

SIUE Presentation Outlines Ways to Prevent Domestic Terrorism in Southern Illinois

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
February 13 2024 10:05 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Two SIUE professors hosted a “Building Community Resilience to Radicalization to Violence” community briefing to share information on the threat of violence in southern Illinois and ways to prevent radicalization.

Drs. Suranjan Weeraratne and Laurie Rice, political science professors at SIUE, invited students and community members to attend the briefing on Feb. 12, 2024, where they spoke about the ways in which people are radicalized and how communities can prevent domestic terrorism.

“The success of a targeted violence and terrorism prevention program depends on dedicated partners from all sectors of society working together,” Rice said. “In other words, it takes all of us to help keep our communities safe from the threat of targeted violence.”

Weeraratne and Rice presented findings of a survey they distributed across 41 counties in Illinois. Their work was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships. They noted that an individual’s rights to believe and speak about ideologies and associate with others are protected by the Constitution, but the threat, planning and use of violence are not protected.

The most common violent extremism is racially or ethnically motivated, followed by anti-government or anti-authority violent extremism. There are different theories on how individuals become radicalized and moved to violence, but most people in southern Illinois believe that social media plays a role.

Throughout their presentation, Weeraratne and Rice talked about the risk factors that suggest an individual might be predisposed to radicalization. Some of these risk factors include a history of being bullied, feelings of isolation or difficulty accomplishing life goals.

In southern Illinois, over 50% of people report experiencing life difficulties in the past three years. One-third of people say they are financially unstable, and there is considerable adult bullying happening throughout the region. All of these are risk factors.

While risk factors aren’t predictive, indicators suggest someone might be planning an act of violence and can foreshadow an act of targeted violence or domestic terrorism. Sudden behavioral changes or a belief that violence is justifiable are both indicators.

However, there are also ways to prevent targeted violence and domestic terrorism. Rice and Weeraratne encourage people to call 911 if they think someone is actively planning an act of violence.

But even if someone isn't yet at the planning stage, you can still help minimize radicalization in your community. Inclusion and communication are ways to support people who feel isolated and bullied. By reaching out to family and friends and staying engaged with your community, you can protect yourself from radicalization and support others, too.

“Building protective factors requires a whole of society approach,” Weeraratne said. “Community is the first line of defense.”

Weeraratne and Rice will host a second “Building Community Resilience to Radicalization to Violence” community briefing from 5:30–7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, at SIUE. You can email sweerar@siue.edu or larice@siue.edu for more information.