

# DOES IT WORK? HOW TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PROGRAMME PREVENTING RADICALISATION

In this document we discuss criteria for effectiveness research and a procedure is described how to scientifically test the effectiveness of a programme that aims to prevent radicalisation

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# HOW TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PROGRAMME PREVENTING RADICALISATION

## INTRODUCTION

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The call for “evidence-based” interventions designed to halt, curb or reverse the process of violent radicalisation is growing. An evaluation of the effect of a programme is often required in funding applications. There exist different kinds of methods to examine effects of a programme (see the In-Depth section on the right for more information). During the past years there has been extensive discussion about the question what method should be applied to show conclusive evidence that a programme is effective.

In this document, we describe an evaluation of a programme that aims to make young adults resilient against violent radicalisation. As described below, we used a combination of research methods to investigate the effects of this programme.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

A programme, DIAMANT (SIPI, 2011) was evaluated. This programme focuses on adolescents who are at risk of losing connection with society. Specifically, the programme focuses on young adults who themselves are first-generation immigrants or have parents who immigrated to the Netherlands.

The participants in the programme were often unemployed or had dropped-out of education. They had not been radicalised but were described as potentially vulnerable to violent radicalisation. In total, three groups were included in the effect measurement. Each group consisted of 10 to 15 participants (14 to 24 years old).

## IN DEPTH

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There exist different methods that you can use to examine effectiveness of a programme. In this focus document we distinguish between experimental and non-experimental research.

In **experimental research** two groups are compared: in one group an intervention takes place (e.g., participation in a programme). This is the *experimental group*. In the other group, the *control group*, no intervention takes place. To see whether the programme is effective or not, these groups are compared. For example, if a programme should result in increased empathy (i.e., one feels what another person feels) then the experimental group should show more empathy compared to the control group. Ideally, participants in each group are divided randomly (based on chance) over the two groups. Because of practical constraints, this kind of method is rarely applied in field research.

In **non-experimental research** the effect of a programme on a group is investigated without a direct comparison with another group. Instead, one measurement is taken shortly after the programme takes place. This method is often used in field research.

In **longitudinal research** effects of the programme are examined over time. A group that participates in a programme is examined before and after the programme. Ideally, there are more so-called ‘measurement points’. For example, halfway through a programme an additional measurement is conducted. To examine the effect of the programme over time, a measurement can be done later in time (e.g., half a year after the programme is completed). This is called the *follow-up measurement*.

### **Which method is best?**

There has been quite some discussion during the past years about which method provides conclusive support for effectiveness. In general, good research combines different methods research and meets the following three characteristics:

1. The research should show the effect of the intervention without measuring other ‘side-effects’. An experimental design meets this criterion.
2. The group that is studied is comparable to other groups in practice. In other words, if the study were conducted with other comparable groups, similar results would be found (this is called *external validity*). Non-experimental studies can meet this characteristic.
3. Follow-up measures should be used to examine the effect over a longer period of time (longitudinal research).



# METHOD

The DIAMANT programme consisted of four parts and was carried out over a period of three months. The participants completed three so-called 'modules' in which they learnt respectively (1) to think about their identity and to deal with important events in their lives (*Turning Point*); (2) to deal with different opinions and to make decisions (*Moral Reasoning*); (3) to deal with aggression and conflicts (*Conflict Management*).

In addition, participants were coached by certified trainers in finding work or getting an education. The coaching continued after the three-month programme was completed.

## RESEARCH PREDICTIONS

Before the programme started we made the following predictions, for which we expected to find a difference before and after the programme:

1. *Self-esteem* would be higher after the programme compared to before;
2. *Sense of agency* (knowing what one wants and is able to do) would increase after the programme compared to before;
3. *Connection to society* (less social isolation) would be stronger after the programme compared to before;
4. *Perspective taking* (being able to imagine the perspective and opinions of other people) would increase after the programme compared to before;
5. *Empathy* (being able to feel what other people feel) would increase after the programme compared to before;
6. It was expected that after the programme, participants would show less support for the use of violence to reach their ideals.

Making expectations clear in advance is an important criterion for doing an effect study (see also Lub, 2013). The predictions were based on the goals set by the developers of the programme.

Due to practical constraints, we could not conduct an experimental study including an experimental and control group (see the In-Depth section). To overcome this shortcoming, we used a combination of methods to examine effectiveness of the programme.

## USE OF DIFFERENT METHODS TO STRENGTHEN THE RESEARCH

To show the effect of the intervention we used both questionnaires (a so-called quantitative measure) and interviews (a qualitative measure) to measure changes on the factors about which we made predictions.

For example, to measure changes in self-esteem, we used items of a previously designed scale that measures self-esteem: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). This is how this looks in a questionnaire:

How do you feel about yourself the last couple of weeks?

I am content with myself.

I do not agree at all.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I agree completely.
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I have a number of good qualities.

I do not agree at all.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I agree completely.
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I have a lot to be proud of.

I do not agree at all.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I agree completely.
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I have a high self-esteem.

I do not agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I agree completely.
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## CONDUCTING AND ANALYSING INTERVIEWS

Besides using a questionnaire, we also interviewed participants before-, during-, and after the training programme. For this purpose we designed an interview scheme, which include several topics that are discussed in the interview. These topics included what participants thought about the programme and the trainers, but also psychological factors like self-esteem.

By coding an interview, the answers of different participants were structured and could be compared. A so-called coding scheme was developed to examine the relevant factors further. In Table 1 part of such a coding scheme is given. For example, self-esteem is divided in (a) low and (b) high.



Table 1.  
Part of the Coding Scheme that was used to analyse the Interviews

I Results of Programme DIAMANT	1. Agency	a. Improvement
		b. No improvement
	2. Personal goals	a. Clear goals
		b. No clear goals
	3. Understanding for people who think differently	a. Shows understanding
		b. Does not show understanding
	4. Taking own responsibility	a. Takes own responsibility
		b. Does not take own responsibility
	5. Self-esteem	a. Low
		b. High

The advantage of using both questionnaires and interviews is that these methods complement each other: With a questionnaire the interviewer him- or herself is not present. There is more distance to the participant and participants are less likely to be influenced in their answering. In interviews, however, one can go more in-depth. Information can come up in interviews that the researcher did not think about before.

#### EXTERNAL VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

To meet the demand for external validity (i.e., are results similar in different groups), we conducted the effect measurement in three groups. To be able to draw strong conclusions, it is important to replicate findings in different groups. This increases the external validity of the research (whether the programme is effective or not across different groups).

#### THE RESEARCH DESIGN

We used the so-called *longitudinal research method* to examine changes over time. To illustrate this we show the research design in Figure 1. By examining the factors before the programme, during the programme, directly after the completion of the programme, and three months after completion of the programme we could determine effects over time.

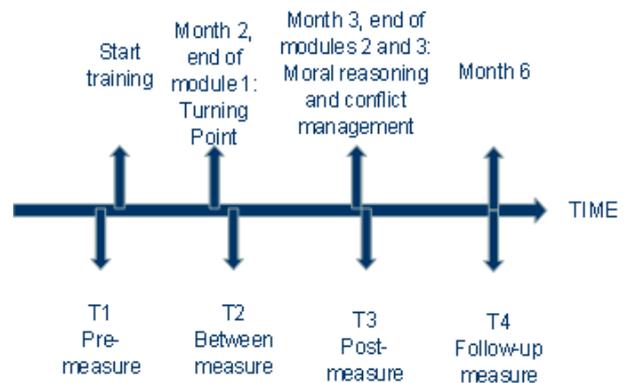


Figure 1. Illustration of measurement points in effect study of resilience program

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

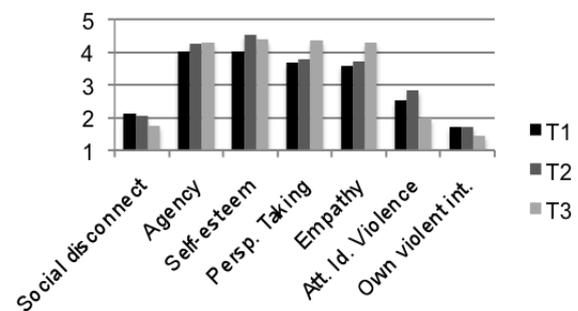


Figure 2. Results on factors before (T1), during (T2) and after the programme (T3).

In Figure 2 some results are given from the questionnaire. It can be seen that over time participants felt less disconnected (so more connected) to society. Interview data showed that, after the programme, the majority of participants were enrolled in an education or found work or an internship.

Empathy and perspective taking increased as well. This was also found in the interviews. Participants said they understood the views and opinions of others better. Compared to before the programme, participants supported less the use of violence to reach one's ideals.

## FOLLOW-UP MEASUREMENT

In one group we examined whether these results changed three months after the programme. The results showed that empathy and perspective taking did not reduce over time. Also, the majority of participants were still at work or in school and, therefore, connected to society. This can be regarded as further evidence of effectiveness of the programme over a longer period of time.

## TO CONCLUDE

In this document it is shown how a programme can be evaluated using different measures (i.e., questionnaires and interviews). Also, the programme was evaluated over time to examine change in, for example, levels of self-esteem in participants. The use of (1) different methods, (2) a research design with measurements at different points in time and (3) examining different groups provides a strong basis for drawing conclusions about the effects of a programme.

## REFERENCE AND FURTHER READING

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