

## RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM OF INDONESIAN CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

*Several regions in Indonesia such as Aceh, Central Sulawesi, NTB and Maluku have experienced conflict situations with ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group backgrounds. This background carries the risk of conflict triggering acts of violence-based extremism and radicalism which of course have an impact on the development of children born and growing up in conflict areas. Extremist behavior that leads to radical actions and acts of terror involving children has occurred in Indonesia in cases of family suicide bombings. Effective interventions are needed to control the potential for radicalization in children. This research uses a qualitative approach using data collection methods through literature studies to understand and detail the dynamics related to children involved in radicalism and violent extremism, especially in the context of acts of terrorism in Indonesia. Data from literature studies are used to analyze the role of family, environment and education in building children's resilience against the threat of radicalism. Through a qualitative approach, this research explores the practice of social control modes, the role of Restorative Justice (RJ), and its implications. Analysis of the classification of children involved in terrorism based on factors such as affiliation, province of origin, age, level of radicalization, and conviction provides an in-depth understanding of their characteristics and patterns of involvement. The research results provide an overview of the potential threat of exposure to radicalism and violence-based extremism targeting children.*

**KEYWORDS** Resilience, Radicalization, Violent Extremism, Children In Conflict With The Law



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### INTRODUCTION

Evaluation that is balanced with innovation from effective deradicalization programs can be a solution step to reduce the number of regenerative terrorism perpetrators, especially for children of terror groups who have been in conflict areas for years. In finding solutions to the problems of threat situations that can occur at any time as a result of regenerative radicalism patterns, relevant preventive aspects are needed to be applied, including presenting the role of educational institutions at

various levels. Through schools as a means of social control for children, there is an opportunity to build resilience, independence, and psychological strength needed by children for the ability to think critically and fortify themselves.

There are still parents who teach radicalism and invite children to commit acts of terrorism that create an atmosphere of terror or fear on a widespread basis and cause mass casualties, which can interfere with the growth and development of children in Indonesia. The phenomenon of children's involvement in acts of terrorism, apart from being the perpetrators of bombings, also has the potential to be targets of radicalization by the families of terrorists, as well as targets of recruitment from terrorist groups or networks. Referring to Wening and Wahyudi (2021), children can become dangerous weapons in the hands of individuals who exploit and/or use them to commit criminal acts or terrorism. Prevention of child recruitment by terrorist and violent extremist groups requires a paradigm shift in policy design, focusing on early intervention rather than response (Perl, 2020). Early intervention is possible through social control modes that can involve various elements in society by working with stake holders.

Innes (2003) citing Black (1983) describes the practice of modes of social control involving law enforcement in some cases centered on the role of the state, while restorative justice (RJ) efforts focus on victims and perpetrators so that there is a gap that needs to be considered between the harm caused by an incident of criminality and how that harm can be repaired. In the RJ process, the meeting of all parties directly affected by an event through deliberation to reach consensus in determining how to deal with the consequences of an event, while at the conceptual level, the idea of restorative justice can be seen to have a number of features that are in line with Donald Black's 'conciliation' style of social control with the ideal standard of social harmony.

Referring to an early formulation of the principles underpinning the restorative justice movement, Braithwaite (1989) in Innes (2003) distinguishes between 'stigmatization' and 'shaming'. Focusing on how traditional penological responses to deviance tend to criminalize the deviant and compensate the harmed party. Braithwaite's alternative to stigmatizing, focusing on the process of punishment through echo detection of the theme of inclusion versus exclusion is a potentially solutive alternative in debates around the exercise of social control to consider because RJ schemes seek to create a form of social control that does not create conditions where the offender is excluded from society, but rather the emphasis is on reintegrating the offender into society.

RJ efforts through social control through education institutions that accommodate education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. At the Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary levels, special focus should be given to developing youth activities that stimulate social interaction between Muslim and Christian students. The role of education in shaping mindsets, stimulating intellectual development, fostering social sensitivity, and the ability to manage emotions are important for a student's future. However, based on research conducted by IPAC in the journal Istiqomah (2022), it is stated that the Al Amanah Putra and Putri Islamic Boarding School in Tanah Runtuh Poso led by Haji Adnan Aarsal has been exploited by the MIT group as a center for spreading their ideology,

manipulating the minds of impressionable young people, and perpetuating violent extremism.

The potential role of schools in deradicalizing children requires comprehensive research to develop effective intervention strategies for similar cases in the future. The author focuses on building the resilience of children who come from families exposed to violent extremism and radicalism through acts of terrorism that have been carried out in real life by exploring how children build resilience in themselves with the intervention of educational institutions as a strong educational function in resisting the attraction of extremism and radicalism, thus promoting peace and harmony for living in harmony between religious communities, nation and state for future generations.

Understanding and overcoming the root causes of violent extremism and radicalism in the target of deradicalization at the age of children is one of the assets to build sustainable peace and security in society. By exploring the potential of resilience-building programs for children at risk, this research can shed light on the process of indoctrination and radicalization, explore the process of social interaction based on children's resilience factors in order to contribute to policy makers, educators, and practitioners in the field of counter-terrorism, as well as control strategies for the spread of radicalization so that it can assist in the development of effective and efficient evidence-based interventions, as well as focus on developing resilience and reducing the vulnerability of young individuals to the influence of extremism as a control measure for acts of terrorism. As various stakeholders take up the challenge of reducing the influence of extremism and radicalism, there is an urgent need to understand and address the root causes that lead to the indoctrination of young people into violent extremism.

### **Literature Review**

A deep understanding of the root causes of radicalism and extremism that lead to terrorism is necessary to develop appropriate solutions. Countering radicalism and terrorism with an approach that focuses on deep understanding of fanaticism and extremism is the main foundation for designing deradicalization strategies that are appropriate to the subjects and their circumstances. Information on the level of radicalism of the research subjects plays a role in determining the appropriate solutions in deradicalization efforts as needed (Schmid, 2022).

After the reform era of 1998, Indonesia witnessed a stronger presence of transnational Islamic movements such as Wahhabism, Salafism, Hizbut Tahrir, and other small splinter groups. Sunni or Aswaja movements with modernist and puritanical religious orientations openly promoted themselves and this trend led to contestation of the designation 'Aswaja' in Indonesia. This condition also supports the growth of Islamic boarding schools that teach an understanding of radicalism and violence-based extremism (Ismail, 2011).

There are several pesantren that are suspected of fostering radical or Islamist ideas among their students. Radical or Islamist thinking is an Islamic ideology that is built on the basis of a scripturalist understanding of the sources of Islamic teachings to be applied both in personal and social life. Muslims who have such ideological views are categorized into the wahabi-salafi group which refers to the

name of the founder of the movement, Muhamad bin Abdul Wahab, and the word salafi refers to their recognition as followers of the first generation of Muslims. One of the most famous is Pesantren Al Mukmin in Ngruki near Solo, Central Java, under the leadership of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. From the books it uses, Pesantren Al Mukmin can be identified as affiliated with the wahabi-salafi school of Islam. The growth of new wahabi-salafi pesantren in Indonesia has been significant in the past decade. In addition, some pesantren are famous for their specialties (Isbah, 2020). Abu Bakar Ba'asyir himself is a convicted Bali Bombing case who had founded Jamaah Islamiyah and Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid.

There is no direct link between sadistic acts of terrorism and Islam because the roots of these crimes are caused by the mythology of heroism and revenge, and considering that the strengthening of extremism and terrorism beliefs occurs when the interpretation of the Quran and Hadith is wrong, but believed to be true (ben Touhami Meftah, 2018). In cases of terrorism involving children, parents have an important role in shaping their children's views and behaviors related to extremism, thus leading to children's vulnerability or potential to follow the choices of parents involved in terrorism activities (Arianti, 2018).

The head of the family participating and obeying the call for jihad from his affiliated imam in Syria, which is a reflection of the leader of Daulah Islamiyah in Syria as the motivation for jihad and the mecca of the Islamic struggle at the global level, influences the relationship between individuals and leaders in the phenomenon of transnational jihadism and how this ideology affects families (Sheikh & Krause, 2022). This is even more serious when a father's jihadi spirit as the head of the family is also significantly supported by a mother. How the role of a woman, especially as a mother who has an important role in domestic or household affairs can potentially be a spreader of ideologies that influence children (Nahdohdin et al., 2019).

That women's status as mothers has an important role in educating and influencing the direction of radical ideology for their family members (Speckhard, 2015). Women were involved in the Surabaya bomb attack in 2018, which involved women and children as perpetrators (Istiqomah & Afandi, 2022). In conditions where the family can no longer be a safe place for children to grow up in a normal life, Islamic educational institutions can be an effective tool in preparing literacy in interpreting the Quran and Hadith proportionally to prevent radicalization by promoting a more moderate understanding of Islam (Woodward et al., 2010).

Understanding the role of Islamic education in the context of radicalism reform is an important step in countering extremism as a means to transform extreme thinking and views into more moderate ones (Evans, 2006). Islamic Religion teachers armed with the education curriculum and teaching in schools have the opportunity to propose the introduction and understanding of moderate Islam, or anti-terrorism lessons in the classroom as one of the potential approaches in overcoming radicalism (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, Pondok Pesantren with a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) background are known to be moderate. NU introduces itself as AhlusSunnah wal Jama'ah al-Nahdhiyyah to distinguish itself from non-local Islamic organizations such as those with wahabi-salafi views. Based on this theological orientation, NU is expected to

develop Islam based on the mandate of the four madhhabs, namely Imam Hanafi, Imam Maliki, Imam Shafi'i and Imam Ahmad Ibn Hambal because they have met the requirements as Mujtahids. NU is expected to strengthen the association and unity of the practitioners, and disseminate the teachings of Islam based on the four madhhabs. The above objectives can also be implemented by supporting the construction of new mosques, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, as well as improving the welfare of its members and improving the quality of life of orphans (Ismail, 2011).

Planting the concept of the four mahzhab is one of the factors to stimulate and foster the concept of resilience in children. Based on Grossman (2021), the concept of resilience can be used as a model to prevent and overcome the ideology of terrorism to violent extremism. Understanding the concept of resilience is narrated as a tool to handle and prevent the development of the ideology of terrorism and extremism.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this qualitative research, the main focus is on collecting in-depth data about the phenomenon. The limited data and limited sources in the thematic context of the thesis showed the need for the researcher to face these challenges with creativity. The author applied a number of diverse research approaches. First, the author conducted a literature study on peer-reviewed research that had been conducted as a historical comparative step, which provided historical context and an in-depth understanding of the issue based on a review of relevant literature.

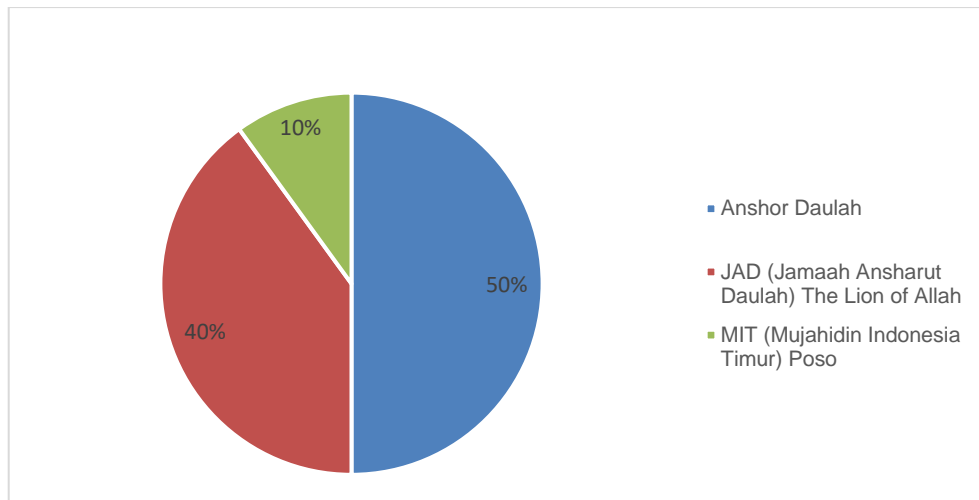
Next, the author conducted field research, which involved interviews with research subjects. The research subjects consisted of santriwan and santriwati of child age whose parents were affiliated with the MIT group. This step is important to gain insights directly from individuals who are in the situation under study. Thus, this research method provides a holistic approach that includes historical understanding and direct understanding of the context of children in the MIT group in an Islamic Boarding School.

In addition, this research approach allows the author to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, potentials, and factors that influence children in dealing with violent extremism and radicalism. This can serve as a strong foundation for developing more effective and contextually appropriate resilience-building efforts faced by children within terrorist networks.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on data from the Indonesian National Police in 2023, from 2017 to 2019 there were 20 children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases in Indonesia (Warsyim, 2023). Referring to BNPT data (2023), from 2016 to 2022 there were 147 children involved in terrorism, both as perpetrators, children of perpetrators, victims, and deportees. The following is a classification of children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases that occurred from 2017 to 2020 based on affiliation, province of origin, age, and level of radicalism:

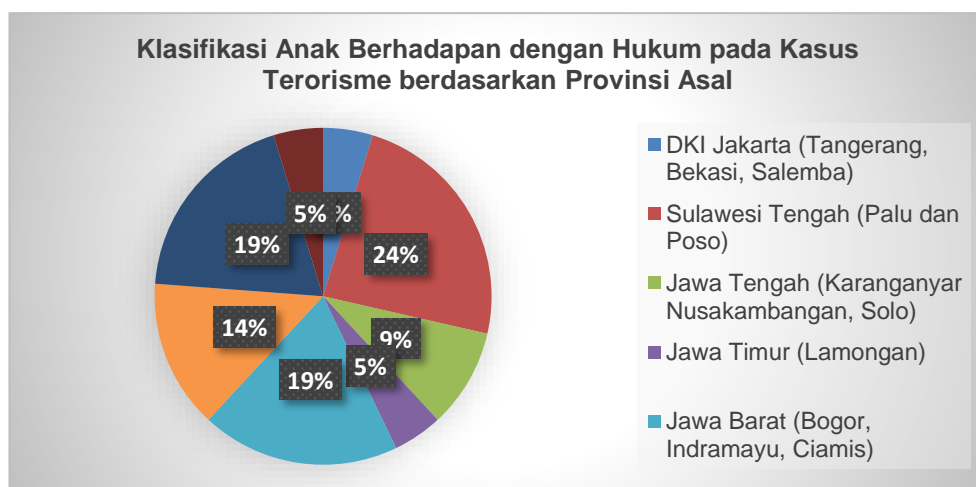
### A. Affiliation



There are significant differences in the level of involvement of children in legal matters among the four affiliated groups mentioned. The Anshor Daulah group or those who are not affiliated to a particular group, but support the existence of Daulah Islamiyah have the highest involvement rate of 50%, while the involvement rate of children in the JAD group exists with a difference of only 10% from Anshor Daulah. The involvement of children in terrorism cases in the MIT group is 10%, indicating that the MIT group still has the potential to contribute terrorists from the age of children.

Further analysis is needed to understand the factors that influence the different levels of involvement in each of these groups, and an understanding of the conflict background in the area of residence, education level, social and economic status of families exposed to radicalism and violent extremism can help formulate appropriate intervention strategies for controlling acts of terrorism involving children.

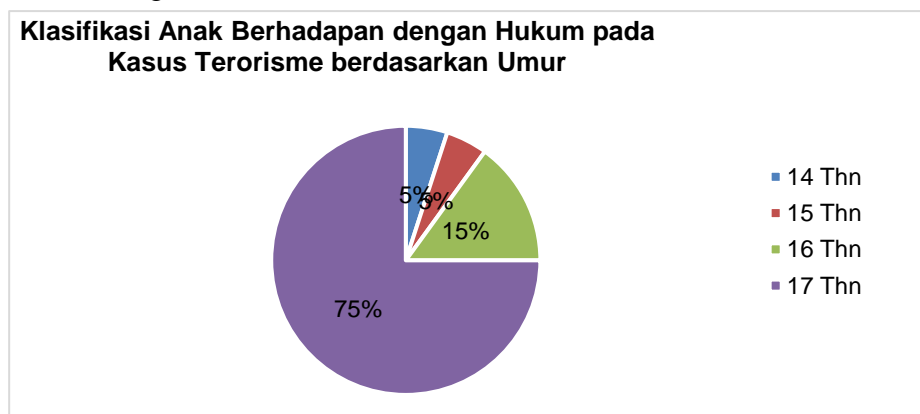
### B. Province of origin



Based on the data, it can be concluded that regions in Java and Sulawesi are the highest areas for terrorism activities involving children. The classification analysis of the distribution of children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases based on the province of origin is as follows:

- a. DKI Jakarta, including the cities of Tangerang and Bekasi as well as Salemba, has the largest number of children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases at 19%. This shows that this area is an incubator that supports the development of children's involvement in terrorism activities.
- b. Central Java, including Karanganyar, Nusakambangan and Solo, has the highest number at 14%. Pockets such as Islamic boarding schools affiliated with terrorist networks show that this area has a high occurrence of terrorism activities.
- c. The 19% portion of the pie chart covers West Java, including Bogor, Indramayu and Ciamis. As in Central Java, the spread of radicalism and violent extremism in West Java is also still supported by several Islamic boarding schools, as well as unofficial recitation places established by terror networks that intend to recruit young people from an early age.
- d. North Sumatra, including Medan and Toli-Toli, is equal to East Java, which includes Lamongan, and East Kalimantan, which includes Balikpapan and Samarinda, each has the same number of 5%. This data shows that this region has the potential to recruit children in order to commit acts of terrorism.
- e. Central Sulawesi, including Palu and Poso, has a total of 14%. This shows that this region is a quite productive area for children involvement in terrorism activities.
- f. 9% of child terrorism-related cases occurred in Bali, this is due to the contribution of study centers affiliated with terror networks that play an active role in accommodating children in educational activities with camouflage such as schools, Qur'an houses and Qur'an Education parks.

### C. Age



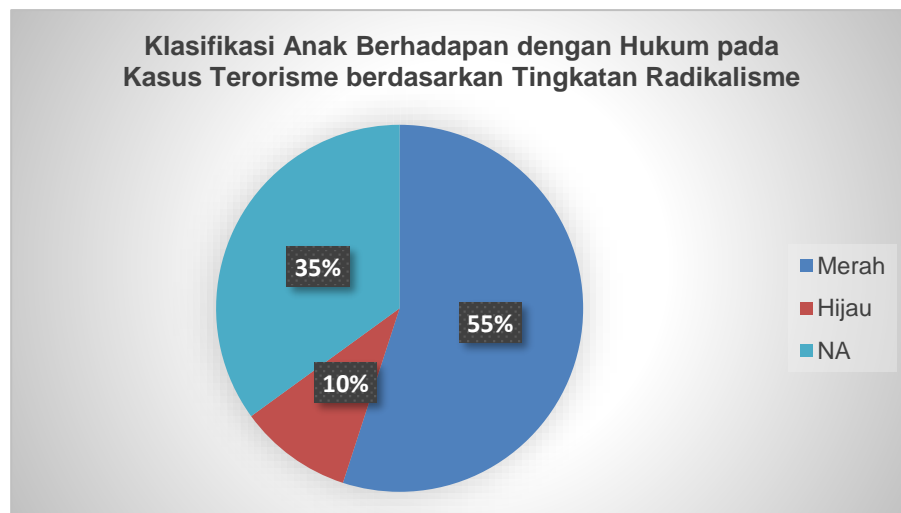
The pie chart above classifies children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases based on age. Based on the data, 10% of children aged 14 to 15 years old are



involved in terrorism cases. Furthermore, 15% of children aged 16 years old are involved in terrorism cases, and more than twice as many as 75% are aged 17 years old.

Analysis of the data shows that terrorist networks in Indonesia are still actively involving children in carrying out their actions. This is also due to the factors of family attachment (kinship) that ambitious to practice the highest jihad practice together with their family members. In addition to family influence, the pattern of identity search at a young age that fulfills self-actualization through organizations also has the potential to encourage young people to join terrorism networks. In general, social background, psychological life experience in conflict environment, and misunderstanding of religion also contribute to the radicalization of children.

#### D. Radical level

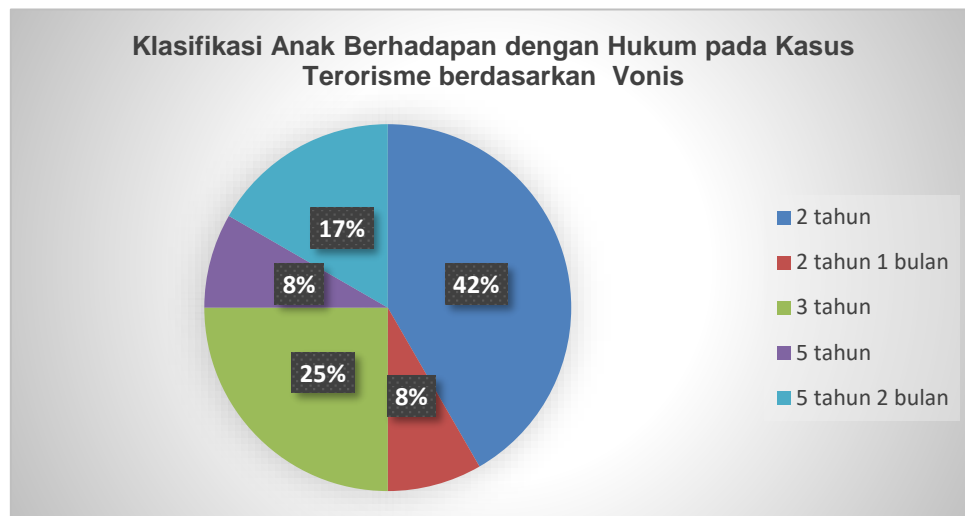


According to the pie chart, children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases are divided into two levels of radicalism. The classification shows the percentage of children involved in terrorism cases according to their radicalism level. From the figure, 55% of terrorism cases involved children with red radicalism level. The red level may indicate a high level of radicalism, having the potential and risk to commit acts of terrorism that cause death to themselves, as well as other victims around them.

At the green radical level, which accounts for 10% of terrorism cases in children as described, attention and intervention from the authorities are still needed in order to strengthen moderation. This effort is needed to maintain the consistency of understanding of children who have been exposed to radicalism and violent extremism. The remaining 35% of the data obtained by the author does not show a description of the radical level.



E. Sentences



The pie chart explains that the highest sentence given to children in conflict with the law in terrorism cases is 5 years and 2 months, which is given to 17% of children. 42% of children were sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 2 years. 8% of children were released with a green radical level, 17% of children were released with a red radical level, 25% of children were sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 2 years, 8% of children were sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 2 years 1 month, then there were 8% of children sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 5 years, and 8% of children were sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 5 years 2 months.

Analysis of the data shows that the number of children sentenced to imprisonment is higher than those released. This may be due to the more serious acts committed by these children. However, it is important to remember that with or without prison sentences, effective preventive and intervention efforts are still needed to reduce the number of children involved in terrorism cases. In addition, it is also necessary to provide social and psychological support to children who have been released, so that they do not return to terrorism activities.

From the data, it can also be seen that of the children sentenced to prison, the number of children sentenced to imprisonment with a duration of 3 years is the highest, namely 42%. This shows that the acts committed by these children require longer prison sentences. In addition, of the children who were released, the number of children released with a red radical level was higher than those released with a green radical level. This suggests that higher levels of radicalism may lead to harsher sentences.

To reduce the number of children involved in terrorism cases, there needs to be effective preventive and intervention efforts from the cooperation between the government, religious leaders, community leaders, and families. This includes education on anti-terrorism values, providing psychological and social support, and monitoring activities that may trigger radicalism. In addition, there is also a need for collaboration between countries in reducing the threat of global terrorism. Here are some points that can be elaborated:

- a. **Anti-Terrorism Education**  
The implementation of an approach to control radicalism and violent extremism through anti-terrorism education is important. Schools and educational institutions can incorporate curricula that provide a better understanding of the impact of radicalism and extremism on society. This program can include teaching the values of tolerance, pluralism, and inculcating the correct understanding of religions and ideologies to form moderate and inclusive views.
- b. **Social and Psychological Support**  
Prevention programs also need to focus on providing social and psychological support to children who are vulnerable to being exposed to terrorism networks or are in environments with conflict situations. Counseling and mental support services can help overcome psychological problems that may trigger involvement in radical activities. Collaboration with institutions that can provide mental health interventions and fulfill psychological needs in schools or communities can be an important step in providing the assistance needed.
- c. **Local Community Empowerment**  
Local community empowerment should also be a key focus. Prevention programs can involve local communities in efforts to detect and prevent radicalization. Initiatives that encourage interfaith dialogue, inter-group cooperation, and a better understanding of community needs will provide a strong foundation for addressing radicalization issues at the community level.
- d. **Surveillance of Online Activities**  
Given the important role of social media and the internet in the recruitment process, prevention approaches should also include surveillance of online activities. Digital education and an understanding of the risks of online radicalization can help children and families to maintain vigilance and engage them in safe internet use.
- e. **Inter-State Collaboration:**  
Given that terrorism is a global challenge, cooperation between countries is necessary. Exchange of intelligence information, coordination in countering cross-border terrorist activities, and harmonization of prevention strategies can help create joint efforts to tackle this issue.
- f. **Social Reintegration for Children Who Have Been Exposed to Radicalism and Violent Extremism**  
Deradicalization interventions for children also include social reintegration programs for children who have been involved in terrorist activities. This involves rehabilitation and mentoring approaches that can help them return to society by shaping a positive outlook and supporting behavior change.
- g. **Family Resources and Engagement**  
Family involvement is a key element in prevention. Education and support to families in detecting changes in their children's behavior, as well as raising awareness of the dangers of radicalism, will strengthen the layers of protection at the household level.

Through a holistic and coordinated approach to prevention, communities can reduce the risk of children's involvement in radicalism and terrorism activities. Effective policies should focus on establishing a supportive and safe environment for children to grow up in, while eliminating the risk factors that push them down radical paths.

## CONCLUSION

Building children's resilience to the threat of radicalization and violent extremism, especially in the context of terrorism, becomes significant when children grow up in conflict situations. By combining fair assessments with innovative de-radicalization programs, an in-depth picture of the factors affecting children exposed to radicalism and violence can determine aspects of effective interventions including through education. Educational institutions play an important role in shaping children's resilience, independence and psychological strength. Schools are considered a tool of social control that can shape critical thinking and help children stay away from the appeal of extremism.

The influence of extremism that leads to radical actions born from the influence of parents who pass on the understanding of radicalism and invite children to be involved in acts of terrorism is a serious threat to the development of children. The phenomenon of involving children as perpetrators or targets of radicalization requires preventive solutions and early intervention. Restorative Justice (RJ) and social control approaches are allowed as preventive measures in the educational environment. This includes reducing stigmatization and focusing on inclusion, as well as reintegrating perpetrators into society.

Data analysis included classification by affiliation, province of origin, age, radicalization level, and conviction of children involved in terrorism. This provides an in-depth understanding of the patterns and characteristics of the children involved as each individual comes from a different background. The significance of anti-terrorism education, social and psychological support, local community empowerment, online activity monitoring, international collaboration, and reintegration for children who are already involved as holistic prevention strategies. Through a holistic approach in order to control violent extremism and radicalism that threatens the future of Indonesian children, it is necessary to address the root causes of children's radicalization, build a safe environment, and reduce the risk of children's exposure to radical activities and terrorism.

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