

EX POST PAPER

Research Seminar

Introduction

Tasked by the European Commission to boost communication and dialogue amongst practitioners, national policymakers and academic evidence-based researchers, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence held a research seminar on 17 October in Amsterdam.

The *Final Report* (May 2018) of the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R) was the springboard for the research seminar.

The seminar focused on:

- priority topics
- dialogue amongst researchers, practitioners and policymakers
- perspectives on future priorities so as to address current knowledge gaps, and how to better link researchers and their output.

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Researchers, practitioners and policymakers form the three pillars of a successful approach to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). For the HLCEG-R, increasing synergy and the interplay between these stakeholders is a priority.

The RAN research seminar has initiated a more systematic exchange between these stakeholders. With this in mind, the research community, the policymaking community and practitioners identified how to streamline their research priorities and modalities so as to integrate research evidence into practices and policies. Practitioners, policymakers and researchers discussed the most pressing challenges in P/CVE from their respective positions, and explored how each stakeholder could address these challenges through cooperation and joint focus.

Moreover, the research seminar explored primary research efforts and identified challenges and principal subjects for future research under HLCEG-R-prioritised topics. This ex post paper takes stock of the current evidence base of HLCEG-R-prioritised areas and the dialogue involving stakeholders in research, practice and policymaking. It also takes stock of prioritised topics to be studied through closer collaboration in the future.

Policymakers, practitioners and academics: sharing lessons and dilemmas

The EU research context of violent extremism and radicalisation is a highly complex arena: researchers work across many different academic disciplines (political science, international relations, sociology, criminology, religious studies, etc.) on specific violent extremism issues using various qualitative and quantitative methods. Despite the high volume of research material, many within and beyond the academic community recognise the necessity to undertake literature reviews and stock-taking of evidence-based research. Much of the scholarly work on CVE is based on theory and anecdotes rather than hard data tested through rigorous scientific methods. As Rohlwing (2016) astutely observes: 'what is chronically missing are **empirical studies** and good **qualitative** and **quantitative** evidence to bolster — or challenge — the common assumptions about CVE practice and policy.'⁽¹⁾ This legitimate critique of the state of CVE-related research is borne out below in our brief review of evidence-based findings in each of the prioritised research themes highlighted by, and organised in line with, the HLCEG-R report. Despite the compelling academic contributions to this body of research, there is an urgent need to focus on **better quality, interdisciplinary efforts** and identification of **research on prioritised P/CVE issues**. It is necessary to take stock of fragmented research,

and identify and prioritise the **research and knowledge gaps** to address.

Practitioners and policymakers working on P/CVE issues also indicate that we need a more robust evidence base to develop and implement effective P/CVE-initiatives. More research is required to better drive policy and programming design as well as risk assessment and evaluation tools.

The academic community and practitioner/policymaking communities have faced a number of **challenges** in their collaboration. First, academics want 'more **clarity on definitions, concepts and framing** related to countering violent extremism research.'⁽²⁾ Second, while academics often communicate in obtuse and overcomplicated **language** to non-academics, academics frequently overlook the **practical, on-the-ground realities** that practitioners experience. Third, academics have difficulty **accessing hard, primary data**: limitations in accessing/sharing classified information, as well as data protection and privacy legislation set out by governments complicate access to data for academics. In turn, this seriously impacts the academic community's ability to **test underlying assumptions** about violent extremism and P/CVE-measures. Fourth, academics and practitioners operate on **different time-scales**: practitioners are pressed to deliver results quickly, while academics are subject to **scientific rigour** and have the advantage of working with a longer time perspective. The drawback is that by the time academics publish their insights, the nature of the **problem may have shifted** and/or become less

⁽¹⁾ Rohlwing, A. (2016, August 17). Women, CVE, and the Problem of empirical data: How can we better measure women's roles in countering violent extremism? [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/women-cve-and-the-problem-of-empirical-data-how-can-we-better->

[measure-womens-roles-in-countering-violent-extremism/](#)

⁽²⁾ Zeiger, S., & Aly, A. (2015). *Countering violent extremism: Developing an evidence-base for policy and practice*. Curtin University. Retrieved from <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-23201691817.pdf>

relevant. In sum, 'there are notable differences between academics and practitioners with respect to the goals they seek to influence, the social systems in which they operate, the variables they attempt to manipulate, and acceptable time frames for addressing problems' ⁽³⁾.

Nevertheless, while cooperation between the research community and the practitioner/policymaking fields in P/CVE research poses challenges, crucially, it also presents many **shared opportunities**.

First, academics can apply **scientific rigour** and carry out **quality control** on practitioner methods and programmes. Providing the evidence base is key for programme design, implementation and evaluation. Second, practitioners can improve their own **critical thinking** so as to better distinguish between good and bad data ⁽⁴⁾, while academics can help **make sense of their scientific findings**, which often feature inaccessible details and contextualisation. Third, academics and practitioners can simultaneously direct their efforts towards the joint **design, implementation and evaluation of P/CVE measures**. Fourth, practitioner and policymaking participation in research discussions, focus and design **ensures policy and practical relevance** of research efforts. Fifth, closer collaboration ensures focused, targeted efforts and a necessary, **reflective knowledge inventory or stock-taking** from the body of research, to register knowledge, knowledge gaps, and any lacking elements that hinder advances in both theory and practice.

The research seminar focused on these challenges and opportunities for researchers, practitioners

and policymakers, concentrating on the substance of the research on the priority areas identified by HLCEG-R report as well as the process of exchanging perspectives and lessons learned.

Insights from the seminar

The European Commission, having funded over 400 000 research topics, stresses that P/CVE research needs to be further consolidated in a wider process through a **trialogue** between academics, policymakers and practitioners, and possibly through co-creation processes. By asking policymakers and practitioners what will be needed in 5 to 10 years from now, the research community can anticipate circumstances and needs, and identify knowledge and gaps through closer triologue efforts.

France is forging closer collaboration between research, policy and practice. Since 2016, such collaboration has increased the dialogue between researchers and policymakers over P/CVE issues. The French National Center for Scientific Research (**Centre national de la recherche scientifique — CNRS**) has reached an understanding with security and intelligence agencies, and fosters close collaboration between policymakers and the academic community, on violent extremism issues. Various scientific committees have been created under French ministries: for instance, the Scientific Council for Radicalisation Processes (Conseil scientifique sur les processus de radicalisation — **CosPRAD**) was established by the French prime minister in 2017. It maps research on radicalisation, and connects researchers and their output to policymakers.

⁽³⁾ Rynes, S. L., Bartunek, J. M., & Daft, R. L. (2001). Across the great divide: Knowledge creation and transfer between practitioners and academics. *Academy of management Journal*, 44(2), 340-355.

⁽⁴⁾ Rynes, S. L., Bartunek, J. M., & Daft, R. L. (2001). Across the great divide: Knowledge creation and transfer between practitioners and academics. *Academy of management Journal*, 44(2), 340-355.

Benchmarking and thematic workshops strengthen this cooperation. Several platforms exist to facilitate exchange and dialogue amongst researchers, policymakers and practitioners. The Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation (Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation — **CIPDR**) funds and coordinates the convergence of these French efforts on multiple levels. **Finland** has a **national network of researchers** on violent extremism issues. There is structured cooperation with good mutual understanding of differences between roles and of boundaries between research and policymaking communities. Researchers provide evidence-based knowledge but do not provide policy input. Through regular seminars, the latest evidence from academia is delivered to the policymaking community. Policymakers integrate the latest academic evidence into the national strategy on CVE.

Some EU states have a long(er) tradition of cooperation across researchers, policymakers and practitioners, while other countries have set up specific structures for cooperation such as scientific committees on P/CVE issues, think tanks or national networks. This type of cooperation is a **win-win situation** for all: it fosters interaction, policymakers can actively learn from and support research, evaluation becomes more effective through closer dialogue, and research, supported by government, becomes accessible for a larger audience.

A **mutual understanding of other parties' roles and responsibilities** and a willingness to invest time and resources will build a solid foundation for cooperation. It is essential that the dialogue between researchers and policymakers be constructively respectful, without hostility.

Report structure

This ex post report explores the following research themes: (a) signs and risks of radicalisation: risk assessment tools; (b) understanding resilience factors; (c) the evidence base for radicalisation factors and pathways, including trends in home-grown radicalisation and returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs); (d) evaluations of different prison regimes and pathways leading towards and from radicalisation in prison; (e) dealing with vulnerable groups (children, migrants and asylum seekers); (f) extremist ideas and their dissemination via the Internet or other media; (g) evaluation and successful interventions in P/CVE; and (h) research lessons from P/CVE beyond the EU.

Each theme includes a section which also contains a summary of some of the research insights and evidence bases from peer-reviewed academic contributions. It is by no means exhaustive, but acts as a reference point for building on knowledge from the academic community as well as from practitioner and policymaking perspectives. Insights from discussions at the research seminar are featured at the end of each section under 'Research gaps and findings'.

Signs and risks of radicalisation: risk assessment tools

According to Borum (2015), there are eight risk clusters involved in violent extremism and terrorism: affect/emotions, behaviours, cognitive style, beliefs/ideology, attitudes, social factors,

and identities and capacities⁽⁵⁾. Significant research has been carried out on how to better conduct specialised terrorism-related risk assessments. The existing risk assessment tools concentrate on assessing individuals' thinking and reasoning and these individuals' risk of committing violent acts. Examples are the **Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG 22+)**, the **Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF)**, the **Violent Extremism Risk Assessment, version 2 (VERA-2)**, the **Structured Assessment of Violent Extremism (SAVE)** and the **Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18)**. Many of these risk assessment tools have three components: engagement, intent and capability. These are further subdivided into specific risk indicators predicting and assessing psychological predictors, affinities and attitudes towards terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. All risk assessment tools feature lists of indicators for factors like the following: (a) beliefs and attitudes, (b) context and intent, (c) history and capabilities, (d) commitment and motivation, and (e) protective circumstances.

The British government employs ERG 22+ in the screening process of individuals referred to the Channel process. Similarly, VERA-2 is widely used by prison and probation services in several countries. The **IR46** (Islamitisch Radicaliserings-model) is a Dutch risk assessment model used in a multi-agency setting by Haaglanden Regional Safety House (Veiligheidshuis). These risk assessment tools share 'risk dimensions, such as intent and capability, and risk factors, like injustices or grievances, indoctrination,

dehumanisation, us-and-them thinking'⁽⁶⁾. There are a number of differences between the different risk assessment instruments. The ERG 22+ was developed for individuals convicted of terrorism offences. VERA-2 is a specialised risk assessment tool designed for use with individuals either having history of extremist violence, and/or actively involved in violent extremism (breaking the law). TRAP-18 is used as an investigative framework and employs 8 proximal warning behaviours and 10 longer term distal characteristics. TRAP-18 is a 'risk investigative template' designed to guide intelligence analysts in making threat assessments of targeted violence. Similar to TRAP-18, the RAN CoE Returnee 45 is a risk investigative tool that has not yet been tested or validated. In addition, the VERA-2 creators also designed CYBERA (derived from the term CYBER-VERA) which combines cyber-related risk indicators with VERA-2 risk indicators.

The **Structured Assessment of Violent Extremism (SAVE)** is designed to assess the extremist way of thinking and the influence this has on mindsets, in terms of committing violence. SAVE comprises a 'checklist inventory of 30 'cognitive' risk indicators (i.e. perceptions and beliefs) and a software program which functions as visualisation application'⁽⁷⁾. A structured professional judgement (SPJ) tool, Model of Analysis for Differentiating Delusional Disorder from the Radicalization of Extreme Beliefs-17 Factor (**MADDD-or-Rad-17**) was developed by Mark Cunningham (2018) to determine whether an

⁽⁵⁾ Borum, R. (2015). Assessing risk for terrorism involvement. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2(2), 63.

⁽⁶⁾ Dean, G., & Pettet, G. (2017). The 3 R's of risk assessment for violent extremism. *Journal of forensic practice*, 19(2), 91-101.

⁽⁷⁾ Dean, G., & Pettet, G. (2017). The 3 R's of risk assessment for violent extremism. *Journal of forensic practice*, 19(2), 93.

offense is the product of a delusional disorder or is due to the radicalisation of extreme beliefs ⁽⁸⁾.

Broadly speaking, there are **three basic models of risk assessment**, as explained below.

- Professional judgement involving risk predictions based solely on the professional's experience and knowledge of the individual being assessed.
- Actuarial tools based on checklists of risk indicators, using a formula which results in an overall risk prediction (e.g. high, medium or low risk).
- SPJ, which combines both approaches (professional and actuarial) to guide the process systematically, identifying risks and evaluating the individual in context. In this SPJ model, assessment is based on both the presence and relevance of risk factors for the individual concerned.

These models guide the multi-agency process, create a shared understanding across government agencies and provide useable risk indicators for future violence. They are also useful from a rehabilitation/treatment perspective, as some risk assessments include protective factors.

Research efforts assess the reliability of these risk assessment tools and the subjectivity of professional judgement in risk assessments. Researchers highlight methodological issues such as low base rates as well as validation and reliability problems in capturing diverse personality types and risky behaviours. Some researchers have questioned whether the rating

scales used in VERA-2 have in fact been reviewed or evidenced at all ⁽⁹⁾.

In a systematic review of risk assessment tools, Scarcella et al. (2016) note that only half of the studies/tools they looked at contained a transparent description of instruments, and the assessment of psychometric properties was of poor quality overall. This study encourages researchers to develop a gold standard of validity and reliability for risk assessment guidelines and checklists. It stresses that 'instruments need to be tested, validity and reliability need to be cross-verified, and studies need to be capable of being replicated and critiqued.' Serious ethical issues arise if these risk assessment tools are used without prior disclosure of study results.

Further research is necessary on the relative value of the risk factors. Borum (2015) proposes eight core domains 'as a framework for data gathering: Affect/Emotions, Behaviours, Cognitive Style, Beliefs/Ideology, Attitudes, Social factors, Identities, and Capacities, with each domain containing more specific lines of inquiry to include both "activating" and "disinhibiting" mechanisms' ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Some researchers stress the need to contextualise risk factors when assessing individual trajectories, in order to determine which factors are more significant. Others argue that it is necessary to distinguish between vulnerability in general and the specific vulnerability related to radicalisation. Hence, it is important to 'disaggregate "vulnerability" to radicalisation into two dimensions: susceptibility to moral change and

⁽⁸⁾ Cunningham, M. D. (2018). Differentiating delusional disorder from the radicalization of extreme beliefs: A 17-factor model. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 5(3), 137.

⁽⁹⁾ Scarcella, A., Page, R., & Furtado, V. (2016). Terrorism, radicalisation, extremism, authoritarianism

and fundamentalism: a systematic review of the quality and psychometric properties of assessments. *PloS one*, 11(12), e0166947.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Borum, R. (2015). Assessing risk for terrorism involvement. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2(2), 63.

susceptibility to exposure to radicalising settings' ⁽¹¹⁾. The former dimension is governed by cognitive capabilities and value-based rules, while the latter is governed by social and self selection. Borum (2014) argues that risk assessments need to focus on an individual's 'motivational, attributional, volitional, emotional, attitudinal, and worldview propensities' ⁽¹²⁾.

Different forms of criticism are directed against risk assessment tools. Very few risk assessment tools and risk factors are empirically validated. They are also applied inconsistently, and there is an overreliance on static risk factors ⁽¹³⁾. Some argue that there is an overemphasis on the individual, and not enough emphasis on the individual's interrelationship with contextual factors (the environment). Others claim that the aim of risk assessment tools is to identify the individual's risk of being radicalised rather than of violence.

Another noteworthy issue is the level of assessor skill and training: this is important, as risk assessments often are carried out by a single assessor. The question of who should be conducting risk assessments is also relevant. For example, van de Weert and Eijkman raise the issue of subjectivity in the detection of radicalisation and violent extremism: they observe that youth

workers are insufficiently equipped to detect (violent) extremism at the local level ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Research gaps and findings

A number of EU projects have studied the risk assessment of violent extremists. The research indicates a **positive correlation between mental health disorders and violent extremism (but there is no causality)** — a fact that is sometimes difficult for policymakers to acknowledge. Although various **EU-funded tools** have been developed, it is clear that they **complement each other** rather than compete with or duplicate the other's efforts.

The European project 'Database and Assessment of Risks of violent Extremists' (**DARE**) developed a database of convicted terrorists and violent extremists and their acts. The accompanying DARE codebook identifies the most critical risk factors, and it will be used to systematically score judicial files. The **DARE codebook** utilises 'demographic data, indictment and act analysis, analysis of the subject, criminal and personal history, developmental pathway, psychopathology, radicalisation, and items of the risk assessment instrument for violent extremism VERA-2R' ⁽¹⁵⁾.

DARE and other similar projects must **take into account and conform to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU**

⁽¹¹⁾ Corner, E., Bouhana, N., & Gill, P. (2018). The multifinality of vulnerability indicators in lone-actor terrorism. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1-22.

⁽¹²⁾ Borum, R. (2014). Psychological vulnerabilities and propensities for involvement in violent extremism. *Behavioral sciences & the law*, 32(3), 286-305.

⁽¹³⁾ RTI International. (2018). *Countering violent extremism: The application of risk assessment tools in the criminal justice and rehabilitation process. Literature Review*. Prepared for First Responders Group Department of Homeland Security Science

and Technology Directorate. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OPSR_TP_CVE-Application-Risk-Assessment-Tools-Criminal-Rehab-Process_2018Feb-508.pdf

⁽¹⁴⁾ van de Weert, A., & Eijkman, Q. A. (2018).

Subjectivity in detection of radicalisation and violent extremism: a youth worker's perspective. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-24.

⁽¹⁵⁾ DARE Codebook Violent Extremists (Version 05-10-18) in author's possession.

2016/679). In so doing, one option is to use encrypted personal data.

MINDb4ACT is a collaborative project with 7 law enforcement agencies (LEAs), think tanks, research centres, universities, industry associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in 10 Member States (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Austria, Poland, Finland and the United Kingdom). Through 21 pilot projects, practices and interventions will be held in 5 key areas: (a) prisons and the judiciary, (b) schools and learning centres, (c) immigration hotspots and asylum centres, (d) cities, and (e) the internet and media ⁽¹⁶⁾. The objective is to prevent rather than predict violent extremism.

'Policy recommendation and improved communication tools for law enforcement and security agencies preventing violent radicalisation' (**Pericles**) is a project dedicated to the 'transitional processes of radicalisation' ⁽¹⁷⁾. This project followed 15 offenders in Germany, and found, following a professional diagnosis, that 6 of the 15 suffered from mental disorders. Far-right extremist attitudes are on the rise in young individuals from the age of 15, and are more likely if the young individual's family holds such attitudes than if his or her friends do.

Understanding resilience factors

Broadly speaking, resilience is an individual's ability to adapt to and overcome adversity in the

face of challenging circumstances and traumas. The issue of resilience is complex and multifaceted, as the level of resilience must be taken into account: resilience at individual level (to overcome a terrorist attack or to foster individual resilience to reject extremist messages) or resilience at community level (developing strong social bonds critical to preventing violence and community polarisation).

There are many protective factors in violence prevention that are applicable to violent extremism.

Sieckelinck and Gielen (2017) identify several protective factors that promote resilience in individuals: enhancing social coping skills through anger management and conflict resolution; democratic citizenship; religious knowledge, counter-narratives and internet-safeguarding measures; participation and trauma therapy; a supportive and warm family environment; and autonomy, self-esteem and a sense of self-control (agency) which includes social and emotional well-being and life skills ⁽¹⁸⁾.

In a systematic review of research on protective factors against extremism and violent radicalisation, **Lösel et al. (2018)** identify 30 different protective factors with a protective effect: 'self-control, adherence to law, acceptance of police legitimacy, illness, positive parenting behaviour, non-violent significant others, good school achievement, non-violent peers, contact to foreigners, and a basic attachment to society.'⁽¹⁹⁾

⁽¹⁶⁾ MINDb4ACT. (2018). About MINDb4ACT. Retrieved from <https://mindb4act.eu/about/>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Pericles. (2018). Pericles. Overall concept. Retrieved from <http://project-pericles.eu/about/>

⁽¹⁸⁾ Sieckelinck, S. & Gielen, A.-J. (2018). Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation. RAN CoE Issue Paper, April 2018. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/home-](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf)

[affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf)

⁽¹⁹⁾ Friedrich Lösel, Sonja King, Doris Bender, Irina Jugl. "Protective Factors Against Extremism and Violent Radicalization: A Systematic Review of the Evidence",

In a different study on violent extremism in higher education, **Van Brunt, Murphy and Zedginidze (2017)** identify several protective factors: social connection, pluralistic inclusivity, non-violent outlets, social safety, emotional stability, professional/academic engagement, global competence, empathy, resilience and consequences of actions ⁽²⁰⁾.

Bhui et al. (2014) tested hypotheses about depression, psychosocial adversity and social assets as risk and resiliency factors in the early phases of radicalisation ⁽²¹⁾. Having surveyed 608 individuals of Pakistani or Bangladeshi family origins, aged 18 to 45, of Muslim heritage and living in East London and Bradford, they found that those with most sympathy for violent protest and terrorism were more likely to report depression, and that religion was important to these individuals.

Researchers identify a close interrelationship between individual resilience and community resilience. Some researchers suggest that social connections, social groups and social capital are fundamental to community resilience. Engaging marginalised or underrepresented community members is an important means of strengthening community resilience. Research shows that policies resulting in the creation of 'suspect

communities' undermine resilience. While a strong social sense of identity within specific ethnic or religious groups may build resilience against extremism, social marginalisation may lead to a vulnerability to violent extremism. The development of strong partnerships between communities and government is a central component of strengthening community resilience.

Ellis and Abdi (2017) argue that there are three types of social connections which are critical to a resilient community in relation to violent extremism: bonds, bridging and linking ⁽²²⁾. It is essential that governments work across these three dimensions to strengthen their links and partnerships with communities.

Grossman et al. (2017) developed Building Resilience to Violent Extremism (BRAVE-14), a validated 5-factor, 14-item measure for identifying and understanding young individuals' resilience to violent extremism at community level. There are five factors underpinning youth resilience to violent extremism: cultural identity and connectedness, bridging capital, linking capital, violence-related behaviours, and violence-related beliefs ⁽²³⁾.

International Journal of Developmental Sciences, Vol.12, No.9 (August 2018): pp.1-14.

⁽²⁰⁾ Van Brunt, B., Murphy, A., & Zedginidze, A. (2017). An exploration of the risk, protective, and mobilization factors related to violent extremism in college populations. *Violence and gender*, 4(3), 81-101.

⁽²¹⁾ Bhui, K., Everitt, B., & Jones, E. (2014). Might depression, psychosocial adversity, and limited social assets explain vulnerability to and resistance against violent radicalisation?. *PloS one*, 9(9), e105918.

Retrieved from <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0105918>

⁽²²⁾ Ellis, B. H., & Abdi, S. (2017). Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. *American Psychologist*, 72(3), 289.

⁽²³⁾ Grossman, M., Ungar, M., Brisson, J., Gerrand, V., Hadfield, K., & Jefferies, P. (2017). Understanding youth resilience to violent extremism: A standardised research measure. Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (Deakin University, Australia) and the Resilience Research Centre (Dalhousie University, Canada). Retrieved from http://www.deakin.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1374679/Understanding-Youth-Resilience-to-Violent-Extremism-the-BRAVE-14-Standardised-Measure.pdf

Various models exist for boosting resilience in communities. In particular, successful partnership involves identifying important issues to community members rather than focusing on violent extremism. Promoting an atmosphere of trust, respect and co-creation are essential ingredients. Some researchers advance the idea that **Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)** is a useful model that has helped address violence among ethnic minority youths⁽²⁴⁾.

Exploring community resilience in Denmark, **Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack (2016)** conclude that 'a high-level CVE knowledge but no trust from the community equals little impact'⁽²⁵⁾. A report by **CERTA (2016)** on resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism in Denmark concludes that families, close friends and mentors alongside religious communities are the strongest factors positively influencing resilience⁽²⁶⁾.

Gielen (2017) provides a useful overview of the existing resilience literature and efforts to use resilience training on vulnerable individuals and groups. In particular, she points out that it is worthwhile developing and evaluating resilience tools and mentoring programmes within the education sector'⁽²⁷⁾. Likewise, various methods are applied to foster community resilience in '**More than a Game**', a sport-focused youth mentoring programme in Melbourne, Australia

that uses team-based sports to address issues of identity, belonging and cultural isolation amongst young Muslim men'⁽²⁸⁾.

Another important area of research inquiry is the role of **community policing** in strengthening community resilience. Very few studies exist that address or chart the difficult relationship-forming processes between community police and local communities. An exception is the study by **Staniforth (2014)** which outlines neighbourhood policing principles⁽²⁹⁾. More research is also needed on **how to effectively** reach and communicate with young individuals on the subject of violent extremism.

Research gaps and findings

It is important to define resilience and it is **essential to focus on protective factors** rather than merely identifying potential risk factors. What protective factors are at work in cases where some individuals become radicalised and others do not? **More research is needed on protective factors** and the dynamic interaction between these factors as well as on the **correlation between protective and risk factors**.

Policymakers must adopt a holistic **strengths-based approach focusing on resilience** rather than a risk-based approach alone. A **three-pronged approach is effective in promoting resilience**, as it

⁽²⁴⁾ Ellis, B. H., & Abdi, S. (2017). Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. *American Psychologist*, 72(3), 289.

⁽²⁵⁾ Dalgaard-Nielsen, A., & Schack, P. (2016). Community resilience to militant Islamism: Who and what?: An explorative study of resilience in three Danish communities. *Democracy and Security*, 12(4), 309-327.

⁽²⁶⁾ CERTA Intelligence & Security. (2016.) Motstandskraft mod radikaliserings og voldelig ekstremisme – et eksplorativt studie af modstandskraft i udvalgte danske lokalmiljøer (Trygfonden).

⁽²⁷⁾ Gielen, A.-J. (2017). Countering violent extremism: A realist review for assessing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how?. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-19.

⁽²⁸⁾ Johns, A., Grossman, M., & McDonald, K. (2014). 'More than a game': The impact of sport-based youth mentoring schemes on developing resilience toward violent extremism. *Social Inclusion*, 2(2), 57-70.

⁽²⁹⁾ Staniforth, A. (2014). *Preventing terrorism and violent extremism*. Oxford University Press.

addresses **emotional, relational, and cognitive and ideological** aspects. Resilience in young individuals can be stimulated through participation, empowerment and increased social cohesion. Additionally, resilience must be strengthened through **education efforts and social media literacy**.

There is a need for **evaluation of multi-agency approaches**, as these are often restricted to single interventions. It is important to understand **how multi-agency collaboration actually accounts for protective factors in assessments**.

Another area lacking research is the means of building resilience in **young individuals who are already expressing anger towards society**. A significant challenge for those working in this area is understanding that resilience works best in individuals who do not need it.

The evidence base for radicalisation factors and pathways, including trends in home-grown radicalisation and returning FTFs

Existing research shows radicalisation is driven and sustained by multiple causes. Understanding radicalisation and pathways towards violent extremism calls for multicausal and multilevel explanations: there is no single profile and individuals do not follow one single track.

A related RAN Issue Paper (2016) conceptualises violent extremism as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating individual, and at times interlocking, combinations: these include individual socio-psychological factors, social factors, political factors, ideological and/or religious dimensions, the role of culture and identity issues, and trauma and other trigger mechanisms, all of which exist alongside three key drivers that act as a motor of radicalisation, namely group dynamics, radicalisers/groomers, and the role of social media' ⁽³⁰⁾. The radicalisation mechanisms are the product of the interplay between various push and pull factors within individuals, radicalisation settings (such as prisons or so-called underground extremist milieus) and group dynamics.

Recent research on radicalisation factors and pathways focuses on understanding specific factors, underlying processes and their interplay. Unravelling and comprehending the interrelationships of these factors is key to prevention intervention. Researchers make the case that research needs to grasp the underlying driving forces and tipping points for radicalisation that leads to violence as well as for radicalisation that does not lead to violence.

In one of the first **multidisciplinary systematic literature reviews** focusing on the radicalisation of young individuals in Europe, **Campelo et al. (2018)** highlight a multitude of vulnerability factors across different levels and advance a three-level model for radicalisation processes among youths ⁽³¹⁾. In terms of individual risk factors, the study identifies trait vulnerabilities or

⁽³⁰⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Centre of Excellence. (2016). *The root causes of violent extremism*. RAN Issue Paper. Amsterdam. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ra

[n-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf](#)

⁽³¹⁾ Campelo, N., Oppetit, A., Neau, F., Cohen, D., & Bronsard, G. (2018). Who are the European youths willing to engage in radicalisation? A multidisciplinary review of their psychological and social profiles. *European psychiatry*, 52, 1-14..

psychological vulnerabilities (the depressive dimension; addictive and risky behaviour; early experiences of abandonment in their life trajectories; fragile family structures; changes during adolescence and the quest for an ideal; personal uncertainty and recovery of lost dignity; perceived injustice; triggering events such as trauma, death or other life-changing events and psychopathological mechanisms that reinforce radical engagement). The study also examines micro-environmental factors: friendships with radicalised individuals, family dysfunction, similarities with sectarian hold, and dehumanisation to justify the use of violence. At macro-environmental level, the risk factors are social polarisation, a perceived group threat, the role of religious ideology, the geopolitical context, and processes of societal change. This research points to a key role for mental health professionals, specifically adolescent psychiatry, in secondary and tertiary prevention.

Eisenman and Flavahan (2018) argue that a social-ecological framework (used by the World Health Organization) for addressing the risk and protective factors for violence is useful in understanding violent extremism. They posit that interpersonal violence is the outcome of an interplay of factors across four levels, namely of the individual, the relationship, the community and the social ⁽³²⁾.

Decety, Pape and Workman (2018) developed a multilevel interdisciplinary framework, integrating social psychology and neuroscience, to comprehend the psychological processes that

underpin group dynamics, interpersonal processes, values and micro-sociological processes ⁽³³⁾. Their study provides an insightful flow-chart of the dynamic social and cognitive processes involved in radicalisation (see Figure 1).

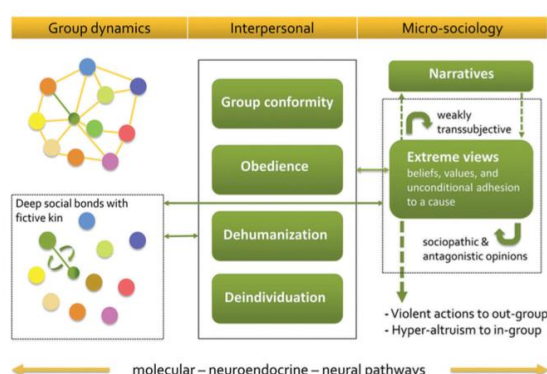


Figure 1 Psychological Processes

Reprinted from 'A multilevel social neuroscience perspective on radicalization and terrorism' by J. Decety, R. Pape and C.I. Workman, 2018, *Social Neuroscience*, 13(5), p.513.

(Full-size image available on p.33)

Vergani et al. (2018) conducted a systematic scoping review of scientific literature on radicalisation into violent extremism between 2001 and 2015. This study shows that 'empirical research disproportionately focuses on pull factors, which appear in 78.4 % of the articles, while push factors (appearing in 57.4 % of the articles) and personal factors (appear in 39.2 % of the articles) are comparatively under-researched' ⁽³⁴⁾. Significantly, Vergani et al. find that qualitative methods over-represent pull factors as a cause of radicalisation, while failing to explore the interaction between personal, push

⁽³²⁾ Eisenman, D. P., & Flavahan, L. (2017). Canaries in the coal mine: interpersonal violence, gang violence, and violent extremism through a public health prevention lens. *International review of psychiatry*, 29(4), 341-349.

⁽³³⁾ Decety, J., Pape, R., & Workman, C. I. (2018). A multilevel social neuroscience perspective on

radicalization and terrorism. *Social neuroscience*, 13(5), 511-529.

⁽³⁴⁾ Vergani, M., Iqbal, M., Ilbahar, E., & Barton, G. (2018). The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-32.

and pull factors. As such, their study advocates more rigorous research designs and the use of control groups of non-violent extremists to distinguish between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation.

More research is needed on the dynamics and interplay of various push and pull factors. Researchers must also gain a greater understanding of different radicalisation pathways.

One of the most significant recent evidence-based studies, conducted by Aarhus University researcher **Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018)**, forcefully argues for improved mechanisms of causality in understanding radicalisation processes⁽³⁵⁾. His extensive literature review analyses seven approaches to the psychological mechanisms of radicalisation: (a) Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg & Adelman, 2013); (b) Significant Quest/'3N' (Webber & Kruglandski, 2018); (c) Devoted Actor Model (Atran, 2016); (d) Mindset and Worldview (Borum, 2014); (e) Reactive Approach Motivation (McGregor, Hayes & Prentice, 2015); and (f) Two-pyramid approach (McCauley & Mosalenko, 2017).

radicalisation' by O. Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 39 (March-April), p.91.

(Full-size image available on p.33)

Gøtzsche-Astrup discerns the following commonalities in these competing theories about radicalisation which are seen to be driven by:

- normal psychological mechanisms rather than psychopathology;
- motivational processes rather than instrumental calculations of risk and reward;
- negative life experiences that put the individual in a position of flux, in terms of fundamental questions;
- experience of fundamental uncertainty or loss of meaning or significance;
- shift in social identity towards a single social group rather than many groups;
- small-group dynamics drive the process to behavioural extremes;
- heightened dispositional anxiety, aggression and impulsivity;
- 'sacred values' viewed as necessary in later stages of radicalisation;
- psychological mindset of authoritarianism, dogmatism and fundamentalism;
- negative emotions, particularly anger and contempt.

This study finds that social-motivational processes are essentially driven by primitive mechanisms of aggression which create a negative motivational state of mind. Negative life experiences can become triggers as these 'stimulate a sense of uncertainty about fundamental existential questions within the individual' which is exploited by subcultures offering an alternative. Small-group dynamics counteract negative experience/emotions but can accentuate

Table 1
Seven approaches to the psychological mechanisms of radicalisation.

Theory	Central papers	Central tenets	Dependent variable	Explanatory variable(s)	Support - internal validity	Support - external validity	Support - measurement validity
Uncertainty-Identity Theory	Hogg & Adelman (2013)	Motivational and social identity theory	Joining and supporting radical groups	Self-uncertainty Group centrality Autocratic leadership Behavioral aggression and hostility	Strong	Moderate	Area of focus
Significance Quest/'3N'	Webber & Kruglandski (2018)	Social psychological motivational theory	Coming to see as socially normative violent behaviour that is deviant from the majority perspective	Perceived membership Need for significance Narratives legitimising violence Norms and groups Sacred values Identity factors	Area of focus	Strong	Moderate
Devoted Actor Model	Atran (2016)	Ideology, values	Unconditional commitment, sacrifice and willingness to engage in extreme behaviour for a group	Psychological 'distance' that increases the risk of involvement in violent activities	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Mindset and Worldview	Borum (2014)	Distinction between mindset factors and worldview factors	Aggressive religious radicalisation	Psychological mindset authoritarianism	Area of focus	Area of focus	Area of focus
Reactive Approach Motivation	McGregor, Hayes, & Prentice (2015)	Motivational framework encompassing personality and social dynamics	Aggressive religious radicalisation	Motivational processes directed through interaction between personality, norms and group affiliation	Area of focus	Moderate	Moderate
Two-pyramid approach	McCauley & Mosalenko (2017)	Disrupting opinion and action	Radical opinion (support) and radical action (behavioural intentions)	Radical opinion (support) Radical action (behavioural intentions) Group factors Mind factors	Area of focus	Moderate	Strong

Table 1: Competing Theories

Reprinted from 'The time for causal designs: Review and evaluation of empirical support for mechanisms of political

⁽³⁵⁾ Gøtzsche-Astrup, O. (2018). The time for causal designs: Review and evaluation of empirical support

for mechanisms of political radicalisation. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 39(March-April), 90-99.

polarisation and be a key driver in translating radical beliefs into action. Strong emotions such as anger and contempt are important motivational drivers in collective action. Another motivational factor is the 'self- and social identity dynamic', which through a 'disembeddedness' process, results in an individual's sense of self-identity being lessened and replaced by reliance on the social identity of specific groups. As such, group dynamics and radicalisation are mutually reinforcing processes.

Other commonalities identified by Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018) are evident in the part played by ideologies encompassing narratives, religions, norms, sacred values and worldviews, though it is too early to determine if ideology propels violent behaviour or if it is used to rationalise and justify violent action. This question of the role of ideology is similar to the meta-debate between **Gilles Kepel's** 'radicalisation of political Islam' and **Oliver Roy's** 'Islamisation of radicals'.

Scott Atran's research on **sacred values** suggests that individual jihadists fuse their self-identity with that of the group and hold sacred values that are exceptionally strong and difficult to break away from once they become devoted actors. These sacred values cannot be abandoned, but they can be reinterpreted. In a similar vein, the University of Oxford's research on theories of **extreme self-sacrifice** led by Professor Whitehouse identifies '**identity fusion**' as a key psychological process. This 'identity fusion' — a visceral sense of oneness with the group — is shaped by emotional, life-shaping experiences and

motivates a strong desire to defend and protect other group members⁽³⁶⁾. This research implies that intervention needs to concentrate on 'de-fusion' — to understand the causal pathways for this feeling of 'shared essence' and how personal identities are shared with pro-group commitment. This process of 'de-fusion' examines extremists as personal and collective identities as well as their social networks and surrounding communities (parents, friends, teachers, etc.).

Sociologist Professor Kevin McDonald shows that different radicalisation experiences 'highlight embodied imaginaries more than political ideologies, [and] conspiracy theories more than religion'⁽³⁷⁾. In particular, McDonald critiques radicalisation vulnerability models, as they apprehend radicalisation as something 'done to a person', which fails to account for the kinds of agency at work in radicalisation experiences. Instead, McDonald argues, radicalisation is a 'social process, full of exchanges, communications and shared emotions' becoming 'a form of embodied sociality, one where the ability to feel certain things makes it possible to think certain things'⁽³⁸⁾. In this sensory process, social media and jihadi culture are important components. More empirical research is needed on the role of emotion and the relationships between push, pull and protective factors.

Along parallel lines, **Professor Thomas Hegghammar** et al. explore the rich inventory of **jihadi cultural practices**, including poetry, song, iconography and dream interpretation⁽³⁹⁾. While these factors are visibly present, further research

⁽³⁶⁾ University of Oxford. (2018, March 5). Dying for the group: what motivates the ultimate sacrifice? Retrieved from <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-03-05-dying-group-what-motivates-ultimate-sacrifice> and Whitehouse, H. (2018). Dying for the group: Towards a general theory of extreme self-sacrifice. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1-64.

⁽³⁷⁾ University of Sydney. (n.d.). Event_Radicalisation. Retrieved from <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/sydney-ideas/2018/radicalisation.html>

⁽³⁸⁾ McDonald, K. (2018). *Radicalization*. Polity Press.

⁽³⁹⁾ Hegghammer, T. (Ed.). *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017.

is needed on how jihadi culture affects individuals and groups. Research by **Lohlker** et al. also spotlights the rich symbolic world of online jihadism⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Other researchers studied the **radicalisation pathways** to violent extremism. French researcher Dounia Bouzar argues that IS extremists use the same four recruitment steps for all their 'radical recruits': isolation from the social environment, and indoctrination combined with a conspiratorial world-view, leading the recruits to doubt everything; self-identification of recruits as a chosen people and adoption of the group identity; a complete break from outside influences; and dehumanisation⁽⁴¹⁾. **Lindekilde** et al. analyse two **lone-actor radicalisation pathways**: 'Volatile' and 'Autonomous', whereby they find that the former (Volatile) 'pattern of radicalisation predominantly encompasses individuals with jihadist convictions, while right-wing extremists are drawn to the Autonomous pattern'⁽⁴²⁾.

Research on the **crime-terror nexus** has emerged in different fields in criminology: strain-theories (blocked opportunities, adversity and stress are conditions that favour alternatives and anomie); psychology (focus on life events and significant loss); and sociology (creation of a socio-economic underclass). Limited social mobility may produce 'negative emotions (anger and frustration) which

may alter social and moral boundaries placed on unconventional goals and violent means'⁽⁴³⁾. Dutch researchers conclude that there is a correlation between low socio-economic status and violent and terror offenders. Other researchers consider the **Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation** a useful analytical tool⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The issue of acculturation — the process of balancing two competing cultural influences — and its potential role in radicalisation has also been explored by researchers. Individuals at odds with their parents and feeling rejected by society embrace a third culture which provides a sense of belonging — this can lead to involvement in violent extremism. As such, counterculture and pathways to extremism and gang culture involve similar processes. For example, some researchers observe that self- and identity-uncertainty play a key psychological role in extremism⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Recent research on violent extremism considered the role of **toxic masculinity**. Exploring the role of masculinity in young men transitioning into extremism, sociologist Michael Kimmel found that a sense of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement, combined with setbacks, has led many right-wing individuals to search internally for answers which they externalise by blaming systems, immigrants

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Lohlker, R. (Ed.). (2013). *Jihadism: Online discourses and representations* (Vol. 2). V&R unipress GmbH.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Bouzar, D. (2016, March 25). *Scientific American* Rescue Mission: Freeing Young Recruits from the Grip of ISIS. Retrieved from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/rescue-mission-freeing-young-recruits-from-the-grip-of-isis/>

⁽⁴²⁾ Lindekilde, L., O'Connor, F., & Schuurman, B. (2017). Radicalization patterns and modes of attack planning and preparation among lone-actor terrorists: an exploratory analysis. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-21.

⁽⁴³⁾ Ljujic, V., van Prooijen, J. W., & Weerman, F. (2017). Beyond the crime-terror nexus: socio-economic status, violent crimes and terrorism. *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, 3(3), 158-172.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Bouhana, N., & Per-Olof, H. W. (2010). Theorizing terrorism: terrorism as moral action: a scoping study. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 2(2), 9.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Hogg, M. A. (2014). From uncertainty to extremism: Social categorization and identity processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 338-342.

or others for their predicament⁽⁴⁶⁾. Understanding the **role of emotions** and how these are morphed into rage and anger through the radicalisation process is key.

A recent **French multidisciplinary study (2018)** exploring why European adolescents and young adults have been drawn towards radical Islamism since 2010 suggests that adolescent psychopathology plays a role in the radicalisation process⁽⁴⁷⁾. Specifically, the study showcases the **interplay between adolescent mechanisms and radical influences**: adolescents' experience of turbulence and personal uncertainty, combined with triggering events, provides cognitive openings to extremist groups and ideologies offering a sense of purpose, belonging and moral certainty. This study developed a three-tiered model (Individual, Micro-Environmental, and Macro-Environmental), with risk factors extending from adolescence to 'a psychiatric condition, psychological vulnerability, abandonment issues, perceived injustice, and personal uncertainty.'

Scholars observe that research on **families and their role in radicalisation** is lacking. Families and their related dynamics are complex, and they can provide both risk and protective factors in relation to radicalisation. Families are a broad category, so it is worthwhile distinguishing between parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins. **Spalek (2016)** notes that more research is needed on 'differences between violent and non-violent

radicalisation; generational differences; the implications for families of convicted terrorists; families as constituting risk and/or protective factors in relation to radicalisation'⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Tensions within families, intra-familial violence, the functionality of families and the impact of absent or dysfunctional parents are factors worth exploring further. Similarly, it is worth analysing the sociocultural context of families and their function in different cultural settings.

Recent research by **Sikkens, van San, Sieckelink and de Winter (2018)** reveals that most parents struggle to cope with radicalisation signs in their children and do not know how to react. This study examines how parents react to their children's interest in extremist ideologies, and advocates further research on the influence of parental support and control on deradicalisation⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Research on radicalisation is further complicated by the fact that the empirical knowledge base is rather limited. As **Hafez and Mullins (2015)** show, most empirical research on the radicalisation of youths in Europe considers four dimensions, namely grievances, networks, ideologies and enabling support structures⁽⁵⁰⁾. They believe that the research can be improved in three ways: with greater collaboration between researchers and the intelligence community; with research collaboration on data organisation; and with better research design, as most research selects

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Kimmel, M. S. (2018). *Healing from hate: How young men get into-and out of-violent extremism*. University of California Press.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Campelo, N., Oppetit, A., Neau, F., Cohen, D., & Bronsard, G. (2018). Who are the European youths willing to engage in radicalisation? A multidisciplinary review of their psychological and social profiles. *European psychiatry*, 52, 1-14.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Spalek, B. (2016). Radicalisation, de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation in relation to families: Key

challenges for research, policy and practice. *Security Journal*, 29(1), 39-52.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Sikkens, E., van San, M., Sieckelink, S., & de Winter, M. (2018). Parents' Perspectives on Radicalization: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(7), 2276-2284.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Hafez, M., & Mullins, C. (2015). The radicalization puzzle: a theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(11), 958-975.

on the dependent variable, only testing theories where radicalisation is present.

The **Decker and Pyrooz (2015)** research on gangs provides valuable lessons learned for the study of violent extremism and radicalisation. Their work proposes many improvements: they argue for a number of triangulation of ideas and methods, and an understanding of the symmetries and asymmetries across the selection and the (dis-) engagement processes leading into and out of groups. They urge researchers to study the collective — the clique, cell, group or organisation — rather than overlook it, and note that knowledge of the efficacy of programmes should be proportional to the investment in such programmes. They advise researchers to distinguish instrumental from symbolic activities, and understand the network of opposition underpinning extra-legal groups. They stress that research must be held accountable for false positives and false negatives, that comparative research will offer greater returns to knowledge than research conducted in isolation, and that definitions matter. They underline that there is a need for theory making and theory testing, and remind researchers of the importance of the role played by prison and by women ⁽⁵¹⁾.

Research on FTFs

Numerous studies on FTFs have been carried out in Europe. Many of these studies are descriptive,

rather than using the hard evidence-based data which is often held exclusively by government security and intelligence services. There are a few exceptions — some reports are based on hard facts (complete data-sets) outlining age, gender, geography, socio-economic factors, citizenship and country of origin, etc.

Several **German security agencies (2016)** published a report on 784 German foreign fighters, revealing that 79 % were male and 21 % female, that 61 % were born in Germany and that two-thirds had a criminal record.⁵² While FTFs came from 162 German cities, there was a concentration of extremism hotbeds, with only 13 cities having more than 10 FTFs. This study also shows that only 10 % had returned due to disillusionment; 25 % of returnees and 22 % of their parents were willing to cooperate with government authorities when they returned. Significantly more than 48 % of returning FTFs returned to extremist milieus.

Gustafsson & Ranstorp (2017) conducted a study on 267 of 300 Swedish FTFs, based on aggregated data from the Swedish Security Services ⁽⁵³⁾. It reveals that 76 % were male and 24 % female, and that 70 % were residing in segregated and socially vulnerable areas. Over 80 % came from four cities. 75 % were Swedish citizens, but only 34 % were actually born in Sweden. The study also contains a European overview of FTF statistics and a breakdown of the data. It highlights geographical hotbeds of radicalisation, microfinancing of extremism, the role of radical feeder groups in

⁽⁵¹⁾ Decker, S. H., & Pyrooz, D. C. (2015). 'I'm down for a Jihad': How 100 years of gang research can inform the study of terrorism, radicalization and extremism. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9(1), 104-112.

⁵² Original report by German security agencies was removed from Internet. Daniel Heinke has summarised findings. Heinke, D. (March 2017). German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The

Updated Data and Its Implications. *Sentinel*, 10(3), 17-23.

⁽⁵³⁾ Gustafsson, L., & Ranstorp, M. (2017). *Swedish foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq: An analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data*. Swedish Defence University: Arkitektkopia AB. Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

violent extremism, and how returning FTFs affect sectarianism within communities. A follow-on study (2018) on Salafism and Salafi-jihadism in Sweden maps out the different hierarchies, roles, functions and influences across 17 cities.

The **Norwegian Police Security Service (Politiets sikkerhetstjeneste — PST)** published a report on 137 violence-promoting jihadists, some of whom had become FTFs: 88 % were male and only 12 % were female, with 86 % becoming radicalised after 2011. The report reveals that 61 % had migrated to Norway as teenagers, and that only 21 % with minority backgrounds were born and raised in Norway. There was a strong correlation with crime, as 68 % were criminals and 46 % were involved in violent crime. Interestingly, the PST observes that 17.5 % of the jihadists had lost one or both of their parents (often before the age of 10).

Renard and Coolsaet (2018) provide a valuable overview of FTF returnees in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands⁽⁵⁴⁾. The **RAN CoE manual on returnees, Responses to Returnees**, provides a practical practitioner's guide to different pathways, depending on whether the returnee is a minor, is sent to prison, or is subject to non-custodial reintegration⁽⁵⁵⁾. This manual on returnees highlights the importance of

understanding the role of gender when responding to returnees. In March 2018, the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate of the United Nations Security Council (**UNCTED**) produced a research-based report on **returnees and challenges of reintegration and rehabilitation of FTFs**⁽⁵⁶⁾. The UNCTED report underscores that FTF typologies fail to reflect the complexities of the roles and challenges of returning FTFs, that the threat may be dormant for a period and that 'imprisonment may delay the threat posed by these individuals, not reduce it'⁽⁵⁷⁾. In particular, the UNCTED report stresses the importance of suitable risk assessment tools.

Existing research on FTFs has explored the **gender dimension** and the well-documented role of women as supporters, recruiters, facilitators, fighters and victims⁽⁵⁸⁾. It is important to better understand women's roles in extremism, as well as how to respond appropriately — aspects requiring tailored gender-specific approaches. Equally, the **role of children** needs to be further examined in terms of trauma and rehabilitation efforts.

Research gaps and findings

Significant research efforts have been carried out, enhancing our understanding of radicalisation and its associated dynamics. It is essential to take stock

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Renard, T. & Coolsaet, R. (2018). Returnees — Who are they, why are they (not) coming back and how should we deal with them? Assessing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Egmont Paper 101. Brussels: Egmont Institute, February 2018.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Centre of Excellence. (2017). *Responses to returnees: Foreign terrorist fighters and their families*. RAN Manual, July 2017. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. (2018). *The challenge of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters: Research*

perspectives. CTED Trends Report. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CTED-Trends-Report-March-2018.pdf>

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. (2018). *The challenge of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters: Research perspectives*. CTED Trends Report. p.14.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Winterbotham, E. (2017). Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation: A milieu approach. *The RUSI Journal*, 162(3), 60-72. Also see: Cook, J., Vale, G. (2018). *From Daesh to Diaspora: Tracing the Women and Minors of the Islamic State*. ICSR Report.

of this knowledge. There are still prioritised research gaps — FTFs are still leaving for conflict zones abroad and researchers must comprehend their **motivation and the mechanisms keeping them on the move**. On the subject of FTF returnees, more information is needed about their **motivations and signs of disengagement**. A key policy area is the continuity of interventions, both within prisons and after prisoners are released. A broader understanding is needed of **why individuals disengage** and what conditions are required for effective deradicalisation initiatives. Other areas where more research is required are the **interrelationship between online and offline components of radicalisation**, the role of **radicalisation agents** and the **dynamics of hotspots of radicalisation**.

Researchers must ascertain what the **critical combination of radicalisation factors is**, and how this relates to interventions. More multidisciplinary research should be carried out on **radicalisation pathways**. At the same time, lessons learned from historical radicalisation cases should be used to contextualise present issues.

Evaluating prison regimes and pathways towards and from radicalisation in prison

Policy and research have increasingly prioritised the role of prisons in CVE. Prisons have been portrayed as hotbeds for radicalisation due to extremist recruiters taking advantage of the overcrowded conditions and often overwhelmed

prison management. Whether radicalised inmates should be integrated into the mainstream inmate population or segregated in separate high-security facilities is subject to debate. Rehabilitation and reintegration strategies are also crucial for disengagement and deradicalisation.

Silke and Veldhuis (2017) provide a synthesis of the principal research findings on prison and violent extremism in recent years. Within the research community, 'it is generally accepted that radicalisation primarily stems from a combination of institutional, social, and individual factors, such as overcrowding and deprivation, violence and group dynamics, and a desire for protection and belonging' ⁽⁵⁹⁾. In particular, they stress, two factors stand out: overcrowding and charismatic leadership. While these factors seem important in the context of prison gangs, Silke and Veldhuis point out that the evidence base is weak and anecdotal, as it draws from a small number of case studies, theoretical literature and prison gang studies from criminology.

As regards **prison management of radicalised inmates**, opinions differ on whether it is better to 'concentrate' or 'disperse' inmates. The Netherlands have 'concentrated' their violent extremist offenders while most other countries 'disperse' these individuals across a small number of high-security facilities. Yet Veldhuis' research and evaluation of the Dutch cases of placing violent extremist offenders into specialised 'terrorist wings' shows that there is little effect or benefit in such an approach ⁽⁶⁰⁾. In fact, this kind of policy can be counterproductive and increase

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Silke, A., & Veldhuis, T. (2017). Countering Violent extremism in prisons: A review of key recent research and critical research gaps. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11(5), 2-11.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Veldhuis, T. (2015). *Captivated by fear: an evaluation of terrorism detention policy*. (Doctoral dissertation, Groningen: The University of Groningen,).

Retrieved from https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/16347790/Complete_dissertation.pdf

See also: Veldhuis, T. M. (2016). Prisoner radicalization and terrorism detention policy: institutionalized fear or evidence-based policy making?. (London: Routledge, 2016).

recruitment, networks and planning, both inside and outside the prison. Many other countries have opted for a **mixed approach, 'dispersing' violent extremist offenders** into different maximum-security facilities. Yet it is clear that evidence-based research is lacking, of a type which can independently evaluate the benefits and drawback of different prison regimes. It is known that safe and well-operated prisons are crucial, as 'undue restrictiveness, problems with overcrowding, understaffing, gang violence and humiliating or discriminatory behaviour by prison staff can create pressing, stressful situations that can not only push vulnerable inmates into the arms of charismatic extremist leaders, but can in themselves provide a breeding ground for resentment and radicalisation' ⁽⁶¹⁾.

Research on the **deradicalisation** of violent extremist offenders held in prison is relatively limited. Much of it is derived from extra-EU examples, and it is questionable whether these lessons learned are applicable to radically different contexts.

Imams can play a crucial role in the rehabilitation efforts of terrorist prisoners. **Beckford et al. (2005)** find that religion plays an important role in the rehabilitation of Muslim prisoners in the United Kingdom and France. In particular, they argue that imams must be involved in deradicalisation efforts, and they 'feel that if *imams* are not used within prisons then inmates are more likely to be radicalised once released' ⁽⁶²⁾. Research is needed to support the training and vetting of Muslim chaplains and different dialogue

intervention methods, which are lacking. Similarly, it is vital that research be carried out on prisoner and prison-staff relationships in the context of radicalisation and rehabilitation. There is some research on the impact of CVE on the prison chaplaincy and the erosion of its neutral role in providing pastoral care ⁽⁶³⁾.

Reintegration efforts are crucial when releasing violent extremist offenders. This reintegration process begins in prison and continues throughout the release process and rehabilitation efforts. **Dean (2012)** argues that rehabilitation of terrorist offenders must undergo a five-point process which helps reintegrate prisoners once they are released.

These **Healthy Identity Interventions** focus on:

- 'Enabling them to meet their personal needs and desires without becoming involved with an extremist group, cause or ideology
- Addressing the specific attitudes or beliefs that enable them to harm (or support harm) to others
- Enabling them to express, tolerate and cope with powerful emotions without denigrating or harming others
- Empowering them to take more responsibility for who they are, how they live their lives and the personal commitments they make
- Encouraging them to use alternative ways to realise their goals or express their

⁽⁶¹⁾ Veldhuis, T. M., & Lindenberg, S. (2012). Limits of tolerance under pressure: A case study of Dutch terrorist detention policy. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(3), 425-443.

⁽⁶²⁾ Beckford, J. (2005) Muslim in the Prisons of Britain and France. *Journal of Contemporary of European Studies*, 13(3), 287-297. Also see: Awan, I. (2013).

Muslim prisoners, radicalization and rehabilitation in British prisons. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 33(3), 371-384.

⁽⁶³⁾ Todd, A. J. (2013). Preventing the 'neutral' chaplain? The potential impact of anti-'extremism' policy on prison chaplaincy. *Practical Theology*, 6(2), 144-158.

commitments without breaking the law or causing harm to others' (⁶⁴).

Marsden (2015) outlines how reduction of the risk of reoffending and encouraging desistance is influenced by several factors: a constructive relationship with the offender manager; motivation to engage with the rehabilitation process; critical thinking; a balanced identity; healing family rifts; training, employment and education; rejection of the legitimacy of violence/crime in response to grievances; and addressing the denial and minimisation of the offence (⁶⁵). This study advocates a shift from a focus on risks and weaknesses to a strength-based approach, in order to counterbalance risk assessment methodology. Importantly, this study used multi-attribute utility technology (**MAUT**) designed to understand the effectiveness of work with violent extremist and terrorist offenders. Similarly, Barrelle's article 'Pro-Integration: Disengagement and Life after Extremism' (2015) provides a useful framework with which to understand disengagement processes (⁶⁶).

Gielen's (2018) methodological framework for exit programmes for female jihadists integrates Barrelle's (2015) Pro-Integration model, which measures positive levels of social engagement across social relations, coping mechanisms, identity, ideology and action orientation (⁶⁷).

Disengagement programmes in prison environments must be studied, as **Cherney (2018)** did with her examination of the Proactive Integrated Support Model (**PRISM**) intervention programme aiming to achieve disengagement in the Australian state of New South Wales (⁶⁸).

One of the principal reasons for the lack of research on violent extremist offenders in prison is the difficulty gaining access to prisons for field research, since data held by prison institutions are highly restricted.

Silke and Veldhuis (2017) identify significant research gaps in prisons and in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts after release. Research on the social and psychological mechanisms at play (why do some individuals become radicalised while others do not?) needs to be undertaken in a prison environment. Also, more research is needed on the dynamics behind violent extremist inmate gangs and how prison staff can intervene in these processes. Very few studies exist on juvenile violent extremist offenders. More work needs to focus on the challenges faced by violent extremist offenders once they leave prison, and on the dynamics of recidivism. Lastly, Silke and Veldhuis urge researchers to conduct evaluation studies on prison and probation programmes

(⁶⁴) Dean, C., (2012). Intervening effectively with terrorist offenders. *Prison Service Journal, Special edition: Combating extremism and terrorism*, Issue 203. Retrieved from <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20September%202012%20No.%20203.pdf>

(⁶⁵) Marsden, S. V. (2015). Conceptualising 'success' with those convicted of terrorism offences: Aims, methods, and barriers to reintegration. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7(2), 143-165.

(⁶⁶) Barrelle, K. (2015). Pro-integration: disengagement from and life after extremism. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7(2), 129-142.

(⁶⁷) Gielen, A.-J. (2018). Exit programmes for female jihadists: A proposal for conducting realistic evaluation of the Dutch approach. *International Sociology*, 33(4), 454-472.

(⁶⁸) Cherney, A. (2018). Evaluating interventions to disengage extremist offenders: a study of the Proactive Integrated Support Model (PRISM). *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-20.

focused on terrorist or violent extremist offenders⁽⁶⁹⁾.

Research gaps and findings

Research on ERG 22+ considers the validation issue and pathways towards and from radicalisation. British government research on over 170 Islamists and 22 factors shows that all factors are relevant. Surprisingly, **mental health disorders** turned out to be one of the lowest factors present within the group, in contrast to other research findings. Other research findings indicate that success factors in exit programmes in prison include a **lack of reoffending, a non-criminal identity, and alternatives to address injustice** (this was one of the highest risk factors for the ERG 22+ research). **VERA-2 and ERG 22+ seem comparable**, as they are developed from the same data set and research findings.

Empirical research on prison regimes is extremely limited. There are very different approaches to risk assessment in prisons, as contexts in different Member States differ. It is vital to **differentiate between radicalisation of ordinary prisoners and hardening of convicted extremists.** A mixture of approaches (between **dispersal and concentration**) is the best option (depending on context). Research shows that a key element in successful intervention is **skilled prison staff** who can handle situations and issues confidently.

A major challenge is **research access to extremist prisoners.** Many empirical studies are classified

and are only published after several years, thereby losing their relevance and usefulness.

Mental health issues seem to appear more for **lone actors** rather than for members of terrorist groups.

Dealing with vulnerable groups (children, migrants and asylum seekers)

Research on children and violent extremism has been largely neglected. Studies exist on the recruitment and radicalisation of children taken into the ranks of ISIS, and on the associated range of consequences (trauma treatment, family relations, security risk assessment issues, etc.). Most studies have focused on the phenomenon of children being recruited into the ISIS fold rather than researching rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Much depends on the environmental setting (such as families or schools) and on whether the children are vulnerable to radicalisation or have already being radicalised.

Lynch (2016) identifies how to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trauma in child returnees from conflict zones. Specifically, this study provides detailed guidance on how to identify and work with children at risk, and on therapy methods for dealing with trauma⁽⁷⁰⁾. A study by **Simi (2016)** on white supremacists notes that a large portion of the interviewed extremists

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Silke, A., & Veldhuis, T. (2017). Countering Violent Extremism in Prisons: A Review of Key Recent Research and Critical Research Gaps. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11(5), 2-11.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Centre of Excellence. (2016). *Child returnees from conflict zones*. RAN Issue Paper, November 2016. Prepared by Orla

Lynch. Retrieved from Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_child_returnees_from_conflict_zones_112016_en.pdf

were experiencing family dysfunction and were victims of childhood physical and sexual abuse ⁽⁷¹⁾.

Stanley et al. (2018) studied the role of social workers dealing with cases of children in radicalised settings. They recommend that social workers become skilled in four areas before carrying out home visits to families with radicalised youths: '1) Family work skills — working with family dynamics, power, control and involving extended family, using ecomap and genogram tools; (2) Political and ideological analysis skills; (3) Risk thinking at a sophisticated level; (4) Developing a sociological imagination (Mills 1959) to help link the person in context, highlighting historic forces as influences in where we are today.' Similarly, **Stanley et al. (2018)** provide practical tools and intervention methods for dealing with families and potentially radicalised children. Specifically, they advance strength-based approaches to interventions within family settings, such as Signs of Safety, the Family Group Conference (FGC), The Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation (GLM), and the Capabilities Approach (CA) ⁽⁷²⁾.

Tackling **radicalisation in an education setting** is another important topic. Much of the academic writing on education and radicalisation in the United Kingdom has been dominated by a 'securitisation' discourse. Others legitimately

question the difficult role teachers have in detecting deviant behaviour as 'educators are unwittingly drawn into a villain-victim imagery of their students' ⁽⁷³⁾. But researchers also propose various methods to strengthen protective factors in youths at educational institutions. For example, **Sewell and Hulusi (2016)** provide a literature review of the psychological theories of personal uncertainty and Reactive Approach Motivation ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

Integrative complexity (IC) is a Cambridge-based initiative that counters oversimplification in values, thinking and identity by changing youths' 'mindset through broadening values, thinking and social identity complexity using action learning, group exercises, and multimedia materials' ⁽⁷⁵⁾. IC interventions in Northern Ireland, for example, have resulted in increasing cognitive (and emotional) management capacities in post-conflict contexts in young individuals.

The issue of violent extremism and radicalisation as related to **refugees and/or asylum seekers** is complex and ambiguous, and has not been really researched to any degree. There is significant research on violent extremism and vulnerable refugee communities **beyond** Europe, but very little in the EU. These few studies argue that refugees or asylum seekers are vulnerable to extremist recruiters due to financial incentives or

⁽⁷¹⁾ Simi, P., Sporer, K., & Bubolz, B. F. (2016). Narratives of childhood adversity and adolescent misconduct as precursors to violent extremism: A life-course criminological approach. *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 53(4), 536-563.

⁽⁷²⁾ Stanley, T., Guru, S., & Gupta, A. (2018). Working with prevent: Social work options for cases of 'radicalisation risk'. *Practice*, 30(2), 131-146.

⁽⁷³⁾ Sieckelinck, S., Kaulingfreks, F., & De Winter, M. (2015). Neither villains nor victims: towards an educational perspective on radicalisation. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(3), 329-343.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Sewell, A., & Hulusi, H. (2016). Preventing radicalisation to extreme positions in children and young people. What does the literature tell us and should educational psychology respond?. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32(4), 343-354.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Davies, L. (2018). Review of educational initiatives in counter-extremism internationally. The Segerstedt Institute, Report 5. University of Gothenburg. Retrieved from https://segerstedtinstitutet.gu.se/digitalAssets/1673/1673173_review-of-educational-initiatives-180110.pdf

the search for a sense of purpose or social identity. When **De Bie et al. (2014)** explored the interface between jihadi networks and vulnerable immigrants in the Netherlands, they find that jihadi networks offered a sense of belonging, while the relationship was primarily grounded more in pragmatic, monetary interests ⁽⁷⁶⁾. Eleftheriadou (2018) provides a composite model for understanding radicalisation within a refugee environment ⁽⁷⁷⁾.

There is clearly a pressing research need to focus on vulnerable groups and the connection to violent extremism or radicalisation, especially youths, as well as refugees and asylum seekers. There is scope to begin research efforts in the refugee camps in the Middle East and analyse patterns and trends compared to experiences in Europe.

Research gaps and findings

Classrooms are an effective arena for P/CVE with children. A major challenge for teachers is speaking about **sensitive, controversial topics in the classroom**. More research is needed on **context- and culture-specific issues of religion and societal dynamics, gender relations or relationships**. This research should differentiate between different student age groups.

Other research areas identified are the possible involvement of **refugees or asylum seekers** in terrorist plots, **children returning from conflict zones** and **children's vulnerability to violent extremist propaganda online**.

Understanding **the influence of self-sufficiency** (housing and job security, for instance) in bolstering resilience against radicalisation for vulnerable communities is key. Researchers in Amsterdam developed an interesting methodology to screen for self-sufficiency, with promising results in relation to violent extremists. Mental health screening is also important, as many extremists have shown signs of psychiatric problems. Further research on **mental health issues (including trauma)** needs to be undertaken.

Dealing with vulnerable groups in P/CVE work, without stigmatisation, is another subject needing attention. Moreover, working with these groups poses significant problems around **confidentiality and information-sharing** — yet another area lacking research.

Extremist ideas and their dissemination on the Internet or other media

There is an immense amount of academic literature on violent extremism and social media. This brief literature review will focus on terrorism/extremism and social media, and the implications for countering propaganda through counter-narratives and alternative narratives.

Weimann (2006, 2015) provides an overview of the dynamic relationship between violent extremists and terrorists on social media, specifically how terrorists exploit the Internet in various ways ⁽⁷⁸⁾. **Fisher (2015)** published a related article titled 'Swarmcast: How Jihadist Networks

⁽⁷⁶⁾ de Bie, J. L., de Poot, C. J., & van der Leun, J. P. (2014). Jihadi networks and the involvement of vulnerable immigrants: reconsidering the ideological and pragmatic value. *Global Crime*, 15(3-4), 275-298.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Eleftheriadou, M. (2018). Refugee Radicalization/militarization in the age of the

European refugee crisis: A Composite model. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-22.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Weimann, G. (2006). *Terror on the Internet: The new arena, the new challenges*. US Institute of Peace Press. Also see Weimann, G. (2015). *Terrorism in Cyberspace*. Columbia University Press.

Maintain a Persistent Online Presence' ⁽⁷⁹⁾. **Ingram (2016)** provides a framework for analysing how militant Islamist propaganda and messaging 'provide its supporters with a system of meaning that shapes how they perceive the world', through a process where it manipulates compelling followers to legitimise and engage in violence ⁽⁸⁰⁾. **Berger's (2017)** methodology charts extremist propaganda using a linkage-based framework that targets the themes exploited by extremist groups to mobilise potential recruits ⁽⁸¹⁾.

Winter (2015) explores ISIS propaganda and the various themes that feature in ISIS social media propaganda: mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war and utopia ⁽⁸²⁾. **Glazzard (2017)** makes a case for studying violent extremism as narratives in the literary sense, to understand the creative sources of violent extremism inspiration ⁽⁸³⁾. **Halverson et al. (2011)** provide a framework for understanding the 'master narratives' or 'systems of stories' that animate jihadist propaganda ⁽⁸⁴⁾. **Schmid (2015)** identifies a dozen narrative themes of ISIS that expose

vulnerabilities and points the way towards developing convincing counter-arguments ⁽⁸⁵⁾.

Some research concentrates on terrorist groups' use of different **strategies of identity-building**. **Rothenberger et al. (2018)** analyse the discursive construction of five terrorist groups' identity on social media, using five discursive macro strategies. This study observes that terrorist groups used strategies of demontage (dismantling) and destruction, and strategies of justification and relativisation with strong boundary construction (us-and-them thinking): 'dehumanisation of enemies; moral justification, shift of blame, displacement of responsibility and downplaying of harmful effects' ⁽⁸⁶⁾.

Turning to the array of countermeasures used online on social media, **Greenberg (2016)** provides an overview (e.g. disruption, diversion and alternative engagement, counter-messaging) as well as concrete recommendations.⁸⁷ **Braddock and Horgan (2015)** explore if and how narratives persuade, and trace the development of targeted

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Fisher, A. (2015). Swarmcast: How jihadist networks maintain a persistent online presence. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9(3), 3-20.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Ingram, H. J. (2016). Deciphering the siren call of militant Islamist propaganda. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), September 2016.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Berger, J. M. (2017). Deconstruction of identity concepts in Islamic state propaganda. A linkage-based approach to counter-terrorism strategic communications. Via the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT). Europol Public Information. Retrieved from https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/bergerjm_deconstructionofislamicstatetexts.pdf

⁽⁸²⁾ Winter, C. (2015). Documenting the virtual 'caliphate'. *Quilliam Foundation*, 33, 1-50. Retrieved from <http://www.aloufok.net/caliphate.pdf>

⁽⁸³⁾ Glazzard, A. (2017). Losing the plot: Narrative, counter-narrative and violent extremism. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Research Paper,

May 2017. Retrieved from <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ICCT-Glazzard-Losing-the-Plot-May-2017.pdf>

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Halverson, J., Corman, S., & Goodall, H. L. (2011). *Master narratives of Islamist extremism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Springer.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Schmid, A. P. (2015). Challenging the narrative of the Islamic State. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Research Paper, June 2015. <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf>

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Rothenberger, L., Müller, K., & Elmezeny, A. (2018). The discursive construction of terrorist group identity. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30(3), 428-453.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Greenberg, K. (2016) Counter-radicalization via the Internet. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 668(1), 165-179.

counter-narrative themes⁽⁸⁸⁾. Van Eerten et al. (2017) provide a comprehensive overview of counter-messaging, alternative messaging and strategic communication by government⁽⁸⁹⁾. The **Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Tuck & Silverman, 2016)** produced a very useful counter-narrative handbook containing concrete advice⁽⁹⁰⁾.

While the volume of academic contributions is larger than most, there is still a pressing need to examine the impact of different types of counter-narratives: which work and which do not, and importantly, why?

Research gaps and findings

A large body of research exists on the **evolution of violent extremist and terrorist propaganda on social media**. A significant challenge for **law enforcement** in detecting extremist propaganda on open platforms and the dark web is the interpretation, extraction and summarising of content in **multiple languages**. **Semi (automated) detection** is important for early detection efforts. More research needs to be conducted on why extremist groups **move between social media platforms**.

When considering the effectiveness of alternative and counter-narratives, it is useful to factor in **biological algorithms, echo chambers and filter bubbles**. From a **neurological perspective**, when an individual's core value and identity are threatened, it is not the prefrontal cortex that

reacts but the amygdala — this makes individuals feel threatened. Changing individuals' minds requires a cognitive opening, and it is preferable to **highlight shared values than to seek confrontation**. Further studies are needed that link neuroscience and psychology, in relation to violent extremism.

Research is also lacking on the **content and mechanisms of hate speech**, specifically on the **spectrum of propaganda from right-wing populism to extremism**. Social media is **multidimensional** — individuals do not just consume propaganda, but also produce it. It would be useful to have a conceptual analysis of this dynamic and what it means for radicalisation processes.

There is also insufficient work on the interaction between propaganda and **new technology and media platforms**.

Evaluation and successful interventions in P/CVE

There are very few academic studies of evaluation methods in P/CVE. One of the main criticisms within the CVE field is the lack of empirical data for use in evaluating the effectiveness of the measures. **Mastroe (2016)** outlines some of the related challenges: 'identifying the outcome variable; availability of data to analyse; identifying

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Braddock, K., & Horgan, J. (2016). Towards a guide for constructing and disseminating counternarratives to reduce support for terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39(5), 381-404.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ van Eerten, J. J., Doosje, B., Konijn, E., de Graaf, B. A., & de Goede, M. (2017). *Developing a social media response to radicalization: The role of counter-narratives in prevention of radicalization and de-radicalization*. University of Amsterdam. Retrieved

from

https://www.wodc.nl/binaries/2607_Volledige_Tekst_tcm28-286136.pdf

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Tuck, H., & Silverman, T. (2016). *The counter-narrative handbook*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Retrieved from

https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/3_Medienkompetenz/Gegennarrative/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf

the time frame of the analysis; and cross-case comparison of evaluation results' ⁽⁹¹⁾.

The **US Institute of Peace (Holmer et al., 2018)** considers the multitude of conceptual and practical challenges in measuring impact and value of P/CVE programmes: these include causality, accounting for the vast number of variables, addressing contextual variations, developing valid indicators and collecting relevant and reliable data, and measuring social relationships and networks ⁽⁹²⁾.

Gielen (2017a) examines a number of evaluation methods in depth: effect evaluation, pragmatic evaluation, theory-driven evaluation, process evaluation, and realist evaluation. This study reviews 73 different studies/programmes found in the academic literature and the underpinning evaluation methods ⁽⁹³⁾.

In another study, **Gielen (2017b)** advises on developing CVE intervention, as listed below.

- 'CVE programmes should address the grievances, causes and risk factors that lead to violent extremism.

- Make a clear distinction between CVE programme and interventions.
- Formulate goals.
- Identify target audiences accordingly.
- Formulate a theory of change for each CVE (sub)programme and intervention.
- Make use of existing theory and evaluations.
- Formulate smart indicators on three levels.
- Include researchers/evaluators prior to implementation.
- Demand a thorough project plan of external partners.
- [Employ] multi-method data collection' ⁽⁹⁴⁾.

The RAND Corporation (2017) provides valuable lessons in this area with the development of the RAND programme Evaluation Toolkit ⁽⁹⁵⁾.

Research gaps and findings

Evaluation should be included from the start of projects, and should involve practitioners from the outset, so they accept the evaluation. **Impact evaluation** and work towards evidence-based approaches is a top priority in the field. Research tends to focus excessively on the problem (the

⁽⁹¹⁾ Mastroe, C. (2016). Evaluating CVE: Understanding the recent changes to the United Kingdom's implementation of *Prevent*. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10(2), 50-60. Retrieved from <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/501/989>

⁽⁹²⁾ Holmer, G., Bauman, P., & Aryaeinejad, K (2018). *Measuring Up: Evaluating the impact of P/CVE Programs*. United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/preventing-counteracting-violent-extremism-measuringup.pdf>

⁽⁹³⁾ Gielen, A.-J. (2017). Countering violent extremism: A realist review for assessing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-19.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Gielen, A.-J. (2017). Evaluating countering violent extremism. In L. Colaert (Ed.). *De-radicalisation – Scientific insights for policy*, 101-118. Flemish Peace Institute. Retrieved from https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/sites/vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/files/files/reports/deradicalisering_eng_lowres.pdf#page=103

⁽⁹⁵⁾ Beaghley, S., C Helmus, T., Matthews, M., Rajeev, R., David, S., Amanda, K., & A Brown, M. (2017). *Development and pilot test of the RAND program evaluation toolkit for countering violent extremism*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1799/RAND_RR1799.pdf

causes of radicalisation) rather than the solution (the effects of P/CVE interventions).

Research should concentrate on **evaluation of the impact of multi-agency approaches**, not just on single projects and interventions. Generic prevention tends to work best for those that do not need it. As such, research should **better specify the target of prevention and the reasons behind this choice**.

Researchers are best placed to help **develop methods and indicators to measure effect and outcome**, rather than just evaluating implementation and output.

Policymakers should avoid using the term 'best practices', as there are no universal benchmarks. A more accurate alternative phrase is '**good or inspiring practices**'.

Research indicates that **peers work as gatekeepers** and are better than parents at countering and signalling radicalisation.

CVE should not be concerned with good practice alone, but should also focus on **good people**: in successful cases, the intervention is not necessarily the determining factor; the practitioner executing it might well be responsible for the success instead. This aspect needs to be factored in as a consideration and studied further.

Research shows that increased resilience is important, but needs to be in effect across several

levels (schools, homes, community engagement and peers). **Prioritise secondary and tertiary intervention for evaluation**, as these areas are targeted.

Extra-EU P/CVE research lessons

Literature from the development and security field is significantly rich in data and scientific rigour, and there are many valuable lessons contained in reports and academic studies from the Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and various United Nations (UN) bodies related to CVE programming and evaluation measures.

A study by **RUSI (Glazzard et al. 2015)** on the **drivers of violent extremism** is very useful in examining the validity of various hypotheses and its consequences for the DFID⁽⁹⁶⁾. Additionally, **RUSI (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016)** provides guidance to policymakers and implementers of CVE and risk reduction (deradicalisation) programmes⁽⁹⁷⁾.

A **United Nations University** state-of-research review on **children and extreme violence** reveals that children join non-state armed groups for several reasons: a need to belong, a quest for significance, peer networks, risk accumulation, impulsive behaviour, and bucking authority. Furthermore, children become violent due to in-group identity, in-group love, dehumanisation, and social norms and radicalisation⁽⁹⁸⁾.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jespersen, S. T., & Sneha Reddy Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of violent extremism: Hypotheses and literature review*. Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

⁽⁹⁷⁾ Khalil, J., & Zeuthen, M. (2016). *Countering violent extremism and risk reduction: A guide to programme*

design and evaluation. Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Whitehall Report 2-16. Retrieved from https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20160608_cve_and_rr.combined.online4.pdf

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Littman, R. (2017). *Children and extreme violence: Insights from social science on child trajectories into and out of non-state armed groups*. 'State of research' brief. United Nations University. Retrieved from

The **UNDP study *Journey to Extremism in Africa* (Ojielo, 2017)** unpacks the **causes, consequences and trajectories of violent extremism** ⁽⁹⁹⁾. In particular, the study makes some important recommendations: shift away from security measures alone, as security-driven responses are counterproductive; specific geographic areas (hotbeds) are higher risks; and it is important to tackle structural causes and make a distinction between 'P/CVE-specific' and 'P/CVE-relevant' interventions.

UNESCO's (Alava, 2017) global mapping of research on **youth and violent extremism on social media** demonstrates that rather than being the **initiator** or **cause** of violent behaviour, social media facilitates the radicalisation process ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. On the same subject, Defence Research and Development Canada provide an evidence-based review of literature and projects on CVE on social media ⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

Hedayah, another important CVE centre of excellence, holds annual state-of-the-art reviews of academic contributions on CVE and violent extremism-related issues ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

The issue of **reintegration of child soldiers** is another important body of knowledge that is potentially transferable to dealing with children,

extremism and trauma within the EU. Numerous international aid organisations, development organisations and the academic community have extracted important lessons on child soldiers in terms of prevention, demobilisation and reintegration.

Research gaps and findings

There is a wealth of research and experience outside the EU, and closer collaboration should be prioritised to exchange research and lessons. Finding evidence-based guidelines is a continuing challenge beyond the EU too, where similar experiences are noted. Performing evaluations and stressing mental health issues are priority topics.

There are important lessons to be learned from the **Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence**, which has invested in projects and research over the past decade. For example, the subjects studied include **when and why religious movements turn to violence; collective ethics** (how norms of justice influence behaviour and individuals' reactions); and gaining a better understanding of **protective factors in communities**.

http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6290/unu_brief_s_SocialScience.pdf

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Ojielo, O. (2017). *Journey to extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Retrieved from <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Alava, S., Frau-Meigs, D., & Hassan, G. (2017). *Youth and violent extremism on social media: Mapping the research*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Publishing. Retrieved from

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002603/260382e.pdf>

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Waldman, S., & Verga, S. (2016). Countering violent extremism on social media: An overview of recent literature and Government of Canada projects with guidance for practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers. Defence Research and Development Canada. Scientific Report DRDC-RDDC-2016-R229. Retrieved from http://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc262/p805091_A1b.pdf

⁽¹⁰²⁾ Hedayah. (n.d.). Publications: Reports. Retrieved from <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/publications/89/report>

Hedayah holds an annual research conference, where they take stock of important **research findings across different regions in the world**: on the role of **narratives and counter-narratives**; on the role of **gender** in P/CVE efforts; on **reintegration efforts** and P/CVE efforts in the **education sector**, etc. Important lessons can be learned by remaining aware and informed of related efforts elsewhere, and taking stock of P/CVE knowledge is crucial. A great deal of work has been carried out beyond the EU in relation to the role of women and reintegration efforts.

The exit programme of **Social Welfare, Academics and Training (SWAaT) for Pakistan** shows high rates of **reintegration** of young boys with little recidivism. Understanding and dealing with mental health issues (particularly PTSD) is key in this local context.

There are common factors leading to pathways (social grievances, poverty, a lack of literacy) and for radicalisation prevention (a sense of belonging and inclusion, critical thinking skills). Moreover, there are important lessons to be learned beyond the EU on engaging with religious leaders in the prevention of violent extremism.

Research lessons

There is a **lack of evidence-based research**, especially on the **impact of P/CVE interventions**, including the **impact of multi-agency interventions**. Therefore, research on impact evaluations and impact of multi-agency interventions (not just single projects or interventions) should be highly prioritised in the field. Also, research on **protective factors and resilience** is imperative.

It is crucial to continue the **trialogue**: the success and impact of the research depends on the audience. Research should not be conducted in isolation, but rather in **collaboration with policymakers and practitioners**. For successful

collaboration, these stakeholders should learn to **trust each other and to speak the same language**. This can only be achieved by providing more opportunities for interaction and nurturing a relationship. One possible pathway is to establish **national points of contact for P/CVE researchers**.

At the same time, it is important to **manage expectations**. Research produces knowledge, not solutions. Both practitioners and researchers should be included and involved at the start of an evaluation or research project, so as to manage expectations.

The **EU** plays an important role for the convergence of research, practice and policymaking. Funds for research should include a **dedicated budget** for a chapter on the implications for practitioners and policymakers, in a specific and concise way. The EU should not operate in isolation from the rest of the world. There is a **wealth of data and knowledge available on other continents**, and work from researchers globally can be accelerated and enhanced by joint efforts.

Proposed topics for future research include:

- asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies;
- the relationship between online and offline behavioural change;
- resilience factors;
- varying opinions on meaningful change from different actors (a life-course analysis);
- family support;
- working with vulnerable communities without stigmatisation;
- confidentiality, privacy laws and information-sharing in P/CVE;
- the role of gender in radicalisation and P/CVE;
- the influence of religious education;
- the effect of mass migration on the radicalisation of hosting communities and

preventative measures (from hospitality to hostility);

- the impact of ideology;
- the long-term sustainability of P/CVE measures and mechanisms (a lower level of terrorist threat implies fewer resources);

- hate speech, propaganda and its impact;
- right-wing extremism;
- the impact of multi-agency interventions.

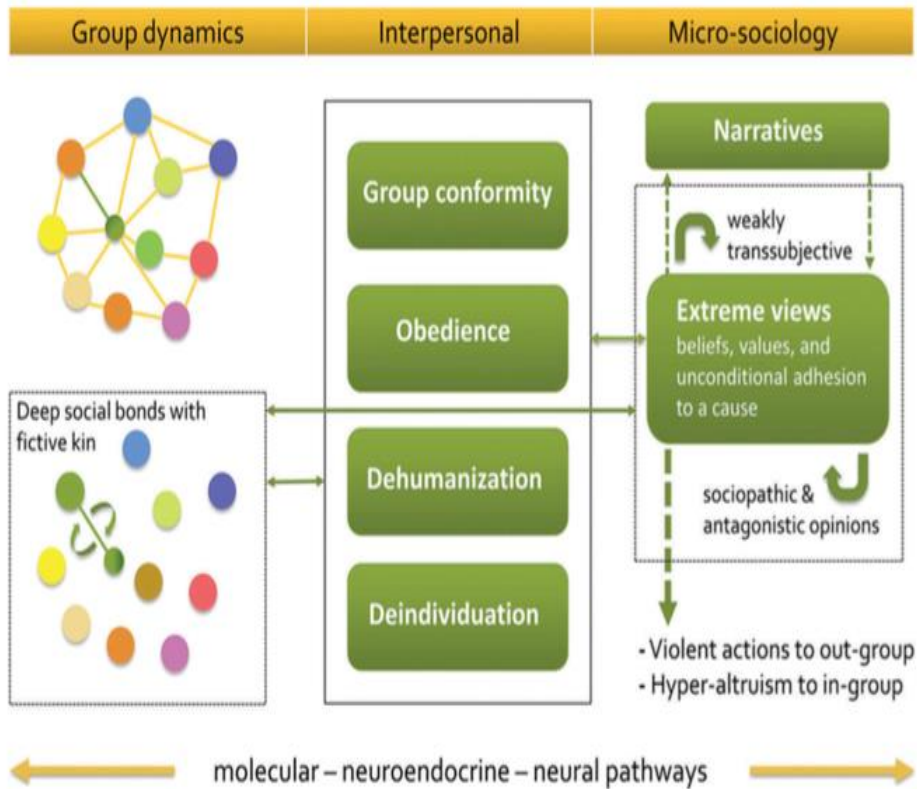


Figure 1: Psychological processes. Reprinted from 'A multilevel social neuroscience perspective on radicalization and terrorism' by J. Decety, R. Pape and C.I. Workman, 2018, *Social Neuroscience*, 13(5), p. 513.

Table 1
Seven approaches to the psychological mechanisms of radicalisation.

Theory	Central papers	Central tenets	Dependent variable	Explanatory variable(s)	Support - internal validity	Support - external validity	Support - measurement validity
Uncertainty-Identity Theory	Hogg & Adelman (2013)	Motivational and social identity theory	Joining and supporting radical groups Autocratic leadership Behavioural aggression and hostility	Self-uncertainty Group enitativity Social identity complexity Peripheral membership	Strong	Moderate	Area of focus
Significance Quest/"3N"	Webber & Kruglanski (2018)	Social psychological motivational theory	Coming to see as socially normative violent behaviour that is deviant from the majority perspective	Need for significance Narratives legitimising violence Networks and groups	Area of focus	Strong	Moderate
Devoted Actor Model	Atran (2016)	Ideology, values	Unconditional commitment, sacrifice and willingness to engage in extreme behaviour for a group	Sacred values Identity fusion	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Mindset and Worldview	Borum (2014)	Distinction between mindset factors and worldview factors	Psychological "climate" that increases the risk of involvement in violent extremism	Psychological mindset: authoritarianism	Area of focus	Area of focus	Area of focus
Reactive Approach Motivation	McGregor, Hayes, & Prentice (2015)	Motivational framework encompassing personality and social dynamics	Aggressive religious radicalisation	Motivational processes diverted through interaction between personality, threats and group affordances	Area of focus	Moderate	Moderate
Two-pyramid approach	McCauley & Moskaleiko (2017)	Distinguishing opinion and action	Radical opinion (support) and radical action (behavioural intentions)	Individual factors Group factors Mass factors	Area of focus	Moderate	Strong

O. Gøtzsche-Astrup

Table 1: Competing theories. Reprinted from 'The time for causal designs: Review and evaluation of empirical support for mechanisms of political radicalisation' by O. Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 39 (March-April), p.91.

Acronyms

CA	Capabilities Approach
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
CIPDR	Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation (Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalization)
CNRS	French National Center for Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique)
COSPRAD	Scientific Council for Radicalisation Processes (Conseil scientifique sur les processus de radicalisation)
CVE	Countering violent extremism
CYBERA	CYBER-VERA
DARE	Database and Assessment of Risks of violent Extremists
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
ERG 22+	Extremism Risk Guidance
FGC	Family Group Conference
FTF	Foreign terrorist fighters
GDPR	EU General Data Protection Regulation
GLM	Good Lives Model
IC	Integrative complexity
ICCT	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
LEA	Law enforcement agencies
MADDD-or-Rad-17	Model of Analysis for Differentiating Delusional Disorder from the Radicalization of Extreme Beliefs–17 Factor
MAUT	Multi-attribute utility technology
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PRISM	Proactive Integrated Support Model
PST	Norwegian Police Security Service (Politiets sikkerhetstjeneste)

PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SAVE	Structured Assessment of Violent Extremism
SPJ	Structured professional judgement
SWAaT for Pakistan	Social Welfare, Academics and Training for Pakistan
TRAP-18	Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol
UN	United Nations
UNCTED	United Nations Security Council, Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VAF	Vulnerability Assessment Framework
VERA-2	Violent Extremism Risk Assessment, version 2