc.

Issues Affecting Uptake of Current Interventions

- ▶ CVE focused interventions may also prove to be counterproductive - can contribute to feelings of marginalisation, victimisation, harassment, stigmatisation
 - ▶ Deficit-based (or risk-based) approaches can be detrimental to the mental health of a young person characterised as 'a risk', contributing to stigmatisation
 - ▶ Feelings of victimisation, harassment can translate to inherent issues of defiance and rejection
 - ▶ Rejection can destabilise feelings of belonging and attachment



Risk and Protective Factors that Contribute to a Vulnerable/Resilient Mindset among Youth
 (Reynolds, Jones, Klik, Saydan, & Chia, 2016)

Reframing Youth Interventions

- ▶ Alternative strengths-based approaches (SBA) offer more effective ways to work with young people and focus on:
 - ▶ strengths, abilities and potential rather than problems and deficits
- ▶ SBAs are based on assumptions that:
 - ▶ all young people have existing competencies and resources for their own empowerment
 - ▶ young people are capable of solving problems and learning new skills (Centre for Child Wellbeing, 2011)

What Works in Interventions?

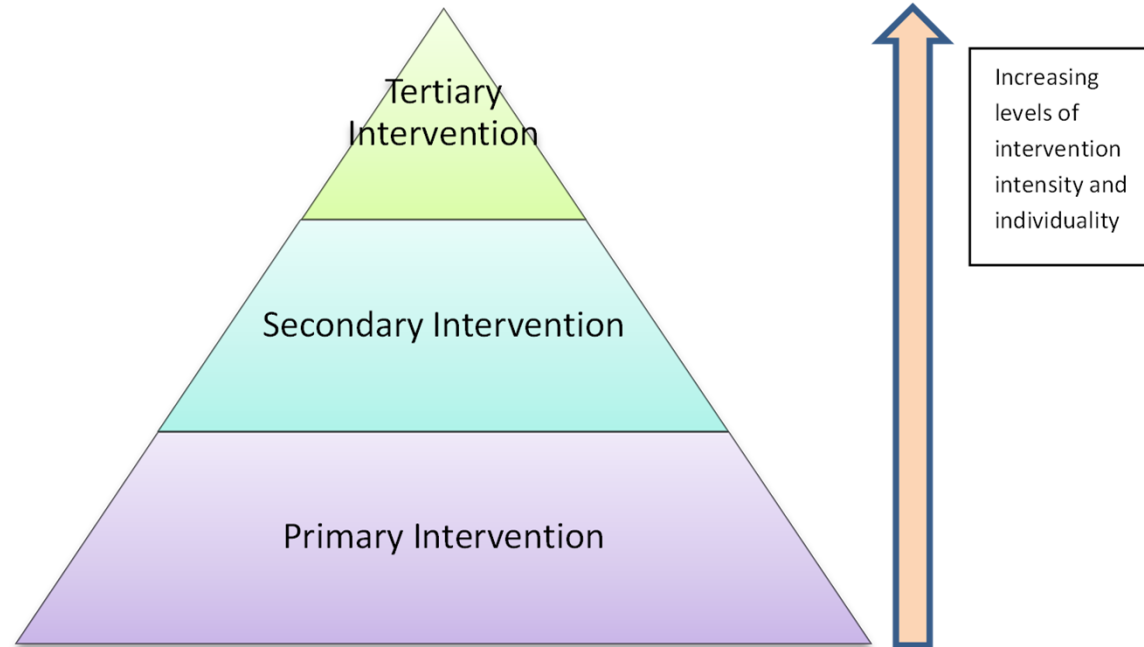
- ▶ Interventions need to consider the deeper social and cultural adaptations, i.e.
 - ▶ critical cultural values and traditions
 - ▶ education
 - ▶ socio-economic status
 - ▶ language
 - ▶ religious values
 - ▶ individual's own interpretation and identity with their race, religion, ethnicity, and culture

What Works in Interventions?

- ▶ Lessons from existing programs can assist in establishing evidence-base for interventions:
 - ▶ behavioural modification,
 - ▶ restorative justice,
 - ▶ drug and alcohol,
 - ▶ anger management,
 - ▶ gang desistance,
 - ▶ family or domestic violence,
 - ▶ sex offending, and
 - ▶ other specific offender populations

Moving Forwards

- ▶ Our community-led strategy aims to empower young Muslims and their families with a range of culturally and religiously acceptable options to help resolve crisis
- ▶ Our grass-roots concept aims to identify and coordinate Muslim community services around Victoria, with a view to provide a trusted response mechanism and capacity building where/if required



Our focus is on secondary-level intervention

Predicted Outcomes of Community-Led Approaches

- ▶ Greater levels of cooperation
- ▶ Greater access to where's needed
- ▶ A better understanding of key issues
- ▶ Ability to develop longer-term solutions and culturally/religiously sensitive interventions
- ▶ Ability to address broader multi-level individual, family and community issues
- ▶ Safer and more capable communities
- ▶ More cost effective and targeted solutions

Questions?

