Pathway of School-Age Youth into Violent Extremist Activity and the De-Radicalisation Programme in Indonesia

Amira Paripurna1 & Sarwirini2
Airlangga University, Indonesia

Imam Subandi3
Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract
This study aims to explore the radicalisation process of school-age youth involved in terrorism. It also aims to examine the government’s de-radicalisation programme targeting young children engaged in terrorist activity. This study finds that terrorist groups do not specifically target young children for recruitment, and they tend to wait for group members or new recruits who are willing to surrender and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the struggle and victory of Islam. This study also finds that the Indonesian government has not yet formulated or implemented policies and measures that are inadequate for dealing with the growing phenomenon of child terrorists.

Keywords: Children, Counter-terrorism, De-radicalisation, Indonesia, Prison, Radicalisation, Terrorism.

Introduction
Although Muslims form the majority of the population, Indonesian society is not based on Islamic rules. The Indonesian Republic is founded on the state ideology of ‘Pancasila’, which consists of five principles: belief in one God, just and civilised humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations, and social justice for all people of Indonesia (Bourchier, 2019; Morfit, 1981).

1 Lecturer, Master of Police Science Program Postgraduate School and Faculty of Law, Criminal Law Department, Airlangga University, Surabaya 60286, Indonesia. Email: amira@fh.unair.ac.id
2 Associate Professor, Program Director of Master of Police Science, Postgraduate School and Faculty of Law, Criminal Law Department, Airlangga University, Surabaya 60286, Indonesia. Email: sarwirini@fh.unair.ac.id
3 Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Law, Diponegoro University, Semarang 50139, Indonesia. Email: andymarshof@yahoo.com
Since Indonesian independence, Islamic extremist groups have committed acts of terrorism. There have been three phases of terrorist activity, religious violence, and radicalism (Parmurna, 2017). The first phase, in the 1950s, was characterised by the emergence of the Darul Islam (DI/TII) Kartosuwiryo movement, and subsequently by the movement of Kahar Muzakkar and Daud Beureureh (Widjajanto & Wardhani, 2004, pp. 37–38). The second phase comprised the Commando Jihad movement from the 1970s to the 1980s; the main actor of the Commando Jihad movement was connected to the previous radicalist movement, which involved former members of DI/TII Kartosuwiryo (Widjajanto & Wardhani, 2004, pp. 39–40). The third phase began in the late 1990s and has continued until the present. This phase stemmed from the effects of the two previous phases. The turning point of the third phase was the Bali bombings, which occurred in 2001. This phase comprised Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and was inspired by the same ideology as that of al Qaeda. JI’s goals are essentially the same as those of DI/TII, but with a regional perspective. In 2000, JI changed its name to the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). Eight years later, it became known as the Jamaah Ansharut Tawhid (JAT) group, and it has subsequently become Jamaah Anshorut Syariah (JAS), Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and Jamaah Ansharut Khilafah (JAK) (IPAC, 2016). Today, JAD is the most active terrorist group in Indonesia, swearing allegiance to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Throughout Indonesia’s post-independence political history, these violent extremist groups have consistently sought to replace Pancasila as the Indonesian state ideology, and to establish an Indonesian Islamic state (Anwar, 2019; Hasim, 2015, pp. 10–12).

In Indonesia, the inclusion of school-age youth in terrorist groups is relatively new. The phenomenon was first identified in 2007: following the arrest of Taufik Kondang, a follower of Abu Dujana (the military leader of Jemaah Islamiyyah during 2005–2007), two youths – IA (aged 16) and NF (19) – were found guilty of conspiring to hide Taufik Kondang from the police (Tempo, 2007). In 2009, DDP (18) was identified as the suicide bomber in the JW Marriot bombing (Kompas, 2009). In 2012, FM (19) and MSP (20) were involved in several terror threats in Solo (Bagus, 2015). Even though they were no longer young enough to be considered of school age, their involvement in terrorism began when they were younger. In 2015, eight school-age youths were involved in terrorist networks (Lubis, 2016). All of them were brought before the criminal court and received sentences based on the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2003. Moreover, in 2016, five school-age youths were arrested by the Indonesian Special Counter-Terrorism police squad (the Densus 88). They were involved in several bombings that took place across the country: ABS (17) participated in making bombs for the Thamrin bombings, in Jakarta, January 14 (Tribunnews, 2016); FL (14) played a role in hiding information about one of the perpetrators of the Thamrin bombings (Kompas, 2016); IAH (17) was the bomber of the Catholic Church of Sasti Santo Yosep Medan, North Sumatra, in August (StraitsTimes, 2016); GA (16) assisted in the purchasing of explosive materials for the attack on the Church of Oikumene in Samarinda, East Kalimantan (Nara, 2016); RPP (16) helped to manufacture bombs for the Church of Ecumenics terror attack (Ibid.). In 2017, two school-age youths were involved in a terror plot to attack the police station and vital
infrastructure in Central Sulawesi (Munir, 2017). Very young children were involved in recent suicide bombings in 2018 (Lloyd, 2018). The involvement of school-age youth in ISIS has also been noted, with the identification of about 130 people, consisting of children under the age of 15 years, and women. According to Indonesian Child Protection Commission (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia, KPAI), the number of school-age youths exposed to radicalism has increased by 42%, from 180 cases in 2015 to 256 cases by 2016 (Qommaria & Angga, 2017). This data shows that the growing number of school-age youths involved in terrorism in Indonesia is a serious threat that needs to be addressed by the government. Undoubtedly, school-age youth terrorism has been identified as an alarming threat by the Indonesian security agencies.

In the context of Indonesia, there is an urgent need to take more serious measures to prevent the involvement of school-age youth in terrorism. This is because growing evidence shows that an increasing number of young persons from diverse locations across the country are becoming members or supporters of terrorist organisations. Thus, this research is significant because few studies specifically address the recruitment, radicalisation, and utilisation of young people by terrorist groups (Sugiarto, 2015). Hence, the processes by which school-age youths become involved in terrorist groups are not well understood. The European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008, p. 9) suggests that there is an increasing understanding that radicalisation that leads to violence is a process taking place at “the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory”. In line with this suggestion, this study aims to elaborate on the radicalisation process and the pathways via which school-age youths engage in terrorist activities, and also to examine the de-radicalisation programme provided by the Indonesian government. Clearer conceptual thinking can help to prioritise the questions we need to answer and to improve the focus of policy decisions, as well as resource allocation, to address this new phenomenon in Indonesia.

Literature Review

The concepts of terrorism and radicalism are often used interchangeably. The term ‘pathways’ as used in the title of this paper means the process of becoming involved and engaging in violent extremist or terrorist actions. Thus, to clarify the concept for this paper, “the term radicalization is used to refer to the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs” (Borum, 2011, p. 9). Derived from terrorist profiling, many theories assume that the terrorist has an abnormal personality with clearly identifiable character traits that can be explained adequately with insights from psychology and psychiatry. In fact, “there are nearly as many variants of personality who become involved in terrorist pursuits as there are variants of personality” (Post, 1985). Besides, the efforts to provide an overall “terrorist profile” are somehow misleading. Counter-terrorism efforts still frequently rely on profiles, even though terrorist profiling has not proven to be a panacea for terrorism. Critics of profiling show that it has some inherent hazards – for example, terrorist profiling is often based on projections from a small, statistically insignificant sample of individuals (Horgan, 2008). In other words, such profiling tends to rely on overgeneralisations and spurious associations (Crenshaw, 2000; Press, 2009; Siggin, 2002). Therefore, this study is not aimed at creating a profile of school-age youth engaged in violent extremist activity. Instead, it has the particular aim of exploring the
radicalisation pathway, outlining factors and causes that lead school-age youths to engage in violent extremist activities.

Several conceptual models and explanatory frameworks of the pathways of radicalisation and subsequent engagement in terrorist activities have been discussed by scholars. For example, based on a review of social science theories of violent radicalisation, Borum (2011) concludes that there are three main elements: “(1) developing antipathy toward a target group; (2) creating justifications and mandates for violent action; (3) eliminating social and psychological barriers that might inhibit violent action” (p. 26). Furthermore, different levels of analysis are necessary for discussing different explanatory models of the causes and factors involved in violent radicalisation. As suggested by Schmid (2013, pp. 3–5), there are three levels of analysis: micro, meso and macro.

The micro-level factors of radicalisation include an individual’s characteristics and socioeconomic circumstances. Based on this, Moghaddam (2005) introduced the ‘staircase’ model, explaining that the ground floor of the radicalisation process is an individual’s perception of society’s deprivation and lack of fairness, which causes them to climb to the next stair because they have insufficient opportunities to take part in decision-making and gain a sense of justice. In addition, such individuals are driven by personal and political grievances (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008), as well as an inclination towards adventure and excitement (Cottee & Hayward, 2011). Furthermore, the ‘significance quest’ theory (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009) plays a role at the micro level. The ‘quest’ is a “fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect” (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73). The meso or group level correlates with the broader radical environment which can encourage the process of radicalisation (Smith, 2013). In this milieu, the individual gets support for his or her ideas and establishes a connection with this new reference group, enjoying the social bonds, interaction and kinship that come with it (Horgan, 2008). Us-versus-them thinking is formed by comparing one group to other groups to show the existence of injustice, and this is expounded in radical rhetoric. The perception that this new reference group is more authoritative and more legitimate attracts certain individuals.

The macro or societal/cultural level refers to the process of radicalisation that relates to issues external to society. Typical examples include globalisation, modernisation and the foreign policies of some (Western) countries. Again, us-versus-them thinking can expand and strengthen a radical group. These typical external issues can reinforce a group’s identity. Black-and-white worldviews and mindsets are less complex and provide a secure feeling through which it is easy to identify who is the enemy and who is not.

This three-level model of analysis makes distinctions between root causes and triggers. The root causes are usually considered a prerequisite of the radicalisation process, as without them, the process would not take place. Newman (2006, p. 751) depicts terrorism as the dependent variable, while the root causes create the independent variables and influence an individual’s radicalisation in the long term. In contrast, trigger events are related to specific events and do not commence the process of radicalisation, instead stimulating or accelerating the radicalisation process. Both root causes and trigger events can take place at all levels of the model. For example, micro trigger events include the death of a loved one, or divorce; meso trigger events include recruitment and the role of
the Internet and media; macro trigger events include military actions, arrests of certain people, or attacks on a group.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the context(s) in which young persons are recruited and radicalised by terrorist groups. The research aims to understand why these groups appear to target young persons, as well as to identify the approaches and tactics employed to recruit and radicalise the youth. The various ways in which terrorist groups appeal to their young audiences are also discussed. In addition, the discussion also includes some of the initiatives implemented by the Indonesian government to deal with the increasing number of school-age youths involved with terrorism.

This research employed a case study of the juvenile terrorist offenders found guilty of committing the terrorism act at Toli Toli, Central Sulawesi. In March 2017, the Densus 88 captured nine suspected terrorists. Police found and seized packages of material for making explosives / homemade bombs, such as denatured alcohol, KNO3 fertiliser, charcoals, sulphur, nails, and a gas canister. They made and planted a homemade bomb as part of a plot to attack the Police station in the Toli Toli district (Sitompul, 2017). The group has no connection to the old network in Sulawesi, the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). The police succeeded in revealing that the group is new and is affiliated with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This new group has sworn allegiance to ISIS, and the nine arrested had followed ISIS through a religious teacher, named Basri, who lived in Toli Toli. Two of the nine were school-age youths, aged only sixteen and seventeen years old. Both were sentenced to a year in prison for their involvement, which included buying and receiving materials to be used for bomb-making, as well as attending several meetings to plot the attack.

In-depth interviews were conducted with these two youths, who are currently serving their year-long sentence in the Salemba Detention Centre (SDC), Central Jakarta. For additional information and to enrich the analysis, interviews were also conducted with two former adult jihadists who have experience as “ideologues”, as well as being recruiters for the Jama’ah Islamiyyah terrorist organisation. The interviews were also conducted with a correctional officer (Prison Service) at Class II-A, Salemba Prison, Central Jakarta; two members of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia, KPAI); and two members of the Prasasti Foundation that conducts research and studies relating to peace and conflict, political violence, terrorism and transnational crime. The interviews were primarily conducted to reveal the process of radicalisation of school-age youth, as well as to explore the routes or pathways via which they ultimately join a terror group and engage in terrorist activity.

A review of the literature served as the base that guided the discussions during the interviews. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, all questions were open-ended as part of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted during August–September 2017. The average duration of the interviews was 1.5 hours. Notes were taken on the most important aspects mentioned in each interview. The researchers secured the collected data and maintained the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Thus, the participants remain anonymous, with their identities coded by participant number (i.e.,
Informant #1, Informant #2). The methodologies for collecting data used in this article were previously reviewed and approved by the academic office and the Centre of Research and Innovation (Lembaga Penelitian dan Inovasi, LPI) of the institution.

Results

The Motivations of the Youth to Involve in Terrorist Group and Its Activities

This study found that the interviewed youths voluntarily joined the terrorist group. Given that the worldwide evolution of terrorism has led to increasing involvement of children, their recruitment into terror networks in Indonesia is not extraordinary. It is important to note that this study found that some involvement of children or young people in acts of terror is not part of some grand design planned to specifically target and prepare school-age youths to become members of the next generation. The involvement of young children in terrorist groups is considered to be the result of the successful delivery of Islamic dawah.

Based on the interviews with the former jihadists, this study found that terrorist groups do not have specific missions and goals to prepare youths/children as the next generation of terrorist groups (Informant #3; Informant #4, 2017). Some children who engage in terrorist networks and commit acts of violence in the form of terror are accidentally “entrapped” by propaganda of extremist groups and terrorists. Therefore, the claim that the increased involvement of school-age youth in terrorism is a strategic manoeuvre of terrorist organisations, aimed at increasing the probability of operational success, cannot be fully justified. This is because terrorist groups do not target certain groups of people of certain ages. Terrorist groups are only looking for people who are willing to ‘sincerely and voluntarily’ follow the true teachings of Islamic dawah based on the versions or interpretations of those groups (Informant #4, 2017).

Islamic dawah is intended for all Muslims, regardless of age, socio-economic status, or gender. Hence, the concept of ‘recruiting’ new members is actually considered irrelevant by these terrorist groups. ‘Recruiting’, in their view, is a process of searching for, locating, inviting and assigning several persons with certain characteristics as candidates for group membership, as defined in the group’s planning (Informant #3, 2017). According to extremist and terror groups, what they do is not under the scope of recruitment activity, as commonly understood by society. These groups only conduct activities to convey the mission of spreading the truth of Islamic teachings. They consider it part of the duty of every adherent of Islam. One of the interviewees stated that “the willingness to listen and to observe the truth of Islamic teachings is done based on his/her belief – the belief to follow the path of the truth of Islamic teachings” (Informant #3, 2017). Also, this study found that the assumption that school-age youths have deliberately been chosen, prepared and developed through a terror network, or children are used as martyrs to carry out terror plans, is incorrect. It is merely an accidental circumstance. Terrorist groups just randomly wait for members of the group or new people who are willing to surrender and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the struggle and victory of Islam (Informant #4, 2017).

Based on the results of interviews, the motivations to join mainly stem from personal connections (friendship networks and kinship), a group’s ideological appeal, and political
grievances. Even though both interviewed youths come from a low-income family background, this study does not find any economic gain as the source of motivation to join a terrorist group. One of the youths involved with this terrorist group is from a broken home (Informant #1, 2017). After the divorce of his parents, he lived with his father and stepmother. He often quarrelled with his stepmother and was seen as a useless child. His stepmother drove him out, and finally, he left home and lived temporarily in a mosque, which was willing to provide a place to stay temporarily. He met with a friend who introduced him to a group related to a terrorist organisation.

Afterwards, he sometimes stayed at his friend’s house and sometimes found other places for shelter. He lived like this for about 6 months. He felt a broken emotional connection with his family, since he had not received affection from his parents. After running away, he felt he found a personal friendship and felt welcomed when meeting with his new friend and the group.

For his daily living expenses, he found odd jobs, mainly as a waiter or dishwasher, with a monthly salary of IDR 300,000 (approximately USD 18). The mother of Informant #1 is a domestic worker and his father is a farmer. His involvement in terrorist activities, however, is not motivated by a need for economic stability. Furthermore, during the interviews, there was no indication that either of the two youths was motivated by the prospect of fame, glory, or respect. This is articulated by one of the youths:

I join this for the sake of God. I do not pursue worldliness and do not need material-related things. I only want the blessing of God. (Informant #1, 2017)

Furthermore, this study found that the motivation for engaging in terrorist activities is somewhat influenced by political grievances, as shown in this following statement:

They all [police] are infidels, [because] they defend the Indonesian state, while the Indonesian state is not Islamic. You can see Indonesia has very high criminality, many people are in prison. It will not happen when we use the Law of God, [It will not happen] if we have Khalifah and implement sharia law. All of this injustice and what we are suffering now in society [such as] poverty and criminality in society, is as the consequence that we do not apply sharia law. (Informant #2, 2017)

The above findings on the youths’ motivation for becoming involved in terrorist activity show some similarities to the research findings conducted by Darden (2019) on ‘Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth’, which found that the main factors driving youths toward terrorism were the desire for personal connections – including friendship and kinship – the appeal of the ideology of a group and political grievance.

**The Process of Radicalization**

**Establishing Injustice Perception, Group Identity and Total Trust**

The results of the interviews with the school-age youths showed that parents and family did not play a role in their involvement in terrorism. However, their peer groups and friends played an important role, as they were the first source of contact with the violent and extreme ideology. Intense interaction with their peer group and friends
formed the willingness to get involved in terror activity (plotting a terror act). The involvement of school-age youth is a result of the overall and immediate environment created either by teachers, organisational leaders, members of other organisations, or friends. In this study, the incorporation of school-age youths into terrorist groups should not be viewed as merely a result of the leaders and fighters who invite, lure or drag them in.

Based on the interviews with the school-age terrorist offenders and also with the former adult jihadists, we found that a cadre model was conducted to foster total trust in the organisation. Before a person of any age is exposed to the ideology and the subsequent socialisation of extreme values, there is a process of creating a perception of injustice and unfairness. In this process, youths are introduced to a heated political situation. The teacher instills a message about imbalance and the lack of fairness for Muslims as compared to non-Muslims. In addition, the teacher also discusses the conflicts in Palestine and the Middle East and presents them as a war against Islam, and suggests that on a national and international scale, Muslim society has experienced unjust treatment from the government. These teachings are designed to trigger a wave of anger and hatred towards other groups (either non-Muslims or groups that do not support their mission), to create an ‘us-versus-them’ perception, and to build an awareness of the youth’s position in society. It is also aimed to establish and build a stronger spirit to defend Islam.

Afterward, indoctrination will be intensified through a small Islamic study group, consisting of four or five people. During the study group or one-on-one meetings with the teacher, total trust among fellow members of the organisation is established through a process of isolation from other groups in society. This process is designed to establish a new identity, with the youths belonging to the group and taking on the valuable mission of fighting against injustice and unfairness, and upholding the group’s mission to defend Islam and bring its glory to the world. Through this exclusive study group, the teacher or ideologue instills the preaching of Tauhid (oneness of God), worshipping God, the meaning of jihad, and fighting against Taghut.

As a true Muslim, [you] have to practise two things, worshipping God and avoiding Taghut. This is a Qur’ānic command as stated under Surah An-Nahl verse 36.
(Informant #2, 2017)

During the interviews, the youths were questioned further about the meaning of Taghut: they used this term to denounce everything that is worshiped instead of God (Allah). Further, they associated the Indonesian government with Taghut, because the government adopts a democratic system and this system applies laws that are created by human beings. Based on the teachings that they receive; the two youths believe that any individual or legal entity that applies a law other than God’s law (sharia law) is considered an infidel. The consequence of this belief is the need to prove that they are good believers, and thus they must fight against the government and the state apparatus (Indonesian National Armed Forces, Indonesian National Police), as well as members of the House of People’s Representatives and the People’s Consultative Assembly. Anyone who does not belong to their terrorist group is considered an enemy.
Further, the youths have been taught that Muslims who are loyal to the Indonesian state and its ideology (Pancasila) are regarded as non-believers. Thus, they are also considered an enemy of the group. By this stage, the antipathy toward other groups has been established, as reflected in this statement:

... all Muslims who believe in Pancasila must re-take the Shahadah. Muslims who believe in Pancasila are shirk [shirk in Islamic teaching means the sin of practising idolatry or polytheism – i.e., the deification or worship of anyone or anything besides the singular God/Allah]. (Informant #1, 2017)

Further, extreme and violent thoughts are indoctrinated in the youths, as highlighted in this following statement:

Muslims must only believe in God and follow God’s Law. Muslims who abandon this principle can be killed. (Informant #2, 2017)

From the above statements and explanations, it can be said that the two youths experienced a process of legitimising and justifying their actions through a legitimate source, such as the Qur‘ān. For Muslims, “the Qur‘ān is considered the most sacred and important source of Islamic Law, which contains verses related to God, human beliefs and how a particular believer should live in this worldly life” (Alwazna, 2016, p. 251). The ideology has misused the Qur‘ān as a tool to brainwash the youths. Following this legitimization from a justified source – i.e., the Qur‘ān – the next step is to show the verses from the Qur‘ān in a literal and singular interpretation, leading the youths to believe in only one particular teaching. All in all, from the discussion above, the pathways to becoming violent radicals show some identical elements to those formulated by Borum (2011, p. 26). The two youths in this study have experienced a process of becoming antagonistic toward other groups, building legitimate thoughts for extreme and violent actions, and excluding any social and psychological limitations that might prevent them from committing a violent act.

The Role of Online Radicalization: Strengthen the Faith that Jihad is A Way of Life and Exposure to Violence

In certain cases, the Internet has been used by extremist groups to raise funds, provide information to followers, and to train terrorists (UNICEF, 2012). This study confirms that accessing radical content via websites has strengthened the youths’ understanding of extremism and violence as legitimate means to achieve certain goals. Based on the interviews, we found that through direct methods (face-to-face meetings, closed meetings with the teacher and student relations) teachers or ideologues begin to introduce and push an extreme ideology by challenging new members’ Islamic beliefs (Informant #3, 2017; Informant #4, 2017). The point is to question their commitment to Islam and the extent to which they will obey God, the Qur‘ān, and the Prophet Muhammad, and make required sacrifices. Teachers teach jihadist verses based on a single interpretation. Once the school-age youths fully understand the extreme ideology, they move on to the next level, which tests their loyalty to the organisation, and then they are isolated into smaller, more
intense meetings and lessons. This strengthens their faith that jihad is a way of life. The next level exposes them to violent acts.

Exposure to acts of violence serves to dampen feelings of guilt, regret, or disgust at the time of witnessing or participating in brutality and violence (Anderson, 2016, p. 28). Further, Anderson (2016) emphasises that this loss of sensitivity increases children’s propensity to commit acts of violence (p. 28). It allows children to become cold-hearted future fighters when needed by the terrorist group. The school-age youths were exposed to violence by indoctrination and being shown extreme thoughts and real practices (i.e., videos or films of wars in the Middle East). The exposure to violence aims to prepare them to participate in actual acts of violence, such as bombings. Continuous exposure to violence can make them obsessed with violence.

After face-to-face meetings, the followers are advised to keep doing self-study by reading a recommended book (written by Aman Abdurahman—known as the founder of Jama’ah Anshorut Daulah) as well as watching recommended videos via YouTube. Other recommended books include: Muqorrof Fii Tawhid in Indonesian, which is basically not only a translation of the ISIS books of Aqeedah, but an explanation from Aman Abdurrahman about ISIS Aqeedah; Seri Materi Tawhid, which contains a collection of Aman Abdurrahman’s lectures book; and Kumpulan Risalah Ulama Dakwah Tawhid Najed, a book translated by Aman Abdurrahman. However, the youths did not enjoy reading the recommended books, instead preferring to listen to recorded preachings and to watch videos or documentaries.

Accessing videos from YouTube is one of the significant tools for these youths to develop their extremist thoughts. All of the radical material can easily be accessed on the Internet. The interviews revealed that the content accessed from YouTube included the Islamic preachings of Aman Abdurrahman, videos of conflict in Middle Eastern countries, videos of Israeli military operations in Palestine and any videos demonstrating how Muslim societies are persecuted or treated unfairly by Western countries. The youths felt more connected with the sufferings of fellow Muslims in other countries after watching the videos, often feeling upset. Their feelings of solidarity to support them and fight against the enemies of Islam were strengthened.

De-Radicalization Programs for School-Age Youth

The two youths in this study were sentenced to a year’s imprisonment. Due to the lack of juvenile prisons in Indonesia, the juveniles are housed in adult prisons, currently in SDC. The SDC has a total of 193 full-time and part-time staff. There are currently 572 inmates, of which 50 are boys between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. The criminal offences committed by these inmates include terrorism, drug trafficking, sexual assault, drug abuse, murder, physical violence, theft, reckless driving, and other small-scale offences.

At SDC, blocks of juvenile offenders and adult inmates are separated. Juvenile offenders are classified based on age, sex, length of criminal sanction, type of crime, and other criteria. Juvenile terrorist offenders are housed in cells with other juvenile terrorist offenders. As “special” inmates, they become an exclusive group and follow a set routine — for example, they have their congregational prayer, study Islamic teachings among
themselves, and show their group “identity” by wearing the Salafi style of short clothing (ankle-length trousers).

The state has no choice but to house juveniles at the same facilities as adults, with prison officers ensuring physical separation between juvenile and adult prisoners, but due to the lack of facilities, juvenile and adult prisoners share some common spaces, such as showers, day rooms, and prayer rooms. The SDC has created regular programmes for all juveniles to receive educational, psychological, vocational, and recreational services (Informant #5, 2017). However, juvenile terrorist offenders are not willing to participate in the programme offered by the SDC (Informant #5, 2017). They prefer to study the Qur’an by themselves (reading it or memorising verses). According to the youths, the programmes are not beneficial to them because they are un-Islamic (Informant #1, 2017; Informant #2, 2017). Furthermore, the programmes are considered attempts to erode their faith in Islam. Thus, they keep their distance and are suspicious of any programme offered by the government, prison officers, police officers, or the Indonesian National Coordinator of Counter-Terrorism (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, BNPT).

When this study was conducted, there were two juvenile terrorist offenders and four adult terrorist offenders in the SDC. The juveniles and adults met mostly during prayer times (five times a day) (Informant #5, 2017). After the congregational prayers, they usually have discussions about Islamic teachings and any other issues. The juvenile terrorist offenders acknowledge that they were inspired by the book written by Aman Abdurrahman. In the SDC, their faith has become much stronger after meeting the adult terrorist prisoners. Although the SDC provides an Imam (to lead the congregation or conduct Islamic teachings), the juvenile terrorist offenders do not trust him; they only trust adults from their group. The “small exclusive” group created by the terrorist inmates has attracted other prisoners. Initially, these other prisoners asked about how to build bombs and what drove the terrorist offenders to conduct such violent actions, and they also raised questions related to Islamic teachings and jihadi doctrines. From these interactions, the fellow prisoners gradually began to sympathise with their thoughts about Islam and the jihadi doctrines. The extremist and radical thoughts spread to the other inmates. Thus, it can be truly stated that the prison is “a school” that radicalises other Muslim inmates, as well as offering a way to “invite” new friends or sympathisers.

The Indonesian government, represented by the Indonesian National Coordinator of Counter-Terrorism (BNPT), has introduced prison-based de-radicalisation programmes. As highlighted by Bjørgo and Horgan (2009, p. 252) these programmes are usually managed by governmental or non-governmental actors, and they “have automatic access to potential clients and attempt to persuade the inmates to participate in the programs through a varying degree of voluntariness or even coercion” (Koehler, 2017a, p. 74).

BNPT, in this regard, visits both juvenile and adult terrorist offenders at the prison for certain projects once a month. The BNPT projects are attempts at ideological change or psychological disengagement. Klinik Pancasila is one of the methods employed by BNPT. This is a programme to replace terrorist ideology with the principles of the state philosophy through open ideological or theological dialogues or debates. As noted by Daniel Koehler (2017b), these dialogues/debates are widely used in Southeast Asian programmes, while in Western contexts, attempts to induce psychological disengagement or ideological de-radicalisation are conducted in more covert or indirect ways.
This study found that BNPT’s programmes were scrutinised intensely by the two youths. When the BNPT held a programme and visited the youths in the prison, the youths attended for only a short period of time before returning to their cell. They showed stubborn resistance. This suggested that an active contact approach established by the BNPT might face a higher rate of failure in convincing individuals to participate in the de-radicalisation programme. Most of the inmates are reluctant to participate in the programme because it might harm their reputation as an individual or as a group. The two youths argued that, as a mujahid, it is taboo to accept any kind of programme from Taghut (referring to the Indonesian government). However, to some extent, they agreed to participate in the BNPT’s de-radicalisation programme in order to obtain rewards. For example, the BNPT officers usually offer pocket money to the inmates, which is spent on daily basic needs, such as toiletries, snacks, or additional food (Informant #1, 2017; Informant #2, 2017). Apparently, a similar attitude exists to the de-radicalisation program for Indonesia’s foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) who many of them also involved women and children (Irham, 2020). As noted by Sumpter (2018), the government has unclear intention and unprepared response to Indonesia’s ISIS returnees.

Some scholars have noted that the direct dialogue or debate that attempts to persuade and to show ideological misconceptions may result in rejection due to a strong self-defence mechanism. It may also enhance the previous faiths/beliefs as a reaction (Braddock, 2014; Nilesen, 2013). Thus, the de-radicalisation programme through the Klinik Pancasila fails to achieve its goal. The interviews show that the youths remain steadfast that they cannot obey any law other than the law of God (Informant #1, 2017; Informant #2, 2017). Further, according to Informant #2 (2017), Muslims who obey the laws of the country are infidels, and this view is held despite undergoing a de-radicalisation program.

All in all, the above discussion has shown that the de-radicalisation programme, which employs a strong ideological/theological debate and an authoritative approach, faces some difficulties. The limited credibility of government representatives in the eyes of the participants (in this regard, the two youths) has created some hurdles for attempts to create a cognitive opening for potential de-radicalisation. It also has some risk of participants merely ‘playing along’ to give the impression that they have disengaged or de-radicalised. Koehler (2017b, p. 74) emphasises that “prison-based and active governmental de-radicalization programs therefore naturally have a higher rate of recidivism and abortion”.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the assumption that school-age youth are deliberately chosen, prepared and developed through a terror network, or children are used as martyrs to carry out terror plans, cannot be fully justified. This study found that there is no evidence that violence is used when recruiting school-age youths.

The motivations for joining a terrorist group include a search for personal connections, the group’s ideological appeal, and political grievances. Before the youths are exposed to the ideology and the socialisation of extreme values, there is a process of creating a perception of injustice and unfairness. They also experience a process of forming legitimisation and justification of their actions to commit violence by finding it through
legitimate sources. Online radicalisation remains highly important in strengthening extreme thoughts.

The de-radicalisation programme through the Klinik Pancasila has failed to de-radicalise the youths involved in terrorist activity. It employs an authoritative approach to highlight ideological misconceptions, but direct dialogue or debate that attempts to persuade has faced stubborn resistance. Thus, prison-based and active governmental de-radicalisation programmes have a higher risk of failure and a higher rate of recidivism.

Furthermore, the most obvious challenge in implementing prison-based de-radicalisation programmes is related to the general crisis of Indonesian prisons, such as inadequate rehabilitation programmes for inmates, overcrowding, and lack of funds to improve the skills and capacities of prison officers to provide meaningful post-care services. These issues are particularly pressing when dealing with inmates serving time for terrorism and have affected the prison-based de-radicalisation programmes implemented by the BNPT. In this regard, there is plenty of unfinished “homework” for the Indonesian government in dealing with the involvement of school-age youth in terrorism.

This study recommends that the coordination between BNPT and prison services should be improved in their efforts to rehabilitate and de-radicalize the youth involved in terrorist activity. The prison-based de-radicalisation program should be merely focused on reaching the goal to disengage the youth from the extremist groups and re-engage in harmonious living. Giving the fact that, the terrorist offenders are resistance to government related agency, thus in implementing the de-radicalisation program, BNPT should also involve of many stakeholders (i.e., civil society organizations). Capacity building programs for the prison staffs in carrying out their duty to supervise the convicted terrorists are needed. This capacity building includes improvement of their understanding and knowledge of radicalism and radicalism counter-narrative strategy.

References
Behr, V. I., et.al. (2013). Radicalisation in the digital era: the use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism. RAND: Santa Monica.


