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Intergenerational Influence: The Pathway to Radicalisation

By Unaesah Rahmah and Haula Noor

SYNOPSIS

In January 2023, Askary Sibghotulhaq, the son of former Jemaah Islamiyah leader Parawijayanto, [appeared in court](#) on charges of facilitating the departure of members of the banned group for military training in Syria. Analysts had anticipated that Askary would be his father's successor as the next JI leader because of his religious knowledge, military training, and kinship networks. His case highlights the prevalence of intergenerational radicalisation within Indonesian terrorist networks.

COMMENTARY

Despite claiming to have shifted its organisational ideology to *dakwah* (religious propagation) and politics, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) continues to utilise kinship ties as a tool for recruitment and further engagement in the group's cause. Since its inception in 1990, there have been several cases that illustrate the complexity of kinship links in the group. These include relationships between male siblings, in-laws, fathers and sons, as well as more distant family members.

Parawijayanto, JI's former long-time leader, and his son Askary are an example of a prominent father-son relationship in JI. Other examples of sons who shared such a relationship with their fathers [include](#) Abu Dzar, Abdullah Daud, Farihin Ahmad, [Abu Rusydan](#), Umar Jundul Haq, Rusdan Abdul Hadi, and Ridwan Abdul Hayyie. Such father-son relationships and their exploitation by a terrorist organisation support scholar Robert E. Lane's argument on the influence of parents over their offspring's political stand. Lane posited that there are two ways in which a father could influence his child's political views.

First, through a process of overt and covert indoctrination, the child comes to accept the father's value system, including his loyalties and beliefs, as a model for imitation.

Such values could be inculcated through the glorification of a narrative in which the father or other family seniors had employed force to address political grievances. For example, JI terrorists Mukhlas and [Farihin](#) were inspired to be *mujahideen* through their fathers' narratives of involvement in armed struggles against the governing authorities of the day.

Second, the child's community or regional environment shapes his political beliefs, as for example, through the father's networks and the father-child personal relationship. The child's personality is shaped to the extent that it develops and sustains a social orientation towards radicalism. The child is further indoctrinated when the father [enrols](#) him in JI-affiliated schools, ranging from pre-kindergarten to religious schools such as *madrasahs* and *pesantrens*, both of which provide the social networks.

In the case of [Askary](#), he served as the head of the international department in JI up to the time his father was arrested in 2019. By incorporating him into JI's structure, his father created an environment which sustained Askary's commitment to the movement.

Askary's position also allowed him to expand his networks and to forge connections with foreign militant groups such as the Free Syrian Army. His responsibilities included managing and despatching JI members to Syria for military training and providing assistance to the ikhwan (JI associates) in Moro in the southern Philippines. Additionally, Askary also attended meetings in Bogor (West Java) and Ponorogo (East Java) in 2018 along with his father, where they discussed JI's *tamkin siyasi* (political consolidation) strategy.

In other cases, adult children of JI members have often [taken it upon themselves](#) to continue their fathers' jihad activities. These include [Umar Jundul Haq](#), son of Imam Samudra, who masterminded the 2002 Bali bombings, and Ridwan Abdul Hayyie, son of [Abu Jibril](#), one of the leaders of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). Umar and Ridwan joined militant groups in Syria to wage jihad.

Family Influence

Although father-son involvement in jihad activities is significant within the JI network, it is not always the father alone that is responsible for indoctrinating the children with the JI's ideology. In fact, women in JI are granted "[pseudo-autonomy](#)" in decision-making over their children's education and care, despite the fact that they do not participate in violent acts to the same degree as men.

Furthermore, JI leaders frequently marry their children to those of fellow group members so that the next generation is raised with the same worldview. In Askary's case, he married the daughter of Abu Husna, the previous head of JI's education division who eventually swore allegiance to Islamic State (IS), also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Marriage not only [establishes and strengthens](#) relationships within JI, it also helps to ensure that children are nurtured in a family environment that promotes a worldview congruent with JI's ideology.

Fidelity and Normative Influence

To what extent does kinship play in the ability of JI to regenerate? Research by Haula Noor, the co-author of this article, has revealed that the concepts of fidelity and [normative influence](#) could provide us with an explanation.

The concept of *fidelity* involves the transmission of norms and practices that cultivate a sense of allegiance in an individual. This can lead to radicalisation at a young age as habits are learned, and attitudes and values are imbibed, besides the deep acceptance of belief structures within the family and the larger social milieu.

On its part, *normative influence* involves norms that legitimise the use of violence within the family context. Such norms could be observed in members' acceptance of violent acts and adherence to beliefs that legitimise violence. This provides normative support to individuals who are inclined to participate in violent jihad.

Throughout everyday activities and interactions, including conversations and storytelling, parents, older family members or extended families could pass their values to the children. The children are gradually groomed to have fidelity as well as the normative view of the extreme ideology and the use of violence, which leads to eventual acceptance into the movement.

Lessons Learned for Countering Terrorism

Kinship ties are exploited by JI to recruit individuals and to increase their involvement in the JI cause. They also make it difficult for JI members to leave the cause given the JI's preaching that defection is tantamount to [betraying one's own family](#). Similarly, kinship networks provide a structure that can prove challenging for outsiders to penetrate, such as security services seeking to dismantle terrorist organisations.

While interventions involving family members are believed to be [effective](#) in interrupting radicalisation, engaging those with extreme views or sympathies for militant organisations in counter-terrorism (CT) initiatives might ironically backfire and strengthen the targeted individual's ideology instead. It is therefore essential for families to work together in preventing terrorism through a comprehensive and collaborative strategy.

Community engagement and an early warning system are two possible approaches for such a strategy. In the Indonesian context, these could be done by enhancing the role of the [Coordination Forum for Terrorism Prevention](#) (Forum Koordinasi Pencegahan Terorisme/FKPT) that has served as a partner of the National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme/BNPT) at the provincial level. Presently, while the FKPT has provided support to the BNPT in its programmes on preventing and countering violent extremism, they have yet to engage the family unit in their community engagement or outreach programmes.

In fulfilling its responsibilities, the FKPT could collaborate with religious actors and community leaders to provide training on terrorism awareness and media literacy targeting family units. Families and communities will be taught to recognise the signs

of radicalisation and to report suspicious activities to law enforcement agencies. The partnership could also conduct risk assessments, such as analysing local political climate, social and economic issues, and any past terrorist incidences to better understand the underlying causes of terrorism in Indonesia.

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