Nordic Social Work Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rnsw20

The role of social support for social workers engaged in preventing radicalization and violent extremism

Håvard Haugstvedt

To cite this article: Håvard Haugstvedt (2020): The role of social support for social workers engaged in preventing radicalization and violent extremism, Nordic Social Work Research, DOI: 10.1080/2156857X.2020.1806102

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2020.1806102

Published online: 12 Aug 2020.

NORDIC SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH
https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2020.1806102

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The role of social support for social workers engaged in preventing radicalization and violent extremism

Håvard Haugstvedt

PhD Research Fellow at the University of Stavanger, Department of Social Studies, and guest researcher at Center for Research on Extremism (C-Rex), University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, social workers have been engaged in prevention work against violent extremism in the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries. There are scholarly findings of professional uncertainty among social workers carrying out this task, but the influence of organizational factors and support have not yet been studied in this context. This paper fills some of that gap with findings from research using 17 in-depth and two focus group interviews with experienced social workers involved in prevention work against radicalization and violent extremism. Theoretically, this paper applies Curtona and Russell's theory of social support to its findings. The analysis revealed that professional acknowledgement is important for these social workers and that being given time and understanding of how this work impacts professionals on a personal level is a critical part of their interaction with peers and managers. Supportive measures, such as peer support, debriefing, and supervision, are also essential parts of maintaining well-being in the aftermath of these client encounters. Additionally, the novel contribution of this paper is that, for practitioners in a mixed and still evolving practice field, these support services may also strengthen prevention workers to remain close to their professional principles and focus on emancipating, not controlling their target group.

KEYWORDS

Social work; violent extremism; multiagency approach; social support

Introduction and context

Violent extremism and terrorism is perceived as a big threat to European countries (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation [EUROPOL], 2019). Since the early 1990s, and especially during the last decade, social workers, alongside the police and, to some extent, the security service, have played a role in preventing radicalization and violent extremism in Nordic countries (Carlsson 2017; Lid et al. 2016). This work is characterized both by compassionate dialogue with clients (Haugstvedt 2019; Ponsot, Autixier, and Madriaza 2017) and by elements of control and cooperation with the police and security service (Chisholm and Coulter 2017; McKendrick and Finch 2017). The new task has caused concern that prevention workers will engage in 'soft policing' of vulnerable individuals and groups (Chisholm and Coulter 2017; McKendrick and Finch 2016, 2017) and stigmatize Muslims (Qurashi 2018).

Acknowledgement and social support have been found to influence social workers' ability to handle work stress (Kim and Stoner 2008; Nissly, Barak, and Levin 2005). Within the field of preventing violent extremism, this might be of even higher importance due to the mixed roles, closeness to police and security service, and the novelty of this work. This has the potential to

CONTACT Håvard Haugstvedt havard.haugstvedt@uis.no

create uncertainty about what social workers actually do in this field. Generally, in social work, role ambiguity is identified as a factor associated with work stress (Indregard, Knardahl, and Nielsen 2017; Johannessen, Tynes, and Sterud 2013; Kim and Stoner 2008; Yürür and Sarikaya 2012) for professionals altogether as well as for preventing violent extremism (Sweifach, Heft LaPorte, and Linzer 2010). To cope with such issues, scholarly work has found a need for support from peers and managers (Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002; Nissly, Barak, and Levin 2005).

There are international findings of professional uncertainty among those performing this work (Chisholm and Coulter 2017; Dryden 2017; Lid et al. 2016). However, as no studies have examined the topic of organizational factors and support within the context of preventing radicalization and violent extremism, little is known about what these professionals need from peers, managers, and support staff.

What is different about this specific prevention work?

The balance between control and support is well known within social work as a source of tension (Levin 2007). This tension became further intensified in the United Kingdom after the *Prevent policy* became a legal duty for public sector workers in 2015 (Stanley 2018). While the framework of this multiagency work is different and far less reaching in Norway compared to the United Kingdom, in Norway, the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) is also engaged in multiagency cooperation (Carlsson 2017). This might be of particular concern and possibly create some of the tension found in the United Kingdom. Research carried out in Belgium found that closeness to police and unclear roles and practices have caused Belgian social workers engaged in preventing violent extremism to lose contact with their target group (Brion and Guittet 2018).

Prevention work should be based on solid expertise. However, an international review of the training courses seeking to provide such competency found training to be insufficient to effectively strengthen workers in deradicalizing those identified as extremists (Koehler and Fiebig 2019). This is not surprising, as no proper explanation has been found for why some radicalize into violent extremists and others do not. A wide variety of influencing factors have been found, such as mental health issues among solo terrorists (Grønnerød and Hellevik 2016) and feelings of insignificance (Kruglanski et al. 2018), but no studies have been conclusive. Moreover, no strong evidence exists on what works in terms of prevention or deradicalization efforts (Pistone et al. 2019). Also, screening tools have been developed to help identify at risk individuals. But scholars have raised concern of the conceptualizations underpinning such tools (Knudsen 2018), as well as them being heavily reliant on the quality and utilization of the source information (Egan et al. 2016). Hence, the work to prevent radicalization and violent extremism cannot be based on checklists and standardized approaches alone. This might cause some of the uncertainties experienced by practitioners within the multiagency approach to prevent radicalization and violent extremism (Chisholm and Coulter 2017; Dryden 2017; Lid et al. 2016). While facing uncertainty is recognized as a part of social work (Miller 2006), it also calls for support from colleagues as well as critically reviewing professional decision-making to improve practice (Munro 2019).

These findings point towards a new and evolving practice field where social workers interact both with clients at risk of (further) radicalization and with police and security service. The difference in discourses found among social workers and 'security workers' (Sivenbring and Malmros 2020) set to cooperate in these cases might contribute to some of the uncertainties identified earlier. The novelty of this task in a mixed professional landscape, the lack of training to reach high levels of expertise, and the overall low numbers of cases paint a picture of a task that creates challenges for social workers. Hence, proper support and continuous dissemination of practice through critical reflection and supervision might play a crucial role in both social workers' well-being and their professional practice. This leads to the following research question:

- *How do social workers involved in preventing radicalization and violent extremism experience and perceive their own needs for organizational support?*

This question will be answered through analysis of interview data, from highly experienced social workers involved in preventing violent extremism in Norway. First, this paper introduces findings from scholarly literature on organizational factors that influence social workers' stress at work, their well-being, and their ability to manage challenging tasks.

Review

Although social work is considered a rewarding profession (Stevens et al. 2012), it has also been found to affect the worker in many negative ways, including through burnout and secondary trauma (Acker 1999; Adams, Boscarino, and Figley 2006; Baugerud, Vangbæk, and Melinder 2017; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). This is at least partially explained by the following. Social workers' openness and empathy towards their clients make them vulnerable to stress (Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002), and at times, they interact with very challenging service users who may struggle with mental health problems (Acker 1999) or may be victims of child abuse (Horwitz 1998). In addition, it has been found that social workers experience high emotional demands (Indregard, Knardahl, and Nielsen 2017) and that co-workers or family might struggle to understand their needs after potentially traumatic incidents at work (Horwitz 1998). To gain a deeper understanding of work stress and possibly prevent it, many studies have explored the relationship and influence of organizational factors on job satisfaction, well-being, and stress within social work (Baugerud, Vangbæk, and Melinder 2017; Ben-Zur and Michael 2007; Nissly, Barak, and Levin 2005). For example, Baugerud, Vangbæk, and Melinder (2017) found that a high workload predicted high levels of burnout among child protection workers, while commitment to their organization and a sense of work mastery reduced levels of compassion fatigue. In the following, the influence of organizational factors on social workers' well-being will be presented.

Social support, from either managers and co-workers, has been found to reduce intention to quit among social workers (Ducharme, Knudsen, and Roman 2007; Nissly, Barak, and Levin 2005) and reduce job stress in general (Ben-Zur and Michael 2007; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). Supervisory support in particular has been found to positively influence social workers within child protection services to remain in their position over time (Dickinson and Perry 2002). Further, social support from colleagues is effective in reversing negative thoughts on what might happen in challenging client sessions (Chudzik 2016). However, the strongest predictors of work-related stress and burnout appear to be work pressure, workload, role ambiguity, and relationship with superiors (Kim and Stoner 2008; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). To bolster workers for the challenges in social work, both formal and informal group support have been recommended to draw attention to the fulfiling and satisfactory sides of doing social work, which could help reduce stress (Collins 2008).

Several authors have argued that organizations need to build supportive job conditions to reduce high levels of stress among social workers (Kim and Stoner 2008; Yürür and Sarikaya 2012) and provide supervisors as resources for frontline staff in social services (Kim and Lee 2009). Supervision that is directly related to clinical practice may also have an indirect buffering effect on working with challenging clients by teaching the workers how to handle these clients, providing adequate interventions, increasing the sense of personal accomplishments, and thus reducing work stress (Ducharme, Knudsen, and Roman 2007; Yürür and Sarikaya 2012). In addition to reducing burnout and raising awareness of professional boundaries (Urdang 2010), self-reflection and critical examination of social work practice also help practitioners become aware of their own values (Ixer 2003) and resist oppressive structures and practices (Heron 2005; Sakamoto and Pitner 2005). As social work addresses the needs and troubles of vulnerable populations, supervision is of vital

importance to handling their cases as well as for personal development as a social worker (Hughes 2010).

This brief review has found evidence that organizational and work factors, such as role ambiguity, high caseloads, and poor support from co-workers and supervisors, are associated with work-related stress. However, both formal and informal social support from co-workers and supervisors have been found and suggested to be effective strategies to assist social workers in managing challenging client work, work-related stress, and job retention. However, even more importantly, supervision and critical reflection of practice have been proven as tools that can heighten the awareness of oppressive practices and influence both social workers' well-being and their practices towards vulnerable target groups. These findings indicate a solid ground for an exploration of organizational support as an influencing factor in social workers' prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, which this paper builds on. In the following, the theoretical perspectives of social support by Cutrona and Russell (1990) will be presented and later applied as a useful lens for this paper's findings.

Theory

Social support appears to be important for maintaining physical and mental health and for enhancing resilience to stress (Ozbay et al. 2007). Cutrona and Russell (1990) set forth to develop a theory and construction of social support by reviewing and combining findings in earlier studies. This work, as well as Cutrona's (2000) further developments, found that social support contains two main dimensions, instrumental support and nurturant support, with subvariations in both.

Instrumental support includes, as the name describes, instrumental measures of support that can be directly relevant to solving the problem at hand. This may be specific advice on how a situation can be handled or offerings of resources to help manage the problem, such as money if the problem is of a financial nature (Cutrona 2000). This category includes both information support, such as suggestions and advice on what to do, and tangible support. Tangible support is something we can do for the person with the problem to indirectly influence the problem, such as loaning them money or taking care of their children at times to relieve stress. Nurturant support, in contrast, is related to easing the negative emotions influenced by the problem but does not directly solve it. In this category, emotional support is the act of engaging in empathic listening, being attentive, or just being there for someone when needed. This also includes esteem support, which involves showing and telling a person how much they are worth and bolstering a person's self-esteem and sense of competency (Cutrona 2000; Cutrona and Russell 1990).

Researchers of social support, like Cutrona and Russell (1990), have struggled with identifying what type of support is most efficient for easing various problems (Pinkerton and Dolan 2007). One main finding from Cutrona (2000) is that emotional support appears to be favourable in most cases, while instrumental support through advice and information is more likely to be received positively if the support provider has control over or competency in the problem area. While a large body of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of social support, the mechanisms are still debated and findings vary (Nurullah 2012). Among important dimensions is the cultural context wherein support is given and received (Kim, Sherman, and Taylor 2008), and gender of both the giver and recipient (Thoits 2011).

Methodology

The studies included in the review mainly applied statistical approaches by analysing the association and influence of organizational factors and work stress, burnout and job retention, and various supportive measures. This paper, however, utilizes data from in-depth and focus group interviews to explore organizational factors that influence the participants at work and what they experience as needed or wanted. This is a qualitative in-depth study of a particular branch and phenomenon in

social work that is aimed at providing a richness and depth of data through dialogue with the participants (Blaikie 2010).

Sampling and data collection

Participants were recruited from a range of services in western, middle, and eastern parts of Norway. To secure various and rich descriptions of practice and experience, purposeful sampling (Yin 2016, 93) sought highly experienced social workers who work in both large cities and smaller municipalities. The recruitment process began by engaging with local managers and coordinators in the municipalities. These starting points served to open doors to others, followed by initial screening via telephone to ensure participants had experience on the research topic. Lastly, the snowball method was used to reach additional participants (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). Prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is not organized in a standardized way in Norway. Therefore, participants were recruited from child protection services, social services, outreach services, and various projects, all of which have responsibilities and experience in providing interventions or follow-up services for youth and adults at risk of (further) radicalization.

Both the 17 in-depth interviews and the two focus group interviews were conducted from winter to autumn 2018. I sought data triangulation by combining these two approaches (Yin 2016). The interviews had a mean length of 101 minutes. Participants were both female (6) and male (11), with a mean age of 39 years. Their highest educational levels were a bachelor's degree (9) and master's degree (8), with a mean 12.5 years of experience in social work and 3.5 years of working to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. On the basis of the above, the participants are considered by the author to represent competency and experience at a very high level in this field and are able to provide insight into the current research topic.

Ethical considerations

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data approved the project, no. 58,477, on 1 February 2018. Information about the research project, confidentiality, and consent forms were provided to all potential participants early in the recruitment process. These were collected before the interviews were carried out. Consent forms and audio recordings of interviews were securely stored according to the guidelines of the University of Stavanger. To ensure the participants' discretion, all data were anonymized.

Analysis

A six-step thematic analysis revealed two main themes, or patterns, within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006): the need for acknowledgement from co-workers and managers and the need for professional strengthening. Next, an integrated findings and discussion section, where Cutrona and Russell's (1990) construction of social support are applied, will follow.

Theme 1: acknowledgement

This study found a need to recognize that working to prevent radicalization and violent extremism is demanding and impacts the social workers. The participants in this study appears to understand and handle the task at hand. However, in the interviews, they highlighted that, when they get deep into dialogue about ideology and values, they are challenged, and this challenge creates a heightened need for professional acknowledgement within their own organization. The topic of professional acknowledgement were discussed in a focus group, and the transcript below gives insight into how managerial acknowledgement is of particular significance.

Participant 5: I know it. I have felt the same. It's like all consuming, especially if they are people with a lot on their mind, talkative, and extreme opinions about everything. So, you try to receive everything and try to work it out. At the same time, you have to sit there and listen to and respond when you can. But afterwards, I have experienced many times that I am just sitting there, unable to work. […]

Participant 2: And then there must be someone who is able to recognize that these tasks are difficult.

Participant 5: Yes, and our leader has been very good at recognizing that this is something that requires a lot. And if it is difficult for us. Then, we can spend some time to process it and have time to … [gets interrupted]

Participant 2: It's allowed to have a time-out.

Participant 5: Yes, time-out, simply.

The three participants talked about how managerial acknowledgement allows them to process highly challenging meetings and sessions with clients who may have strong views on society that may contradict their own. Managerial acknowledgement of how challenging this task is also seems to create an opportunity to spend time after challenging encounters to calm down, 'shake it off,' and take care of themselves. This form of acknowledgement thereby appears to provide approval for them to spend working hours pulling themselves together after emotionally difficult conversations. The need for acknowledgement is not new in social work or elsewhere. However, these workers explore a still fairly new terrain within social work where uncertainty of roles and tasks may confuse both workers and the target group.

Acknowledgement is not a category itself presented by Cutrona & Russell (1990), but it is within the realm of what they coined nurturant support, and more specifically emotional and esteem support. The participants talked about how co-workers, managers, and other professionals, such as psychologists, all are valuable in the sense that they provide various types of nurturant support to them. Although some forms of support may be counterproductive (Lehman and Hemphill 1990), studies have previously found that emotional support is wanted by most (Cutrona 2000; Cutrona and Suhr 1992). The current research revealed a need for both emotional support, and recognition of their professional task being challenging. Cutrona and Russell (1990) labelled the latter esteem support, and this could include others' acts to boost their beliefs in their abilities and strengthen their self-esteem (Ko, Wang, and Xu 2013). These two aspects of nurturant support appears entangled with each other. However, the provider of support makes an important distinction between peers and managers. While acknowledgement from both groups are desired, managerial acknowledgement has the consequence of also facilitating tangible and instrumental support. This leads to the next theme, professional strengthening.

Theme 2: professional strengthening

The second main theme includes two sub-themes: support from peers, and formal supportive measures aiming to help the social workers manage challenging client encounters. The latter are measures consisting of services like supervision, debriefing, professional guidance, and self-support training. While these are more 'formal' than nurturant support, they build on the ideal environment for supervision facilitated through nurturant support; a safe space for professionals to reflect and learn (Beddoe 2010).

Peer support

Below, two participants in the first focus group discusses their experience of working with individuals at risk of (further) radicalization and what they need from peers at work.

Participant 3: We have a group of those who work with these cases, but we call it adiscussion group. But it is more of a way to process these things. Get input onwhat to do next. Seek or ask for help from other services.

Participant 4: To 'play ball' with others . . . Because we have to deal with a lot of cases, it's very nice to be there with someone who has an understanding of what it is like to be in those situations.

The above reveals that the group setting has a dual function: case-oriented processes and peer support. First, the social workers receive input and advice on specific cases they deal with, and second, the discussion groups provide recognition to the participants that the work they share is something special and thus provide sought-after (nurturant) support to the participants. This appears connected with the fact that these workers seldom have a colleague that has the same responsibilities as they do. Below, two participants in individual interviews describe this from different experiences:

Participant: It's tough when you are alone with all of it without colleagues. And I think it's because the consequences are so much greater than in other work.

Participant: I don't think I could have done this alone, like if I didn't have anyone around me who understood the problems I faced. And luckily I had that. I could vent without any chaos happening, without being afraid that they would sound the alarm right away.

These participants point out the value, or need, of a close colleague or partner, as the issues of violent extremism might potentially have severe consequences. These consequences, like travelling to Syria, causes stress and concern in those not familiar with this field. This kind of peer support provides a way for practitioners in a novel practice field to vent, discuss, and reflect upon cases where there are no comprehensive guidelines or professional history of what to do and how to collaborate with other agencies, such as the police and security service.

Information support was found to mainly be received from co-workers and collaborating professionals through group discussions as well as from psychologists and other specialists involved in debriefing and advising the participants as will be presented next. In addition, this study found that various social support strategies are integrated or work in parallel. In discussion groups, the participants experience both recognition and information support, such as advice from co-workers and peers (Cutrona and Russell 1990). As many of the other practitioners in these groups deal with the same target group and tasks, they are in a unique position to give advice on managing both the work and the challenging encounters. Thus, these group discussions have the potential to provide both nurturant and instrumental support.

Debriefing and supervision

The current research also found an outspoken need for supervision and professional guidance. Debriefing is a service to individuals who have experienced distressing incidents. Its aim is to normalize common trauma reactions and provide useful information regarding coping strategies (Hawker, Durkin, and Hawker 2011). Internationally, professional guidance has previously been found to increase job retention among child protection workers (Landsman 2001; Westbrook, Ellis, and Ellett 2006), and perceived supervisory support has been positively associated with reduced symptoms of burnout (Hamama 2012). In the work to address and explore clients' ideology and support for various organizations, social workers have previously been found to use well-known strategies like Socratic questioning and motivational interviewing (Haugstvedt 2019). These strategies expose social workers to clients' attitudes, and as the conversation below shows, these attitudes might also be directed at the workers personally.

Participants: I think it's mostly that I'm not used to it. And I think you have to have good supervision on how not to take it all in because some of it can be very hard.

Researcher: Like what?

Participant: If you meet with a client and talk to someone who utters things that really break with your basic values, your human view, and also get it directed right atyourself or someone close to you. That can be hard.

The participant in the transcript above experiences that he becomes the target of his client's attitudes and that this experience is both novel and very challenging. Supervision, in this case, is presented as the remedy that strengthens the worker's ability to handle these challenging encounters, to not take it all in, as he says. Some of the participants have been educated in techniques that assist them when dialogue and cooperation with the target group become stressful, as well as in ways to understand both clients and themselves in their professional interaction.

Participant: We have had psychologists that specialize in coaching professionals on just that [handling challenging encounters], and they use basic psychological techniques, like taking a short break, to go get some water, get some fresh air, just to manage what you're experiencing. I believe it reduces stress levels sowe are more able to manage it all. And then there's the debriefing, where we've had experts explain and help us understand situations and ourselves, so that we're not so easily tipped off or manipulated. It's important that we're firmly grounded professionally in this work because it's so challenging

Also, in addition to social workers' own professional knowledge and competency, debriefing and educational programmes have been established in some services to strengthen the prevention workers' ability to engage with clients as well as shield themselves from clients' manipulative attempts.

Such support services, advice and professional training, has been found to be most effective when the support provider has more control over the subject, for example, competency or experience, than the support receiver (Cutrona 2000). Although not asked about it directly, this did surface throughout the interviews, and participants talked with enthusiasm about receiving advice and thoughts from psychologists who were engaged by their agencies to support them through debriefings and supervision of practice. In regard to the group discussions in which some of the participants in this study also engaged, advice might have the potential to be counterproductive or harmful to the professional relationship if more experienced practitioners find themselves on the receiving end of advice coming from a novice practitioner. As such, status, competency, and overall position might be factors that influence group discussion and especially how advice is received. Instrumental support from psychologists corresponds to earlier findings of receiving expert advice, and this support appear to strengthen practitioners and make them more resilient to the challenges they face in client encounters and their own reactions.

This is also in accordance with earlier findings of supervision playing a key role in good social work for both the clients and the workers' own professional development and practice (Hughes 2010). Through supervision and dialogue with others, social workers can develop reflective practices and critical thinking (Ixer 2003; Urdang 2010). This has been found to have the potential to uncover oppressive structures and values that influence social work (Heron 2005; Sakamoto and Pitner 2005), thereby also creating chances to change them. However, in situations where social workers experience high levels of anxiety, self-reflection has been found to be difficult (Ferguson 2018). This calls for training in self-reflection outside of actual client situations to develop the capacity to think clearly about service users' needs (Ferguson 2018), develop emancipatory forms of practice (Houston 2015; Rogers 2012), and undercover power relations on individual, organizational, and structural levels in society (Mattsson 2014).

The topic of experience and competency in terms of the support provider was not addressed in this research project. Future studies might find this topic worth exploring in association with coworkers of uneven experience and formal competency. Also, the subjects of self-control and the

ability to maintain and control emotions, cognitions, and behaviour (Cohen 2012) have not yet been thoroughly integrated into the scholarly literature on social support (Pilcher and Bryant 2016). This integration could also provide findings that could both strengthen and challenge social support research and possibly uncover new effective pathways.

The paper's finding 'fits' well with Cutrona and Russell's (1990) theory of social support. However, the findings also show that the various types of social support are possibly more connected, or overlapping, than the original assumption. The context, professional social work, not private relations, may however influence this notion. This paper has shown that information support, such as hearing a peer's assessment of a particular case, or receiving training in self-care within client encounters from a psychologist, also functions as emotional support. Additionally, the emotional and esteem support from managers in particular, may provide social workers with time and space to clear their mind after challenging client encounters. This removes other tasks or responsibilities, if only for a short period of time, and thereby indirectly function as tangible support by easing other professional 'burdens'. These findings exceeds Cutrona and Russell's (1990) original categorization. However, the unique aspect of qualified peer support identified in this paper also resonates with Cutrona's (2000) later findings of nurses and counsellors; problems at work are most efficiently prevented at work, with someone how is familiar with the challenges.

This analysis also reveals that the needs that surface from doing client work within the context of preventing radicalization and violent extremism share commonalities with actual client work itself. Like this paper's findings, client work relies on the ability of the professional to acknowledge the clients' perspectives and experiences, communicate empathy, and create a safe supportive environment before exploring sensitive issues (Miller 2006). This supports and substantiates earlier findings from this kind of prevention work as challenging (Chisholm and Coulter 2017). Also, this study revealed that various actors in social workers' organization may fill very different support functions. Peers and managers provide the bulk load of nurturant support, while managers also functions as gatekeepers able to provide both time off, and more specialized services from psychologists and other experts. Hence, social support in this context is recognized as a puzzle with many interdependent pieces.

How do these findings compare to those of other studies?

This study's main findings are that social workers have a need for extra acknowledgement and understanding from co-workers and managers of how this work affects them emotionally and that they are given time to both perform and gather themselves afterwards. Also, it has been shown that, to be able to do this kind of work, social workers feel they need both informal and formal supportive measures, especially professional supervision and dissemination of their practice. This is somewhat similar with earlier research on social workers and social support, especially the value emotional support from co-workers and managers have on work-related stress (Chudzik 2016; Hamama 2012; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002; Nissly, Barak, and Levin 2005; Nurullah 2012). In previous studies, supervision, debriefing, and advice (Collins 2008; Ducharme, Knudsen, and Roman 2007; Yürür and Sarikaya 2012) were shown to be greatly appreciated by the participants. The supportive work environments suggested by earlier studies (Kim and Lee 2009; Kim and Stoner 2008) were recognized in this study as well.

While also easing stress and possibly burnout (Urdang 2010), instrumental support surfaced as a tool that has the potential to uncover, resist, and challenge discourses and structures of oppression, such as the connection between Muslim populations in Western societies and terrorism (Coppock and McGovern 2014; Qurashi 2018; Stanley, Guru, and Coppock 2017; Stanley and Guru 2015). In social work with refugees in the UK and Australia, supervision was also found to be connected to both workers' well-being, and to the quality of the interventions and services they provided (Robinson 2013). The concern raised by mainly UK scholars about the securitization of social work (McKendrick and Finch 2017; Qurashi 2018; Ragazzi 2017) is highly relevant for today's

practitioners, and perhaps particularly in Norway where PST is a collaborative partner for some services.

Implications for practice

These findings give direct implications for the above issues. Striving towards an emancipatory and anti-oppressive practice, social workers undertaking new tasks, such as preventing violent extremism, should and can strengthen their practice by having a critical eye on their own values and assumptions and how they might be influenced by security discourses as well as by client manipulation. In addition to taking care of themselves through various supportive measures and supervision, these steps can also help practitioners navigate a 'treacherous landscape,' where the police and security service's agenda does not necessarily coincide with that of social services. As these findings become known, they should be taken into account in the practice field to further bolster practitioners into more confident, and still, empathic workers who have had a short glimpse into the needs of their clients. Social workers may, through discussion and reflection with peers and supervisors, become aware of the similarities between clients' and social workers' need. This may contribute to maintaining an empathic practice based on professional assessments rather than fear and mistrust of minority populations, such as Muslim communities.

Limitations

It is worth noting that the total number of participants in this study was 17. Moreover, this study only explored the perspectives of one group of practitioners involved in prevention strategies and not those individuals at which it is aimed. The perspectives of the latter group are of great importance, especially regarding how they experience the interventions or narratives about themselves found in mass media and from government agencies. However, the experiences of organizational structures from the perspective of the practitioners are important because these support services may strengthen them into more reflective and ethically conscious workers who are more robust and ready for the dilemmas that arise in this kind of work.

Conclusion

Violent extremism and terrorism are perceived as a big threat to European countries (EUROPOL 2019). Social workers involved in preventing and countering radicalization and violent extremism have the challenging task of managing a balance of both control and support as well as client encounters that some social workers experience as causing uncertainty and even fear. To support and strengthen these workers within a still evolving task, the participants in this study brought forth experiences that may prove useful to both researchers and practitioners. These workers, who are mainly the only ones with this task in their service, expressed the need and desire to have their work acknowledged as being particularly professionally challenging. Furthermore, both nurturant and instrumental support strategies have been found to help them manage this after client encounters, and the two may be more closely connected and overlapping than Cutrona and Russell (1990) hypothesized, as well as to client work itself. Surprisingly, the findings of social workers' needs are somewhat in line with basic strategies in social work with clients. This insight may, by being grounded in own emotional experience, lower the constructed difference between 'us and them', in which may help facilitate a more curious approach and a deeper understanding of clients' perspectives.

Both peers, managers and specialists are important pieces in the puzzle of social support. However, managers are especially responsible and may create work environments that are supportive of these and other practitioners, as well as clear the way for both nurturant and instrumental support. As multiagency work to prevent radicalization and violent extremism is still developing,

this is and will be a field where practitioners will look for clarity of both their role and tasks. Also, social support may contribute to strengthening social workers' professional identity and practice. This paper's novel contribution is that these findings occur within the context of preventing radicalization and violent extremism, where social workers collaborate with the police and security service. Following this paper's findings regarding the need for both emotional support and dissemination of practice, social workers engaged in preventing violent extremism may be better suited to withstand political agendas and security discourses that may widen, not close, the gaps between minority and majority groups in society.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank anonymous reviewers, my supervisors Associate Professor Svein Erik Tuastad and Associate Professor Hulda Mjøll Gunnarsdottir, as well as my fellow PhD candidates and other faculty staff at the Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger. Also, I would like to thank supportive colleagues at the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-Rex) at the University of Oslo. Discussions, reflections, and dialogue with you all have brought this paper forward.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Håvard Haugstvedt http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7285-1416

References

Acker, G. M. 1999. "The Impact of Clients' Mental Illness on Social Workers' Job Satisfaction and Burnout." *Health & Social Work* 24 (2): 112–119. doi:10.1093/hsw/24.2.112.

Adams, R. E., J. A. Boscarino, and C. R. Figley. 2006. "Compassion Fatigue and Psychological Distress among Social Workers: A Validation Study." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 76 (1): 103–108. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.76.1.103.

Baugerud, G. A., S. Vangbæk, and A. Melinder. 2017. "Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout and Compassion Satisfaction among Norwegian Child Protection Workers: Protective and Risk Factors." *The British Journal of Social Work* 48: 215–235. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcx002.

Beddoe, L. 2010. "Surveillance or Reflection: Professional Supervision in "The Risk Society"." *British Journal of Social Work* 40 (4): 1279–1296. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcq018.

Ben-Zur, H., and K. Michael. 2007. "Burnout, Social Support, and Coping at Work among Social Workers, Psychologists, and Nurses: The Role of Challenge/Control Appraisals." *Social Work in Health Care* 45 (4): 63–82. doi:10.1300/J010v45n04_04.

Biernacki, P., and D. Waldorf. 1981. "Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling." *Sociological Methods & Research* 10 (2): 141–163. doi:10.1177/004912418101000205.

Blaikie, N. 2010. *Designing Social Research. The Logic of Anticipation. 2nd* ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brion, F., and E.-P. Guittet (2018). "*Prevention of Radicalisation in Molenbeek. An Overview*" (p. 13) [Research Paper]. Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain). affectliberties.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AFFECT-RP-6-2018-BRION-GUITTET-Prevention-of-radicalisation-in-Molenbeek-VF.pdf

Carlsson, Y. (2017). "Violent Extremism: Prevention of a Wicked problem—The Role of Local Authorities." *C-Rex Working Paper Series, No. 2 (2017)*, 1–26.

Chisholm, T., and A. Coulter (2017). "*Safeguarding and Radicalisation*" (p. 50) [Research Report]. UK Department for Education.

Chudzik, L. 2016. "Therapeutic Assessment of a Violent Criminal Offender: Managing the Cultural Narrative of Evil." *Journal of Personality Assessment* 98 (6): 585–589. doi:10.1080/00223891.2016.1215321.

Cohen, M. T. 2012. "The Importance of Self-Regulation for College Student Learning." *College Student Journa* 46 (4): 892–902.

Collins, S. 2008. "Statutory Social Workers: Stress, Job Satisfaction, Coping, Social Support and Individual Differences." *British Journal of Social Work* 38 (6): 1173–1193. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcm047.
Coppock, V., and M. McGovern. 2014. "'Dangerous Minds'? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the 'Psychological Vulnerability' of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain." *Children & Society* 28 (3): 242–256. doi:10.1111/chso.12060.
Cutrona, C. E. 2000. "Social Support Principles for Strengthening Families: Messages from the USA." In *Family Support. Direction From Diversity*, edited by J. Canavan, P. Dolan, and J. Pinkerton, 103–121. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Cutrona, C. E., and D. W. Russell. 1990. "Type of Social Support and Specific Stress: Toward a Theory of Optimal Matching." In *Social Supprt: An Interactional View*, edited by I. G. Sarason, B. R. Sarason, and G. R. Pierce, 319–366. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.
Cutrona, C. E., and J. A. Suhr. 1992. "Controllability of Stressful Events and Satisfaction with Spouse Support Behaviors." *Communication Research* 19 (2): 154–174. doi:10.1177/009365092019002002.
Dickinson, N. S., and R. E. Perry. 2002. "Factors Influencing the Retention of Specially Educated Public Child Welfare Workers." *Journal of Health & Social Policy* 15 (3–4): 89–103. doi:10.1300/J045v15n03_07.
Dryden, M. 2017. "Radicalisation: The Last Taboo in Safeguarding and Child Protection? Assessing Practitioner Preparedness in Preventing the Radicalisation of Looked-After Children1." *Journal for Deradicalization* 13: 101–136.
Ducharme, L. J., H. K. Knudsen, and P. M. Roman. 2007. "Emotional Exhaustion and Turnover Intention in Human Service Occupations: The Protective Role of Coworker Support." *Sociological Spectrum* 28 (1): 81–104. doi:10.1080/02732170701675268.
Egan, V., J. Cole, B. Cole, L. Alison, E. Alison, S. Waring, and S. Elntib. 2016. "Can You Identify Violent Extremists Using a Screening Checklist and Open-source Intelligence Alone?" *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 3 (1): 21–36. doi:10.1037/tam0000058.
EUROPOL. (2019). "*The Threat from Terrorism in the EU Became More Complex in 2018*" [Press Release]. EUROPOL. https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/threat-terrorism-in-eu-became-more-complex-in-2018
Ferguson, H. 2018. "How Social Workers Reflect in Action and When and Why They Don't: The Possibilities and Limits to Reflective Practice in Social Work." *Social Work Education* 37 (4): 415–427. doi:10.1080/02615479.2017.1413083.
Grønnerød, J. S., and P. M. Hellevik. 2016. *Radikalisering Og Psykisk Helse – En Kunnskapsoppsummering (4/2016)*. Oslo: Nasjonalt kunnskapssenter om vold og traumatisk stress.
Hamama, L. 2012. "Burnout in Social Workers Treating Children as Related to Demographic Characteristics, Work Environment, and Social Support." *Social Work Research* 36 (2): 113–125. doi:10.1093/swr/svs003.
Haugstvedt, H. 2019. "Trusting the Mistrusted: Norwegian Social Workers' Strategies in Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism." *Journal for Deradicalization* 19: 149–184.
Hawker, D. M., J. Durkin, and D. S. J. Hawker. 2011. "To Debrief or Not to Debrief Our Heroes: That Is the Question." *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 18 (6): 453–463. doi:10.1002/cpp.730.
Heron, B. 2005. "Self-reflection in Critical Social Work Practice: Subjectivity and the Possibilities of Resistance." *Reflective Practice* 6 (3): 341–351. doi:10.1080/14623940500220095.
Horwitz, M. 1998. "Social Worker Trauma: Building Resilience in Child Protection Social Workers." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 68 (3): 363–377. doi:10.1080/00377319809517536.
Houston, S. 2015. "Enabling Others in Social Work: Reflexivity and the Theory of Social Domains." *Critical and Radical Social Work* 3 (2): 245–260. doi:10.1332/204986015X14302240420229.
Hughes, J. M. 2010. "The Role of Supervision in Social Work: A Critical Analysis." *Critical Social Thinking: Policy and Practice* 2: 59–77.
Indregard, A.-M. R., S. Knardahl, and M. B. Nielsen. 2017. "Emotional Dissonance and Sickness Absence: A Prospective Study of Employees Working with Clients." *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health* 90 (1): 83–92. doi:10.1007/s00420-016-1176-9.
Ixer, G. 2003. "Developing the Relationship between Reflective Practice and Social Work Values." *Journal of Practice Teaching* 5 (1): 7–22. doi:10.1921/17466105.5.1.7.
Johannessen, H. A., T. Tynes, and T. Sterud. 2013. "Effects of Occupational Role Conflict and Emotional Demands on Subsequent Psychological Distress: A 3-Year Follow-Up Study of the General Working Population in Norway." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 55 (6): 605–613. doi:10.1097/JOM.0b013e3182917899.
Kim, H., and S. Y. Lee. 2009. "Supervisory Communication, Burnout, and Turnover Intention among Social Workers in Health Care Settings." *Social Work in Health Care* 48 (4): 364–385. doi:10.1080/00981380802598499.
Kim, H., and M. Stoner. 2008. "Burnout and Turnover Intention among Social Workers: Effects of Role Stress, Job Autonomy and Social Support." *Administration in Social Work* 32 (3): 5–25. doi:10.1080/03643100801922357.
Kim, H. S., D. K. Sherman, and S. E. Taylor. 2008. "Culture and Social Support." *American Psychologist* 63 (6): 518–526. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.

Knudsen, R. A. 2018. "Measuring Radicalisation: Risk Assessment Conceptualisations and Practice in England and Wales." *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 1–18. doi:10.1080/19434472.2018.1509105.
Ko, H.-C., -L.-L. Wang, and Y.-T. Xu. 2013. "Understanding the Different Types of Social Support Offered by Audience to A-List Diary-Like and Informative Bloggers." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* 16 (3): 194–199. doi:10.1089/cyber.2012.0297.
Koehler, D., and V. Fiebig. 2019. "Knowing What to Do: Academic and Practitioner Understanding of How to Counter Violent Radicalization." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13 (3): 44–62. JSTOR.
Kruglanski, A., K. Jasko, D. Webber, M. Chernikova, and E. Molinario. 2018. "The Making of Violent Extremists." *Review of General Psychology* 22 (1): 107–120. doi:10.1037/gpr0000144.
Landsman, M. J. 2001. "Commitment in Public Child Welfare." *Social Service Review* 75 (3): 386–419. doi:10.1086/322857.
Lehman, D. R., and K. J. Hemphill. 1990. "Recipients' Perceptions of Support Attempts and Attributions for Support Attempts that Fail." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 7 (4): 563–574. doi:10.1177/0265407590074012.
Levin, I. 2007. *Hva Er Sosialt Arbeid*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
Lid, S., M. Winswold, S. Søholt, S. J. Hansen, G. Heierstad, and J. E. Klausen. 2016. *Forebygging Av Radikalisering Og Voldelig Ekstremisme. Hva Er Kommunenes Rolle?* (No. 2; NIBR-Rapport, pp. 1–289). Oslo: NIBR.
Lloyd, C., R. King, and L. Chenoweth. 2002. "Social Work, Stress and Burnout: A Review." *Journal of Mental Health* 11 (3): 255–265. doi:10.1080/09638230020023642.
Mattsson, T. 2014. "Intersectionality as a Useful Tool: Anti-Oppressive Social Work and Critical Reflection." *Affilia* 29 (1): 8–17. doi:10.1177/0886109913510659.
McKendrick, D., and J. Finch. 2016. "'Under Heavy Manners?': Social Work, Radicalisation, Troubled Families and Non-Linear War." *British Journal of Social Work* 308–324. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcv141.
McKendrick, D., and J. Finch. 2017. ""Downpressor Man": Securitisation, Safeguarding and Social Work." *Critical and Radical Social Work* 5 (3): 287–300. doi:10.1332/204986017X15029697482460.
Miller, L. 2006. *Counselling Skills for Social Work*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Munro, E. 2019. "Decision-making under Uncertainty in Child Protection: Creating a Just and Learning Culture." *Child & Family Social Work* 24 (1): 123–130. doi:10.1111/cfs.12589.
Nissly, J. A., M. E. M. Barak, and A. Levin. 2005. "Stress, Social Support, and Workers' Intentions to Leave Their Jobs in Public Child Welfare." *Administration in Social Work* 29 (1): 79–100. doi:10.1300/J147v29n01_06.
Nurullah, A. S. 2012. "Received and Provided Social Support: A Review of Current Evidence and Future Directions." *American Journal of Health Studies* 27 (3): 173–188.
Ozbay, F., D. C. Johnson, E. Dimoulas, C. A. Morgan, D. Charney, and S. Southwick. 2007. "Social Support and Resilience to Stress: From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice." *Psychiatry (Edgmont (Pa.: Township))* 4 (5): 35–40. PubMed.
Pilcher, J. J., and S. A. Bryant. 2016. "Implications of Social Support as a Self-Control Resource." *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 10. doi:10.3389/fnbeh.2016.00228.
Pinkerton, J., and P. Dolan. 2007. "Family Support, Social Capital, Resilience and Adolescent Coping." *Child & Family Social Work* 12 (3): 219–228. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2007.00497.x.
Pistone, I., E. Eriksson, U. Beckman, C. Mattson, and M. Sager. 2019. "A Scoping Review of Interventions for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Current Status and Implications for Future Research." *Journal for Deradicalization* 19: 1–84.
Ponsot, A. S., C. Autixier, and P. Madriaza. 2017. "Factors Facilitating the Successful Implementation of a Prevention of Violent Radicalization Intervention as Identified by Front-Line Practitioners." *Journal for Deradicalization, Nr* 18 (16): 1–33.
Qurashi, F. 2018. "The Prevent Strategy and the UK 'War on Terror': Embedding Infrastructures of Surveillance in Muslim Communities." *Palgrave Communications* 4 (1): 1–13. doi:10.1057/s41599-017-0061-9.
Ragazzi, F. 2017. "Countering Terrorism and Radicalisation: Securitising Social Policy?" *Critical Social Policy* 37 (2): 163–179. doi:10.1177/0261018316683472.
Robinson, K. 2013. "Supervision Found Wanting: Experiences of Health and Social Workers in Non-Government Organisations Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers." *Practice* 25 (2): 87–103. doi:10.1080/09503153.2013.775238.
Rogers, J. 2012. "Anti-Oppressive Social Work Research: Reflections on Power in the Creation of Knowledge." *Social Work Education* 31 (7): 866–879. doi:10.1080/02615479.2011.602965.
Sakamoto, I., and R. O. Pitner. 2005. "Use of Critical Consciousness in Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice: Disentangling Power Dynamics at Personal and Structural Levels." *British Journal of Social Work* 35 (4): 435–452. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch190.
Sivenbring, J., and R. A. Malmros. 2020. *Mixing Logics. Multiagency Approaches for Countering Violent Extremism*. Gothenburg: Segerstedtinstitutet, Gøteborgs Universitet.
Stanley, T. 2018. "The Relevance of Risk Work Theory to Practice: The Case of Statutory Social Work and the Risk of Radicalisation in the UK." *Health, Risk & Society* 20 (1–2): 104–112. doi:10.1080/13698575.2018.1444739.

Stanley, T., and S. Guru. 2015. "Childhood Radicalisation Risk: An Emerging Practice Issue." *Practice* 27 (5): 353–366. doi:10.1080/09503153.2015.1053858.

Stanley, T., S. Guru, and V. Coppock. 2017. "A Risky Time for Muslim Families: Professionalised Counter-radicalisation Networks." *Journal of Social Work Practice* 31 (4): 477–490. doi:10.1080/02650533.2017.1394829.

Stevens, M., J. Moriarty, J. Manthorpe, S. Hussein, E. Sharpe, J. Orme, G. Mcyntyre, K. Cavanagh, P. Green-Lister, and B. R. Crisp. 2012. "Helping Others or a Rewarding Career? Investigating Student Motivations to Train as Social Workers in England." *Journal of Social Work* 12 (1): 16–36. doi:10.1177/1468017310380085.

Sweifach, J., H. Heft LaPorte, and N. Linzer. 2010. "Social Work Responses to Terrorism: Balancing Ethics and Responsibility." *International Social Work* 53 (6): 822–835. doi:10.1177/0020872809360036.

Thoits, P. A. 2011. "Mechanisms Linking Social Ties and Support to Physical and Mental Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 52: 145–161. doi:10.1177/0022146510395592.

Urdang, E. 2010. "Awareness of Self—A Critical Tool." *Social Work Education* 29 (5): 523–538. doi:10.1080/02615470903164950.

Westbrook, T. M., J. Ellis, and A. J. Ellett. 2006. "Improving Retention among Public Child Welfare Workers: What Can We Learn from the Insights and Experiences of Committed Survivors?" *Administration in Social Work* 30 (4): 37–62. doi:10.1300/J147v30n04_04.

Yin, R. 2016. *Qualitaitve Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guildford Press.

Yürür, S., and M. Sarikaya. 2012. "The Effects of Workload, Role Ambiguity, and Social Support on Burnout among Social Workers in Turkey." *Administration in Social Work* 36 (5): 457–478. doi:10.1080/03643107.2011.613365.