## G17   The Impact of Age Estimation of Recruited and Exploited Children by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will be informed about the importance and value of estimating age based on a methodological approach in the context of terrorist attacks involving recruitment of children and adolescents.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing attendees about the legal implications of age estimation of recruited and exploited children by terrorist and violent extremist groups.

Age estimation is the application of dental, skeletal, and physical maturity indicators in assessing the most probable chronological age of individuals.

Terrorist attacks, armed conflict, and all other forms of violent extremist groups are influenced by the age group of the recruited children–adolescents (7–21 years). A child can be a victim of an armed conflict or an alleged offender; however, the age assessment approach should be used efficiently to estimate the age, to classify the age range, then to promote the protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the child in society. The arrest of a child perpetrator takes precedence over the identification of a child perpetrator who has died while carrying out terrorist activity.

Situations in which a child who has not reached the minimum age of criminal responsibility is held liable or where a minor is prosecuted at the same standard of criminal responsibility as an adult must be avoided. Therefore, age estimation should be conducted as closely as possible to the time of the incident, as opposed to the time of the arrest.

The legal system has increased its efforts to combat terrorism and extremist groups. Adhering to the minimum age of criminal responsibility is crucial when it comes to underage recruitment and child trafficking, due to the inherent margin of error of age estimation. Globally, there is an irrebuttable legal presumption that a child under a certain age is incapable of committing a criminal offence.

The forensic scientist should be aware of the country-specific legal significance of certain age groups such as 7, 15, 18, and 21 years in the context of criminal liability, the legal working age, and child trafficking. The use of unverified examination methods for age estimation can have dire consequences in court. The juvenile legal system stipulates the enrollment in a correction facility as a means of guiding, educating, and rehabilitating the minor. Alternatively, the child remains in the care of his/her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), provided that the aforementioned sign an affidavit, asserting responsibility for the prevention of the child's involvement in future terrorist activity.

The dignity of the child always takes precedence; therefore, the least invasive method of age assessment must be employed. Independent professionals carrying out the age assessment must comply with international human rights standards. More recently, new developments are focusing on digital apps that can be used in age assessment (e.g., SALEM mobile app).

The emphasis falls not on revealing the identity of the child, but rather on leading the child back toward society by virtue of the correct application of internationally approved guidelines.

**Age Estimation, Juvenile/Adult Legal System, Human Rights**