



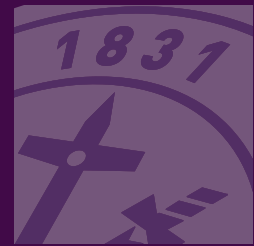
Royal United Services Institute
for Defence and Security Studies

Occasional Paper

The Contested Relationship Between Youth and Violent Extremism

Assessing the Evidence Base in Relation to P/CVE
Interventions

Claudia Wallner



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Executive Summary

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the key limitations of youth empowerment interventions in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and identifies potential solutions to overcoming these as part of the Prevention Project, a comprehensive research project examining existing literature on the effectiveness of P/CVE interventions.

Age is frequently identified as a risk factor or a predictor for engagement in violent extremism. Indeed, certain factors associated with youth – such as changes in social identity, weakened social control and the intensified influence of peer groups – can make individuals more susceptible to violent extremist influences. Yet, using age as a predictor for engagement in such behaviour does not account for the vast majority of young people who do not engage in violent extremism. It also does little for identifying the minority who do engage in it.

Youth programmes are often based on a simplistic understanding of the reasons why some young people engage in violent extremism. Consequently, they struggle with targeting their activities and fail to address the complex factors that drive young people to violent extremism. The programmatic focus on youth as a potential extremist threat and the lack of clear criteria to decide which young people to focus the attention of P/CVE work on can lead to the securitisation of everyday, youth-related activities and the framing of youth as a ‘suspect community’.

Key findings and recommendations include:

1. Narrow, age-based definitions of youth are not applicable in areas where achieving adulthood does not depend on reaching a certain age. In order to be relevant to the contexts in which they are implemented, interventions should work with regional and national definitions of youth that typically take locally relevant factors into account.
2. Better targeting strategies that are based on evidence about risk and resilience factors and their cumulative impacts are needed to allocate resources efficiently and avoid the marginalisation of already vulnerable groups. This underscores the need for a better understanding of youth motivations and a move away from viewing the entire ‘youth’ segment of the population as a potential terror threat.
3. Youth agendas tend to adopt a highly securitised view of young people, particularly young males, that perceives them as a threat to peace and stability. An improved and context-specific understanding of gender with regard to youth could help tailor interventions to the intended target audiences.

Instead of viewing youth through a security lens, youth programming should engage young people as partners. Increasing young people’s sense of ownership over youth-specific P/CVE interventions can contribute to making interventions more relevant, relatable and engaging for the target audience. Empowerment can help reduce certain grievances, but only in specific

contexts. In most cases, integrated interventions are more effective. If local drivers and youth-specific factors, as well as mechanisms of change of interventions, are better understood, these could be combined in a more deliberate and effective manner.

Introduction

IN RECENT YEARS, young people, and particularly young males, have been an essential source of support for terrorist groups and movements across the globe. Reports about teenagers and adolescents travelling to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State have reinforced the portrayal of young people as a terror threat.¹ More recently, reports about increasing numbers of arrests and convictions of teenagers for serious terrorism-related crimes linked to the far right, including the capture of a 13-year-old far-right terrorist ringleader in Estonia, have brought this image to the forefront once more.² Given that young people make up a high proportion of those involved in terrorism,³ much of the programming in the preventive space is targeted at the segment of the population that is contextually and locally defined as ‘youth’.

This paper explores the evidence base for this type of programming as part of the Prevention Project, a comprehensive research project examining existing literature on the effectiveness of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) interventions. The project, which commenced in January 2018 and is funded by the Norwegian government, aims to contribute to filling the knowledge gap on the effectiveness of interventions in this space by collating and analysing available evidence in different thematic areas within P/CVE. Previous papers that were published as part of the Prevention Project explored the evidence base for P/CVE interventions targeting women and girls, interventions in the education sector, P/CVE communications, and mentorship approaches.

The focus of this paper is on interventions that aim to prevent and counter violent extremism through youth empowerment. The literature reviewed for this paper covers P/CVE interventions that target young people outside the formal education system with the aim of empowering them by building up their confidence and skills or providing them with economic opportunities. This does not necessarily imply these approaches are effective. Instead, it highlights the focus of existing research and programming in this context.

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1. Barbara Franz, ‘Popjihadism: Why Young European Muslims Are Joining the Islamic State’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* (Vol. 26, No. 2, 2015), pp. 5–20; Mark Townsend, ‘Hundreds of Young People Still Want to Join Isis in Syria’, *The Guardian*, 13 August 2016; Austa Somvichian-Clausen, ‘Why Some Young Europeans Are Joining ISIS’, *National Geographic*, 18 September 2017.
 2. Jenipher Camino Gonzales, ‘Far-Right Terrorist Ringleader Found to Be Teenager in Estonia’, *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2020; Bethan Johnson, ‘Boys to Men: The Violent Teenagers of the Radical Right’, Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right, 21 October 2020, <<https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/10/21/11709/>>, accessed 6 December 2020.
 3. Noëlla Richard, Regev Ben Jacob and Patrick Keuleers, ‘Frontlines: Young People at the Forefront of Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism’, UNDP Global Report, 2019.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis of P/CVE interventions on youth empowerment, the reviewed evidence indicates that much of the programming in this space is not underpinned by a clear understanding of what the terms ‘youth’ and ‘empowerment’ mean in a given context and how they relate to violent extremism. The programmatic focus on certain age groups can create the impression that all individuals in these groups are at risk of radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism, which is not supported by evidence, while neglecting local and cultural variations in how ‘youth’ is defined and how extremist groups target youth. That is not to say that young people should be ignored in P/CVE programming. As is the case with other types of criminal activities, young people are indeed over-represented in violent extremism and certain factors associated with youth as a life-course stage can make individuals more susceptible to violent extremist influences. However, due to the simplistic understanding of youth that is at the root of many of the reviewed P/CVE interventions, existing interventions often struggle with targeting and fail to address the complex factors that drive young people to violent extremism. This ultimately risks the securitisation of everyday activities relating to youth and the framing of youth as a ‘suspect community’.

The overarching goal of this review is to examine the key limitations of existing P/CVE youth empowerment interventions in the literature and identify potential solutions to overcoming these. The paper examines this question in three chapters. After giving a brief overview of the Prevention Project’s methodology and evidence base, as well as key definitions underlying this research, the paper outlines existing literature on the relationship between youth and violent extremism. Following this, it analyses the limitations of existing interventions and discusses ways of overcoming these. The conclusion summarises the paper’s key findings and provides recommendations for P/CVE youth empowerment programming.

Methodology

This paper is based on a review of 88 English-language studies that explored P/CVE interventions aiming to empower youth.⁴ In line with the inclusion criteria set out in the methodology of the Prevention Project,⁵ the review included project evaluations, programme documents, peer-reviewed studies and grey literature.

Quality was not a criterion for inclusion, but the quality of all reviewed studies was assessed and classified as ‘high’, ‘moderate’ or ‘low’, based on their conceptual framing, transparency, methods used, research design, internal validity, cogency and independence. The findings of each study were then coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’. However, given the limitations of the scoring process (detailed in Annex II), the quality and effectiveness scores for the studies included in this paper are not listed.

The reliance on publicly available studies, with the exception of a small number of internal project documents and evaluations provided to the project team by implementing organisations,

4. For a full bibliography, see Annex I.

5. See Annex II for more details on the project methodology.

is a clear limitation that should be noted from the outset. As a result of this limitation, projects and organisations that have an established public profile or publish their project evaluations online are likely to be over-represented in this review. At the same time, promising findings from projects that were not made publicly accessible, often due to sensitivity or confidentiality concerns, were not included in this review. These limitations were factored in by the project team in the assessment and analysis of available evidence.

The interventions discussed in this paper cover a wide range of activities and target groups, given the breadth of the concepts at the basis of these interventions. The concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘empowerment’ are highly context dependent, and uncontested and universally accepted definitions for these concepts do not exist. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss differences in interpretations and determine which definitions were adopted in this paper.

Key Definitions

Youth: The term ‘youth’, which will be used interchangeably with ‘young people’ in this paper, refers to the stage of life at the transition between childhood and adulthood.⁶ Given the contextual and local differences regarding who is included in this group, significant variations exist between national and regional definitions of the concept. For example, the African Youth Charter defines youths as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, while the upper limit for this age bracket is even higher, at 40 years, in some countries, such as Mali.⁷ This stands in contrast to the UN’s definition of youth, developed to ensure statistical consistency across regions, which includes individuals between the ages of 15 and 24.⁸

Reaching adulthood depends to a large extent on the cultural context and often entails being economically independent and getting married, rather than reaching a certain age.⁹ Differences between conceptualisations of youth also exist between genders.¹⁰ In some contexts, women skip the stage of ‘youth’ altogether and transition from being a girl to being a woman once they first menstruate, while in others, reaching adulthood involves getting married and having children.¹¹

6. Lyndsay McLean Hilker and Erika Fraser, ‘Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States’, Social Development Direct, 30 April 2009.

7. Valeria Izzi, ‘Just Keeping Them Busy? Youth Employment Projects as a Peacebuilding Tool’, *International Development Planning Review* (Vol. 35, No. 2, 2013), pp. 103–17.

8. UN, ‘Fact Sheet: Definition of Youth’, <<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>>, accessed 6 December 2020.

9. McLean Hilker and Fraser, ‘Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States’; Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, ‘Dowry and Division: Youth and State Building in South Sudan’, Special Report No. 295, United States Institute of Peace, November 2011.

10. Marc Sommers, ‘Governance, Security and Culture: Assessing Africa’s Youth Bulge’, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* (Vol. 5, No. 2, 2011), pp. 292–303.

11. McLean Hilker and Fraser, ‘Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States’.

For the purpose of this paper, contextually and culturally relevant definitions of youth as the life stage preceding adulthood are adopted, covering individuals from the age of 15 up to around 40.¹² It should, however, be noted that definitions of youth adopted in programming interventions discussed in this paper do not necessarily correspond to the way violent extremist groups consider the concept of youth in their recruitment efforts.

Youth empowerment: Youth empowerment refers to the ‘attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and in their societies’.¹³ P/CVE interventions address different dimensions of youth empowerment, ranging from economic empowerment, which often takes the form of skills training or capacity building to improve the economic opportunities of young people, to psychological empowerment or confidence building and empowerment on an organisational level, allowing youth to take an active role in civil society and in the implementation of P/CVE interventions in their communities.¹⁴ Yet, what it takes for a young person to be ‘empowered’ depends both on the local context and on the individual in question. Empowerment activities therefore need to be responsive to local and individual needs to unlock the existing potential of young people rather than pushing on them a predefined idea of what it means to be empowered.

The Evidence Base

The body of literature that was assessed for this paper consisted of 88 relevant articles covering different aspects of youth empowerment. As Table 1 shows, the largest share of the studies (35 studies; 40%) found the assessed interventions to be ‘somewhat effective’, followed by those that reported ‘mixed’ effects (26 studies; 29%). Another 20 studies (23%) were considered ‘inconclusive’, either because they did not examine the results of the discussed interventions specifically or because they made theoretical reflections about interventions in this field in general. Seven studies (8%) found the assessed interventions to be ineffective, four of which dealt with economic interventions specifically. As with the other themes examined as part of the project, none of the studies reviewed were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific interventions beyond the immediate outcomes of the intervention and assumption-based theories of change.

Many of the studies within this thematic area are theoretical reflections and reviews on the potential of youth empowerment interventions rather than evaluations or reviews of concrete interventions. In turn, this explains why a relatively large proportion of studies in this field provide ‘inconclusive’ evidence on the effectiveness of interventions.

12. *Ibid.*; Sommers and Schwartz, ‘Dowry and Division’.

13. Richard, Jacob and Keuleers, ‘Frontlines’.

14. Pomme Woltman and Yasmine Gssime, ‘Ex Post Paper: Empowering Young People to Successfully Participate in PCVE’, RAN Centre of Excellence, 10–11 September 2018.

Table 1: Summary of the Team’s Assessment of the Evidence Base on Youth Empowerment Interventions

Intervention Impact	Quality of Evidence			Total
	High	Moderate	Low	
Effective	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Somewhat effective	11	16	8	35 (40%)
Mixed	19	7	0	26 (29%)
Ineffective	4	3	0	7 (8%)
Inconclusive	7	6	7	20 (23%)
Total	41 (47%)	32 (36%)	15 (17%)	88

Source: Author generated. For full bibliographical details of the studies used, see Annex I.

As Table 2 shows, in terms of geographical coverage, 27 identified articles had no specific geographical focus or covered more than one region. The remaining 61 articles focused on one specific region, with Europe and sub-Saharan Africa making up the majority of studies.

Table 2: Summary of the Geographical Distribution of Assessed Studies

Region	Number of Studies
No geographical focus/multiple regions	27
Europe	21
Sub-Saharan Africa	21
South Asia	7
North Africa	3
North America	3
Oceania	2
Middle East	3
Southeast Asia	1
Total	88

Source: Author generated. For full bibliographical details of the studies used, see Annex I.

I. Youth and Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature

SIMILAR TO OTHER P/CVE intervention areas, the research for this paper suggests that youth empowerment interventions to prevent and counter violent extremism have largely been developed on the basis of assumptions about why and how young people get involved in violent extremism. Therefore, before reviewing the evidence base for the effectiveness of youth programming in P/CVE, this chapter will discuss the existing knowledge base on the relationship between youth and violent extremism in more detail.

At the core of the majority of the programming in this field is an understanding that young people are generally more vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism than individuals in other age categories. Indeed, the evidence suggests that while not all members of violent extremist organisations fall into the category of ‘youth’, young people – particularly young males – are significantly over-represented in terrorism.¹⁵ For example, a study on suicide bombers in Israel found their mean age to be 21.¹⁶

This is consistent with the over-representation of youth in criminal offending in general, often described as the age–crime curve, which follows an asymmetrical bell shape and indicates that criminal offending tends to peak between the ages of 15 and 19 and then slowly declines from the early 20s.¹⁷ However, while the age profiles of terrorists typically follow a similar pattern, the age range of terrorism offenders is far wider and the peak age for engaging in terrorism is generally higher than the peak age for non-political violent crimes, with the propensity for violent terrorism offences only dropping off after age 35.¹⁸ Furthermore, non-violent terrorism offences such as terrorism financing do not follow the same trends and non-violent offenders are typically much older on average than those who are engaged in violence.¹⁹

15. Hannes Weber, ‘Age Structure and Political Violence: A Re-Assessment of the “Youth Bulge” Hypothesis’, *International Interactions* (Vol. 45, No. 1, 2019), pp. 80–112; Richard, Jacob and Keuleers, ‘Frontlines’.

16. Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi, ‘Human Capital and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Vol. 21, No. 3, Summer 2007), pp. 223–38.

17. Rolf Loeber and David P Farrington, ‘Age-Crime Curve’, in Gerben Bruinsma and David Weisburd (eds), *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (New York, NY: Springer, 2014).

18. Jytte Klausen, Tyler Morrill and Rosanne Libretti, ‘The Terrorist Age-Crime Curve: An Analysis of American Islamist Terrorist Offenders and Age-Specific Propensity for Participation in Violent and Nonviolent Incidents’, *Social Science Quarterly* (Vol. 97, No. 1, 2016), pp. 19–32.

19. *Ibid.*

Given the consistent relationship between age and terrorism, age is frequently identified as a risk factor or a predictor for engagement in violent extremism. As resources for counterterrorism and P/CVE activities are limited, models based on risk factors are thought to be useful to help with the prioritisation of preventive action. As a result of the determination of age as a risk factor for violent extremism, youth agendas tend to be highly securitised and gendered, whereby youth, particularly young males, are perceived as a threat to peace and stability.²⁰ Yet, using age as a predictor for engagement in such behaviour does not account for the vast majority of young people who do not engage in violent extremism and it does little towards identifying the minority who do end up engaging in violent extremism.²¹

While age alone does not provide a full explanation for engagement in violent extremism, certain life-course stages and changes that are typically associated with youth, including changes in social identity and weakened social control, can play a role in facilitating the steps towards engagement in violent extremism and should therefore not be overlooked in trying to understand what drives individuals to terrorism.²² Instead of viewing factors in isolation, these transition points should be understood in the context of broader life-course processes, with structural and individual risk factors, as well as protective factors, interacting with situational contexts and timing to shape the pathways individuals take in their lives.²³

One of the most significant situational risk factors for engagement in violent extremist activities is association with peers who are already involved with violent extremism.²⁴ While dynamics of social control are still present in childhood and peer influences tend to diminish with adulthood, the influence of small peer groups is particularly strong from early adolescence until the onset of adulthood. This is due to the relative independence from the authorities of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood that individuals experience in these life stages.²⁵ Small, close-knit peer groups usually form between individuals who live in the same neighbourhood, go to the same school, mosque or madrasa, or engage in the same activities, such as football, bodybuilding or martial arts training. If a few of the members of such action-oriented peer groups come to support a terrorist cause, the others often follow.²⁶ Arguably, the role of

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20. Vicki Coppock and Mark McGovern, “‘Dangerous Minds’? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the “Psychological Vulnerability” of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain’, *Children and Society* (Vol. 28, No. 3, 2014), pp. 242–56.
 21. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), ‘RAN YOUNG Issue Paper: Policy Recommendations’, 2018; USAID, ‘Tunisia Transition Initiative Final Evaluation’, June 2014.
 22. Christoffer Carlsson et al., ‘A Life-Course Analysis of Engagement in Violent Extremist Groups’, *British Journal of Criminology* (Vol. 60, No. 1, 2020), pp. 74–92.
 23. Adrian Cherney, ‘Exploring Youth Radicalisation Through the Framework of Developmental Crime Prevention: A Case Study of Ahmad Numan Haider’, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* (Vol. 32, No. 3, 2020), pp. 277–91; Carlsson et al., ‘A Life-Course Analysis of Engagement in Violent Extremist Groups’.
 24. Rudie J M Neve et al., ‘Radicalisation and Travelling to Syria Among Delinquent Youths: A Case Study from the Netherlands’, *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 22, 2020), pp. 249–86.
 25. Carlsson et al., ‘A Life-Course Analysis of Engagement in Violent Extremist Groups’.
 26. Scott Atran, ‘Who Becomes a Terrorist Today?’, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Vol. 2, No. 5, 2008), pp. 3–10.

companionship and small peer groups in convincing youth to join violent extremist causes is greater than the role external terrorist recruiters play in this context.²⁷ This is supported by data suggesting that a majority of those who join violent extremist groups or commit acts of terrorism either do so as part of small groups or were introduced to the cause by a friend.²⁸

In addition to situational factors that can play a facilitating role in driving youth towards violent extremism, the transition phase between childhood and adulthood is also characterised by biological and psychosocial factors that make young people more impulsive and action-oriented and less risk-averse than adults.²⁹ Youth is a phase of change and differentiation in which individuals search for identity and belonging and often come into contact with new peer groups, ideas and influences.³⁰

Similar to youth gangs, terrorist groups and networks provide a sense of belonging and status, and promise excitement and adventure.³¹ As Arie Kruglanski and colleagues describe in their significance quest theory, a need for personal significance, which includes the need for respect, esteem and meaning in life, is the dominant need that drives violent extremism.³² In combination with narrative and meaning frameworks that provide a common cause to aspire to, and contact with a network of people who subscribe to this narrative, the need for personal significance can take young people on the pathway to violent extremism. At the same time, this quest for significance can also be satisfied by peaceful activities for a worthy cause, depending on the networks and narratives with which a young person comes into contact.³³

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27. *Ibid.*; Adrian Cherney et al., 'Understanding Youth Radicalisation: An Analysis of Australian Data', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2020), pp. 1–23.
 28. Jessica Trisko Darden, 'Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth', American Enterprise Institute, May 2019; Shandon Harris-Hogan and Kate Barrelle, 'Young Blood: Understanding the Emergence of a New Cohort of Australian Jihadists', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 32, No. 7, 2020), pp. 1391–412.
 29. Ratna Ghosh et al., 'Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* (Vol. 23, No. 2, 2017); Richard C Baffa et al., 'Defining and Understanding the Next Generation of Salafi-Jihadis', RAND, August 2019; Werner Prinzjakowitsch, 'RAN Issue Paper: Annex to RAN's *Manifesto for Education: The Role of Non-Formal Education in P/CVE*', RAN Centre of Excellence, November 2018.
 30. Prinzjakowitsch, 'RAN Issue Paper'; Akil N Awan, 'Negative Youth Engagement: Involvement in Radicalism and Extremism', in UN, 'Youth Civic Engagement', 2016, pp. 87–94; Coppock and McGovern, "'Dangerous Minds"?'.
 31. Harris-Hogan and Barrelle, 'Young Blood'; Neve et al., 'Radicalisation and Travelling to Syria Among Delinquent Youths'; Yvon Dandurand, 'Social Inclusion Programmes for Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism', in Marco Lombardi et al. (eds), *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Among Youth to Prevent Terrorism* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015).
 32. Arie W Kruglanski and Preben Bertelsen, 'Life Psychology and Significance Quest: A Complementary Approach to Violent Extremism and Counter-Radicalisation', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (Vol. 15, No. 1, 2020), pp. 1–22; Arie Kruglanski et al., 'The Making of Violent Extremists', *Review of General Psychology* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 2018), pp. 107–20.
 33. Kruglanski et al., 'The Making of Violent Extremists'.

Technology contributes to these factors by enabling young people to connect online with groups and ideas on a global level and allowing them to build a sense of identity and belonging that goes far beyond their immediate physical environments.³⁴ However, while mainstream social media platforms and fringe communications forums are important vectors for the spread of extremist content that allow violent extremists to connect with potential recruits and forge international ties, technology tends to act as an enabler, not a cause, of radicalisation and recruitment.³⁵ Some might find a sense of belonging and personal significance in online communities dedicated to a certain extremist ideology, but research has shown that engagement in violent extremism typically involves offline interactions with radical milieus in addition to online interactions.³⁶ As is the case with offline groups and connections, the effects radical online milieus have on young people depend on the presence or absence of other risk or protective factors in their lives. If no other risk factors are present, or if they are outweighed by protective factors, exposure to violent extremist content alone will typically not make young people susceptible to violent extremism.

It should be noted in this context that impulsivity, risk-taking behaviours and the search for identity, significance and belonging that are associated with youth are highly gendered factors and processes that play out differently in male and female youths. For example, violence in pursuit of personal significance is often used as revenge for gendered feelings of humiliation and emasculation, and linked to socially constructed norms of masculine dominance and superiority.³⁷ Similarly, cultural expectations that are associated with the achievement of adulthood are different for male and female youths, with economic achievements often being necessary for male youths in order to get married and attain adulthood, while the achievement of adulthood for female youths is often dependent on the availability of men for marriage.³⁸ Failing to achieve these cultural expectations due to a lack of opportunities for marriage or economic achievement can lead to issues of failed or delayed adulthood and associated frustrations that can be exploited by terrorist groups for recruitment and mobilisation, though it is important to highlight that a vast majority of the youths who experience such frustrations do not engage in violent extremism.

34. Baffa et al., 'Defining and Understanding the Next Generation of Salafi-Jihadis'; Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, 'The Global Securitisation of Youth', *Third World Quarterly* (Vol. 39, No. 5, 2018), pp. 854–70.

35. Andrew Glazzard, 'Shooting the Messenger: Do Not Blame the Internet for Terrorism', *RUSI Newsbrief* (Vol. 39, No. 1, 2019).

36. Joe Whittaker and Chamin Herath, 'The Christchurch Terror Attack: A Case of Online Radicalisation?', *VoxPol*, 16 December 2020, <<https://www.voxpol.eu/the-christchurch-terror-attack-a-case-of-online-radicalisation/>>, accessed 6 January 2020.

37. Kruglanski et al., 'The Making of Violent Extremists'; Elizabeth Pearson, 'Gendered Reflections? Extremism in the UK's Radical Right and Al-Muhajiroun Networks', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2020), pp. 1–24.

38. Sommers, 'Governance, Security and Culture'.

In line with gendered factors that can contribute to directing the pathways of individuals into violent extremism, terrorist groups specifically recruit youth based on their age and gender.³⁹ While male youths are often recruited as fighters, depending on their age and training, young females in violent extremist groups are typically recruited to perform support duties and play a role in recruiting other female youth into the group. However, using female youth in attacks can also serve a strategic purpose for the group by signalling particular brutality and resolve.⁴⁰

In addition to risk factors that are specific to youth, young people are also experiencing some of the same grievances and other factors that are thought to play a role in the radicalisation and recruitment of adults. For example, geographic proximity to conflict, regular exposure to extremist propaganda, and social and political marginalisation can act as risk factors for violent extremism for youth and adults under certain conditions.⁴¹

Similarly, a lack of economic opportunities and actual or perceived economic inequalities are factors that are often argued to contribute to making young people – as well as adults – more susceptible to violent extremism.⁴² This assumption is linked to the perception in the literature that ‘youth bulges’ – population structures that are dominated by large youth cohorts – are associated with an elevated risk for engaging in terrorism and political violence.⁴³ Large youth populations tend to lead to higher rates of youth unemployment, which can lead to the prolongation of the transition of individuals into adulthood, as well as failed expectations and frustrations, and decrease the opportunity cost of getting involved with violent extremism.⁴⁴ Yet, while correlations between large youth cohorts and high rates of terrorism can be established in some contexts, there is no conclusive evidence for the existence of a causal link between the youth ratio and rates of terrorism.⁴⁵ Factors such as education, the strength of domestic labour markets and governance are likely to play a role in this process.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the theory has been criticised for reinforcing the generalised assertion that male youth present a security threat, which contributes little to predicting youth engagement in violent extremism

39. Darden, ‘Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth’.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. George Grayson and Flavie Bertouille, ‘Can More Jobs Bring Peace? Understanding Peace Impact in Employment Programme Design in Kenya and Somalia’, International Alert, 2020; Richard, Jacob and Keuleers, ‘Frontlines’.

43. Henrik Urdal and Kristian Hoelscher, ‘Urban Youth Bulges and Social Disorder: An Empirical Study of Asian and Sub-Saharan African Cities’, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 2009; Weber, ‘Age Structure and Political Violence’.

44. McLean Hilker and Fraser, ‘Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States’; Baffa et al., ‘Defining and Understanding the Next Generation of Salafi-Jihadis’.

45. Weber, ‘Age Structure and Political Violence’; McLean Hilker and Fraser, ‘Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States’.

46. *Ibid.*

while risking a shift of the focus away from other security concerns, such as small arms or illicit drugs.⁴⁷

While none of the risk factors discussed above can explain youth engagement with violent extremism in isolation, research indicates that vulnerability to violent extremism increases with the number of risk factors youths have across different risk domains, including structural factors, individual-, family-, community- and society-level factors, psychosocial factors and ideological motivators.⁴⁸ Still, a majority of the people who experience such patterns of accumulated risk factors do not engage in violent extremism or other violent activities. This can be explained by the presence of protective factors, which provide individuals who experience certain risk factors with the resilience to reject violent extremism.⁴⁹ Friedrich Lösel and colleagues identified factors that protect against different forms of violent extremism at an individual, family, school, community and society level. On an individual level, this can include self-control, adherence to the law and an acceptance of police legitimacy. At the family level, positive parenting behaviours, non-violent spouses and owning residential property were identified as having a protective effect against violent extremism, while good school achievement and contact with non-violent peers and foreigners protect young people from violent extremism at the school level. In communities and at the societal level, protective factors include social bonding as well as attachment to and integration into society.⁵⁰

Examining the cumulative influence of risk and protective factors across different risk domains on the propensity of youth to engage in violent extremism allows for a more nuanced understanding of vulnerability to extremist recruitment and radicalisation than the focus on youth in general as a phase of vulnerability. Such an understanding should also inform the targeting of P/CVE interventions in order to allocate the limited resources available for preventive programming in the most efficient and impactful way.

47. Anne Hendrixson, 'Beyond Bonus or Bomb: Upholding the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People', *Reproductive Health Matters* (Vol. 22, No. 43, 2014), pp. 125–34; Sommers, 'Governance, Security and Culture'.

48. Friedrich Lösel et al., 'Protective Factors Against Extremism and Violent Radicalization: A Systematic Review of Research', *International Journal of Developmental Science* (Vol. 12, No. 1–2, 2018), pp. 89–102; Gayatri Sahgal and Timothy Kimaiyo, 'Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: An Evaluation of a Mentorship Intervention in Kenya', *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 24, 2020), pp. 113–60.

49. Lösel et al., 'Protective Factors Against Extremism and Violent Radicalization'.

50. *Ibid.*

II. Youth and P/CVE Programming: Existing Limitations and Potential Solutions

HAVING OUTLINED THE existing evidence and theories about the relationship between youth and violent extremism, this chapter identifies limitations of existing P/CVE youth empowerment programmes. It then discusses how these limitations can be overcome by refining existing ideas and approaches and ensuring that the understanding of how and why youth get involved with violent extremism is applied to inform P/CVE programming.

Limitation 1: Targeting

Lack of Clear Guidance and Selection Criteria for Intended Target Groups

Based on the understanding that youth are generally more at risk of embracing violent extremism than other age groups, a high number of P/CVE projects rely on traditional youth work as a form of prevention.⁵¹ If done right, it is assumed that youth work has the potential of redirecting young people from recruitment trajectories and equipping them with life skills that enable them to reject violent extremism.⁵² It is also believed that youth work is able to reach and work with groups of young people that are difficult or impossible to reach through other institutions or interventions.⁵³

Yet, the implicit or explicit expectation of youth workers to assess the young people they are working with for signs of radicalisation raises questions about targeting. For example, in the UK, a review of 48 Prevent-supported youth projects by the Youth Justice Board found that neither directions on the intended target groups nor goals of Prevent-supported interventions were clear to project administrators.⁵⁴ Similarly, a study on Dutch youth workers showed that while they are expected to detect and report radicalisation processes among the youth they work

51. Merle Verdegaal and Wessel Haanstra, 'Ex Post Paper: The Role of Youth Work in the Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism', RAN Centre of Excellence, 6–7 December 2017; Håvard Haugstvedt, 'The Role of Social Support for Social Workers Engaged in Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism', *Nordic Social Work Research* (2020), pp. 1–14; Miriam R Arbeit et al., 'Youth Practitioners Can Counter Fascism: What We Know and What We Need', *Journal of Youth Development* (Vol. 15, No. 5, 2020), pp. 37–67.

52. Arbeit et al., 'Youth Practitioners Can Counter Fascism'.

53. Prinzjakowitsch, 'RAN Issue Paper'.

54. Alexander Frederick Hirschfield et al., 'Process Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism: Programmes for Young People', 2012.

with, no clear guidelines exist for the process of detection, leading to decisions being based on the personal judgements of individual workers rather than standardised criteria.⁵⁵ This is problematic as the personal judgements of individuals are dependent on individual values and assumptions and might be influenced by security discourses and manipulated by clients.⁵⁶

While youth and social workers' uncertainties around who to target with such activities do not automatically threaten the effectiveness of interventions, a lack of clarity has been shown to lead to arbitrary decisions and stigmatisation.⁵⁷ Aside from wasting resources on youth who are not at risk of engaging in violent extremist activities, such arbitrary labelling of young people can also backfire and increase distrust in public institutions and the state.⁵⁸

Some of the discussed uncertainties about targeting are linked to general uncertainties in youth work and social services around having to take on new responsibilities in P/CVE and having to conform to the agendas of security services and the police, which might not align with youth work agendas.⁵⁹ However, ambiguous targeting practices are also an issue in P/CVE youth programming more broadly.

Various supportive measures, including training on implicit bias and assumptions as well as the use of risk assessment tools, can help practitioners navigate some of the uncertainties associated with targeting youth. In addition to better support and guidance, clear criteria for the identification of at-risk youth are needed. As the previous chapter highlighted, not all young people, or all young males, are equally at risk of engaging in violent extremism, and targeting practices therefore need to go beyond identifying risk groups on the basis of age and gender only.

For example, a relatively comprehensive, locally relevant and evidence-based set of criteria for the identification of at-risk youth was used in projects that were part of the Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism II (STRIVE II) programme, implemented by RUSI in Kenya.⁶⁰ Drawing on the literature on risk and resilience factors as well as consultations with community stakeholders, a set of four primary and six secondary criteria was developed to ensure the

55. Annemarie van de Weert and Quirine A M Eijkman, 'Subjectivity in Detection of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Youth Worker's Perspective', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 11, No. 3, 2019), pp. 191–214.

56. Haugstvedt, 'The Role of Social Support for Social Workers Engaged in Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism'.

57. For example, youth workers did not consider nationalism, far-right extremism or far-left extremism to be part of their role in detecting radicalisation. They also reported a lack of in-depth cultural understanding as well as the pedagogical and didactical skills to deal with sensitive subjects, which made it difficult for them to decide when to report cases to the security chain.

58. Jan Jämte and Rune Ellefsen, 'The Consequences of Soft Repression', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* (Vol. 25, No. 3, 2020), pp. 383–404.

59. Haugstvedt, 'The Role of Social Support for Social Workers Engaged in Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism'.

60. Sahgal and Kimaiyo, 'Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism'.

intervention targeted youth at risk of radicalisation and recruitment. The primary criteria included association with violent criminals and members of gangs, close relationships with family members or peers who are involved in violent extremist groups or activities, expression of radical or extremist views, and affiliation with individuals who display extremist tendencies. Secondary criteria included dysfunctional family backgrounds, dropping out of school, religious conversion, social withdrawal, membership in a criminal gang and a lack of employment prospects.⁶¹ In collaboration with local teachers, social workers, community and religious leaders, young people in project locations who met at least one of the primary criteria and two of the secondary criteria were recruited into the project.⁶²

While these criteria are not universally applicable, the development of catalogues of criteria building on the literature (such as on the importance of peer groups in the radicalisation and recruitment of youth) and consultations with local stakeholders can play an essential role in improving the targeting of P/CVE youth programming. Given the limited scope of P/CVE programmes and the vastness of youth populations, focusing capacities on those who are most likely to engage in violence inspired by extremist ideologies is crucial to delivering effective interventions. If certain projects lack the capacity to include all identified at-risk youths in activities, precise identification of those young people can still be helpful in determining the need for follow-up activities or referring young people to other projects.

Selection and Availability of Youth for P/CVE Programming

Targeting criteria are important to determine who should be included in interventions in a given setting, but correctly identifying at-risk youth does not guarantee participation of those youths. Given the voluntary and sometimes self-selective nature of most P/CVE projects, it is questionable whether individuals who are identified as being vulnerable to violent extremist radicalisation and recruitment would be interested and available for relevant project activities.⁶³ At the same time, it cannot be assumed that young people at risk of embracing violent extremism would not volunteer to join such programmes. Yet, limited capacities of P/CVE projects, as well as the life conditions and commitments of young people, might hinder certain youths who would benefit from participating in P/CVE activities from taking part.

While projects such as Open Youth Work in Austria claimed successes in attracting individuals vulnerable to radicalisation to their youth clubs and drop-in centres,⁶⁴ reaching vulnerable segments of the population is reportedly more difficult in precarious settings. For example, as a study conducted in the Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon showed, youth work projects had difficulties attracting and reaching the intended target groups. Boys in the targeted youth category were often not able to join project activities as they were working long hours to support

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. Prinzjakowitsch, 'RAN Issue Paper'.

64. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Approaches and Practices', 2018.

their families financially and girls were often not allowed to leave their homes to participate in youth work projects.⁶⁵

Therefore, projects need to be particularly sensitive to the (often gendered) factors that determine youth availability and participation in interventions. This includes ensuring that project activities take into account time restraints of participants and building trust with local communities and stakeholders to encourage parents and guardians to allow youth to participate in relevant projects.

For interventions that rely on self-selection of participants, but also for those that select and recruit participants on the basis of certain criteria, it is also important that project activities are enjoyable for young people to make the intended participants more likely to choose to take part in them. For example, bringing young people into interventions through enjoyable activities such as sports, music or theatre could potentially reduce some of the issues with attracting target audiences to voluntary activities. Coaches and trainers might be well placed to reach some young people at risk of recruitment and radicalisation as they often act as figures of trust and role models for youth.

Another way to increase the likelihood of at-risk youth to voluntarily participate in project activities is to ensure that the programmes are relatable to the intended target groups and that facilitators are able to attain the trust of these young people. Those who design and implement programming should not make assumptions about what vulnerable youths find relatable, but should instead approach and involve youth in their research and assessment to better understand their needs. There are, however, some general conditions that can arguably contribute to the relatability of interventions.

For example, relatability can be achieved through diversity of staff to ensure that the beneficiaries' ethnic and cultural backgrounds match those of the project facilitators. A study on youth work in the Netherlands indicated that Muslim youth workers and those with a migration background were in a better position to make decisions and distinguish non-violent extremism from violent (Islamist) extremism than their colleagues.⁶⁶ Commenting on the securitised nature of youth work in the UK, Laura Zahra McDonald noted the potential role of Muslim youth workers in reaching young people at risk of radicalisation, alongside building a sense of identity and belonging that is assumed to reduce youth's propensity for engaging in violent extremism. However, the 'insider' role of Muslim youth workers puts them in a difficult position in regard to

65. Basmeh & Zeitooneh, 'Exploring Resilience, Violent Extremist Thinking, and the Impact of Peace Education on Syrian Youth in Shatila', August 2018.

66. Van de Weert and Eijkman, 'Subjectivity in Detection of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism'.

the Prevent reporting duties and the government's sensitivities around the 'types' of Muslims⁶⁷ that are considered to be suitable partners for cooperation.⁶⁸

Another example of an intervention involving staff with diverse backgrounds was the STREET (Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers) mentoring and social support project in south London, which was discussed in more detail in a Prevention Project paper by Emily Winterbotham on P/CVE mentorship interventions.⁶⁹ A study of STREET explained that the project used a comprehensive assessment framework and developed intervention packages tailored to the full spectrum of individual drivers of violent extremism and other antisocial and criminal behaviours.⁷⁰ According to Jack Barclay, who assessed the programme, part of the effectiveness of STREET in reaching and successfully mentoring at-risk youth was due to the fact that the programme was embedded in the local community, with staff understanding the conditions and the lived realities of local youth.⁷¹

Yet, while the diverse backgrounds of staff – which included individuals with a Salafist orientation – ensured relatability and allowed staff to credibly challenge extremist ideas on a theological level, they also presented challenges. Following a review of the Prevent programme in 2011, STREET stopped receiving funding, which, according to sources interviewed by Barclay, can be explained by the fact that some individuals involved in its delivery fell on the wrong side of the government's definition of 'moderate' and 'radical' Muslims.⁷²

It is certainly reasonable for governments to exercise caution with regard to who is involved in the delivery of government-funded or -supported projects. Equally, even if the immediate goal of P/CVE interventions is to reduce extremist violence, giving a platform to radical but non-violent views and attitudes that are at odds with liberal and democratic values and ideals of

67. This refers to the 2011 government review of which community groups share 'British values' and can be considered appropriate partners in counter-radicalisation, based on the state-articulated differentiation between 'moderate' and 'radical' Islam. For example, Salafi Muslims or youth workers who are part of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood are usually not considered to be appropriate partners as these groups are seen as incompatible with the counter-extremist narrative. See HM Government, *Prevent Strategy* (London: The Stationery Office, 2011).

68. Laura Zahra McDonald, 'Securing Identities, Resisting Terror: Muslim Youth Work in the UK and Its Implications for Security', *Religion, State and Society* (Vol. 39, No. 2–3, 2011), pp. 177–89.

69. Emily Winterbotham, 'How Effective Are Mentorship Interventions? Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (September 2020).

70. Jack Barclay, 'Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET): A Case Study in Government-Community Partnership and Direct Intervention to Counter Violent Extremism', Policy Brief, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, December 2011.

71. *Ibid.*

72. As part of the 2011 review of the Prevent strategy, a decision was made to re-evaluate work with and funding for individuals and organisations that were considered to be 'radical'. This included members of Salafi communities in the UK, who have been part of the STREET project. See HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*.

donor governments is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, a narrow understanding of ‘suitable’ partners can also potentially reduce the reach of community-based youth interventions. For example, directing funding only to partners that are deemed ‘moderate’ can, under certain circumstances, mean that particularly vulnerable youths cannot be reached to participate in intervention activities.⁷³

Similar to the potential benefits and legitimate concerns around involving radical but non-violent individuals in the delivery of P/CVE youth interventions, the involvement of ‘formers’ – individuals who successfully deradicalised and disengaged from violent extremist movements or activities – has been associated with certain risks and benefits in terms of achieving relatability. Work with formers has arguably been relatively effective in the prevention of gang violence and, as a study on the applicability of gang recruitment prevention approaches to the prevention of violent extremism argues, certain gang prevention strategies may be well suited to application in the field of P/CVE.⁷⁴ A number of organisations are already working with testimony of former extremists. This includes the Institute for Strategic Dialogue’s Extreme Dialogue programme, which provides open-access educational resources and short films showcasing the experiences of former extremists, and ConnectFutures’ use of live and film testimonies of former extremists.⁷⁵ While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to assess in detail the merits and shortfalls that are associated with the involvement of formers in P/CVE programming, it can be concluded from the reviewed literature that if risks are carefully weighed against potential benefits, such initiatives can play a role in delegitimising political violence and providing credible arguments against violent extremism.⁷⁶

Balancing government and donor preferences for ‘moderation’ and support for liberal values with the need for relatability and credibility in addressing extremist narratives and reaching at-risk youths requires a careful assessment of the ethical, political and strategic risks of including controversial individuals in interventions. Particular attention should be paid to the potential risk of funding for P/CVE interventions being diverted to violent extremist or otherwise problematic causes. Both formers and non-violent but extreme figures can contribute to improving the effectiveness of interventions in some contexts by making them more credible and relatable for at-risk youth, but their use should be carefully considered and closely monitored.

73. Barclay, ‘Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET)’; McDonald, ‘Securing Identities, Resisting Terror’.

74. Dandurand, ‘Social Inclusion Programmes for Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism’.

75. Lynn Davies, ‘Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally: What Works?’, Segerstedt Institute, University of Gothenburg, 2018.

76. David Parker and Lasse Lindekilde, ‘Preventing Extremism with Extremists: A Double-Edged Sword? An Analysis of the Impact of Using Former Extremists in Danish Schools’, *Education Sciences* (Vol. 10, No. 4, 2020).

Limitation 2: Simplistic Understanding of Youth Motivators

Another common limitation of P/CVE youth programmes relates to the simplistic, assumption-based understanding of the reasons why young people turn to violent extremism that often underpins interventions. As Chapter I indicated, pathways of youth to violent extremism are complex, and isolated factors do not usually suffice to explain why a young person took a certain path. Yet, interventions often appear to focus on single factors without taking into account the full spectrum of risk and resilience factors that affect youth.

Given that risk factors for violent extremism are often multi-dimensional, interventions focusing on one aspect of youth empowerment alone were not found to be particularly effective in reducing violent extremism. Therefore, there is a clear need for interventions in this area to emphasise comprehensive, integrated and holistic approaches that address multiple risk dimensions and that are based on a thorough analysis of the local economic, social and political context and needs.⁷⁷ Interventions in all the categories discussed below also need to consider gender-specific factors that are relevant to male and female youth and challenge the prevailing understanding of youth encompassing only males in order to become truly comprehensive and reduce gender biases.⁷⁸

Programmatic Focus on Diversionary Activities

One of the common implicit or explicit assumptions found in the reviewed P/CVE youth empowerment approaches is that boredom and a lack of engagement with positive activities in the community creates a breeding ground for extremism among youth.⁷⁹ Therefore, redirecting the attention and energy of young people to positive activities, including sports, cultural activities, debate clubs and theatre, is assumed to be effective in building resilience to violent

77. Oliver Walton, 'Youth, Armed Violence and Job Creation Programmes: A Rapid Mapping Study', Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre and Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, September 2010; Lilla Schumicky-Logan, 'Addressing Violent Extremism with a Different Approach: The Empirical Case of At-Risk and Vulnerable Youth in Somalia', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (Vol. 12, No. 2, 2017), pp. 66–79.

78. Marc Sommers, 'Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism', Promundo, 2019.

79. Steven Lenos and Annelies Jansen, 'Ex Post Paper: The Role of Sports and Leisure Activities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', RAN Centre of Excellence, 6–7 March 2019; Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., 'Thinking Outside the Box: Exploring the Critical Roles of Sports, Arts, and Culture in Preventing Violent Extremism', Policy Brief, Hedayah and Global Center on Cooperative Security, February 2015; USAID, 'Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE: Summary of Key Interventions and Examples', 2017; Institute for Community Cohesion, 'Young People and Extremism: Some Reflections from Our Local Studies'; USAID, 'Tunisia Transition Initiative Final Evaluation'; Umair Asif, "'Sports for Development and Peace" and Violent Extremism: The Role of Sports for Development and Peace Programs to Prevent Violent Extremism Among Youth in Pakistan', Seoul National University, 2018; Holly Collison et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism Through Sport: Technical Guide', UNODC, 2020.

extremism in a non-securitised way.⁸⁰ Aside from keeping young people busy, such activities are thought to foster the development of teamwork, social and leadership skills, as well as the ability to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways.⁸¹

There is little evidence, however, that channelling the energy and attention of young people into sports or similar activities has a measurable impact on the likelihood of those young people to engage in violent extremism.⁸² While diversionary programmes can have beneficial effects on project participants in the short term, such activities have not been found to be particularly effective in diverting young people away from negative environments and peer groups in the long term and introducing positive alternatives, particularly if they are implemented as standalone solutions without adequate follow-up.⁸³

Young people get involved in violent extremism for many of the same complex reasons as adults, and programmes need to be effective in addressing these factors to achieve a lasting impact on participants. If, for example, a young person finds a sense of meaning and personal significance in a violent extremist group, a sports project is unlikely to present an attractive alternative to participation in that group unless it provides a similar sense of meaning to the individual in question.⁸⁴ Programmes that have no clearly articulated theory of change about how involvement in such activities is intended to contribute to P/CVE objectives were found to be largely ineffective.⁸⁵ Only when they were designed and implemented carefully in packages with other relevant interventions and targeted at the right audiences were such approaches found to have the potential of fostering a sense of belonging and identity in addition to teamwork and social skills.⁸⁶ If they are designed and implemented in this way, sports and other diversionary

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80. Ivo Veenkamp and Sara Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism: Program and Policy Approaches Relating to Youth Through Education, Families and Communities', in Lombardi et al. (eds), *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Among Youth To Prevent Terrorism*; Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., 'The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism', Meeting Note, 2013; Fink et al., 'Thinking Outside the Box'; Saira Bano Orakzai, 'Pakistan's Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Reframing the Policy Framework for Peacebuilding and Development Strategies', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 42, No. 8, 2019), pp. 755–70; Farhan Zahid, 'Pakistan's CVE Programme: An Overview of Achievements and Challenges', *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* (Vol. 9, No. 6, 2017), pp. 11–16.
81. Katja L H Samuel, 'Desk Review on Sport as a Tool for the Prevention of Violent Extremism', UNODC, December 2018; Veenkamp and Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism'; USAID, 'Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE'.
82. Adrian Cherney, 'Designing and Implementing Programmes to Tackle Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons from Criminology', *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* (Vol. 9, No. 1–3, 2016), pp. 82–94; Samuel, 'Desk Review on Sport as a Tool for the Prevention of Violent Extremism'.
83. Cherney, 'Designing and Implementing Programmes to Tackle Radicalization and Violent Extremism'.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Samuel, 'Desk Review on Sport as a Tool for the Prevention of Violent Extremism'.
86. Fink et al., 'The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism'; Collison et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism Through Sport'.

approaches can act as an access point to marginalised or at-risk populations, thereby potentially extending the reach and improving targeting of the entire package of interventions.⁸⁷

Examples of this combination of components into more holistic approaches can be seen in interventions that engage young people through sports- or arts-based projects and use this platform for engagement with other activities, such as mentorship programmes or resilience training. The football-based project, *More than a Game*, recruited young men from the Newport Islamic Society of Melbourne in Australia to a football team and mentored them over a one-year period. The project engaged with young participants as well as the broader community, including the Newport Islamic Society of Melbourne and the police. The evaluation of the intervention showed strong qualitative evidence for its effectiveness in improving the participants' self-discipline, teamwork and leadership skills. In particular, the creation of Muslim–Jewish teams for a football tournament was considered by participants as a transformative experience that significantly improved intercultural communication and camaraderie among members of groups that otherwise did not engage with each other.⁸⁸ Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Peace Education programming in Lebanon similarly engaged youth on the basis of music, sports and arts activities to work on issues such as resilience, belonging and trust, with reported positive impacts.⁸⁹

Programmatic Focus on Building Confidence

Another common assumption that underpinned the reviewed youth empowerment interventions is that young people are more susceptible to violent extremism if they lack self-esteem. Based on this assumption, a number of youth interventions aim to empower young people that are thought to be vulnerable to radicalisation through self-esteem enhancement. This is often done through individual counselling or group empowerment training and is based on the premise that improving the self-image, sense of identity and confidence of vulnerable youths can play a role in reducing their susceptibility to violent extremist narratives.⁹⁰ Generally, the development of a sense of belonging and meaning as well as an improved sense of self-esteem can be positive for vulnerable youths. However, the evidence on the effects of increased levels of self-esteem on factors associated with violent extremism is mixed.

While some studies on self-esteem suggest a small but observable effect of low self-esteem on heightened aggression,⁹¹ other studies have indicated that young people with high levels of

87. Collison et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism Through Sport'.

88. Amelia Johns, Michele Grossman and Kevin McDonald, "'More than a Game': The Impact of Sport-Based Youth Mentoring Schemes on Developing Resilience Toward Violent Extremism', *Social Inclusion* (Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014), pp. 57–70.

89. Basmeh & Zeitooneh, 'Exploring Resilience, Violent Extremist Thinking, and the Impact of Peace Education on Syrian Youth in Shatila'.

90. Vasco Lub, 'Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy: Evaluating the Theories of Change', *Evidence and Policy* (Vol. 9, No. 2, 2013), pp. 165–83.

91. Brent Donnellan et al., 'Low Self-Esteem is Related to Aggression, Antisocial Behavior, and Delinquency', *Psychological Science* (Vol. 16, No. 4, 2005), pp. 328–35.

confidence often display higher levels of aggression and antisocial behaviour, particularly if they experience insults or humiliation.⁹² For example, youths with high levels of self-esteem have been found to show more bias towards individuals that are not part of their own ethnic or social group than people with lower levels of confidence do.⁹³ Similarly, some studies have established connections between narcissism, unstable self-esteem and threatened egotism, all of which are linked to self-esteem, and heightened levels of aggression and violence.⁹⁴ Allard R Feddes and colleagues conclude that ‘a positive relationship can be expected between self-esteem and support for ideology-based violence’, but that ‘this relationship will become weaker when controlling for narcissism’.⁹⁵ Winterbotham’s paper on mentorship interventions discusses the role of confidence-building in mentoring and comes to similar conclusions about the potential risks of increasing confidence levels as part of preventive approaches, while also warning about unforeseen consequences of interventions that lead to diminished levels of confidence.⁹⁶

While unilaterally focusing on enhancing self-esteem can potentially have negative consequences, particularly when intervention participants are already in the process of radicalisation,⁹⁷ approaches combining confidence-building with components building empathy and agency were found to be more promising. Based on the premise that the propensity of individuals for violent extremism and aggressive behaviour is related to low levels of self-esteem, empathy and agency, the Diamant resilience training in the Netherlands aims to strengthen these characteristics in young people.⁹⁸ An evaluation of the training showed that increasing young people’s self-esteem and agency is effective in countering extremism when combined with enhancing empathy and perspective taking.⁹⁹ The evaluation did also find the training to have the negative side effect of slightly increasing reported levels of narcissism, which the study

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92. Christopher L Aberson, Michael Healy and Victoria Romero, ‘Ingroup Bias and Self-Esteem: A Meta-Analysis’, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (Vol. 4, No. 2, 2000), pp. 157–73; Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’; Roy F Baumeister, Brad J Bushman and W Keith Campbell, ‘Self-Esteem, Narcissism, and Aggression: Does Violence Result from Low Self-Esteem or from Threatened Egotism?’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (Vol. 9, No. 1, 2000), pp. 26–29; Roy F Baumeister, Laura Smart and Joseph M Boden, ‘Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem’, *Psychological Review* (Vol. 103, No. 1, 1996), pp. 5–33; Tanja Stucke and Siegfried Sporer, ‘When a Grandiose Self-Image Is Threatened: Narcissism and Self-Concept Clarity as Predictors of Negative Emotions and Aggression Following Ego-Threat’, *Journal of Personality* (Vol. 70, No. 4, 2002), pp. 509–32.
93. Aberson et al., ‘Ingroup Bias and Self-Esteem’.
94. Baumeister et al., ‘Self-Esteem, Narcissism, and Aggression’; Baumeister, Smart and Boden, ‘Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression’.
95. Allard R Feddes, Liesbeth Mann and Bertjan Doosje, ‘Increasing Self-Esteem and Empathy to Prevent Violent Radicalization: A Longitudinal Quantitative Evaluation of a Resilience Training Focused on Adolescents with a Dual Identity’, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (Vol. 45, No. 7, 2015), p. 402.
96. Winterbotham, ‘How Effective Are Mentorship Interventions?’.
97. Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.
98. Feddes, Mann and Doosje, ‘Increasing Self-Esteem and Empathy to Prevent Violent Radicalization’.
99. *Ibid.*

found correlated with increased support for ideology-based violence, but this was largely offset by the effect of increased empathy on reducing support for such violence.¹⁰⁰

Given the limited number of evaluations of projects in this space with specific P/CVE objectives, it is challenging to draw definite conclusions about the effectiveness of confidence-building approaches. The concrete effects of increased self-esteem on the propensity of individuals to engage in violent extremism certainly depends on the individual in question and their existing personality, needs and propensities. Based on the reviewed evidence, such interventions can be effective, but they should be carefully balanced with empathy-building activities to avoid potential negative side effects.

Programmatic Focus on Economic Empowerment

While a relatively large number of interventions focus mainly on the provision of economic opportunities, particularly in parts of the world where youth unemployment rates are relatively high, empirical research has not provided conclusive evidence on a causal relationship between access to economic opportunities and violent extremism.¹⁰¹ In some contexts, poverty, unemployment and a lack of opportunities arguably play a role in youth radicalisation and recruitment processes.¹⁰² However, the factors determining youth violence and violent conflict are usually much more complex than a lack of economic opportunities alone, as a 2015 Mercy Corps study highlighted.¹⁰³

Similarly, little evidence about the effectiveness of such programmes in isolation exists.¹⁰⁴ In addition to the general lack of evidence on any meaningful causal links between access to employment opportunities and violent extremism, this can be partly explained by the fact that economic empowerment is linked to a complex set of short- and long-term trends and factors that are difficult for individual projects to tackle, particularly in short project timeframes. For example, the INVEST programme in Afghanistan, which provided technical and vocational education to increase youth employment, was assessed to be effective in achieving most of the intended economic goals. At the same time, it failed to reduce the willingness of project

100. *Ibid.*

101. Grayson and Bertouille, 'Can More Jobs Bring Peace?'; Trees Pels and Doret J de Ruyter, 'The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization: An Exploration of Theoretical Presumptions and Empirical Research', *Child and Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 2012), pp. 311–25; Carolyn Nash et al., 'Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education', UNESCO and Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, 2017.

102. UNDP, 'Preventing and Responding To Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach', 2012; Darden, 'Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth'.

103. Mercy Corps, 'Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence', 2015.

104. Sanah Sheikh, Shama Sarwar and Chris Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism: Rapid Evidence Assessment', Research Report DFE-RR120, Department for Education, 2011.

participants to engage in political violence as political violence was found to be linked to factors outside the remit of this project.¹⁰⁵

There is also some evidence that interventions aimed at the economic empowerment of young people tend to focus too heavily on the supply side by providing vocational or skills training without taking into account demands of local labour markets.¹⁰⁶ This can potentially lead to additional frustrations over unfulfilled expectations about future employment opportunities. If the focus of an intervention is exclusively on improving the skills of individuals, expectations therefore have to be carefully managed in order to avoid exacerbating existing frustrations and tensions.¹⁰⁷ As one study on the link between employment, education and extremism in eight Arab states (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Qatar and Yemen) demonstrates, underemployment or the attainment of training and education without subsequent employment can increase vulnerability to extremist narratives and potentially increase the attractiveness of violent extremist groups.¹⁰⁸ For example, a lack of adequate employment opportunities might increase grievances against society and the system and frustrations over a lack of personal significance and purpose. If violent extremist groups are able to tap into these grievances by providing compelling narratives of victimhood or fulfil the need for a sense of belonging and purpose through shared goals and objectives, they can be perceived as an attractive alternative. Equally, violent extremist groups can exploit such frustrations by providing (or promising to provide) attractive employment opportunities. Hence, providing vocational training alone may do little to reduce the potential of becoming radicalised if young people are not provided with adequate employment opportunities. In addition, economic empowerment interventions supported by certain donors are sometimes perceived by communities as ‘meddling’ in local affairs, which in turn influences the potential effectiveness of interventions.¹⁰⁹

105. Jason Lyall, Yang-Yang Zhou and Kosuke Imai, ‘Can Economic Assistance Shape Combatant Support in Wartime? Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan’, *American Political Science Review* (Vol. 114, No. 1, 2019), pp. 126–43; J Kurtz, B Tesfaye and R J Wolfe, ‘Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence? Impacts of Vocational Training and Cash Transfers on Youth Support for Political Violence in Afghanistan’, February 2018; Jon Kurtz, Rebecca Wolfe and Beza Tesfaye, ‘Does Youth Employment Build Stability? Evidence from an Impact Evaluation of Vocational Training in Afghanistan’, in Sara Zeiger (ed.), ‘Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism’, 2016.

106. Izzi, ‘Just Keeping Them Busy?’.

107. Grayson and Bertouille, ‘Can More Jobs Bring Peace?’.

108. The paper finds that while education in itself reduces the likelihood of individuals supporting violent extremism, a lack of adequate employment opportunities for educated individuals leads to a type of relative deprivation that is associated with a higher susceptibility of individuals to radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism. This effect was found to be strongest with unemployed or underemployed individuals who attained secondary education. See Kartika Bhatia and Hafez Ghanem, ‘How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism? Evidence from Eight Arab Countries’, Global Working Paper No. 102, Brookings, 2017.

109. James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, ‘Qualitative Study on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming Under the Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI)’, USAID, 2014.

Similar to combining youth engagement and mentorship approaches, combining economic empowerment interventions with elements such as civic participation and following up these activities with employment opportunities has been found to be more effective than providing vocational training alone.¹¹⁰ Many of the current P/CVE intervention packages already take this into consideration. For example, a four-year UNDP project aimed at mitigating the growth of violent extremism in Africa (Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger, Central African Republic, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) aims to improve livelihoods by improving access to education as well as jobs.¹¹¹

Projects across Africa that were supported by USAID had specific components aimed at improving young people's livelihood opportunities to make them more resilient to violent extremism. This includes the Kenya Transition Initiative Eastleigh Programme (KTI-E),¹¹² Garissa Youth in Kenya,¹¹³ the Somali Youth Livelihoods Programme,¹¹⁴ and the Peace and Development Programme in Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso.¹¹⁵ These interventions provided technical training, capacity building and civic engagement opportunities for young people. No final project evaluations of these programmes were included in the reviewed literature, but mid-term reviews indicated that programme beneficiaries were more involved in their communities as a result of their participation and exhibited increased optimism about their future.¹¹⁶

Yet, given the lack of evidence about a direct relationship between economic vulnerability and violent extremism, even the effectiveness of holistic, integrated approaches combining economic empowerment with employment opportunities and other relevant programming components is

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110. Beza Tesfaye et al., “‘If Youth Are Given the Chance’: Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youth Support of Political Violence”, Mercy Corps, 2018; Mercy Corps, ‘Critical Choices Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths’ Propensity Towards Violence’, 2016; International Business and Technical Consultants Inc., ‘Evaluation Report: Mid-Term Performance Evaluation of the USAID Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (SYLI)’, USAID, 2014; Mercy Corps and Consortium Partners, ‘USAID Somalia, Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (SYLI) Quarterly Progress Report, Quarter II, FY 2016’, USAID, 2016; Mercy Corps and Consortium Partners, ‘USAID Somalia, Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (SYLI) Quarterly Progress Report Quarter III, FY 2015’, USAID, 2015.
111. UNDP, ‘Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa’.
112. Khalil and Zeuthen, ‘Qualitative Study on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming Under the Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI)’.
113. Jeffrey Swedberg and Lainie Reisman, ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects’, USAID, 22 February 2013.
114. *Ibid.*
115. Theophilus Ekpon, ‘The Role of Young People in Preventing Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin’, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and Youth, Peace & Security, 2017; International Relief and Development Inc., ‘USAID Peace Through Development II: Quarterly Performance Report: Year 4, Quarter 2’, 30 April 2015.
116. Khalil and Zeuthen, ‘Qualitative Study on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming Under the Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI)’; Swedberg and Reisman, ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects’.

likely limited. As the potential unintended negative consequences of economic empowerment initiatives are difficult to forestall, particularly in the securitised context of P/CVE, economic empowerment components should only be included in programmes if there is clear evidence that economic factors play a central role in radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism in a given context. That is not to say that economic empowerment should be neglected altogether. Instead, rather than creating a link to P/CVE activities, economic empowerment should be dealt with in the realm of traditional development programming wherever possible.

Limitation 3: Danger of Securitisation

Portrayal of Youth as a ‘Suspect Community’

The suggestion that the individuals who are most likely to turn to violent extremism can be easily identified through visible signifiers such as age, gender, religion and ethnicity has been prevalent for many decades.¹¹⁷ However, as mentioned, the general focus on young people as a potential threat and the lack of clear criteria to decide which young people to focus the attention of P/CVE work on can lead to securitisation. That is, the ‘youth’ segment of the population becomes linked with security concerns that take priority over other concerns, often leading to the implementation of counterproductive measures that serve to marginalise and stigmatise young people, particularly those that are already marginalised, rather than empowering them.¹¹⁸

A prominent example of this phenomenon that emerged from the reviewed literature is the portrayal of young (male) British Muslims as a ‘suspect community’ – a particularly vulnerable group that constitutes a potential terror threat to the UK.¹¹⁹ This portrayal and the associated societal fears result in a heightened focus of P/CVE programming as well as ‘hard’ security practices on individuals within this group.¹²⁰ In the same vein, young Kenyan Muslims in regions labelled as ‘hotbeds’ for radicalisation have reportedly been increasingly viewed through a P/CVE lens and targeted through programming.¹²¹ The creation of suspect communities and the homogenisation of groups of individuals on the basis of their age, gender, ethnicity or religion through programming is problematic because it can damage trust in the state and public

117. Natalie James, ‘Treating White Men as a New Suspect Community Is Not the Answer’, *OpenDemocracy*, 1 October 2020, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/treating-white-men-new-suspect-community-not-answer/>>, accessed 9 December 2020.

118. Sukarieh and Tannock, ‘The Global Securitisation of Youth’; Richard, Jacob and Keuleers, ‘Frontlines’.

119. Coppock and McGovern, “‘Dangerous Minds’?”; Madeline-Sophie Abbas, “‘I Grew a Beard and My Dad Flipped Out!’ Co-Option of British Muslim Parents in Countering “Extremism” Within Their Families in Bradford and Leeds’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Vol. 45, No. 9, 2019), pp. 1458–76; McDonald, ‘Securing Identities, Resisting Terror’.

120. McDonald, ‘Securing Identities, Resisting Terror’.

121. Matthew Schwartz and Naz Yalbir, ‘Desecuritizing Kenyan Youth: Young People’s Perspectives on Community Priorities in Mombasa’, Policy Brief, Global Center on Cooperative Security, March 2019.

institutions, which can, in turn, backfire and contribute to radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism.¹²²

Aside from improving targeting practices, as discussed above, a step in the right direction in overcoming these issues would be to move away from a securitised portrayal of young people and acknowledge their agency and their full range of grievances and frustrations. Rather than considering youth as threats or victims, activities should engage youth as partners in the promotion of international peace and security and provide them with skills and opportunities for active participation in P/CVE. Their participation can range from defining frustrations and grievances to identifying potential partners and working to tackle and resolve grievances.¹²³ At the global level, UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and the UNDP's Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding highlight the potential role of youth in policymaking and programming on conflict resolution and prevention of violent extremism.¹²⁴ Particularly in conflict contexts where young people often lack safe spaces for interaction and participation, the active involvement of youth in P/CVE programming has the potential to play a valuable role in addressing their personal grievances, while tapping into their potential as local P/CVE actors.¹²⁵

Several studies reviewed in this paper discuss global youth leadership programmes.¹²⁶ The Extremely Together programme, managed by the Kofi Annan Foundation, works to enhance the capacity of young leaders in order to boost their involvement in P/CVE activities.¹²⁷ YouthCAN, the Youth Civil Activism Network,¹²⁸ regularly conducts activist-led Youth Innovation Labs, which provide a platform and network for young innovators to exchange expertise and tools for the

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122. Jämte and Ellefsen, 'The Consequences of Soft Repression'; Orla Lynch, 'British Muslim Youth: Radicalisation, Terrorism and the Construction of the "Other"', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (Vol. 6, No. 2, 2013), pp. 241–61; James, 'Treating White Men as a New Suspect Community Is Not the Answer'.
123. Tamara Nešković, 'Preliminary Findings: Evaluation of a Pilot Project on "Countering Violent Extremism in the Regions of Maghreb and Sahel"', UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2019.
124. RAN, 'RAN YOUNG Issue Paper: Policy Recommendations'.
125. Richard, Jacob and Keuleers, 'Frontlines'.
126. Robyn Broadbent, 'Using Grass Roots Community Programs as an Anti-Extremism Strategy', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2013), pp. 187–210; RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'; USAID, 'Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE'.
127. RAN, 'RAN YOUNG Issue Paper: Policy Recommendations'; Kofi Annan Foundation, 'Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Young People by Young People', 2018, <https://www.extremelytogether-theguide.org/pdf/kaf_extremism_EN_WEB.pdf>, accessed 6 December 2020.
128. Erin Marie Saltman and Jas Kirt, 'Guidance for International Youth Engagement in PVE and CVE: Youth Responses to Resolution 2250 and the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism', Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and YouthCAN, 2016.

development of counter-narrative P/CVE campaigns.¹²⁹ The effectiveness of these programmes is still unclear as both programmes have yet to be formally evaluated.

Young people do not hold all the answers to the issue of youth engagement in violent extremism and they are likely to resort to some of the same simplistic assumptions about the motivations of other young people as adults do. Yet, involving young people in P/CVE activities can contribute to finding better ways to identify and engage at-risk youth. It can also help to acknowledge and engage youth as agents rather than resorting to the often-patronising ways of dealing with their grievances and motivations.

Securitisation of Communities

Linked to the securitisation of youth and the difficulties many interventions have in identifying young people who are at risk of getting involved with violent extremism, a number of reviewed interventions consider communities of at-risk youth to be natural points of access to young people.¹³⁰ The basis for community-based, youth-focused interventions is the assumption that local communities, families, friends, religious leaders and community youth workers are in the best position to notice radicalisation in young people and exert influence that sways them away from violent extremism.¹³¹ Consequently, communities make up a core element of many youth empowerment interventions.¹³² Especially when it comes to Muslim communities, there is often an implicit assumption that these communities are homogenous and cohesive and that every member of the community is aware of potential extremist thoughts or tendencies that other community members might have.

129. Erin Marie Saltman, Moli Dow and Kelsey Bjornsgaard, 'Youth Innovation Labs: A Model for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', ISD and YouthCAN, 2016.

130. Institute for Community Cohesion, 'Young People and Extremism'.

131. US Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, 'The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Strategic Recommendations and Programming Options', 2016.

132. Institute for Community Cohesion, 'Young People and Extremism'; Erroll Southers and Justin Hienz, 'Foreign Fighters: Terrorist Recruitment and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs in Minneapolis-St.Paul', National Center of Excellence for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events, University of Southern California, April 2015; Michael J Williams, John G Horgan and William P Evans, 'The Critical Role of Friends in Networks for Countering Violent Extremism: Toward a Theory of Vicarious Help-Seeking', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016), pp. 45–65; UK Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Preventing Support for Violent Extremism Through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence – Rapid Evidence Assessment', London, 2010; Samuel Tyler Powers, 'Expanding the Paradigm: Countering Violent Extremism in Britain and the Need for a Youth Centric Community Based Approach', *Journal of Terrorism Research* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 2015), pp. 19–26; Creative Associates International, 'Project Overview: Tunisia ETTYSAL', 2018; Yssa Oumar Basse, 'Final Evaluation: Kallewa Manio: An Integrated Approach to Counter Violent Extremism in Diffa', 2018.

However, it was found that young people do not always primarily identify themselves with the communities they physically live in, but rather with non-local peer groups, formed around common interests, or online communities.¹³³ This presents a potential limitation for programmes aiming to use the support of communities and local authority figures to reach and engage with young people.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the securitised nature of P/CVE efforts can arguably reduce the willingness of communities, friends and families to report suspicions about individuals to authorities, even when they do believe young people might be in the process of radicalisation or recruitment into violent extremism.¹³⁵

A study on community-based youth interventions in the US focused on programmes addressing the recruitment of foreign fighters, particularly those with Somali roots, in Minnesota.¹³⁶ As recruitment in Minnesota was found to take place face to face rather than exclusively online, many of the existing interventions aim to strengthen the capacity of communities to notice and counter signs of violent extremism. These efforts have reportedly improved the relationship between the Somali-American community and local law enforcement agencies, but community members have remained reluctant to report potentially problematic changes in behaviour.¹³⁷ Another study conducted in the US demonstrated that friends are generally better positioned to notice early warning signs of radicalisation than family members, school counsellors or other community members. However, it also found that friends were reluctant to reach out to P/CVE service providers as they were concerned about breaching their friends' trust and stigmatising them by alerting security actors.¹³⁸

Interventions that were identified in the literature as being more successful in this context focused on outreach work with relevant communities in order to build trust, rather than expecting community members to report suspicions to P/CVE service providers or law enforcement agencies.¹³⁹ While these initiatives showed signs of success in building better relationships within and between communities, integrating young people in community activities and improving the relationship between communities and authorities, it should be noted that these findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all settings and cultural contexts. Factors such as the existing relationship between the community and the state, the cohesiveness of the community, the integration of young people in the local community, including local peer

133. Veenkamp and Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism'.

134. Sommers, 'Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism'; *ibid.*

135. Abbas, "'I Grew a Beard and My Dad Flipped Out!'".

136. Southers and Hienz, 'Foreign Fighters'.

137. *Ibid.*

138. Williams, Horgan and Evans, 'The Critical Role of Friends in Networks for Countering Violent Extremism'.

139. Powers, 'Expanding the Paradigm'; Hirschfield et al., 'Process Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism Programmes for Young People'; Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Preventing Support for Violent Extremism Through Community Interventions'; Institute for Community Cohesion, 'Young People and Extremism: Some Reflections from Our Local Studies'.

groups, and the existing level of radicalisation within the community can have an influence on the effectiveness of such approaches.

Furthermore, as mentioned, friends, peer groups and family members are central in determining the radicalisation and recruitment pathways of young people. While they can play important roles in keeping youth away from violent extremism, it is also clear that they can contribute to radicalisation and recruitment. Therefore, while building trust and actively engaging community members in project design to ensure contextual relevance and local buy-in are important, their role in actively keeping young people from engaging in violent extremism should not be overestimated.

Conclusions

THIS PAPER HAS discussed the evidence base for youth empowerment interventions in the P/CVE space, pointed to shortcomings and limitations of existing approaches, and identified potential areas of opportunity in youth empowerment interventions. Its key findings and recommendations are listed below.

Finding 1: Narrow, age-based definitions of youth are not applicable in areas where achieving adulthood does not depend on reaching a certain age.

Definitions for ‘youth’ vary across cultural contexts, but many interventions with youth empowerment agendas follow the definitions used by most UN agencies and target people between the ages of 15 and 24. This assumes that the concepts of youth and adulthood are defined by age, which is not necessarily the case in contexts where societies rely on locally defined signs of manhood and womanhood or when certain societal requirements, such as marriage or starting a job, are fulfilled.¹⁴⁰ Differences between conceptualisations of youth also exist between genders, with different criteria required for male and female youth to achieve adulthood in certain contexts.¹⁴¹

In order to be relevant to the contexts in which they are implemented, interventions should work with regional and national definitions of youth that typically take locally relevant factors into account, rather than limiting the understanding of ‘youth’ to those aged 15 to 24.

Finding 2: Young people are over-represented as perpetrators of acts of terrorism, yet both policy and programming tend to exaggerate the actual threat they pose.

The proportion of youth among violent extremists is relatively high, which can be partly explained by some of the psychological and social developments that individuals go through in this period of their lives, which contribute to a behaviour that can be characterised as more impulsive and action-oriented. As a result, they are more likely to engage in other risky behaviours, such as joining gangs or committing crimes, than other age groups. Given the large youth cohorts in many parts of the world, however, it appears that the prospect of youth engaging in violent extremism is hugely overstated, as the vast majority of the people that fall within the category of ‘youth’, which refers to different age brackets in different cultural contexts, do not engage in terrorism.

Research in this field tends to focus on those who did engage in terrorism, in an attempt to determine motivations and factors that contributed to the radicalisation and recruitment of individual terrorists. At the same time, research exploring why the vast majority of young

140. Sommers, ‘Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism’.

141. Sommers, ‘Governance, Security and Culture’.

people do *not* engage in terrorism, even when they experience some of the same conditions and frustrations as those who do end up being radicalised or recruited into violent extremism, is hard to come by.¹⁴² A greater focus on resilience factors and on the reasons for young people to *not* engage in terrorism, even when they are experiencing hardship and frustrations, is needed to better understand and counter youth radicalisation and recruitment.

Finding 3: Instead of viewing youth through a security lens, youth programming should engage young people as partners.

Youth agendas tend to adopt a highly securitised view of young people, particularly young males, that perceives them as a threat to peace and stability. Although the portrayal of youth as a security threat has been challenged in recent years, a true paradigm shift has yet to happen.

Several authors have highlighted the importance of moving away from securitising youth and involving them as partners in P/CVE rather than seeing them as threats. Including the perspectives and experiences of young people can be expected to make interventions more relevant and appropriate for young people. Increasing young people's sense of ownership over youth-specific P/CVE interventions could also help to alleviate problems in reporting suspicions that are a result of the securitised nature of the field.

Finding 4: Better targeting strategies are needed to allocate resources efficiently and avoid the marginalisation of already vulnerable groups.

Considering all young males as a potential security threat makes targeting interventions very difficult, leading to interventions wasting resources on young people who are at no risk of engaging in violent extremism. Poorly targeted youth interventions that base their theories of change on simplistic assumptions and target their interventions at the broad cohort of 'youth', rather than aiming to assess which individuals are specifically at risk, can also contribute to the marginalisation of project beneficiaries. Therefore, more sophisticated targeting criteria that are based on existing evidence about risk and resilience factors and their cumulative impacts, as well as locally relevant factors, are needed to avoid overly broad targeting strategies. This underscores the need for a better understanding of youth motivations and a move away from viewing the entire 'youth' segment of the population as a potential terror threat.

Finding 5: Young people have complex reasons for joining violent extremist groups and simplistic assumptions about their motivations are usually inaccurate.

There is a tendency to view the motivations of young people as entirely separate from those of 'adults', which makes little sense as 'youth' in some contexts includes individuals up to 40 years of age. Research suggests that the reasons young people join violent extremist groups are as

142. Kim Cragin et al., 'What Factors Cause Youth to Reject Violent Extremism: Results of an Exploratory Analysis in the West Bank', RAND Corporation, 2015.

complex as the reasons adults have for joining, and not taking this complexity into account risks limiting the effectiveness of interventions.

The evidence that some assumptions of youth-based P/CVE interventions is based on is weak. For example, there is little evidence that proves that enhancing the self-esteem of young people or diverting their attention and energy to positive activities, such as sports or arts, can by themselves be effective in countering violent extremism. While self-esteem enhancement or sports activities can act as a platform for other relevant interventions by allowing for regular engagement with at-risk youth, these activities by themselves have not been found to be effective. Activities based on a reductive understanding of youth and their motivations might be valuable in themselves, but they should not be linked with P/CVE and the securitisation that this link entails.

Finding 6: An improved and context-specific understanding of gender is needed in programming.

An improved and context-specific understanding of gender with regard to youth could help tailor interventions to the intended target audiences. A key premise of many initiatives in this area is that the youth at risk of radicalisation are mostly males. Programming that focuses on ‘youth’ commonly refers only to males, whereas ‘gender’ tends to refer mainly to females with no distinction of age, which leads to an overwhelming focus of youth empowerment interventions on young males. This understanding needs to be changed for interventions to become more comprehensive and reduce gender biases.¹⁴³

However, while interventions predominantly focus on young males, male-specific gender issues – including the links between masculinity and violence that persist in certain contexts – are often not addressed in youth-focused P/CVE interventions.¹⁴⁴ In order for interventions to address the full spectrum of driving factors of violent extremism, gender-specific issues of male and female youth, including issues of masculinity, emasculation, humiliation and delayed or ‘failed’ adulthood, need to be researched and integrated further in P/CVE interventions.

Finding 7: Empowerment can help reduce certain grievances, but only in specific contexts. In most cases, integrated interventions are more effective.

While a lack of economic opportunities, confidence or opportunities to participate in civil society or local decision-making are arguably relevant factors contributing to radicalisation and recruitment in certain contexts, interventions purely based on one element of empowerment are rarely effective. Instead, integrated approaches that combine different, contextually relevant programming elements have shown more potential for success. Also, as young people are

143. Sommers, ‘Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism’.

144. Lynn Davies, ‘Gender, Education, Extremism and Security’, *Compare* (Vol. 38, No. 5, 2008), pp. 611–25; *ibid.*

essentially targeted in all areas of P/CVE programming, youth-specific programming components should also be integrated in interventions that are not specifically designed for youth.

A better understanding of the mechanisms of routinely used P/CVE interventions and their long-term impacts would make it easier to define success of interventions and target them to relevant audiences. Many of the interventions discussed above are already effective in addressing specific factors or grievances. If local drivers and youth-specific factors, as well as the mechanisms of change of interventions, are better understood, these elements could be combined in a more deliberate and effective manner.

Finding 8: If they are poorly designed or implemented, youth empowerment interventions can do more harm than good.

Poorly designed and managed interventions may end up doing more harm than good. For example, economic empowerment interventions can create frustrations that act as factors contributing to radicalisation when they create expectations about employment opportunities that remain unfulfilled after the end of an intervention. Similarly, certain types of P/CVE interventions that are funded by specific donors can be perceived by communities as external 'meddling' in local affairs, which tends to have negative impacts on the effectiveness of the intervention and potentially also on the individuals who participate in them.

About the Author

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Claudia holds an MA in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London, and an MSc in Countering Organised Crime and Terrorism from University College London.

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Annex II: Research Methodology

IN JANUARY 2018, the Norwegian government commissioned RUSI to lead the Prevention Project, which ran for over two years. The project aims to improve the knowledge base for preventing and countering violent extremist programming.¹⁴⁵ Facing stark conceptual and methodological challenges (outlined in detail below), preventive interventions have generally relied on assumption-based logics with little empirical grounding, exposing the field to a range of theoretical, practical and ethical problems.

By attempting to answer the research question ‘what can work and what has not worked in preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE)?’, the Prevention Project addresses some of these shortfalls, synthesising academic papers, evaluations, policy briefs and internal documents to understand what evidence, if any, exists for the ‘successful’ or effective application of such activities. This process condensed key findings from the literature and interrogated the basis of these findings to critically assess the substance and limitations of the source material with the aim of understanding the effectiveness (or not) of the intervention approaches described in the literature.

The approach to this review involved: 1) identification of search terms and criteria for inclusion and exclusion; 2) identification of potential sources; 3) collection of material related to P/CVE interventions using key search terms; 4) identification of additional material through snowballing; 5) removal of any material that was not relevant to this study and grouping of collected material into the relevant ‘thematic’ categories; 6) scoring of these studies according to their quality and assigning a related grading (high, medium or low quality); and 7) analysis of the documents to diagnose common assumptions or theories of change underpinning each thematic intervention, the validity of these assumptions and the effectiveness (or not) of the intervention described in the document.

From the outset, it is important to highlight that this was not a systematic literature review in the traditional sense. Systematic methods and principles were, however, adopted where possible to improve transparency, rigour and breadth, and to gauge the robustness of available evidence. In contrast to the natural sciences where this approach was pioneered, there is an ‘inherent contradiction’ between the information required to conduct a systematic

145. The project drew on previous work conducted with Eric Rosand and the similarly named ‘Prevention Project: Organising Against Violent Extremism’. The collaborative relationship with Eric continued for the duration of this project. For more information, see Organizing Against Violent Extremism, ‘About the Prevention Project’, <<https://organizingagainstvle.org/about-the-prevention-project/>>, accessed 30 April 2020.

review and the structure, variance and content of social science studies.¹⁴⁶ The reliance on non-positivist, qualitative methodologies which generally define these disciplines creates challenges: commensurate quality appraisal techniques lack consensus and remain relatively undeveloped.¹⁴⁷ Systematic reviews have also struggled to adequately capture ‘less tangible, difficult to measure outcomes’, such as those in P/CVE, especially when they are nested in or intersect with wider processes and contextual dynamics.¹⁴⁸ Greater flexibility was therefore necessary to accommodate these limitations, and this paper describes the methodological approach adopted for this project in full.

The Literary Landscape and its Limitations

P/CVE has been contested and critiqued on numerous fronts, from being overly reactive and externally imposed,¹⁴⁹ to infringing on civil liberties, unfairly discriminating against ‘suspect communities’,¹⁵⁰ and producing unintended outcomes and negative externalities.¹⁵¹ It has also been accused of lacking a coherent strategy and for being imbued with definitional and conceptual problems.¹⁵²

146. Richard Mallett et al., ‘The Benefits and Challenges of Using Systematic Reviews in International Development Research’, *Journal of Development Effectiveness* (Vol. 3, No. 3, 2012), pp. 445–55.

147. *Ibid.*

148. *Ibid.*

149. Jon Coaffee and Peter Rogers, ‘Rebordering the City for New Security Challenges: From Counter-Terrorism to Community Resilience’, *Space and Polity* (Vol. 12, No. 1, 2008), pp. 101–18.

150. Imran Awan, ‘“I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist”: How the Prevent Strategy has Constructed a “Suspect” Community’, *Politics and Policy* (Vol. 40, No. 6, 2012), pp. 1158–85; P Thomas, ‘Failed and Friendless: The UK’s “Preventing Violent Extremism” Programme’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Vol. 12, No. 3, 2010); F Vermeulen, ‘Suspect Communities – Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin and London’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014) pp. 286–306; Arun Kundnani, *Spooked! How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2009); Charlotte Heath-Kelly, ‘Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Factual: Producing the Radicalisation Discourse and the UK Prevent Strategy’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 2012).

151. Shamim Miah, ‘School Desegregation and the Politics of “Forced Integration”’, *Race & Class* (Vol. 54, No. 2, 2012), pp. 26–38; Froukje Demant and Beatrice de Graaf, ‘How to Counter Radical Narratives: Dutch Deradicalization Policy in the Case of Moluccan and Islamic Radicals’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 33, No. 5, 2010), pp. 408–28; Tahir Abbas, ‘Implementing “Prevent” in Countering Violent Extremism in the UK: A Left-Realist Critique’, *Critical Social Policy* (Vol. 39, No. 3, 2018), pp. 396–412.

152. J M Berger, ‘Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption’, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, 2016, <<https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/J.-M.-Berger-Making-CVE-Work-A-Focused-Approach-Based-on-Process-Disruption-.pdf>>, accessed 11 March 2020.

A Confused Vocabulary

P/CVE is generally considered to be a broad umbrella term to ‘categorise activities implemented by governmental and non-governmental actors seeking to prevent or mitigate violent extremism through non-coercive measures that are united by the objective of addressing the drivers of violent extremism’.¹⁵³ However, linguistic ambiguities and connotations are widespread in the P/CVE space. This is in large part because many stakeholders tend to use ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE) and ‘preventing violent extremism’ (PVE) interchangeably, arguing that there is little difference in objectives, mechanisms or actions between the two.¹⁵⁴ Some development organisations, practitioners and scholars may opt for the PVE label to help distinguish upstream preventive approaches from any ‘security driven framework’,¹⁵⁵ criticising CVE as a vehicle for ‘securitising’ civic domains, such as healthcare, social work and education, and highlighting the term’s genesis in the US-led ‘Global War on Terror’.¹⁵⁶ However, the lack of a consistent definition means it is not possible to draw comparisons between the relative benefits of preventing or countering approaches.

Even within the UN system there are significant discrepancies: for instance, the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate and the United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism use the terms ‘CVE’ and ‘PVE’ respectively, despite sharing a relatively homogenous understanding of the steps necessary to diminish the threat of violent extremism (VE). Both agencies also occasionally conflate these appellations as P/CVE, exemplifying the inconsistency in the application of terminology.

This contestation extends to the adjunct processes of radicalisation and recruitment. The former has various definitions but is generally understood as the ‘social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist ideologies’.¹⁵⁷ This is considered to be a fluid, non-linear and largely idiosyncratic process that affects people in different ways, and does not necessarily imply the adoption of violent behaviour. Instead, radicalisation involves a transition from ‘relatively mainstream beliefs’ to seeking some ‘drastic’ social and/or political change, which may or may not involve violence.¹⁵⁸ Despite the tendency to frame radicalisation

153. Eric Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda’, The Prevention Project and RUSI, September 2018, p. 4.

154. Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.

155. William Stephens, Stijn Sieckelinck and Hans Boutellier, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2 January 2019, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1543144>>, accessed 30 April 2020; Lynn Davies, ‘Security, Extremism and Education: Safeguarding or Surveillance?’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* (Vol. 64, No. 1, 2016), pp. 1–19.

156. *Ibid.*

157. John Horgan, *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).

158. Mohammed Elshimi et al., ‘Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia’, *RUSI Occasional Papers* (April 2018), p. 9.

as a recognisable and consistent phenomenon, it is a concept that is often applied loosely to an eclectic mix of cases and situations.¹⁵⁹

In contrast, Edgar Jones describes recruitment as a 'dynamic process by which a willing or unwilling individual is encouraged or dissuaded from joining a group; it involves a measure of assessment on both sides'.¹⁶⁰ This is therefore distinct from, but may overlap with, the 'belief modification' associated with radicalisation.¹⁶¹

Conceptual Problems

Crucially, P/CVE also faces constraints and ambiguities as VE 'cannot be neatly packaged'¹⁶² due to its discrete iterations and drivers, leading to a myriad of potentially relevant intervention types, including: community debates on sensitive topics; media messaging; interfaith dialogues; empowerment programmes (particularly of women); training of government and security officials; and programmes aimed at individuals deemed to be 'at risk' of joining or being attracted to violent extremist groups. Consequently, 'prevention' risks become a 'catch-all category' that conflates with 'well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education'.¹⁶³ The mislabelling and 're-hatting' of development interventions alongside the covert nature of many preventive activities accentuates this problem, making it difficult to systematically identify P/CVE programming in both theory and practice.

This is compounded by the amorphous nature of VE itself, a phenomenon that is difficult to clearly differentiate from a wider spectrum of violent action, from insurgencies to pogroms and local riots. The UN has notably failed to develop any universally recognised definition of either 'violent extremism' or 'terrorism',¹⁶⁴ and delineations made in the literature are typically context-dependent and often contradictory, especially given the sensitivities and politicisation of such labels. Afghanistan, for instance, is considered an important arena for preventive interventions,¹⁶⁵ but staple case studies in conflict analysis, such as Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and Colombia rarely appear in the P/CVE discourse, despite all four appearing as comparative examples for assessing counterterrorism, disengagement and deradicalisation. This disjuncture

159. RUSI, 'Countering Violent Extremism Curriculum'.

160. Edgar Jones, 'The Reception of Broadcast Terrorism: Recruitment and Radicalisation', *International Review of Psychiatry* (Vol. 29, No. 4, 2017), p. 322.

161. Peter R Neumann, 'The Trouble with Radicalization', *International Affairs* (Vol. 89, No. 4, 2013), pp. 873–93.

162. Georgia Holmer, 'Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective', Special Report No. 336, United States Institute of Peace, September 2013, p. 4.

163. Steven Heydemann, 'State of the Art: Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice', *Insights* (Vol. 1, Spring 2014), p. 1; Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier, 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

164. Rosand et al., 'A Roadmap to Progress'.

165. Reza Fazli, Casey Johnson and Peyton Cooke, 'Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan', Special Report No. 379, United States Institute of Peace, September 2015.

exposes clear discursive, conceptual and theoretical problems with ‘violent extremism’ as a distinct analytical category due to its overlap with wider conflict ecologies.

The genealogy of P/CVE as a concept and a policy domain are also inextricably tied to ‘Islamist-based terrorism’ given its association with the ‘Global War on Terror’. It has since grown in both popularity and scope, integrating other manifestations of VE, such as white supremacy and residual strands of neo-fascism. Nevertheless, there continues to be a disproportionate focus on violent ‘jihadism’, meaning the true breadth of extremist militancy, replete with its numerous derivatives and sub-categories, is rarely represented in the literature.¹⁶⁶

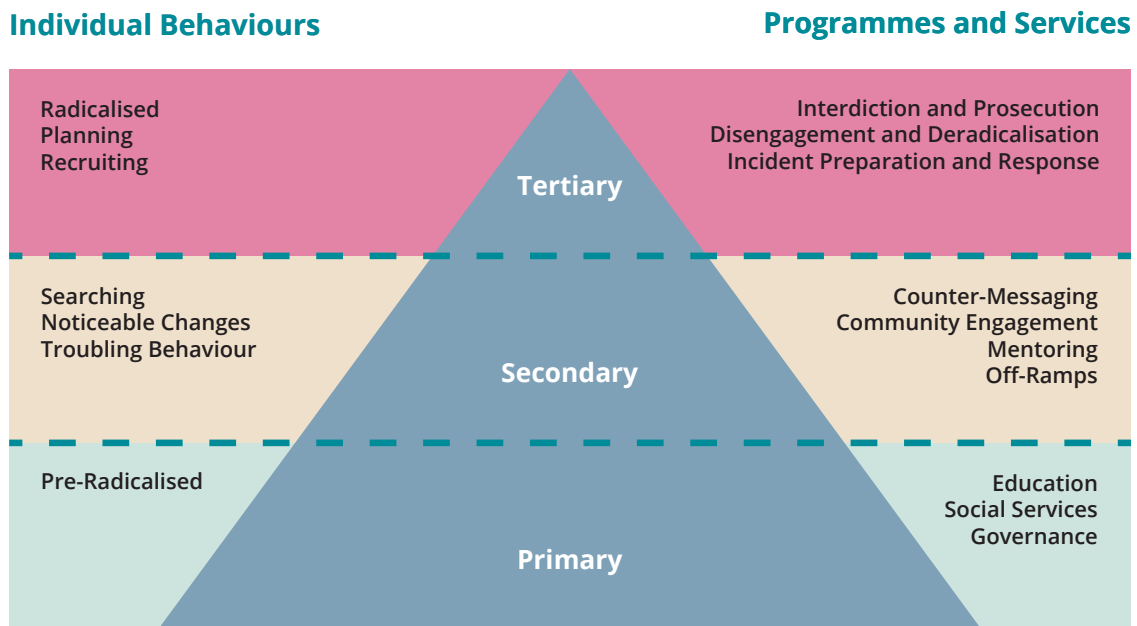
In such a confused context, the ‘public health model’¹⁶⁷ has become an increasingly prominent method for organising and reinterpreting P/CVE activity and agency, drawing on tested approaches for triaging ‘disease responses’ and healthcare. There are various iterations of this framework,¹⁶⁸ but they generally distinguish between three levels of intervention: primary; secondary; and tertiary. Figure 1 demonstrates the authors’ approach to the model adopted for this research project.

166. This disparity appears to be less pronounced in the ‘deradicalisation’ literature, where there has been a prominent strand of academic and practical engagement with demobilising members of far-right groups.

167. There are numerous examples of the public health model framework. See, for instance, Jonathan Challgren et al., ‘Countering Violent Extremism: Applying the Public Health Model’, Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University, October 2016.

168. Some versions add a fourth level – ‘primordial’ prevention – at the base of the pyramid, meaning social and economic policies which affect health.

Figure 1: The Public Health Model for P/CVE



Source: Adapted from Jonathan Challgren et al., 'Countering Violent Extremism: Applying the Public Health Model', Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University, October 2016.

- **Primary:** Broad-based and community-focused prevention programmes addressing a range of social ills including, but not specifically focusing on, factors contributing to radicalisation and/or recruitment into VE.
- **Secondary:** P/CVE activities that either target populations/individuals identified as being 'at risk' or vulnerable to radicalisation and/or recruitment, or address individual incentives, enabling factors and structural motivators contributing to VE. This category has been expanded from the original model proposed by Jonathan Challgren and colleagues, described as activities focused towards 'individuals and groups identified as at-risk for violent extremism'.¹⁶⁹ The addition of interventions that include P/CVE objectives in their explicit or implicit theory of change and/or those addressing factors specifically contributing to recruitment and radicalisation helps reflect contextual and programmatic heterogeneity in what is a sprawling, largely ill-defined domain.
- **Tertiary:** Engaging individuals who have already joined terrorist groups or are identified as violent extremists, these activities typically include disengagement, deradicalisation, isolation and redirection, or counterterrorism.

This is not a perfect typology, especially given the porosity of its conceptual boundaries and potential inconsistencies when applied across heterogeneous contexts, which introduces a degree of subjectivity when distinguishing between tiers. Nevertheless, the model is useful

169. Challgren et al., 'Countering Violent Extremism'.

for reconfiguring an otherwise convoluted P/CVE sector, highlighting the goals, mechanisms and target audiences of various activities as they respond to different stages of radicalisation and recruitment,¹⁷⁰ and demonstrating how they interact and synchronise with one another.¹⁷¹

Problems in Data Collection and Quality

Stakeholders working in the P/CVE space have long described a general lack of good-quality data, especially in relation to monitoring and evaluation. For instance, the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism found only five studies reporting outcome data assessing preventive programmes/interventions between 2005 and 2015,¹⁷² and other studies highlight both the limited availability and questionable quality of a large proportion of P/CVE content.¹⁷³ This is the result of various methodological restrictions that are not unique to the P/CVE space¹⁷⁴ but remain pronounced:

- **Problems of Attribution:** The programmatic logic of a preventive intervention or its 'theory of change' can often become incoherent if it extends too far upstream, as the pathway from delivery to impact of end-target groups is increasingly contorted or

170. This does not imply any linear relationship between different stages but simply reflects the intensity of cognitive and/or behavioural change within individuals during their own specific trajectory of radicalisation and/or recruitment.

171. Challengren et al., 'Countering Violent Extremism'.

172. Caitlin Mastroe and Susan Szmania, 'Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs', National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, March 2016.

173. Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, 'Countering Radicalization in Europe', International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012; Amy-Jane Gielen, 'Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances and How?', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 31, No. 6, 2019), pp. 1149–67.

174. Similar challenges have long characterised peacebuilding and development, but they seem amplified in the context of P/CVE in part because of its relative immaturity, politicisation and conceptual ambiguities. While guidance to help avoid 'reinventing the wheel' is available and the prevention space has become increasingly saturated with toolkits and manuals for improving monitoring and evaluation, robust publicly available data remains sparse. Valuable examples include Lillie Ris and Anita Ernstorfer, 'Borrowing a Wheel: Applying Existing Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Strategies to Emerging Programming Approaches to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism', Briefing Paper, Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium, March 2017; Lucy Holdaway and Ruth Simpson, 'Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation', International Alert and UNDP, 2018; European Commission, 'Operational Guidelines on the Preparation and Implementation of EU Financed Actions Specific to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Third Countries', RUSI, CIVI.POL and the European Commission, 2018.

convoluted.¹⁷⁵ Understanding and tracing these relationships within a litany of variables is difficult, especially when evaluators cannot disaggregate the specific impact of a project from other activities conducted in the same space, or segregate any effect from concurrent shifts in the wider milieu. This leaves attribution difficult to establish, with the lack of short, manageable causal chains making it challenging to exclude rival explanations for a specific trend or effect.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, intended outcomes in P/CVE usually involve ‘nothing happening’, for example, the absence of radicalisation and recruitment. Assessing the mechanics of interventions is therefore problematic as any metric relies on an imperfect set of proxies to ‘prove a negative’, particularly as ethical constraints in complex and challenging contexts usually preclude any comparison between treatment and control groups.

- **Indicators of Success:** Given the diversity of focus areas, confused or contested models of radicalisation, and congruently vague policy objectives, it is hard to formulate indicators of success that relate concrete measures to impact on beneficiaries.¹⁷⁷ Many expected outcomes in P/CVE involve ephemeral changes related to cognition, perception and opinion, which are challenging to track, especially with a paucity of secure baselines for comparison.
- **Operational Challenges:** Stakeholders are often reticent to divert resources away from core programming and there is little appetite on the part of local practitioners to publicise their ‘failures’ as this could compromise future funding opportunities.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, evaluations are encumbered by the immaturity of preventive projects: many long-term interventions have not yet concluded, and completed programmes are frequently designed with short time horizons, limiting avenues for longer-term or longitudinal analyses. Information sharing also relies on a culture of transparency and receptivity, which is difficult to manage when data is sensitive, securitised or heavily regulated.¹⁷⁹

Consequently, monitoring and evaluation in the field of P/CVE tends to concentrate more on programmatic outputs to demonstrate the functionality and efficiency of individual activities. These results are usually difficult to generalise and offer little substantive assessment on the effectiveness of projects beyond superficial benchmarks that do not account for externalities or indirect and long-term impact.¹⁸⁰ Where attempts are made to enumerate outcome-level findings, data is often ‘anecdotal and descriptive’, making inferences about effectiveness that are conjectural, ‘dependent on narrative interpretation’ and ‘difficult to validate’.¹⁸¹

175. Lasse Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money? Problems of Impact Assessment of Counter-Radicalisation Policies on End Target Groups: The Case of Denmark’, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* (Vol. 18, No. 4, 2012), pp. 385–402.

176. *Ibid.*

177. *Ibid.*

178. Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.

179. Peter Romaniuk, ‘Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism’, Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015.

180. Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money?’.

181. *Ibid.*

Given these limitations, it is therefore important that any enquiry into what can work and what has not worked in the P/CVE space establishes how robust the evidence base actually is, identifying not only what the literature claims but interrogating what these claims are based on.

Methodological Approach

As noted at the beginning of this paper, there were seven stages to the literature review. These are outlined in detail below.

1. Search Terms and Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

As part of the literature review for this project, the team designed a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria that would ensure adequate coverage in its data collection:

Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Geographical Locations	All	N/A
Language	English	Other languages
Conceptual Focus	Only P/CVE interventions aimed at the secondary level of the adapted public health model, defined as: 1) interventions that label themselves as PVE, CVE or P/CVE, counter-radicalisation, etc.; 2) interventions that identify factors of VE and how they will address these; and 3) interventions that identify 'at-risk' and 'vulnerable' populations or individuals.	Interventions that do not satisfy these criteria, primary and tertiary-level interventions (for example, deradicalisation, disengagement and reintegration).
Types of VE	All types	N/A
Publication Date	2005–present	Pre-2005
	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Format	1) Peer-reviewed academic outputs, including journal articles, working papers, e-books and other online resources, and other academic outputs; 2) grey literature, including discussion papers, policy briefs, journalistic accounts, conference papers, good practice guidelines and toolkits; and 3) evaluations assessing impact, including independent and self-evaluations.	N/A

Source: Table generated by authors based on the team's inclusion/exclusion criteria.

As noted in Table 1, only publications that focused on interventions falling within the secondary level of the authors' adapted public health model were included. While there are overlaps with other tiers, the huge suite of activities included in primary-level programming, and their often-convoluted relationship with VE as a specific social ill, is beyond the scope of this project. Tertiary interventions engage those who are already violent extremists and subscribe to a distinct set of logics, mechanisms and processes. As a result, this category was also excluded to prioritise a focus on prevention work.

While inconsistencies in the labels of both radicalisation and recruitment have been highlighted, programmes were included in this review irrespective of their chosen definitions for one or both processes, as long as the programme itself aligned with secondary-level criteria enumerated in the public health model. This is largely because the Prevention Project sought to accurately interrogate the literature within its own self-defined parameters and was therefore forced to replicate any discrepancies it found when mapping the P/CVE 'evidence base'.

2. Identification of Potential Sources

Having defined the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the team's experience, contact networks and well-known P/CVE knowledge hubs were leveraged to map out sources for a multi-track data-collection process. As outlined below, these not only included 'traditional peer review storage systems' but also 'alternative channels' to ensure adequate coverage of grey literature and other content typically omitted from the conventional 'information architecture' characterising both P/CVE and the wider development space.¹⁸²

- **Online search engines**, including JSTOR, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and British Library catalogues.
- **Official websites of international and regional donors**, such as the UN, the EU, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund and various European, Middle Eastern, Asian and African governments, alongside the US and Canada.
- **Websites of key stakeholders, NGOs and practitioners**, such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Mercy Corps, International Alert, Search for Common Ground, Overseas Development Institute, the British Council, CIVI.POL, the Global Center on Cooperative Security, and the Anti-Violent Extremism Network, among many others.

182. Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Richard Mallett, 'How to Do a Rigorous, Evidence-Focused Literature Review in International Development', Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), September 2013.

3. Collection of Material Related to P/CVE Interventions Using Key Search Terms

A list of 'search terms' was then developed, with the emphasis on P/CVE to avoid an overwhelming number of responses. As highlighted in the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the explicit inclusion of P/CVE terminology allowed a prioritisation of those studies that specifically focused on the issue of VE rather than wider development and peacebuilding issues.

Table 4: Search Terms

Search Terms 1	PVE, CVE, P/CVE, counter-radicalisation, prevent [prevention], 'preventing violent extremism', 'countering violent extremism'
Search Terms 2	evaluate [evaluating/evaluate/evaluation], impact, evidence, review; effective [effective/effectiveness], ineffective [ineffective/ineffectiveness], challenges, success [successes/successful], failure [failed/failing]
Logical Operators	and/or

Source: Table generated by authors based on the team's chosen search terms.

4. Identification of Additional Material Through Snowballing

This was supplemented with a series of forward and backward snowballing processes. Using the references and bibliographies of collected papers, any relevant studies omitted from the initial search were identified and several P/CVE experts were contacted for further direction and suggestions. Hand searches were subsequently conducted on Google to capture any remaining documents, particularly 'non-academic' articles, newly released studies and content on preventive work (either explicitly working with vulnerable individuals susceptible to recruitment and/or radicalisation or tackling any drivers/factors identified as contributing to VE) without clear labelling of these efforts as P/CVE interventions.

5. Removal of Any Material that was Not Relevant to this Study and Grouping of Collected Material into 'Thematic' Categories

These documents were individually screened by each team member to ensure the satisfaction of inclusion criteria. Any documents that did not meet the inclusion criteria were removed at this stage. The remaining documents were divided into the specific types of thematic intervention that were dictated by the reviewed literature: 'women-focused interventions'; 'religiously based mechanisms'; 'education'; 'mentorship'; 'P/CVE communications'; 'youth empowerment'; 'social cohesion/resilience'; 'economic empowerment'; and 'human rights and law enforcement'. In practice, many of these interventions are overlapping – for example, documents addressing mentorship programmes can also explore how critical thinking programmes are used in education. Therefore, certain studies overlapped between categories, especially those examining multiple or multifaceted programmes. Accordingly, these articles were scored once and integrated across the relevant thematic papers.

6. Scoring of These Studies According to Their Quality and Assigning a Related Grade (High, Medium, Low)

The articles were then classified through a rapid evidence assessment to score each paper's 'quality'. Quality was assessed according to a fixed set of criteria: conceptual framing, transparency, method, research design, internal validity, and cogency, replete with a series of sub-questions as detailed below.¹⁸³

Table 5: Quality Scoring Criteria

Scoring	Category	Sub-Category
3	Conceptual Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the study acknowledge existing research? • Does the study lay out assumptions and describe how they think about an issue? • Does the study pose a research question or outline a hypothesis?
3	Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the geography/context in which the study was conducted? • Does the study present or link to the raw data it analyses?
3	Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the study identify a research method? • Does the study demonstrate why the chosen design and method are well suited to the research question?
3	Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the study employ primary research methods? • Does the study employ secondary research methods? • Does the study rely exclusively on a theoretical or conceptual premise? (As explained in DFID's 'How to Note', 'most studies (primary and secondary) include some discussion of theory, but some focus almost exclusively on the construction of new theories rather than generating, or synthesising empirical data'.)
3	Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the study internally valid for achieving its objectives?
3	Cogency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author 'signpost' the reader throughout? • To what extent does the author consider the study's limitations and/or alternative interpretations of the analysis? • Are the conclusions clearly based on the study's results?
1	Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the assessment conducted by an independent party (to those conducting the intervention itself)?

Source: Based on the 'Principles of Quality' from DFID's 'How to Note' (p. 14) but adapted to reflect the scoring criteria for the 'Prevention Project'.

183. The criteria used to assess quality drew on an adapted version of the Department for International Development's (DFID) 'good practice' criteria. See DFID, 'How to Note: Assessing the Strength of Evidence', last updated 19 March 2014, <www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-note-assessing-the-strength-of-evidence>, accessed 16 March 2020.

Aside from the ‘independence’ category, which entailed a binary score of 0 or 1, the articles were assigned a value of 0 (absent) to 3 (strong) for each category. Team members swapped and re-scored samples of the documents to control for human bias, subjectivity and variation where possible. Once the articles were scored, the scores were aggregated and each paper was given a quality grading. Scores of 0–9 were graded as ‘low quality’; 10–14 were ‘moderate quality’; and 15–19 were considered ‘high quality’.

Two important aspects to this process need to be noted. First, quality was not an inclusion criterion in this study. Instead, the decision was deliberately taken to focus on quantity over quality in order to develop an evidence base. The quality grading was used during the analysis process to understand the weight and significance to ascribe to each paper’s findings and conclusions. Second, although quality was taken into account in the analytical process, the authors have refrained from associating (public) gradings to each reviewed study in the publication series out of respect for the work of other scholars in the field. It is also acknowledged that the grading system may have certain biases, as explained below.¹⁸⁴

7. Analysis of the Documents in Order to Identify Common Assumptions, Assess the Validity of These Assumptions and the Effectiveness (or Not) of the Intervention Approach Described

Once the literature was graded, the documents were analysed to diagnose common assumptions or theories of change of each thematic intervention. The validity of these assumptions was subsequently explored using the evidence presented in the different papers. This includes an interrogation of the claims made in the articles – for example, were their claims substantiated by the data presented? Were any conclusions commensurate with the evidence presented in the study? What assumptions or conclusions were not verified?

During this interrogation, the research team assessed whether the assumptions underpinning the intervention(s) were valid and effective. This assessment was based on: the study’s own assessment of impact, if available; an analysis of the evidence or data presented to support this

184. Anyone interested in obtaining information on these gradings for educational or research purposes can contact the authors directly for more information.

assessment; and the quality grading of each paper. Each paper was then coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’:¹⁸⁵

- Studies identifying a positive impact in relation to specific P/CVE objectives that could either be traced back to the contributions of a specific project, or causally attributed to an intervention, were regarded as ‘effective’.¹⁸⁶
- Studies that based conclusions on intermediate outcomes or anecdotal evidence of success were regarded as ‘potentially effective’.
- Studies that found that interventions produced both positive and negative results were categorised as ‘mixed’.
- Studies concluding that the intervention failed to produce the desired results were regarded as ‘ineffective’, while studies with an absence of any clear findings or those describing a project’s results as ambiguous were deemed ‘inconclusive’.

A tabulated summary of the team’s assessment of the evidence base for each thematic category, based on the aggregation of both ‘quality’ and ‘effectiveness’ assessments, are included in each thematic paper in this publication series.

There are nine thematic publications in this study as dictated by the literature gathered. These explore: ‘women-focused interventions’; ‘religiously based mechanisms’; ‘education’; ‘mentorship’; ‘P/CVE communications’; ‘youth empowerment’; ‘social cohesion/resilience’; ‘economic empowerment’; and ‘human rights and law enforcement’.

These are accompanied by two case studies exploring P/CVE in practice in Kenya and Lebanon. These countries were selected as areas where there has been a saturation of P/CVE activities and interest from a range of donors, including the Norwegian government. RUSI also has a strong foothold in Kenya given its office in Nairobi, which leads a P/CVE programme – STRIVE (Strengthening Resilience against Violent Extremism) II.¹⁸⁷ The two case studies will detail whether and how primary research fed into the results of the analysis exploring P/CVE interventions in practice in each country.

185. Our definition of (in)effectiveness drew on OECD, ‘Evaluation Criteria’, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>>, accessed 15 March 2020. However, given that significant numbers of the reviewed studies were not evaluations, the categories of effectiveness and ineffectiveness were expanded to include ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’ and ‘inconclusive’. This is in line with a similar analysis into the effectiveness of conflict prevention programmes in Cramer, J Goodhand and R Morris, *Evidence Synthesis: What Interventions Have Been Effective in Preventing or Mitigating Armed Violence in Developing and Middle-Income Countries?* (London: DFID, 2016).

186. OECD, ‘Evaluation Criteria’.

187. RUSI, ‘Strive for Development: Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism’, 2017, <<https://rusi.org/projects/strive-horn-africa>>, accessed 5 February 2020.

A concluding paper synthesised the learning from each report in order to answer the question driving this research: ‘what can work and what has not worked in P/CVE?’. This final study includes constructive recommendations for policymakers, donors and civil society organisations operating in the field.

Results and Challenges

To date, the team has collated 463 unique publications, with a current breakdown listed in the tables below.¹⁸⁸

Table 6: Type of Publication and Number of Studies

Type of Publication	Number of Studies
Academic Study	153 (33%)
Programme Evaluation	99 (21%)
Research Report	93 (20%)
Conference Report	15 (3%)
Policy Report	76 (16%)
Commentary	23 (5%)
Blog	4 (1%)

Source: Authors' research.

Table 7: Research Data Type and Number of Studies

Research Data Type	Number of Studies
Primary	190 (41%)
Secondary	192 (42%)
Theoretical/Conceptual	81 (17%)

Source: Authors' research.

Table 8: Research Methods and Number of Studies

Research Methods	Number of Studies
Qualitative	285 (62%)
Quantitative	9 (2%)
Mixed Methods	79 (17%)
No Methodology Given (N/A)	90 (20%)

Source: Authors' research.

188. Please note that this number is likely to increase to over 500 given that further snowballing of data related to several thematic P/CVE intervention areas will still take place.

Table 9: Research Design and Number of Studies

Research Design	Number of Studies
Experimental (Primary)	8 (2%)
Quasi-Experimental (Primary)	4 (1%)
Observational (Primary)	157 (34%)
Systematic Review (Secondary)	6 (1%)
Other Review (Secondary)	160 (35%)
No Design Given (N/A)	128 (28%)

Source: Authors' research.

The design and application of this approach was not without challenges, and the team concedes that despite subjecting its methodology to critical review by P/CVE experts in a consultative workshop convened by RUSI in February 2018, the project may still have been susceptible to some shortfalls and inconsistencies.

The team appreciated the difficulties of sourcing data from the outset but were hopeful that there may be greater stakeholder appetite to share information given repeated calls for greater transparency and exchange from donors and practitioners. Despite formal requests to at least 10 donors, none shared unpublished evaluation material. Acknowledgement and thanks for their valuable contribution go to some civil society organisations and research institutes that did provide access to internal documentation. Nevertheless, the dearth of material was problematic.

Given the lack of available peer-reviewed and public evaluations, grey literature was included to accurately reflect the complexion of the P/CVE evidence base. Integrating 'non-academic' material, such as journalistic accounts, policy briefs, presentations, practitioner reports and good practice/toolkit documents, allowed a dynamic assessment of prevention activities and facilitated a more in-depth analysis of what was perceived to have 'worked' or 'not worked'. Crucially, it also enabled the identification and tracking of common assumptions referenced and recycled throughout the literature to understand if there is any empirical evidence to substantiate such claims.

Nevertheless, this approach did present challenges. For example, collating relevant grey literature was difficult due to the sheer scope and diversity of content. It was also widely dispersed, making it hard to capture in a comprehensive and systematic way. While the team tried to mitigate these challenges with hand searches, snowballing and our own expert knowledge of P/CVE information sources, it is possible some valuable content may have been inadvertently omitted.

The reliance on English-language documentation likely distorted the review's findings, creating a potential bias towards Anglophonic scholarship and expertise largely situated in Western (high-income) countries. Consequently, the study's geographic coverage may not necessarily reflect the true breadth of the P/CVE space, although it is noted that many authors write in English, and donor- and government-funded publications are frequently translated. This means

that important interventions taking place in non-English-speaking countries have largely been captured. However, reductionism may still have been a problem given the challenges of including innovative or effective activities outside mainstream sources and search engines, especially locally led initiatives at the grassroots level that often receive little external attention and rarely have the capacity or budget to publish or disseminate their monitoring/evaluation outputs.

Relying on institutional and organisational websites also potentially undermined the objectivity of the search and retrieval process by introducing a degree of human bias.¹⁸⁹ As Richard Mallett and colleagues argue, divergent search functions and the unintentional exclusion of relevant sites means ‘potentially high numbers of pertinent studies can be missed’.¹⁹⁰ Using the team’s subject-matter expertise, an extensive stakeholder mapping was conducted to mitigate any oversights, but the scope and opacity of the P/CVE space created significant challenges.

Moreover, systematically distinguishing between primary and secondary-level interventions remained difficult, with certain studies requiring ad hoc arbitration by the team to see if it satisfied the inclusion criteria. These issues are clearly demonstrated in the inclusion of education-based interventions: although activities in the education space are rarely targeted at ‘vulnerable’ audiences and often engage all school-aged youth. As such, it could be considered a primary intervention. Yet, education initiatives included in this review described themselves as P/CVE interventions on the basis that the lack of education is a possible structural factor contributing to VE, radicalisation and recruitment. Even if we subsequently assessed that the projects described were primary-level interventions, they were still included on the basis of our inclusion criteria: they described themselves as P/CVE activities. In contrast, broader programmes tackling racism, bullying or civic awareness with no reference to VE or radicalisation were omitted.

Similarly, the team repeatedly cross-checked the scores of each article to limit any variance, but due to the discretionary and subjective nature of the quality scoring process, imperfection and bias were inexorable. While the quality scoring framework was adapted from DFID’s good practice for evidence assessment, there is also an implicit bias towards peer-reviewed academic content. The citation of existing literature, the specification of research methods and the emphasis on independence and empiricism in a given study are important traits and certainly strengthen its authority, but programmatic evaluations, for example, are not necessarily designed for this purpose. The premise of this method may therefore unfairly score papers that do not meet these criteria, enumerating scores that do not necessarily represent their quality or strength.

Finally, the paucity of independent evaluations and peer-reviewed material has challenged the methodological rigour of the analysis. The approach aimed to mitigate some of these problems, but the team acknowledges that conclusions have sometimes failed to be drawn or have been formed on partial data and are therefore liable to be subjective. As such, all findings need to

189. Mallett et al., ‘The Benefits and Challenges of Using Systematic Reviews in International Development’, p. 449.

190. *Ibid.*

be viewed cautiously and as an attempt to contribute towards emerging efforts to build the evidence base for research in the field of P/CVE.

Nevertheless, this project provides a valuable resource aimed at strengthening the knowledge base in prevention work, navigating where possible the conceptual, methodological and practical problems prevalent in the P/CVE space, and contributing to improvements in future programming.

This research methodology has been published in full as Michael Jones and Emily Winterbotham, 'Research Methodology: The Prevention Project', RUSI Occasional Papers, May 2020.

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