

## Religious Radicalization as a Communication Problem

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### Abstract

An integral part of terrorist groups' recruitment strategies is dependent on the communicative isolation of individuals who are potentially fit to be terrorists. Terrorists-to-be receive training on how to proceed in society without revealing their terrorist intentions. This partially accounts for the feelings of shock, disbelief, and surprise with which the parents, relatives, and acquaintances of terrorists often react to the news that the people they think they know have conducted atrocious terrorist acts against innocent victims. Accordingly, the success of terrorist plans largely counts on uncommunicating the terrorist idea to the surrounding environment. Taking targeted individuals to this recruitment stage requires time, indoctrination, and expertise from terrorist recruiters. This proves why terrorist groups prefer to address young people and emerging adults who show signs of communication lack with their own families. This study attempts to verify the applicability of these findings to the Moroccan context. In this respect, a survey was administered to 400 respondents in two different social environments measuring Moroccan youths' predisposition to be drawn by extremist narratives. The results demonstrate that Moroccan parents involuntarily create communicative and emotional gaps in children making them the most desirable profiles for terrorist groups.

**Keywords:** Communication; Family; Radicalization; Terrorism.

## Introduction

9/11 terrorist acts caused so intense reactions in the United States and around the world that the condemning perspectives silenced, for a long while, attempts to understand the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ aspects of terrorism (Schmid, 2013). Emotions of anger made people less receptive of accounts explaining why these individuals conducted those crimes against innocent people. Politicians adopted this view and produced discourses representing terrorism as a danger emanating from the outside of the West, particularly from Muslim countries. This attitude was supported by the foreign nationalities of the perpetrators of 9/11 incidents. Therefore, social scientists who tried to examine terrorism as any other social issue examining its factors and precipitants found it difficult to bring their studies to the center of attention (Schmid, 2013). Madrid bombings in 2004 and London 2005 that were carried out by home-grown terrorists formed the turning point in the western perception of terrorism: the discourse changed from considering terrorism as a danger coming from the outside to a danger being produced in and by the inside. This was particularly the case because the young people who conducted the two bombings were born and grew up in the West. Thus, many researchers were encouraged to find out why these individuals turned into terrorists, which resulted in setting up many governmental anti-radicalization programs charged with preventing and countering religious extremism in young people.

Morocco, the focus of this study, experienced relatively similar transitions in the way terrorism was and is locally approached: while Asni hotel terrorist act in 1994 in Marrakesh was regarded as a mere security problem as it was perpetrated by foreigners, 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca that were carried out by Moroccan young people pushed the state and society to view terrorism both as a social problem and a security concern of high danger. Unfortunately, the two handling perspectives have not been given the same level of importance: while the Moroccan counter terrorism security policies are exceptionally successful, academic works about the problem are scarce and do not seem to produce original accounts of how religious extremism and terrorism unfolds as a process. Despite the fact that media-based debates about religious extremism and terrorism are abundant, three main observations can be made and are behind the interest in studying this topic: first, most discussions are affected by a condemning view, which affects objectivity and break the rule in social sciences that ‘hot issues are to be treated with cool tools’. Limiting discussions to criminalising terrorists may hinder in-depth investigation of the problem. Second, the concepts of ‘extremism’, ‘terrorism’, and ‘radicalisation’ are used interchangeably whereas the first two are often results of the third. Third, the majority of accounts discuss the factors being conducive to religious extremism and terrorism, but do not attempt to explain how the terrorist idea is formulated in the terrorist mind. Hence, the central piece concern of this paper is to examine the role of parents in making children vulnerable to extremist narratives.

## 1- The definition obstacle

Attempts to define and delineate ‘radicalisation’, both as a concept and as a behavior, is an issue of disagreement among experts due to the great variety of definitions provided so far. Radicalisation experts contend that the term is poorly defined (e.g., Neumann 2012, Schmid 2013, Pisoui & Ahmed 2016, etc.). While it is true that available definitions do expand the scope of examination which, in turn, helps explore different angles and fine nuances of the phenomenon, pressure and demand of the “one definition” usually come from practitioners. In particular, policy-makers, law-enforcement agents, prison supervisors, educators, and parents request a check-list-like description of who is and who is not religiously radical (Pisoui & Ahmed, 2016). These actors argue that conceptual clarity (or the single meaning) would better position them to understand how radicalisation manifests in tangible behavioural forms. As such, policy-makers can tailor laws targeting the right individuals suspected of being religious radicals. Relatedly, police officers need clear-cut teachings about the signs of radicalisation to target the right individuals at the right time and place. Likewise, teachers are to be trained on how to detect the early signs of radicalisation to report cases of radical students in their classrooms. Parents also want to be familiar with the early indicators of radicalisation in their children. Otherwise, lack of practical precision may be detrimental and prejudicial to innocent individuals, groups, ethnicities, religions, and liberties. In view of that, academic research about radicalisation is fluctuating between the will to provide in-depth accounts of the phenomenon, and the necessity to respond to the needs of the various practitioners on the field.

Politically-motivated definitions of ‘radicalisation’ further nurture the ambiguity of the concept. Most of these often lack scientific objectivity and precision, and are not evidence-based definitions. Instead of enriching the radicalisation debate, politicians have turned it into a weapon against certain ethnicities and religions. Similarly, many researchers, who are usually affiliated to governments and Intelligence Agencies, take the easiest and the most available claim of associating radicalisation with embracing the “radical beliefs of Islam”. This mono-causal simplistic view often has perilous societal ramifications on Muslims worldwide, especially in the West. Many shallow aspects such as Islam-inspired clothing, beard growing, or hijab have been deemed as serious indicators that the person is on their path to be a terrorist. In this case, Muslims have been “imprisoned” in a continuous need to prove their innocence (Sedgwick, 2010). In the West, this is thought to have caused psychological problems for Muslim youths who do not accept to be questioned and doubted on the basis of their religion. Rather, they want to be judged on the values of citizenship. As a result, many home-grown terrorists may partially be the product of the cliché definitions of radicalisation.

The meaning given to radicalisation is often dependent on history and environment (Moghaddam, 2005). The two conditions seem to determine the relatively changing

attitudes towards radicalisation. That is, the religious manifestations held to be forms of radicalisation in the West may be fully normal in Muslim societies. In this respect, Schmid (2013) posits that radicalisation mean different things to different people. By the same token, as time and perspective change, the collective representation of certain phenomena may change as well. For instance, women's European clothing style may have been considered as normal in the Morocco of the 1960s and 1970s, whereas at the present time may be subject to severe "religious" censure and social repudiation. In this case, Should we consider this to be a collective radicalisation of the Moroccan society? Also, another striking example about the relativism of the concept lies in the historical fact that a good number of Moroccan *mujahedeen* (holy fighters) were officially encouraged to join the fight in Afghanistan upon the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979. And this is known to be motivated by the political interests of Morocco as an ally of the United States of America. Years later, the same Moroccan foreign fighters and their followers were labelled terrorists as the original political considerations dictating their participation in the Afghan war were no longer valid.

Mono-causal definitions of radicalisation tend to highlight one dimension of the phenomenon to the detriment of other dimensions. This type of definitions, when used as a referential background for de-radicalisation policies, usually prove to be unsuccessful in embracing all possible cases due to the multi-factorial structure of radicalisation (Schmid, 2013). For instance, many studies tend to single out personal or individual aspects as the most significant push factors to religious radicalisation. One shortcoming of this trend is that, although it refers to radicalisation as a highly individualised experience, it formulates intervention tips to be applicable to all cases, which is contradictory. Overemphasis on personal traits has often resulted in "false positives" (Schmid, 2013). That is, many people are held "radicals" whereas, in fact, they are not. Accordingly, a professionally sophisticated approach may be needed so that the real indicators of religious radicalisation can be discerned from other personality features or behaviours. In short, the single-factor approaches have fallen short of accounting for all the intricacies of religious radicalisation.

Being under the pressure of the rising threat of terrorists, particularly home-grown ones, many governments and organisations in the West temporarily skip the dilemma of definitions by developing their own working definitions. These are basically intended to be the guiding frame for practitioners to deal with cases of radicalisation and de-radicalisation in a variety of contexts. Similarly, many researchers adopt or develop definitions that serve their examination aims. Following the same line of thought, the paper at hand offer one working definition that would comply with the Moroccan context and meet the objectives of this paper.

## 1.2- A Working Definition

In light of the above findings, this paper proposes the following definition of religious radicalisation in the Moroccan context:

*“Religious radicalisation is the process whereby individuals embrace radical religious beliefs, which can be conducive to extremism and terrorism, as a reaction to purely non-religious push factors”*

This guiding definition abides by the basic finding that radicalisation is a process, and is phrased as such to test the main hypothesis of this paper that Moroccan youths may radicalise as a reaction to parents’ multiple bringing-up deficiencies.

## 2- Push vs. Pull Factors

Hardships such as poverty, relative deprivation, frustrated aspirations, discrimination or exclusion, blocked political participation for the youth, widespread corruption, government failure to provide social services, security concerns, injustice, the search for personal or group identities, catalyst events in Palestine, Iraq, Syria, etc. are all reported to be push factors to individuals’ radicalisation (Schmid 2013). However, push factors represent only one side of the radicalisation process. The other side is shaped by pull factors. Based on many narratives of ex-extremists and/or terrorists, religious radicalisation is the outcome of an interaction between push factors and pull factors (Hassan 2012). The latter are the positive features and benefits that individuals gain from terrorist group membership. For example, many studies confirm that individuals lacking certainty in their lives are more likely to join groups that are highly-structured with which they can identify (Hogg 2014). In this regard, this paper is basically meant to explore if Moroccan parents satisfy their children’s communicational and emotional needs as a way to protect them from extremist and terrorist groups.

## 3- Why Family?

Faced with the inefficiency of security-oriented approaches to disrupt the breeding ideologies and environments of terrorist networks and actions, experts progressively focus on family, school, media, religious institutions, and civil society as potential actors to prevent and counter violent extremism (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). Many radicalisation experts acknowledge family as an under-explored area where young individuals’ religious radicalisation may be stopped in infancy (e.g., Koehler, 2016). Training parents to identify early signs of religious radicalisation in their children, which are attested to be conducive

to extremism and/or terrorism, is considered to be more rewarding than fighting terrorists. An essential part of the training entails allowing parents to differentiate between signs of religious radicalisation and behaviours identified as normal transitional changes related to adolescence and early adulthood stages (Koehler, 2016).

Advocates of the family approach to curb religious radicalisation in early stages tend to support their view with many facts, chief of which are these: adolescents and emerging adults make the age group mostly attracted by terrorist groups. With the rise of ISIS in 2014, the majority of individuals who travelled to Syria are either adolescents or young adults, making the average age of 15-24 (Gielen, 2015). Given the unquestionable influence that families can have on their adolescent children and young adults, it seems plausible to think of the role that families can play in deterring them from becoming radical. The focus on adolescents and emerging adults also stems from the fact that aging is often associated with maturity and peacefulness (Sampson et. al., 2006). The older individuals become, the more resilient they turn towards attempts of recruitment in violent extremism. In addition, mature individuals are often more experienced, which equips them with the analytical and critical skills necessary to deconstruct and counter the narratives used by groups to engage people in the terrorist cause. As pointed out earlier, the most suitable targets of terrorist recruiters are the young people with no cognitive and psychological backgrounds allowing them to examine the radical ideals marketed to them. Here comes the importance of family to empower youths with defence religious narratives should they be subject to radicalising attempts both offline and online.

Parents are evidently accountable for their children's education. A critical part of parents' educational commitment lies in the cognitive/ideological orientation of children to protect them from radical beliefs. In this respect, one major educational challenge is equipping children with religious narratives and perceptions refuting those often propagated by religious extremists and terrorists. Recruiters of terrorist groups find it easier to influence individuals with no solid religious background. Individuals with moderate religious insights would always have critical skills enabling them to recognise terrorist intentions often enveloped in religious messages. However, there seems to be many factors impeding parents to play their fullest role as influencers of their children's religious orientation. The most paramount impediment is the ambiguity of religious radicalisation itself. As shown earlier, radicalisation specialists do not agree on one definition of radicalisation. The concept is extremely contextual and contested. The meaning of religious radicalisation changes from one cultural context to another, and from certain individuals to others. In other terms, what is considered to be religious radicalisation for certain people might be a good sign of maturity and righteousness for others. It follows then that parents may not take their children's arising signs of religious radicalisation seriously. In line with this, parents of terrorists often express shock that their

children committed terrorist acts because they thought that their children had been good individuals.

Terrorism of individuals is often perceived as a single event standing apart from prior incidents in these individuals' lives. In this respect, most experts of radicalisation state that extremism/terrorism are but phases preceded by many other developmental phases (e.g. Bouzar, 2018). The examination of many accounts of terrorists suggest that their adoption of fanatical perceptions often results from a long process of transitional events ranging from childhood to adulthood (Sieckelinck et al. 2017). These transitional events are the periods when adolescents are preoccupied with issues of identity seeking, autonomy desires, shaping religious worldviews, etc. (Arnett 2014). When parents are not there to emotionally support their children during critical phases and guarantee that they receive moderate answers to their enquiries, then there will surely be another part to do that (Arnett 2014). Other difficulties such as financial problems, cultural humiliation and feelings of uselessness may contribute to the radicalisation of adolescents and emerging adults (Sieckelink et al., 2017).

Adolescents and emerging adults with no solid moral formation are found to lack the value systems which serve as defence mechanisms when they are subject to radicalising attempts (Smith et al. 2011). As radicalisation usually involves individuals revolting against ethics and shared values in society, parents' role to bring up their children respecting the moral bonds of their society is important. In this regard, religious extremists tend to criticise, reject, and preach that the way Moroccans practice Islam is incorrect and heretic. For example, extremists may not hesitate to publicly condemn certain religious rituals such as the way people behave in mosques, dress, and read the Qur'an. In this respect, many famous religious preachers in Morocco ridicule the collective recitation of Qur'an in mosques. Being aired on a heavily followed radio programme, one well-known Moroccan preacher referred to the tradition as the Qur'an being read by "crazy people", and refused the tradition that women dress in white after the death of their husbands. When adolescents develop disrespect for certain constituents of the Moroccan culture, they may become easy to be radicalised because they already have the predisposition to believe in alternative narratives. Thus, parents are to guide their children to develop respectful and moderate views regarding many religious aspects of the Moroccan culture.

Parenting styles should fit the educational objectives of parents and prevent radicalisation in children. Hoffman (2000) argues that the most effective parenting style is the one combining between affectionate parent-child interaction and parental discipline. This is proved to have beneficial effects on children's moral development. By contrast, when parents do not provide parental warmth, support, and supervision and opt for harsh parenting, this may result in children's delinquency and in children not taking their parents as models to follow (Hoeve et al. 2008). Later in adolescence and early adulthood, children

need support from their parents, more than control and supervision (Johnson et al. 2011). Given the respondents of this study are adolescents and emerging adults (the age group mostly targeted by terrorist groups), the study partially aims at exploring the kind of relationship they have with their parents.

Parents not guiding their children when they are normal are unlikely to monitor them if they turn radical. In this respect, Hoeve et al. (2008) found that parents often disengage when their children show extremist behaviour. Instead of trying to de-radicalise their extremist children, parents tend to disengage and offer them autonomy. Parents explain their disengaging and passive reaction towards children's extremism by being either intimidated by the child's behaviour, or because they are emotionally excluded by children (Hoeve et al. 2008). Being under the influence of belonging to an extremist group, adolescents and emerging adults dare deride the symbolic position of their parents. Many even try to change the religious views and behaviours of their parents to fit what they believe to be the correct Islam. For instance, they may try to have their mothers, sisters, and female members of the family wear *burqa*, have the father and the male ones grow beard, forbidding males from shaking hands with women, no TV sets allowed in the house, curtains are to be closed all the time so that women cannot be exposed to foreign viewers, etc. That is, parents tend to lose their parental authority in favour of the extremist child who turns into the main actor in the house. In case parents refuse to be supervised by their child and resist being controlled and corrected all the time, they have to get into conflict with the extremist child. As mentioned earlier, there are recruits of terrorist groups who commit crimes against their own parents because terrorists are emotionally detached from their targets.

Sikkens et al. (2018) found that parents usually react to their children endorsing extremist ideals in four different forms: (1) the protected family, (2) the threatened family, (3) the settled family, and (4) the abandoned family. Parents in the protected family would discuss the extremist ideology with their child but never withdraw their support. In the threatened family, parents and their radical child discuss the ideology, but it is often the child who tries to influence parents with his ideals. Parents in a settled family agree with the ideology adopted by their child and would not try to intervene. However, these parents might try to reduce the intensity of the ideology on the child's behaviour when it becomes too apparent. In the abandoned family, parents do not discuss the ideology and are indifferent to the child's extremist behaviour.

Parents' reactions and attitudes towards their children's religious radicalisation change depending on the evolution and stage of radicalisation. Parents are often content with their children's new interest in religion and the positive impact of that on their behaviour, but they begin to worry when signs of fanaticism start to appear in children (Sikkens et al. 2017). This is in line with the nature of parents' reactions regarding the



terrorist acts conducted by their children: for example, parents of Cansablanca attacks (2003), decapitation of the two Scandinavian girls (Shamharouch, 2018), Paris attacks (2015), and Madrid bombings (2004) have all expressed shock, disbelief, and surprise that their children could commit those atrocious acts against innocent people. For the parents, their children were on the right path, practicing their religious rituals and behaving so well. What these parents may not have been aware of is that terrorist groups' recruits were trained on how to conceal their terrorist identity. (RAN, 2017).

Parents of religiously radical children usually react in ways that show uncertainty, powerlessness and lack of expertise (Sikkens et al., 2018). Parents may not take their children's extremist ideals seriously as they perceive it as a developmental stage in their children's lives that would end. For many, radicalisation is not something to cause worry as it is a normal phase that would enable the individual to shape their personality. A second group of parents react powerlessly showing neither support nor control. These parents are emotionally excluded by their radical children and they no longer have the parental authority to influence/change their children's views or behaviours. A third group of parents are aware that something dangerous would come out of their children's religious extremism, but they lacked the tools to intervene.

Empirical studies reveal that parents' late awareness of children's religious radicalisation may drive them to react in ways contradicting with their usual parenting style (Van San et al., 2013). In this respect, parents who are not very religious may try to cope with their children's radical views and practices in order not to break communication and connections with children. By the same token, parents who are religious may refuse their children's radicalisation as they observe that they may turn into extremists or terrorists. In both cases, parents may not be able to de-radicalise or curb the radicalisation escalation as their reactions are affected by surprise, apprehension, and lack of planning. Parents of many youths who joined ISIS had been aware of their children's extremist views but never thought that those ideals would turn into action (Sikkens et al., 2018).

## **1.2- Family in P/CVE Programs**

The focus on the micro-level approaches are basically encouraged by the failure of the macro-level policies to account for the highly personal nature and fine nuances of every individual experience with religious radicalisation. Governments and experts are incapable of profiling the paths that the majority take to become terrorists. Accounts and experiences of extremists and terrorists demonstrate they do not radicalise the same way. As mentioned earlier, while some individuals radicalise under the influence an ideology, others radicalise and then look for an ideology to justify their radicalisation. Accordingly, experts do call governments to create tailored localised P/CVE (prevent/ counter violent extremism) programs whereby families and civil society play a vital role.

Many governments around the world support the design of P/CVE programs in which families and civil society are vital actors. These include, but are not limited to, the following: the United Kingdom's (UK) "Prevent Duty", France's "Stop djihadisme", and "Community Awareness Training" programme in Australia, and Pakistan's WORDE (The World Organization for Resource Development and Education) (Gielen, 2015). These programmes offer lists of warning signs of radicalisation in children for parents to take seriously. Still, these programmes did not achieve their assigned goals. Experts tend to identify three main reasons to be behind the failure of these programs: first, the programs skip the fact that parents may not be the only actors in shaping their children's values and beliefs. Reality suggests that youths are greatly influenced by internet and friends. Second, parents are inaccurately deemed to be able to pinpoint signs of radicalisation in their children and act upon them. However, when adolescents or young adults diverge from the conventional norms of family, parents are unlikely to take that as an indicator of radicalisation to violent extremism. Third, parents may interpret signs of radicalisation in different ways: as noted earlier, while some parents associate the signs with religious extremism, others are pleased that their children are becoming devout and mature.

Designers of P/CVE programs call for changing the view that countering extremism and terrorism are governments' exclusive responsibility. Instead, they recommend engaging society in the prevention of religious radicalisation. Findings demonstrate that individuals may be vulnerable to terrorist appeal when social cohesion and community resilience are eroded (Hogg, 2014). That is, radicalisation to violent extremism is a social phenomenon whose solutions should come from society itself. In Morocco, parents, school, media, mosque, and *'ulama* councils are all to be fully involved in preventing and countering radical tendencies proven to be conducive to violent extremism. The balance between "whole of society" and "whole of governments" efforts prove more efficient in saving young people from the hands of terrorist groups (Hogg, 2014).

### 1.3- Mothers as de-radicalisers

There is evidence that mothers can be effective preventers of children's radicalisation to violent extremism. P/CVE programs worldwide tend to identify positive outcomes on individuals' de-radicalisation when women are involved as de-radicalisers (Gielen, 2015). Mothers' inherent willingness to prevent unruly behaviour in their children is found useful in combatting radicalisation from within families. Building on the accounts of many ex-extremists and ex-terrorists that the emotional bonds they have with their mothers often served as a discouraging power for them to commit terrorist acts, experts devise P/CVE programs in which mothers are vital actors. In line with this, the "Syria Awareness Campaign" in the UK was heavily focused on the role that mothers could play to deter young people from travelling to join ISIS (Gielen, 2015).

Terrorist groups have a tradition which involves allowing the terrorists on the last day before committing the terrorist act to leave a note to all Muslims and to his/her family. A remarkable feature of these notes is addressing the mother in emotional and poetic words pleading her to be patient when she receives the news of their death (Schmid, 2013). This may psychologically be interpreted as the mother being the only person who pulls terrorists back to life, and who renders sad their shift to death. Given the emotional bonds most terrorists have with their mothers, experts view mothers as potentially efficient actors in countering radicalisation to violent extremism. Studies demonstrate that terrorists are able to commit hideous crimes against their victims only because they are trained to be fully detached from any human connections with them (Gill, 2008). Surprisingly enough, their last messages show that their emotional attachment to their mothers could not be defeated by the terrorist recruiters' trainings. This is driving many experts to investigate the capacity of women to solve the puzzle of radicalisation in youths.

Chowdhury et al. (2016) studied 1000 mothers in different countries to examine the potential capability of women to counter violent extremism in children. The study confirms that women are better positioned to prevent and combat radicalisation in their children or other families' children. The survey found that 94% of mothers of radical children expressed their preference to seek support from other women. This qualifies women to be the first recipients of the radicalisation news, more than anyone else. However, despite expressing their willingness to counter radicalisation to violent extremism in children, the women expressed lack of confidence and skill to perform this complex task. That is, they want to help but they do not know how. In addition, these women feel burdened and ashamed by idealising their role and responsibility to prevent, curb, or even stop radicalisation in children, whereas the multi-dimensional and multi-layered mission of combatting radicalisation require the involvement of many actors. They are also afraid lest the privacy of their families should be broken by P/CVE programs (Chowdhury et al., 2016).

## 2- Method and tools

Religious radicalisation is a composite human behaviour resulting from the interplay between many religious and non-religious push and pull factors. That is, a given individual's religious radicalisation is dependent on his/her psychological being, socio-economic status, cultural background, group dynamics, kinship ties, political perceptions, catalyst events, and religious ideology, to name only a few. Therefore, the use of a single research paradigm, as offered by any research philosophy, would certainly fail to account for all the key elements motivating and triggering religious radicalisation in a certain context. Within this view, this study finds it important to diversify the interpretive angles of collected data, both from previous studies and fieldwork, by adopting different research paradigms.

## 2.1- Research Type

This study applies a mixed methods methodology in that data is collected quantitatively and interpreted using both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. It is true that the multi-faceted nature of the research problem requires collecting data from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. However, this paper uses only quantitative data collection method, the questionnaire, for these three reasons:

- a. The objective of this paper is not to study cases of ex/extremists and terrorists, which may require interviewing them to have a close view of how they religiously radicalised. Rather, the aim of the study is to measure the extent to which non-radical Moroccan young people show signs often used by terrorist groups to recruit individuals.
- b. Interviewing non-radical young people about issues related to religious extremism and terrorism can be so intimidating to them, which is thought to be unnecessary in view of the essence of the research problem.
- c. The quantitative technique of the questionnaire allows greater representativeness as it is administered to a sample of 400 respondents.

## 2.2- Sampling Strategy

One of the objectives of the study is to reach findings that are generalizable to and representative the population under examination. To this aim, the data is collected according to a probability sampling in that the respondents of the questionnaire are chosen as randomly as possible. To increase the representativeness of the findings and their implications, the study follows these two major guidelines: first, the respondents' age ranges from 18 to 24, which covers the critical transition from adolescence to adulthood. Most individuals who joined ISIS are in this age range. This transition is mainly critical because individuals have to face adulthood obstacles with the cultural load they bring with them from childhood. Thus, a significant part of how they behave in this period might be influenced by how they were brought up. With a total number of 400 respondents, this study partly aims to measure the extent to which Moroccan young people's childhood influences their religious views as adolescents and emerging adults.

Second, the data is collected from two different areas in Salé city in Morocco: Oued Eddahab (locally known as 'Lwad') and Said Hajji, with 200 respondents from each. These data collection environments present two different socio-economic contexts which are thought to influence results. On the one hand, Oued Eddahab (Lwad) was basically chosen because it is the area in Salé where many people were arrested for terrorist charges after 2003 acts, and some of these individuals are still in prison. This is also the area where many non-government supervised mosques were

closed as were considered to serve as sites for recruiting potential terrorists among young people. Many young people who joined ISIS are from Lwad. Some of these are thought to have died in the fight as pictures of their dead bodies circulate among people in the area. 16 students are reported to have joined ISIS in 2015-2016 from one high school in the area. Lwad is an over-populated area where most neighbourhoods are not subject to urban structuring. The roads are very narrow and unstructured. Most inhabitants practice seasonal or low-paid permanent jobs. Hence, the study will attempt to investigate characteristics of Lwad that makes it, for many people, a breeding environment for religious extremism and terrorism.

On the other hand, Said Hajji is the second data collection context as it provides a socio-economically different environment from Lwad. Said Hajji is a relatively new established area in the city of Salé. Most inhabitants live in apartments, and most them are government officials (teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.). Unlike Lwad, Said Hajji is an area with no terrorist records. Basically, children are brought up and educated in a different way. The majority of students study in private schools. The ultimate aim of comparing two different environments is to verify the impact that social environments have on increasing/decreasing Moroccan young people's vulnerability to religious radicalisation which is attested to be conducive to extremism and terrorism.

### **2.3. Data Analysis Techniques**

Despite the fact that the data is quantitatively collected, quantitative analysis techniques, alone, may not retrieve all the multi-layered meanings that data has to imply about the mechanics of religious radicalisation process among Moroccan young people. In this regard, this study finds it important that a mixed analysis approach should be adopted so that results can be described, explained, and interpreted from various perspectives. Therefore, the study will use quantitative descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, and thematic analysis from the qualitative approach. The latter will allow clustering the results of a number of questions in thematic sub-headings. The rationale for using a mixed analysis approach lies in the fact that results would be meaningful only when interpreted from the lens of Moroccan context and culture. The data was processed using SPSS software, version 21.

## **4- Results and their discussion**

This section presents the main findings of the survey as related to the extent to which parents fulfil their communicational and emotional commitments towards their children. In particular, the study will verify the impact of parents' educational level on their flexibility

to receive their children’s different views and opinions. Besides, the survey examines whether parents provide emotional support to their children. Based on these two findings, we will examine whether children let their parents know about their ideas and online actions or not.

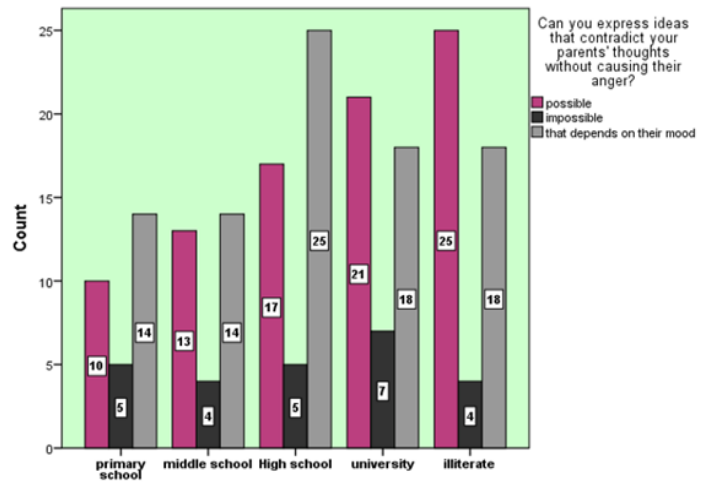
**Parent-child communication:**

**Said Hajji:**

**Table 1.** Mother-child communication.

	Can you express ideas that contradict your parents' thoughts without causing their anger?	Total			
		possible	impossible	that depends on their mood	
What is the educational level of your mother?	primary school	10	5	14	29
	middle school	13	4	14	31
	High school	17	5	25	47
	university	21	7	18	46
	illiterate	25	4	18	47
Total	86	25	89	200	

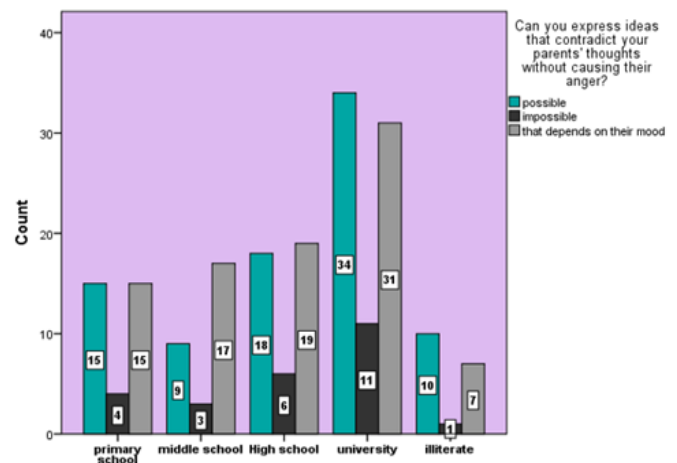
**Figure 1.** Mother-child communication.



**Table 2:** Father-child communication.

	Can you express ideas that contradict your parents' thoughts without causing their anger?	Total			
		possible	impossible	that depends on their mood	
What is the educational level of your father?	primary school	15	4	15	34
	middle school	9	3	17	29
	High school	18	6	19	43
	university	34	11	31	76
	illiterate	10	1	7	18
Total	86	25	89	200	

**Figure 2:** Father-child communication.



Oued Eddahab (Lwad)

Table 3: Mother-child communication.

	Can you express ideas that contradict your parents' thoughts without causing their anger?			Total
	possible	impossible	that depends on their mood	
primary school	22	4	19	45
middle school	10	2	19	31
High school	6	1	7	14
university	2	1	0	3
illiterate	40	11	56	107
Total	80	19	101	200

Table 3: Mother-child communication.

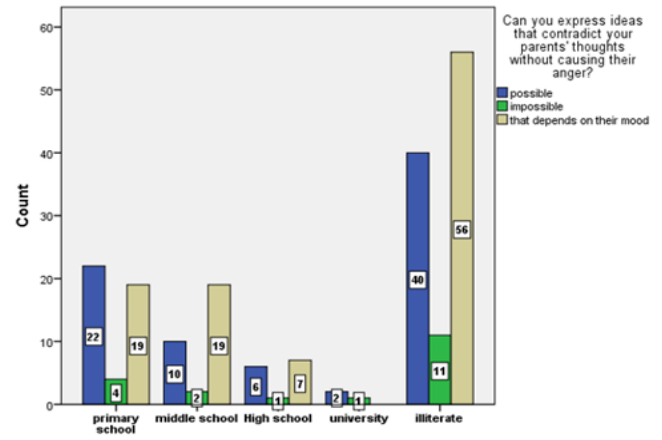
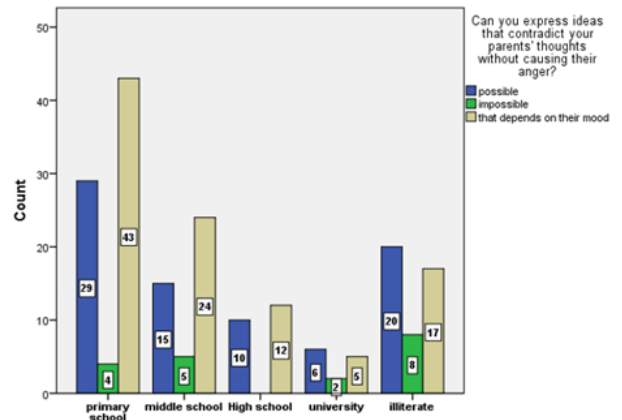


Table 4: Father-child communication.

	Can you express ideas that contradict your parents' thoughts without causing their anger?			Total
	possible	impossible	that depends on their mood	
primary school	29	4	43	76
middle school	15	5	24	44
High school	10	0	12	22
university	6	2	5	13
illiterate	20	8	17	45
Total	80	19	101	200

Table 4: Father-child communication.



Given the psychological, educational, and moral needs adolescents have from parents, it seems plausible to investigate whether the parents of respondents provide those needs or not. In this respect, the findings demonstrate that most parents do not establish effective communication channels with their children: many of these adolescents and emerging adults cannot express different views and opinions without driving their parents angry. Being forbidden to address their fears, worries, concerns, and questions to their parents, this simply means that these parents (1) are not assuming their parental responsibility towards their children, (2) cannot know what their children embrace as thoughts and beliefs, (3) they cannot be counted on to prevent radicalisation in their children, and (4) contribute to preparing individuals who are vulnerable to extremist religious indoctrination.

Given the importance of academic training in improving one's analytical skills, the low percentage of parents who are university graduates (1.5% of mothers and 6.5% of fathers in Oued Eddahab) may render parents less capable of appropriately evaluating the extremity of their children's ideas and beliefs. Likewise, the data reveal that university graduates are more open to receiving their children's views and perceptions: in Said Hajji, many respondents whose parents have academic training confirm that they can freely express their views in the presence of their parents. It is worth noting, however, that although some parents are university graduates in Oued Eddahab, they do not allow their children the freedom of expression. This might be due to the socio-economic constraints posed on parents by the area where they live making them psychologically unprepared for dialogue, and are preoccupied with providing financially for their families.

On the other hand, the results show that the lower the educational level of parents the more oppressive they are towards their children's views. Surprisingly, however, the results show that mothers' open-mindedness and ability to receive children's different ideas and views are not affected by their low educational level: 40 respondents in Oued Eddahab and 20 in Said Hajji say that they can express their views and opinions, no matter how different they can be, to their illiterate mothers. Similarly, many mothers who dropped school at the primary stage also show intellectual flexibility to receive their children's views. This supports the afore-mentioned assumption that mothers are communicatively able to spot early cognitive and behavioural changes in children.

Being aware that their parents do not listen to them, this shows that respondents have feelings and ideas to express but parents are not communicatively available for them. These adolescents and emerging adults would certainly seek other channels to express themselves. This is particularly the case because self-expression is essential to one's personality building. When parents do not assume their educational responsibility to supervise the ideological formation of their children, other parts such as the school, friends, internet, books, etc. would do that. Each channel of these has benefits and shortcomings.

The importance of allowing adolescents and young adults to express their views lies in it being one of the most effective means to detect religious radicalisation in early stages. In this regard, many studies demonstrate that radicalisation can be reversed only through dialogue if discovered in early phases (e.g., Moghaddam, 2005). Once individuals are recruited by groups they receive a special training on how to conceal their terrorist intentions, which might explain why parents, siblings, relatives and acquaintances of terrorists express shock and disbelief that the people they know very well could commit atrocious crimes against innocents. Accordingly, by not accepting their children's opinions, parents tend to miss precious information that might be key to protecting children from turning into extremists or even terrorists. After all, terrorism starts as an idea



and ends as an action. If the different social actors do not handle that idea seriously, action is hard to expect and control.

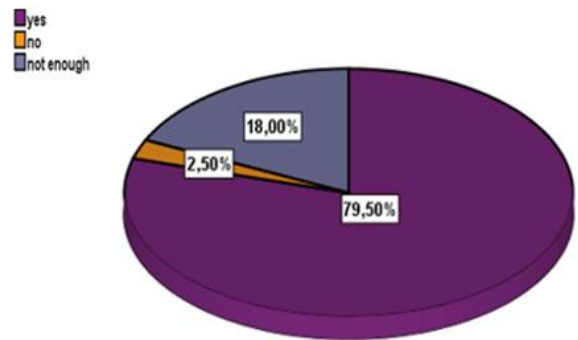
**Parent-child emotional bond:**

**Oued Eddahab (Lwad)**

**Table 5:** Do you receive love and affection from your parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	159	79,5	79,5	79,5
no	5	2,5	2,5	82,0
not enough	36	18,0	18,0	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 5:** Do you receive love and affection from your parents?

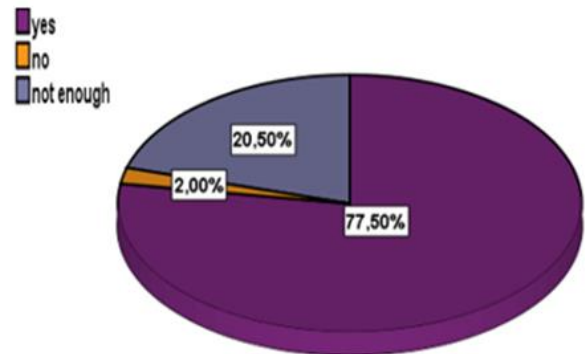


**Said Hajji:**

**Table 6:** Do you receive love and affection from your parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	155	77,5	77,5	77,5
no	4	2,0	2,0	79,5
not enough	41	20,5	20,5	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 6:** Do you receive love and affection from your parents?



Parents are supposed to be the primary source of love, affection, and care for the child. When parents deliberately or involuntarily fail to satisfy the emotional needs of their children, they tend to facilitate the task of foreign actors to draw children by filling their emotional gaps. These actors can unfortunately be terrorist recruiters. One of the main characteristics of the ‘no return’ stage for terrorist recruits is when they are fully prepared to reconsider the notion of family: complete loyalty to the terrorist group entails downplaying the importance of biological connections to family and considering members of the terrorist group, who self-sacrifice for their cause, to be the true members of family (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). This may partially explain why some terrorists are able to

commit terrorist crimes against their own parents. As pointed out earlier, however, recruits' attachment to their mothers does not seem to be easily broken down by terrorist trainings as many terrorists, in their last note to the *Ummah*, tend to implore their mothers to be patient the moment they receive the news of their death. Being fully aware of their almost impossible mission to detach recruits from their mothers, terrorist recruiters convince terrorists-to-be that by carrying out the terrorist act they secure a place for their parents in Paradise. Hence, parents' love, affection, and care for their children may block the groups to use emotional means to assure young people's loyalty to their terrorist cause.

While the majority of respondents mention to be taken care of by their parents (79.5% in Oued Eddahab and 77.5% in Said Hajji), a considerable part of them (18% in Oued Eddahab and 20.5 % in Said Hajji) state to be receiving insufficient love, affection, and care from their parents. In addition, a small minority of the respondents declare to be emotionally detached from their parents. The almost equal results between the two data collection environments demonstrate that financial differences between families do not determine their emotional attachment to their children. Compared to parents in Said Hajji, parents in Oued Eddahab are financially disadvantaged, but they prove to be slightly higher providers of love for their children. Bearing in mind that big numbers do not really count in terrorism as a single person can cause a devastating effect by an isolated terrorist act, these small statistics should be alarming to the following fact: some of the basic traits of the individuals most vulnerable to terrorist narratives are made by parents. As a push factor to extremism/ terrorism, 'emotional poverty' at home can be more painful to children than financial poverty. It provides terrorist recruiters with a wider room to manipulate young people emotionally.

By not providing love, affection and care for their children, parents implicitly introduce them to foreigners who can fill in the emotional gap. These foreigners can be terrorist groups. By declaring not to be receiving enough emotional support from their parents, the respondents show to be mindful that their parents are not emotionally present for them. As a result, they might seek to satisfy their emotional needs elsewhere.

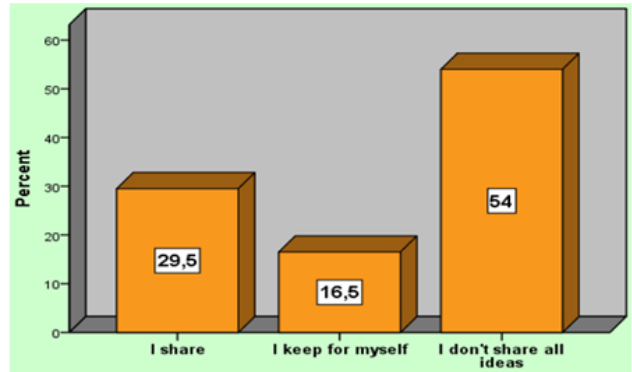
**Thoughts sharing with parents:**

**Oued Eddahab (Lwad)**

**Table 7:** Do you share your thoughts with your parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I share	59	29,5	29,5	29,5
I keep for myself	33	16,5	16,5	46,0
I don't share all ideas	108	54,0	54,0	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 7:** Do you share your thoughts with your parents?

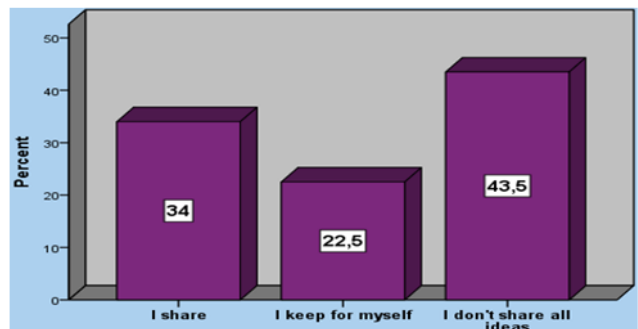


**Said Hajji**

**Table 8:** Do you share your thoughts with your parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I share	68	34,0	34,0	34,0
I keep for myself	45	22,5	22,5	56,5
I don't share all ideas	87	43,5	43,5	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 8:** Do you share your thoughts with your parents?



In their recruitment techniques, terrorist groups start initiating the potential recruit to their terrorist nature and plans only when assured that the individual will not reveal information to others (Moghaddam, 2005). This quality that takes a long time to establish in a recruit is already available in many respondents who do not share their thoughts with their parents (22.5 % in Said Hajji and 16.5 % in Oued Eddahab). From the point of view of terrorist recruiters, these respondents possess one of the qualities necessary for the success of their schemes: ‘they are not going to tell people about it’. This said, the majority of respondents refuse to share all their thoughts with parents (43.5 % in Said Hajji and 54% in Oued Eddahab). It seems normal that these young people could have their own privacy, but they may hide some critical idea or information that would be so dangerous

such as believing in extremist thoughts or being contacted by terrorist groups. Parents may have no way to children’s thoughts if their children insist not to share their ideas. This even becomes more serious in the critical phase of adolescence and the transitional period to adulthood which is often full of challenges for the individual.

Based on the findings above, it may be safe to maintain that parents are partly responsible for discouraging their children not to share their ideas and concerns. When children know that their parents would not accept to listen to their different or uncommon views, this forces children to keep silent. When listening to children is dependent on parents’ mood, children are not ready to share all their ideas. One of the obvious results of this parent-child relationship is that children may hide problems, concerns, difficulties, or even attempts of extremist indoctrination from foreigners. Youths’ silent processing of their own thoughts may cause them to make inappropriate decisions as they do not have access to alternative views. This supports a previously stated assumption that parents, through their improper education, may prepare the breeding environment for religious extremism to find way to children.

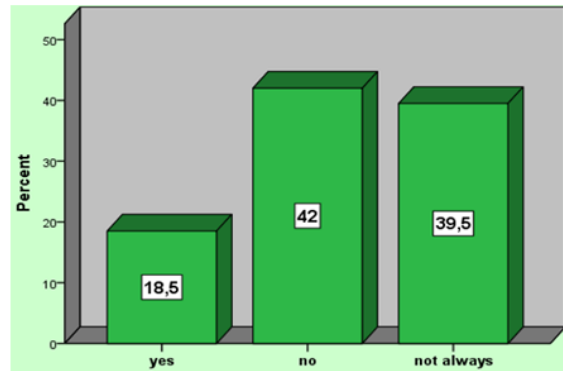
**Children’s online actions and parents.**

**Said Hajji**

**Table 9:** Do you allow your parents to see your activities on the internet?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	37	18,5	18,5	18,5
no	84	42,0	42,0	60,5
not always	79	39,5	39,5	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 9:** Do you allow your parents to see your activities on the internet?

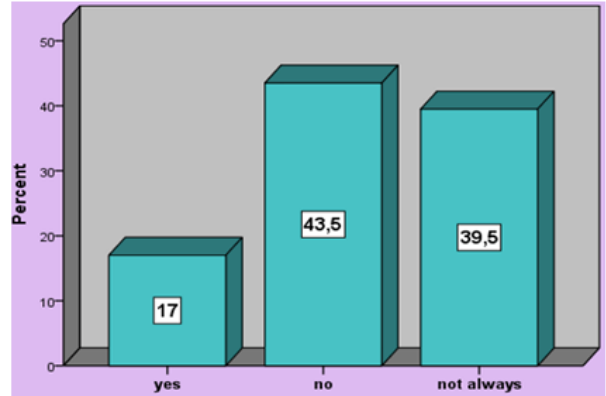


**Oued Eddahab (Lwad)**

**Table 10:** Do you allow your parents to see your activities on the internet?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	34	17,0	17,0	17,0
no	87	43,5	43,5	60,5
not always	79	39,5	39,5	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 10:** Do you allow your parents to see your activities on the internet?



Young people’s virtual actions may determine whether they will become religious extremists or not. A great part of the radicalisation process is currently carried out online (Mirea et al., 2018). Many studies tend to foreground the role of real-life participants such as friends and kinship ties to precipitate an individual’s violent action. However, there are terrorists whose radicalisation process was wholly virtual, on which basis they perpetrated a terrorist act. This may apply more to home-grown terrorists, and also to any terrorists who find it difficult to join groups abroad (Gill et al., 2014). Online terrorist recruitment is a well-developed area both technically and ideologically. As detailed earlier, online recruitment is one of the most sophisticated methods that terrorist groups count on to draw new recruits.

It is alarmingly dangerous that the majority of respondents are not willing to reveal their online activities to their parents (43.5 in Oued Eddahab and 42 % in Said Hajji). This practically means that these young people may religiously radicalise and grow to be extremists or terrorists while parents have no knowledge of what is taking place within their own homes. From another perspective, the respondents’ unwillingness to share their online actions with parents can be considered as a predictable reaction to their parents’ suppression of their freedom of expression. It might fall within the right to privacy that a good number of respondents (39.5 % in Oued Eddahab and 39.5 % in Said Hajji) cannot share all their online activities with parents, but parents have to be alert lest children should choose to hide unsafe actions. Accordingly, it is no exaggeration that by not giving importance to children’s online actions, parents may open their houses to terrorist groups to spread their ideologies and recruit whoever is weak enough to fall within their grip.

#### 4- Conclusion

The theories developed about the potential role of parents in the religious radicalisation process of young people seem to be mostly certified by the fieldwork findings. Respondents tend to report many dysfunctions of the Moroccan family regarding the education of children. The way parents bring up and treat their children tends to create many needs/gaps in children, which might be employed by terrorist groups to recruit young people. The fieldwork could identify, at least, three main gaps in the respondents that are caused by the parenting styles adopted.

##### *a. Communicational gap*

A great part of the studied respondents (400 adolescents and emerging adults) reveal to be forbidden or unable to communicate everything to their parents. This communicational gap is manifest in the following:

- 1) Parents do not allow these young people to express their different views and opinions,
- 2) Children do not let their parents have an idea about their online actions,
- 3) Parents' illiteracy or low level of education hinder identifying the nature of extremist narratives that can potentially be embraced by children, and

A result, these young people are forced to establish their own world away from parental eyes and control. Some of children's thoughts that parents refuse to receive can unfortunately serve as very precious information that they are radicalising or being targeted by a terrorist group. This way parents tend to miss important information about the development of their children's belief systems should they continue to suppress their freedom of speech. It is no exaggeration that many Moroccan young people do not turn into extremists/terrorists just because they are lucky enough not to be targeted by terrorist groups. Terrorist recruiters never cease to search for individuals with gaps to turn them into terrorists. By creating communicational needs in children, parents tend to prepare individuals who may be seduced by foreign people who offer to listen to and pretend to understand them.

##### *b. Emotional gap*

A great number of respondents disclose their feelings about not being emotionally satisfied by their parents. This emotional disconnection between parents and children is evident in the following findings:

- 1) Many clearly reveal not to be receiving enough love, affection, and care from parents,

- 2) Many respondents are emotional attached to the mother and not to the father, which proves that these families are not built on balance and shared responsibilities among parents, and

Emotional deficiency is one of the main paths terrorist recruiters take to attract new members. In this respect, many individuals became terrorists because terrorist groups made them happier than they had been at home. Thus, when parents stop to be emotional providers for their children, they create gaps in them that must be filled in one way or another. Many adolescents fill in the gaps by using drugs, get involved in unsafe love affairs, or religiously radicalise. Terrorist groups are gap fillers par excellence.

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