Research Note

Post-Terrorism, Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation of Female Ex-Detainees of Daesh in Malaysia: A Round Table Discussion with Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM)

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Introduction

This study explores women's engagement in post-terrorism activities in Malaysia. Because they are hard-to-reach subjects, the initial

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collaboration with the Royal Police Malaysia E8 Unit (Polis DiRaja Malaysia or PDRM) is fundamental to pave the way to gaining access to former female detainees involved in terrorism. Based on the PDRM's report, 43 former female detainees are associated with Daesh or Islamic State (IS) and Abu Sayaff. All have been released, except two females who are still incarcerated. The Round Table Discussion is the key to understand the rehabilitation and processes institutionally. The perspective and experience gathered from officers in-charged in the anti-terrorism unit are essential to understand and assess the programs and mechanisms developed to treat former female members of terrorist organisations before rejoining society. The goals of meeting with PDRM are explained as follows; first, the round table discussion will allow researchers to collect primary data on the rehabilitation and deradicalisation processes and mechanisms to treat the global terrorist group's former female detainees. Secondly, the data gathered will be used to understand the ways the programme, process, and mechanism are designed to treat former female detainees of the global terrorist group, and lastly, the data will set a continuous improvement in the design of both preventive and intervention measures.

Literature Review

This study is keen to examine the rehabilitation process provided by the state towards female ex-detainees of the Daesh terrorist group in Malaysia. The rehabilitation process to re-embedding females ex-detainees back to society in Malaysia is none. Besides, most current literature is absent of gender approach and conceptual discourse to assess females ex-detainees of a terrorist group. Laura (2013) discusses the counter communism method in Malaya that further justified the new process in counterterrorism. In comparison, Mohd Mizan (2020) outlined the statecraft approaches by the Malaysian government, standardized in their form to all detainees regardless of gender. In addition, the pre and contemporary terrorism literature revolve around factors both exogenous and endogenous that influenced women to commit such violent acts. The themes built based on previous research are social construction that dictates women's decision to be with terrorism, gender role in the preventive measure, community engagement, and education in instilling ideas to reject radicalism (OSCE, 2019; Phelan, 2020; Zeiger et al. 2019).

The following pieces of literature reflect the macro analyses of state and community roles to combat extremism. Most findings in previous studies highlighted a case study in a particular country and provide preventive measures fit in the cultural context of each unique case study. Warren et al. (2020) discussing women during the Nazi era and arguing a fundamental reason for women to join the extremist group is a similar constant language that motivates them to dedicate their lives to the political cause of restoring society. A word like 'everyone is everyone's enemy is a powerful ideology that attracts even the humble heart of women to join the cause in restoring their nation at all costs. The framing of words and constant emphasis influenced women to be part of the Nazi's Holocaust against the Jews.

Carter (2013) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) report (2009) comprehensively argue that social construction, including values, customs, ideology, religion, masculinity, gender-structured, and poverty, are among indicators that could influence women into supporting extremism and terrorism. Changing the mindset and providing skills to women is necessary empowerment for women as the agent of social change. Women are offered training and development to transform society, and such opportunities involved personal development, leadership and mentoring, understanding the justice system, knowledge of health and wellbeing.

Ahmad (2020) and Richards (2019) believe in education to reform society to reject radical ideology and violent acts. The state and community-based organisations combine their effort and support, creating various programs to educate the community and engage them with character-building activities that appreciate peace and wellbeing. Education continues to be an essential approach to reject extremism and terrorism in the long term. The learning phase also includes active and supportive action from the local community to inform family and young children of the rationale to reject extremism. Ahmad (2020) and Richards (2019) coined the preventive measure for extremism to include a few contexts of racism, far-right movement, and terrorism.

A study by Yuit (2009) on Singapore's approach to counterterrorism is much cited for its preventive measure within the Southeast Asia region. He argues that although Singapore has not suffered any terrorist attack, the act of violence can be triggered at any time if the deficit in

multiethnic relations about race and religion is ill-managed. Besides, Singapore is also vulnerable to terrorist attacks to targeted foreign entities resided in the country. The last bombing strike in Singapore was in November-December 1987, targeting the American International Assurance building and Shell Tower. Also, a few small-scale unrests involving Palestinian fundamentalists. In the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, foreign embassies and the U.S interest were tightly secured to avoid any terrorist attack.

The statecraft approach in combating terrorism in Singapore is relatively straightforward. The state has the Internal Security Act of 1960 to detain a suspect without trial, and the Intelligence Service efficiently coordinates its intelligence info to halt or intervene in a potential threat. Furthermore, the country applies the concept of Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCC) in 84 constituencies and established Harmony Circles for schools, workplaces, and other local organisations to build better engagement and understanding among inter-racial and inter-religious communities.

The above literature reviews justify the gap of study and examine the rehabilitation process for individuals in post-terrorism activities. The origin of terrorism activities in Malaysia is strongly associated with Islamic activism, which may easily be misinterpreted as Islamic fundamentalism. The various activities such as Islamic-based education, the centre for Islamic studies, Islamic networks and association, Muslim entrepreneurs, and many more that carry the flag of Islam as representing the majority Muslim population must be explained. The study would like to investigate female ex-detainees that began their involvement with Islamic activism, later turn their relationship into accepting extremism. Furthermore, in Malaysia, for instance, based on the unpublished data of the Royal Police Department Malaysia, since 2013-2019, there were 483 detainees caught for terrorism charges of Daesh, and out of this total, 150 were non-citizens, 436 were males, and 47 were females.

Methodology: A 'New Normal' Protocol for Focus Group Interviews

Methods in most methodology books are written in a typical research fieldwork condition absent of pandemic or endemic. The protocols of conducting qualitative and quantitative are straightforward and explained in a normal situation as guidelines. However, pandemic

COVID19 challenges these standard conventional methods of conducting research. The 'new normal' condition urges every researcher to improvise and articulate the best way to materialize from the current situation – every decision limits by Movement Control Order (MCO). Due to the COVID19 pandemic and the movement control order in Malaysia (several phases range from movement control order to conditional movement control order), the roundtable discussion meeting was rescheduled a few times and finally held in February 2021 at Bangi Resort Hotel, Selangor. A strict Standard Operating Procedure, namely physical distancing, wearing a face-mask in public space, and hands sanitizing by the Ministry of Health, demanded the hotel management to impose online platform discussion in each room using a free wireless network to participants and researchers. The hotel prepared and sent meals to each room except for tea and coffee breaks in between sessions served with a few condiments for self-service at the level lobby. There were seven officers from Unit E8. Six of them were inspectors and one deputy superintendent. In all seven officers, two were females, and the remaining were males. For the researchers, there were seven of us. Only four stayed at the hotel, while the other was available on a virtual platform. The online platform that we used for two groups was google meet. We divided the group into two, Group A and Group B. The former had three police officers, and the latter had four police officers from the PDRM. Simultaneously, the researchers rotated themselves to join Group A or B for three different phases of question based on selected themes. Discussions were digitally recorded, and group interviews were transcribed.

The Round Table Discussion with PDRM: Gist of discussion

The PDRM outlined two prongs approach in combating terrorism and extremism, which are rehabilitation and deradicalisation. The rehabilitation process involves action to restore someone to everyday life through training and therapy during imprisonment. In comparison, the deradicalisation process involves the process and training to motivate someone with extreme religious views to adopt a more moderate position on the issue. The former emphasizes behavioural changes, namely perspective and attitude through training and therapy, to deconstruct a person's ideology and principle. The latter emphasizes assessing former female detainees' personality changes after the rehabilitation

processes, including perspective, attitude, and action from extremism to peace. The deradicalisation requires continuous monitoring to assess the level of changes, a possibility of recurring behaviour, and the need for intervention to curtail further damage.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the focus group interviews with PDRM officers, the outcome of this study is revealed and explained in the following parts.

A treatment approach: Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation

Both rehabilitation and deradicalization approaches are treatment provided for a person detained under the SOSMA, POCA, and POTA Acts. SOSMA is abbreviated for Security Offenses (Special Measures) Act of 2012 [in Malay, it is called Akta Kesalahan Keselamatan (Langkah-Langkah Khas) 2012]. This law replaced the Internal Security Act (Malaysia) of 1960. It was introduced by Najib Razak, the former and sixth Prime Minister of Malaysia. The parliament approved this act on April 17, 2012, given the Royal Assent on June 18, 2012, and gazetted on June 22, 2012. POCA is abbreviated for the Prevention of Crime Act of 1959. It was first enacted in 1959 (Federation of Malaya Ordinance No. 13 of 1959), revised in 1983 (Act 297 with practical from January 19, 1984). The latest amendment was made by P.U. (A) 201/2015, which came into operation on September 1, 2015. This act provides more effectual prevention of crime throughout Malaysia and for the control of criminals, members of secret societies, terrorists, and other undesirable persons and matters incidental to that.
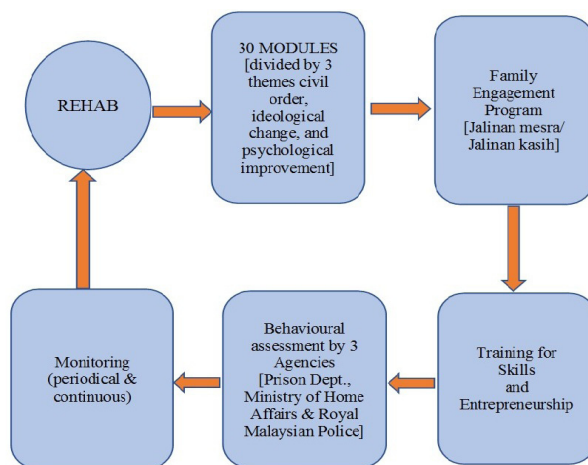
POTA is abbreviated for Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2015 [Act 769]. This act was given the Royal Assent on May 28, 2015, and gazetted on June 4, 2015. This act provides the prevention of the commission or support of terrorist acts involving the listed terrorist organisation in a foreign country or any part of a foreign country. It gives authority to control person engagement in terrorist acts or related matters. The rehabilitation treatment is conducted during detention, while the deradicalisation treatment focuses on monitoring detainees after their release. For the rehabilitation program, the process is delivered in stages, and these stages are indicators in mapping changes or transformation in the detainee's interaction, perspective, and behaviours.

Deradicalisation: Categorisation and Monitoring of Detainees' Behavioural Changes

The deradicalization process is more of assessing changes and transformation, which will be monitored continuously from the day detainees were identified as terrorists until the end of their life. Detainees' records will be on the PDRM radar and list; hence, an officer wearing a civilian dress will continuously keep a close distance with former detainees and continuously monitor their where-about. The frequency of monitoring depends on the category of terrorism activities charged to former detainees. The range of extreme is categorized in three different Zone colors ranging from extreme to most extreme. The first category is called the White Zone, the second category is the Yellow Zone, and the Third category is the Red Zone. The continuous monitoring in assessing former detainees' behavioural changes and interaction in their everyday life and connection they made with locals and abroad will be reported by officers in charge. Mapping the progress of former detainees' behaviours offers essential information for the institution to interfere with the process by adopting intervention program suits to individuals based on gender.

Rehabilitation: The 30 Modules for Daesh ex-Detainees in Malaysia

Diagram 1: PDRM's Rehabilitation Program
for Daesh ex-Detainees in Malaysia

Prepared by authors, 2021

The arrow in Diagram 1 was showing the movement of processes and blended accordingly. The 30 Modules may be organised with the family engagement program to avoid any lapse of disconnection during the rehab process. Family connection and support will likely improve detainees' psychological attitudes and thoughts about rejection from family members. It also motivates detainees to hold hope that they will be rejoining their family and society without reservation. The 30 Modules developed by experts are focused on informing detainees about the civic duties, polity, law, and penalty, including the ideological change that heavy-laden in transforming religious misconception exploiting detainees' body and mind.

Moreover, the rehabilitation program involved experts in providing counselling and clarification of misinterpretation of Islam, the idea of jihad, and knowledge in differentiating radical ideology from the actual practice. Besides the mind and ideological change, PDRM also provides training for skills and entrepreneurship. Based on their observation, economic backwardness draws most female detainees to join the terrorist group other than self-repent, self-redemption, a shortcut to heaven in the afterlife, loyalty to the spouse, and finding the love of life.

Prevention: Coordination of Information and Society Engagement

The Unit E8 of PDRM creates continuous engagement with society. Their efforts are cultivating the idea of rejecting terrorism, extremism, and violence through collective engagements. There are 400 programs involving individuals, institutions [both education and financial], and community-based organisations. According to participants ' age cohorts, types of activities are conferences, exhibitions, and media campaigns instilling peace and rejecting extremism and violence. The police also conduct and facilitate in collaboration with financial institutions to identify and halt any suspicious transaction activities connecting countries and individuals listed in the 66B List.

The coordination of information sharing among institutions and organisations is vital in this prevention measure. Thus, active participation from the community-based organisation or Non-governmental organisations needs to be activated in particularly getting information about the less-fortunate community or Bottom 40 community with marginalized youths that easily corrupt with radical and extreme ideology for the sake of economic desperation. Also, a media literacy program can help marginalized community ways to utilize the apps, weblink,

sorting sources, empowerment for geek economy, and creative online business that could attract youngster to stay focus on the right track and occupy with healthy activities. Although PDRM shared an isolated case of a physically challenged individual involved in terrorist activity, this information enriches the knowledge in enhancing the understanding of terrorism beyond a common perspective. Additionally, another gap of knowledge is children exposed to radical ideas at a young age that could be tapped further in a holistic understanding of terrorism and extremism. In Zamboanga, the Philippines, or some parts of Africa, particularly in the conflict zone, children are recruited to justify a regime change.

Profiling: Analysis of a Person's Psychological and Behavioural Characteristics

Profiling is a term introduced by PDRM referring to pre, post, and during observation to identify terrorists in the society. Profiling means recording and analysing a person's psychological and behavioural characteristics to assess their capabilities in a particular sphere and identify people's categories. This study views profiling as an activity to identify specific elements or indicators of suspected individuals that fit the terrorist descriptions. Before detaining someone suspected terrorist, the E8 Unit will evaluate any police report regarding terrorism, extremism, and violence. Police officers will respond effectively to a formal report made at the police station to initiate an investigation, including tracking their bank account, passport, citizenship status, and income source or transaction activities.

Alternatively, the police can respond accordingly to information provided by intelligence. Profiling measure for during the investigation involves the fast check social media accounts, cross-check of any committed felony in the past, radical ideology quotes, interrogation necessary for details analysis, and review on current legal acts for charges. The final profiling measure is after the verdict sentence declared by the court. Detainees will be placed according to their severity level, the White Zone, Yellow Zone, and Red Zone. These zones will determine the kind of programs and activities design for detainees.

The narrative about Malaysian Women's Terrorism Involvement

Based on the discussion, a few indicators are outlined by participants to narrate reasons for women to involve in terrorist activities. The

indicators can be viewed as follows. First, women's delicate and vulnerable characters are frequently viewed as an essential factor for exploitation and deception. They are criticized for being too easy to persuade, unchallenging, easy to be influenced, and generously open to be exploited. Secondly, tempting offers by the terrorist organisations such as works, wealth, and heaven were also the prime contributing factors for Malaysian women to be involved with Daesh-led extremism activities.

There are three categories of women involved in terrorism: teenagers, married women, single mothers, or widows. For youngsters, they include those in high school and students of higher learning institutions who intrigued with the idea of submission to God or finding a new love to start a family. They are attracted to physical composure, deceived by the offer of life is greener on the other side of the world; married women their involvement are connected to their spouses and submission to their spouse as they believe that their loyalty will prevent their spouse from practicing bigamy or polygamy; single mother and widow are drawn to find a new love and looking for a new source to support their lives. Meanwhile, modus operandi commonly collected from female detainees involved in terrorism activities are: 1) finding a soulmate; 2) a short cut to heaven as martyrdom; 3) self-repent and redemption [most female detainees made 'bad decision' in their past lives and seeking a way to redeem themselves spiritually and cleanse their sins; 4) ignorance of Islamic knowledge; 5) lacking spiritual quality and seeking to find one; 6) mingle with the wrong group of friends; 7) devoting wala' or loyalty to husband or group leader; 8) no source of income or unemployed; 9) looking for a man to support their life and living decently as husband and wife; 10) depending on male leadership to set the course of life.

Apart from that, women play subordinate roles or support systems or assistants to terrorist organisations. They help to prepare foods, caring for the injured or sick members. Women also offer themselves sexual service in the name of God to help male members of the organisation. Their misconception of Islam is to view their services as a sacrifice for the greatest good of jihad. Women are used as middle people as philanthropies or generous donors under the banner of humanitarian aids. Mule accounts are made under women's names, and it was difficult for the police enforcement to connect women with suspicious money transactions because they are victims [easily replace

of identity, name, and particulars] and hardly screen for the 66B List. Since Unit E8 was established in 2001, no women were captured for suspicious financial transactions because they were the real mastermind's camouflage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has found a few gaps that could be synthesized from the round table discussion. First, there is no module for media literacy provided to train detainees during the rehabilitation process. Secondly, there is a human resource issue to manage counterterrorism monitoring and implementation. Officer transfer to another department after a specific year lead to shortages of trained and experienced officers in this field. Thirdly, collaboration with NGOs is still dormant and inactive, while research on underage children and extremism still lacks in Malaysia. Fourthly, like extreme Buddha, the other religious fundamentalist groups, extreme Sikh, and extreme Hindu due to population diversity and belief system, the modus operandi, profiling, rehab, and deradicalisation methods are yet to be explored. Finally yet importantly, the pro-communist or socialist with the radical approach of revolution is yet to be reassessed within the Malaysian context.

This round table discussion has served as an 'eye-opener' to review the rehabilitation and deradicalisation process towards former Daesh-terrorist detainees in Malaysia. As highlighted in the paper, the current literature collection viewed deradicalisation as exactly as rehabilitation. However, discussion from the focus group interviews with representatives of the PDRM E8 Unit provides a variation from the previous finding that the process of deradicalisation in Malaysia is implemented differently. Gender was treated equally in rehabilitation and deradicalisation processes, but women officers will be more focused on female detainees. The authors' follow-up connects with the officers of the PDRM E8 Unit to gain legitimate access to the contact information of former detainees for a person-to-person interview as well as to obtain the statistical data collection and the rehabilitation modules for further analysis.

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Interviews

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Editor's Note:

The views and analysis made in this article are those of the authors.