Occasional Paper

How Effective Are Mentorship Interventions?
Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Emily Winterbotham
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189 years of independent thinking on defence and security

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Published in 2020 by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies.

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RUSI Occasional Paper, September 2020. ISSN 2397-0286 (Online).
Executive Summary

This paper examines the effectiveness of mentorship interventions in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) as part of the Prevention Project, which appraises the available evidence base and examines ‘what can work and what has not worked’ in P/CVE interventions.

Mentorships, as interventions targeted at the specific needs of individuals or groups of individuals and adapted to the local environment, are assumed to have a higher chance of tackling violent extremism than broad approaches targeting general populations.¹ This paper demonstrates that evaluations of mentorship interventions are limited in number and scope – as with the wider P/CVE field.² Existing evaluations often lack well-developed theories of change and are over-reliant on anecdotal evidence.³ It is therefore difficult to draw causal links between mentoring and positive P/CVE outcomes.⁴ This paper is, however, cautiously optimistic about the effectiveness of mentorship programmes.

The body of evidence reviewed was of good quality, including a high number of peer-reviewed papers and evaluation-type material. Further, nearly half of the papers reviewed discussed interventions assessed to be potentially effective, though inevitably still limited by the perennial challenge of proving causation and attribution. Nevertheless, this still makes for what can be referred to as a good ‘contribution story’,⁵ providing a good evidence base for this paper.⁶

3. Ibid.
5. Contribution analysis helps to confirm or revise a theory of change. It is not definitive proof, but rather provides evidence and a line of reasoning from which we can draw a plausible conclusion that, within some level of confidence, the programme has made an important contribution to the documented results.
Key findings and recommendations include:

1. All but four studies reviewed focused on Western interventions. This raises questions about how transferable the findings included in this paper are for other contexts, particularly where multi-agency cooperation is lacking.

2. In Western countries, in particular, mentorship programmes need to be cautious about the assumption that mental vulnerability is primarily associated with Islamist radicalisation rather than right-wing extremism. Similarly, it should not be assumed that young Muslims are in particular need of role models or do not believe in democracy.

3. Equipping individuals with life skills such as vocational capabilities, social concerns and realisation of life options is potentially an effective way forward.

4. Positive youth development (rewarding social connections with diverse peers, confidence in being able to successfully pursue post-secondary education and obtain employment) may reduce susceptibility to radicalisation or violent extremism. But interventions that unilaterally aim to boost self-esteem can also encourage narcissism, aggression or anti-social behaviour.

5. The mentor–mentee relationship is key to intervention effectiveness and can mitigate ‘pull factors’ such as the need for belonging or identity. Creating alternative social networks to violent extremist groups is, however, challenging.

6. For mentorship programmes to be successful, stakeholders with a thorough understanding of the target group’s social setting and context are crucial. Connections to local material and human resources and services are important for programme effectiveness and sustainability.
Introduction

This paper examines the effectiveness of mentorship interventions in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) as part of the Prevention Project, which appraises the available evidence base and examines ‘what can work and what has not worked’ in P/CVE interventions. Primarily funded by the Norwegian government, this research – which commenced in January 2018 and will end in December 2020 – aims to collate, analyse and strengthen knowledge about how to prevent and counter violent extremism (VE).

Mentorship in P/CVE interventions refers to approaches aimed at responding to the needs of individuals or groups of individuals identified to be ‘at risk’ of radicalisation by developing their confidence and ability to deal with the challenges life presents, building resilience to the narratives and networks of violent extremist groups, creating alternative support and social networks, and enhancing knowledge of extremism and how violent extremist groups operate. They aim to produce measurable changes in individual attitudes and behaviours.

The basis for mentorship programmes in P/CVE is derived from evidence from other fields. For example, a meta-analysis of youth mentorship programmes in the US found evidence of improved outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional and academic domains. Furthermore, a key idea in prison rehabilitation programmes is that high-risk or dangerous offenders are better suited for tailored, structured interventions. In the P/CVE space, mentorships, as interventions targeted at the specific needs of individuals or groups of individuals and adapted to the local environment, are therefore assumed to have a higher chance of tackling VE than broad approaches targeting general populations.

The effectiveness (and ineffectiveness) of different mentorship programmes in respect to preventing or countering VE is the focus of this paper. The first chapter outlines the paper’s methodology, including its evidence base and definition of mentoring. The second chapter explores mentorship interventions that the Prevention Project research team categorised as

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promising or potentially effective. The third chapter analyses areas of mentoring where there are limitations and shortcomings. The fourth chapter discusses the strengths and weaknesses of implementing mentorship approaches in P/CVE. The final section summarises the key conclusions and makes some associated recommendations.

**Methodology**

The main question underlying this paper is: what can work and what has not worked in P/CVE mentorship interventions? These include those initiatives implemented by national or local governments, civil society organisations or the private sector. This paper is based on a literature review which applied systematic techniques to evaluate and synthesise findings across 27 studies. These include peer-reviewed publications, independent evaluations, programme documents, and analytical and discursive grey literature (materials and research produced by organisations outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels).

As outlined in the project methodology (see Annex II), each study was assessed according to quality (high, medium or low) on the basis of criteria drawn from the Department for International Development’s recommended practice, including the paper’s conceptual framing, transparency, methods, research design, validity, cogency and independence. Though the studies have been graded according to quality, the authors have refrained from listing the grades of each reviewed paper in the publication series given the potential biases and limitations detailed in Annex II. Recognising that evaluation can be lacking in the field of P/CVE, the approach acknowledges the value in analysing relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes.

Based on the findings of each study, the interventions explored were subsequently coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’. They were also analysed to identify promising approaches and associated challenges and limitations in P/CVE mentorship interventions.

It is important to note from the outset that the public availability of reports covering the work of certain organisations and/or programmes inevitably means that their interventions were more frequently cited and assessed in this review. This should not be perceived as an attempt to undermine their work and it is important to highlight the value of open-access analysis in expanding the evidence base. The research team acknowledges that organisations are likely

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4. For the full bibliography, see Annex I. This paper is part of a broader research project (the Prevention Project) that has reviewed, at the time of writing, 536 unique publications. This number is likely to increase given that the project is still ongoing and further snowballing of data related to several thematic P/CVE intervention areas will be taking place.


6. To see the description of these categories, see Annex II.
to have compelling information in support of their findings that is not always accessible or included in publicly available documentation, often due to the data’s sensitive or confidential nature. However, the team was only able to analyse and draw conclusions from the material gathered through our review.

What Are Mentorship Programmes?

Mentorship programmes are commonly used in both prevention and deradicalisation activities. In the case of the latter, they target those already involved in VE. However, for the purposes of this paper, which focuses on prevention, mentorships are a targeted or ‘secondary prevention’ approach aimed at those considered at heightened risk for violence (having one or more risk factors for violence). Mentorships are defined in this paper as relationships and activities that take place between an individual who has been identified to be at risk of VE and experienced mentors who act in a supporting capacity. This support can be in the form of giving advice, guidance and direction based on a mentor’s knowledge of the area in which the mentee needs guidance to navigate. The mentor can be a peer, a sports coach, a community police officer, a youth worker, a parent or a religious leader. Essentially, they should be someone the individual can trust. Traditionally, this work is seen to take place face-to-face and offline. Interventions can, however, also involve contact between intervention providers and candidates through a variety of media, including social media messaging and phone conversations.

Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, mentoring is distinct from counselling and psychological or therapeutic interventions, which, though complementary to mentoring, involve specialist, professional skills. Mentoring should not be conflated with coaching: coaching is first and foremost a matter of building good relations and of using Socratic question-asking techniques to help others find their own meaningful answers to basic life questions. While mentoring can also apply this approach, it more frequently involves someone with expertise

or knowledge offering informal advice to someone with less experience. Mentoring is also generally seen as longer-term and less structured while coaching is short-term, formal and structured.\textsuperscript{12} Mentors are also often referred to as role models. Yet they are much more than that: mentors should be trained in a number of ways, supported by a programme, and informed by mentoring methods or practice. This is not the case with a role model, whose personal story or life experience inspires others. Support provided by mentors is much more formalised than that of a role model.\textsuperscript{13}

**Assessing the Evidence on Mentorship-Focused Interventions**

**What Is Excluded**

The literature review excluded several areas of investigation. First, although there is a wealth of data in relation to mentoring and youth or within the criminal field, the review only included publications which focused on mentoring in relation to P/CVE. Second, although mentorships are relevant to both ‘at risk’ individuals and those already active in violent extremist groups, the research for this paper focused only on prevention. This means that potentially useful material on well-known mentorship interventions, such as the EXIT programmes\textsuperscript{14} – used in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland and the Netherlands – and Saudi Arabia’s Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After Care programme, have not been included, which is a potential research limitation. Third, as noted above, this paper’s definition of mentoring excludes services that are offered in formal professional roles by those with advanced education or training, such as psychological, therapeutic or counselling interventions, as well as those that are exclusively or mainly didactic in orientation.

Finally, the paper does not provide a detailed analysis of each context in which the interventions are implemented. A focus on interventions could be dismissed as naive when no account is offered of wider socio-political factors fuelling radicalisation. The focus of this paper is, however, on assessing the outcomes or impact of interventions. Context is, therefore, considered to the extent that information is available and relevant in accounting for the outcomes observed. This is a pertinent topic for future research.

**The Body of Evidence**

Twenty-seven papers were included in this review. The paper was fortunate to be able to draw on 13 high-quality and 10 moderate-quality studies. Of these, seven high-quality and five medium-quality studies were categorised as describing potentially effective mentorship interventions, three high-quality and two medium-quality studies revealed mixed results, one high-quality study concluded ineffective results and six studies (two of high quality and four of medium


\textsuperscript{13} Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’.

\textsuperscript{14} See Ranstorp et al., ‘Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism’, pp. 58–64.
quality) described inconclusive results. Only three low-quality studies were included, and these were all categorised as describing inconclusive results.

The body of evidence was strengthened by the fact that 14 of 27 studies reviewed were some form of evaluation or based on evaluations at the programme- or meta-level.¹⁵ The majority of the rest of the literature reviewed drew on radicalisation and deradicalisation literature (quite often based on empirical studies of the target audience). The literature also included conference papers and guidance notes.

Despite the relatively high number of evaluations included in this review relative to the overall number of studies reviewed, no intervention was categorised to be effective. A high number were, however, assessed to be potentially effective. This reflects the difficulty in proving causation and attribution as a result of the infrequent use of quasi-experimental and experimental designs comparing the performance of the treatment group with that of a comparison group on certain key outcome variables.¹⁶ As a result, governments and interventionists can differ in their assessment of success.¹⁷ Some intervention providers – even those working within

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established programmes – reportedly rely on instinct to gauge success, rather than a particular framework or tool.¹⁸

**Table 1: The Body of Evidence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention Impact</th>
<th>Quality of Evidence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potentially effective</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconclusive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

All but four studies included in this review focused on interventions implemented in Western and developed-country contexts. The majority of these were based in the UK (nine studies), Denmark (six studies) and Australia (four studies). The US and other European countries also featured. The dominance of the UK in the literature is unsurprising due to the focus on English-language publications and the longevity of P/CVE interventions in the UK. The Danish model is most comprehensively explored and evidenced in the literature. The outlier in the review was Kenya, which is explained by the fact that four studies are based on RUSI’s work there (which includes STRIVE I in the Horn of Africa, STRIVE II and a street mentorship programme).¹⁹

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¹⁹. For more information, see Fisher, Range and Cuddihy, ‘Evaluation of “Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism” (STRIVE II) in Kenya’.
I. Promising Approaches in Mentoring

It is largely accepted that individuals join extremist movements and groups for a complex range of reasons. Promising mentoring approaches therefore encompass a range of objectives typically focused on changing beliefs, changing behaviour or on changing attitudes that influence behaviour, such as building confidence and self-esteem. The analysis below explores the effectiveness of mentoring in relation to three areas:

1. Building life skills to be able to cope more effectively with potential challenges.
2. The creation of opportunities for pro-social development (for example, the creation of alternative social networks with diverse peers, confidence in being able to successfully pursue post-secondary education and obtain employment) to address ‘pull factors’ associated with violent extremist groups.
3. Developing mentees’ awareness of the risks and consequences of VE.

Many mentorship programmes combine these objectives. The framework adopted is an analytical tool rather than a way to contrast mentorship models.

Mentoring and the Creation of Life Skills to Prevent Violent Extremism

The focus on developing life skills permeates the Danish approach to P/CVE. The method – often referred to as the ‘Aarhus model’ – is based on the life psychology theory (LGT) developed by Preben Bertelsen. The approach features in four papers in this review, including three written or co-authored by Bertelsen, published in 2019 and 2020. All three are peer-reviewed and contain empirical data. One paper includes the empirical testing of the life psychological model with samples from the US and Denmark.

20. Spalek and Davies, ‘Mentoring in Relation to Violent Extremism’.
21. Life psychology has emerged as an integrative framework theory that has been applied in interventions preventing and countering radicalisation processes.
23. Ozer and Bertelsen, ‘Countering Radicalization’.
The focus of the life skills approach is on developing and establishing mentees’ grip on life and dealing with life’s challenges. At a minimum, the objective of mentoring is to steer a mentee away from illegal, violent and extremist life trajectories. The model starts from the premise that all humans essentially strive to have ‘a good enough life for ourselves and each other’. It is assumed that ‘an insecure life attachment is the result of a life, which is or is not to a certain extent perceived to be insecure, excluding, unreliable and unfair, and without proper opportunities for well-being’. Radicalisation is caused by people reacting to these insufficient fundamental life conditions. Testing this assumption empirically through cross-national samples with 322 people in the US and 364 in Denmark, Simon Ozer and Bertelsen demonstrate that an absence of life skills is central to whether an individual perceives their context as insecure and unjust and therefore believes they can only address this through radical means.

Another assumption of the LGT is that possessing a sufficiently good grip on life means attaining reasonable success with life’s tasks and challenges. To successfully handle these general life tasks while preserving balance, one must be equipped with the necessary life skills. Life skills are considered by those applying the LGT framework to be key strengths for an individual who is at risk of radicalisation. Mentoring is therefore designed to create the ability to handle tasks in a way that provides the basis for a good enough life.

Life skills include vocational capabilities that increase an individual’s chances of finding significance and respect (for example, landing a job), and are compatible with other personal (for example, safety and comfort) and social concerns (for example, consideration of and empathy towards others). Life skills may also include realisation of the legal options to pursue one’s rights (to have justice and fairness) within a system of democratic governance. Danish mentors therefore have a social and cognitive role in promoting a better understanding of society, life choices, and responsibility for their own professional and social development. The model is solution- and goal-focused, an approach supported by other practitioners.

The literature provides some credible yet preliminary support for the LGT and associated assumptions underpinning mentorship interventions. No independent programme-level

24. Kruglanski and Bertelsen, ‘Life Psychology and Significance Quest’.
29. Ozer and Bertelsen, ‘Countering Radicalization’.
31. RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’.
32. Bertelsen, ‘Mentoring in Anti-Radicalisation’.
33. Kruglanski and Bertelsen, ‘Life Psychology and Significance Quest’.
34. RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’.
35. Bertelsen, ‘Mentoring in Anti-Radicalisation’.
36. Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’.
evaluation of the Danish mentorship model could be found in English but there are programme evaluations available in Danish. In the absence of English-language programme evaluations, other indicators of success are that the method has received positive feedback in Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) group meetings and international forums. RAN also states that evidence collected via assessment forms in the mentorship programme indicates this is an effective method for individual intervention. RAN, however, provides no detail as to whether the assessment forms are completed by mentees or mentors – whether this is a case of marking one’s own homework, for example. The Ministry of Social Affairs has also reviewed the Aarhus model and deemed it an exemplary practice. The mentorship programme has also been adopted by the Danish government as a nationwide practice implemented through police districts.

As noted above, Ozer and Bertelsen have tested the Danish model and provide preliminary empirical data in support of the assumption that equipping individuals at risk of radicalisation with necessary life skills through mentoring can prevent VE. The study is limited by the sampling of a non-radicalised population. The external validity of the results is therefore limited in regard to whether it would be possible to reach similar results in a population at risk of radicalisation and further testing is required.

The study found that interaction between a mentor and a mentee can support the individual in overcoming everyday challenges or perhaps changing a problematic life trajectory through:

- Identifying a challenge and setting a goal that can be part of a solution for this challenge.
- Empowering an individual to develop relevant life skills needed to reach this specific goal.
- Establishing concrete steps needed to reach this goal.

This provides empirical evidence to support Arie W Kruglanski and Bertelsen’s conclusion that:

While mentoring and psychological interventions cannot change the situational and socio-political factors and life conditions as such, what mentoring in fact can do is empowering motivationally balanced life skills by which the mentee can face and handle the positional challenges of significance and life in a civil and non-violent way.

In addition to questions about external validity, the attitudinal study also provides no evidence that endorsement of violent means in relation to extremism could transform into actual

37. RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. The paper met the criteria for inclusion in this review because it was designed with the objective of testing the Danish mentoring model, which works with radicalised individuals.
42. Ozer and Bertelsen, ‘Countering Radicalization’.
radicalised behaviour.\textsuperscript{44} The authors also admit that different person-oriented interventions may be more or less effective with different personalities.\textsuperscript{45} A final limitation of the LGT model relates to the transferability to other countries. As such, further research in diverse contexts and samples including radicalised individuals and longitudinal and experimental research is needed to strengthen the empirical foundation of the study and the model itself.\textsuperscript{46} As RAN notes, it is more difficult to transfer the results of this study to countries that lack good service infrastructure, in particular multi-agency cooperation, which is required for the practice to operate.\textsuperscript{47}

**Mentoring to Meet Needs for Belonging or Identity**

Social disconnectedness and unfulfilled needs for belonging are often identified in radicalisation literature as contributors to radicalisation among young people.\textsuperscript{48} The goal of some mentorship interventions is therefore to enhance the social ties of radical youths and their relationship with the broader social environment in order to reduce personal problems and feelings of social deprivation.\textsuperscript{49} In other words, the influence of pull factors, such as the need for belonging or identity, can be mitigated by engaging young people in pro-social pathways of development.\textsuperscript{50}

In practice, this means that mentoring aims to support individuals by offering alternative social networks and connections.\textsuperscript{51} This can be achieved, at least in part, by the relationship developed between mentors and mentees. Practitioners agree that mentoring is ultimately about building relationships and trust and demonstrating empathy while providing guidance and support on issues.\textsuperscript{52} The assumption of some programmes is that the stronger the relationship is with a mentor, the better the chance mentees have of making a change in their life and moving away from radicalisation.\textsuperscript{53} David L DuBois asserts that the ‘strength of an affective bond that develops between youth and their mentors is one of [sic.] most robustly established processes through which such relationships can be beneficial for a range of different outcomes’.\textsuperscript{54}

In this regard, an approach known as positive youth development (PYD) was classified as potentially effective. PYD aims to develop assets in five key domains, frequently referred to as the ‘five Cs’: competence (social, academic and cognitive skills); confidence (positive self-worth

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ozer and Bertelsen, ‘Countering Radicalization’.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Kruglanski and Bertelsen, ‘Life Psychology and Significance Quest’.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ozer and Bertelsen, ‘Countering Radicalization’.
\item \textsuperscript{47} RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’, p. 214.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’; DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.
\item \textsuperscript{50} DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’; Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’.
\item \textsuperscript{54} DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’, p. 18.
\end{itemize}
and self-efficacy); connection (positive bonds with people and institutions); character (sense of morality and integrity); and care and compassion (sense of sympathy and empathy). When these develop, they are expected to contribute to the emergence of a ‘sixth C’ of contribution that includes actions to benefit the community or civil society.\(^{55}\)

A key aspect of this approach involves young people building strong relationships with parents, peers, teachers and other adults and connecting to communities, schools and other institutions. The theory is that ‘when youth have opportunities for bonding to persons or institutions whom they regard as having prosocial values, this will reduce the youths’ [sic.] susceptibility to involvement in antisocial behaviour such as substance use or violence’.\(^{56}\) The approach has empirical support in relation to youth development generally.\(^{57}\) DuBois and Fasika Alem argue that there are compelling linkages between the five Cs and the factors identified to be involved in VE and radicalisation, and that PYD therefore has the potential to prevent or reduce VE.\(^{58}\)

Though involvement in VE is markedly different from substance use and other forms of socially problematic behaviour, Vasco Lub also suggests that this type of social ecological intervention can improve the chance of a ‘normal life’ for extremist youth. Using case studies from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, Lub acknowledges that his paper is a theoretical evaluation and, though the hypothesis is plausible, it does not provide a definitive answer and lacks empirical testing.\(^{59}\)

Further evidence of effectiveness is derived from two programmes examined in the literature, which apply the PYD approach. DuBois and Alem draw on a quasi-experimental evaluation of Mosaic’s Secondary School Programme in the UK. Mosaic, a government-supported organisation, applies PYD to support youth (aged 11–18) in marginalised, predominantly Muslim communities. DuBois and Alem say this is illustrative of a PYD-aligned approach to supporting young persons whose life circumstances have the potential to make them vulnerable to radicalisation. The evaluation revealed improved aspirations and expectations of post-secondary education as well as greater confidence in being able to find a job after schooling for mentored youth relative to those in control groups.\(^{60}\)

In Australia, two papers examine a sports-based student mentorship programme with 60 young men (aged 15–25), all Muslims of mixed ethnic backgrounds.\(^{61}\) Sport is assumed by some practitioners to be a particularly effective approach to PYD as the intense experiences

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55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 8.
and emotions experienced in team sports can break down barriers of social difference and facilitate experiences of mutual respect and trust, social inclusion, belonging and resilience. Sports activities posit the coach as a mentor playing an important role in nurturing values of respect, fairness and sportsmanship. In parallel, the programme was accompanied by ‘off-field’ mentoring activities to promote values of interfaith and intercultural harmony encouraging the positive effects of engaging in dialogue instead of violence.62

The research team classed the intervention as potentially effective in this review. An independent, mixed-methods, end-line evaluation designed to measure the impact and effectiveness of the programme by exploring participant and stakeholder views of the project was published in 2017.63 The evaluators found that there was strong qualitative evidence that participation in sport-based programmes can make a significant contribution to developing core components in PYD, including character and confidence building, skills for conflict resolution, a sense of belonging and generally enhancing resilience. Both qualitative and quantitative findings also indicated improved attitudes to and understanding of other cultural groups among participants. The evaluators conclude that mentorship programmes provided to youth from marginalised communities and those with recent immigrant backgrounds have the potential to enhance indicators of PYD that may reduce their susceptibility to radicalisation or VE.64

DuBois and Alem’s meta-level evaluation also concludes that the project demonstrated that mentoring can promote PYD by helping mentees identify and explore their special interests or hobbies (promoting competence), have their voices heard, understand the values, behaviours or activities their mentors do and do not find acceptable and why, and participate in causes that align with their interests and concerns.65

A potential limitation with the Australian sports mentorship and Mosaic PYD programmes, however, is that they are designed on the assumption that their target groups are vulnerable to radicalisation. Though this vulnerability might exist, no detailed information about a risk assessment could be found. It is therefore not known whether the target groups are in fact vulnerable to radicalisation. Mosaic’s website makes no reference to working with people who are vulnerable to radicalisation and the evaluation is assessed at the outcome level in relation to PYD. Evidence of effectiveness is therefore restricted to fulfilling PYD objectives rather than tackling VE.66 Meanwhile, focusing on marginalised communities can be perceived as stigmatising when associated with P/CVE objectives.

Programmatic assumptions regarding vulnerability among those who are marginalised or part of minority groups are relatively common in this type of approach. In the UK, a project led by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change aimed to strengthen the skills of young British women from
ethnic minority backgrounds, primarily from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. These Muslim-majority communities were reported to have the lowest rate of employment in the UK and high levels of vulnerability to VE – as assessed by the UK Prevent strategy. Tower Hamlets, Redbridge and Newham are among priority local areas based on Home Office analysis. The project aimed to strengthen their identity and individual empowerment to contribute to social cohesion and greater individual and community resilience to extremist narratives. The project was found to be successful by an internal end-line mixed-methods evaluation: 48% of mentees indicated that their future plans had changed as a result of the course, and 38% reported an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem and a stronger sense of identity and belonging to British society.

These findings demonstrate that the project is effective in relation to PYD and factors such as belonging, identity, self-esteem and confidence. Given that the project was also targeted at areas of vulnerability to VE – as established by research findings – there is a relatively strong case to be made that this project could potentially reduce vulnerability to VE, though the link to this possible reduction still needs to be more clearly established.

Another way of satisfying an individual’s desire for belonging is to support the development of alternative social networks. For example, STRIVE II in Kenya aimed to create a mentor and mentee network and expand peer networks to satisfy an individual’s desire for belonging. An independent end-line evaluation concluded that the programme offers a membership opportunity, which met participants’ needs and desire to belong and provided a positive group identity which is able to compete with and challenge negative affiliations and connections in the mentees’ day-to-day lives. The evaluation concluded that this demonstrably built resilience against pull factors toward VE.

Reflecting the complexity of this measurement, however, the internal mixed-methods evaluation found that when controlling for socio-demographic variables (which the independent evaluation

67. TBI, ‘Compass Evaluation’.
69. TBI, ‘Compass Evaluation’.
70. Ibid. See pp. 24 and 35 for the figures.
71. Ibid.
did not do), the intervention did not result in any significant increase in the diversity of mentee networks per se. Instead, both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that mentors were the primary point of contact for most mentees and that their peer networks generally had not expanded. The internal evaluation concluded that the creation of alternative networks is more challenging to achieve unless explicit efforts are made to link mentees to contexts and opportunities that could expose them to such alternative circles and networks. Instead, most mentees emphasised the importance of the relationship that they shared with their mentor, which had expanded their worldview and levels of understanding.75 Since this relationship will eventually end, this raises questions as to how well the programme has created alternative networks in the long run and whether this is, in fact, a meaningful proxy measure of success.

The interventions discussed so far in this section were designed around Muslim communities, aimed at addressing concerns related to Islamist VE. Using reported successful case studies from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, Lub suggests that this type of social ecological intervention can also improve the chance of a ‘normal life’ for right-wing extremist youth. Lub also notes that the approach is most effective with young ‘hangers-on’, who are interested in radicalisation, and less with hardcore radicals.76 This finding is supported by the interventions discussed since all were aimed at those who were vulnerable rather than those who had started to radicalise.

In sum, in relation to the effectiveness of the life skills approach most frequently identified in Denmark, there appears to be credible evidence that equipping individuals at risk of radicalisation with necessary life skills through mentoring can prevent VE. This paper would have benefited from being able to review Danish-language evaluations of Denmark’s mentoring programmes. Meanwhile, further testing in diverse contexts and longitudinal and experimental research is now needed to strengthen the empirical foundation of the life skills model. It is also likely to be difficult to transfer this model to countries that lack multi-agency infrastructure.

As to whether mentoring can create alternative networks to counter the influence of violent extremist groups by engaging young people in pro-social pathways, further evidence is required. It is likely that mentoring can improve PYD indicators, such as expanding expectations and confidence, and might, in some cases, improve social networks. However, the links between these and preventing VE require further evidence. It is also unclear whether these efforts work with those who are further along the radicalisation pathway.

**Mentoring to Raise Awareness of the Risks and Consequences of Violent Extremism**

Some mentorships are based on a theory of change that the vulnerability of young people can be reduced by building the awareness of youth of the risks and consequences of VE. STRIVE II in Kenya internally assessed this through two sub-indicators that measured mentees’

76. Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.
understanding of both the risks and benefits of joining violent extremist groups. The internal evaluation found that the mentorship project was associated with improvements in knowledge of the risks and consequences of joining such groups.

The evaluators conclude that it is easier to build knowledge about VE in mentorship programmes. The study also noted that the knowledge of risks and consequences of joining terrorist organisations, in particular, improved at the mid-line and the end-line. This is in keeping with the results of previous studies which underline the difficulties of instituting attitudinal change as opposed to improving knowledge and understanding. What is not, however, known is whether increased knowledge is a determining factor in P/CVE and whether this can change behaviours and attitudes in regard to VE. Moreover, despite demonstrating improvements in the identification of VE risks, surveys and interviews with mentees did not reveal an improvement in their ability to realise that VE groups provide limited benefits only. The internal evaluation notes that given the persuasiveness and appeal of messaging by VE groups – including financial incentives, ideological motivations and religious appeals – it is not surprising that mentees continued to identify some benefits with joining extremist groups.

In sum, there is evidence that equipping individuals at risk of radicalisation with necessary life skills through mentoring can prevent VE. However, more empirical data is required, particularly in different contexts. Enhancing PYD (for example, rewarding social connections with diverse peers, confidence in being able to successfully pursue post-secondary education and obtain employment) may reduce susceptibility to radicalisation or VE, though PYD outcomes need to be more clearly linked to P/CVE. The presence of a mentor who can provide an alternative voice or worldview appears to be important for programme effectiveness and can fulfil needs such as belonging and identity. However, creating alternative networks is more challenging unless explicit efforts are made in the mentorship programme. Whether this is a good proxy of success in any case is less clear.

77. Sahgal and Kimaiyo, ‘Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism’.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
II. Limitations of Mentoring Approaches

This chapter addresses some of the shortcomings in the mentorship programmes analysed in this review. These include: the limitations of self-esteem or confidence-boosting approaches; how the promotion of liberal democratic values can be counterproductive; the dangers of over-emphasising religious education in mentoring; and the limitation of resilience as an objective.

Unintended Consequences of Promoting Self-Esteem

A number of mentorship programmes reviewed include a focus on approaches aimed at improvements of attitudes that influence future behaviour, namely building confidence or self-esteem as key objectives. For example, confidence-building skills are a core component of PYD. In his evaluation, Lub suggests that this, however, ‘shows problematic premises’. First, in the case of the Netherlands, Lub argues that the approach is based on the dominant assumption of Dutch government officials and policymakers that immigrant Muslim youth often struggle with their identity and are assumed to be more vulnerable to radicalisation. Consequently, mental vulnerability is primarily associated with Islamist radicalisation while ‘no greater receptiveness to right-wing extremism is assumed in the case of a disruption of the self-image or low self-esteem’.

Second, some scholars question whether increasing confidence levels results in the prevention of problematic behaviour, increased socially desirable behaviour or improved social relations. On the contrary, Lub points to evidence that interventions that unilaterally aim to boost self-esteem actually encourage narcissism, aggressiveness or anti-social behaviour. Boosting levels of self-confidence, he argues, can also contribute to greater in-group bias.

RUSI’s STRIVE II programme in Kenya also questions the overall efficacy of mentoring in increasing confidence. While the internal evaluation noted positive impacts on attitudes towards risk and morally appropriate behaviour, there was actually a decrease in those reporting levels

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80. For example, programmes in the West Midlands, the Australian sports-based programme, activities implemented by Mosaic, TBI and STREET in the UK.
82. Ibid.
of confidence between the baseline, mid-line and end-line. The programme implementers attribute this to the fact that mentoring had improved mentees’ ability to plan for their future and set more positive goals. As a result, when asked to reflect on key aspects of self-confidence, mentees noted that their feelings of contentment were lower, as they had developed higher aspirations for their lives and circumstances. This could suggest that confidence levels are, in fact, not the most crucial area to develop in mentoring. It does, however, also raise concerns about the unforeseen consequences of these types of activities in raising expectations that cannot be met. DuBois and Alem raise concerns that mentorships could increase the potential for radicalisation if they lead to diminished self-confidence and sense of connectedness in the wake of perceived abandonment if mentors fail to follow through on their commitments.

Promoting Liberal Democratic Values as Part of Mentoring is Potentially Ineffective

A central objective in the Danish mentoring model is to boost ‘democratic competences’ as a way to make young people abstain from choosing radical identities and milieus. This is set out in both the 2009 and 2016 Danish Action Plans and throughout the Aarhus model of prevention. The theory is that by helping target groups become aware of possibilities of citizenship, democratic engagement and the legal recourse they have to address their grievances, the breeding ground of radicalisation will be reduced, and target groups will be better equipped to solve problems of radicalisation.

Lasse Lindekilde examines Denmark’s 2009 Action Plan which funded special ‘associational mentors’ to further the creation of cultural, sports and leisure associations building on democratic principles among adolescents from multicultural backgrounds. Although Denmark’s model is classed in this review as potentially effective, it is important to take into account the findings of Lindekilde’s study, which evaluates the 2009 Plan using empirical research among young conservative Muslim immigrants – the target group of Denmark’s prevention policies at this time – in Aarhus. This study revealed that the vast majority of interviewees were quite critical of...

86. Ibid.
90. Lindekilde, ‘Neo-Liberal Governing of “Radicals”’. 
the design of the policy initiatives and its potential effects (negative evaluations were expressed in 15 of the 17 interviews). 91

Acknowledging that Lindekilde’s sample is small, criticism of the approach revolved around the concept that Denmark’s strategy was driven by the objective of creating an ideal citizen who was responsible, active, liberal, pro-democratic and non-violent. The assumption underpinning this is that young people who are in the earliest phases of radicalisation can be persuaded to change attitudes and behaviours in a more positive direction by interacting with others who hold different perspectives and values. 92 However, the majority of young people interviewed by Lindekilde protested against this type of role model/mentoring approach as discriminatory due to the perception that the implicit message was that certain groups (namely young Muslims) are in particular need of role models. 93

These types of interventions run the risk of being accused of stigmatising young Muslims and immigrant communities. The assumption of Western European governments tends to be that young people from these communities have a greater chance of coming into contact with radical movements in their quest for personal meaning because these movements offer an ideology that responds to their life questions. As a result, Lindekilde warns he cannot rule out the risk of unintended negative effects, including contributing to radicalisation, resulting from an approach associated with the logic of ‘repressive liberalism’. 94 P/CVE programmes run the risk of negative consequences if they are underpinned by the implicit assumption that the failed assimilation of Muslims in the West and more general failures of multiculturalism contribute to radicalisation. 95

Focusing on Religious Education in Mentoring Could Be Ineffective

Some mentoring programmes are based on the understanding that these activities have the potential to help forestall or interrupt the emergence of attitudes, such as the belief that violence towards others is justified based on religious or political tenets. 96 In the US, a programme within an Islamic association involved one imam acting as a mentor with the aim of delivering ‘correct Islamic teachings’ to male and female youth from Yemen. The evaluation (which did not include a comparison group) reported improvements (with no clearly described procedures for testing statistical significance) in mentees’ knowledge and beliefs related to Islamic teachings –

91. Ibid. The study focused on 17 interviews with Muslims while Lindekilde’s paper drew on nine different Muslim interviewees who were all men, aged 19–38, from immigrant and different educational backgrounds.
92. Lindekilde, ‘Neo-Liberal Governing of “Radicals”’.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid., p. 110.
including how Islam views violence – as a result of the intervention. This outcome measurement is clearly only a good proxy measure of success in regard to P/CVE if a poor understanding of Islam is identified to be a causal factor of VE.97

Similarly in Australia, Shahram Akbarzadeh criticised existing counter-radicalisation initiatives for sharing an underlying assumption that radical Muslims have a narrow and often inaccurate understanding of Islam and its principles. Mentoring interventions, therefore, positioned imams and Muslim youth leaders as mentors with the goal of enabling young people participating in the programme to develop an understanding of their religious identity through learning the true principles of Islam – as opposed to violent extremist ideology.98 Akbarzadeh’s 2013 examination of Australian P/CVE programmes found that success was limited by this emphasis on religion, which failed to take into account the full array of factors that contribute to radicalisation.99

In a UK context, Basia Spalek, Lynn Davies and Laura Zahra McDonald question this type of ‘values-based’ approach as potentially creating the impression that mentoring is pushing mentees in directions they may not see as necessary or relevant.100 Mentors in this evaluation of a West Midlands mentorship programme debated whether mentoring and deradicalisation was actually dependent on deploying theological arguments.101 It is noted that the Prevention Project also found limited empirical evidence – at least from publicly accessible data – corroborating the effectiveness of religion-oriented interventions.102

A more effective approach identified in the literature is to ensure that theological questions can be addressed if and when they arise in mentoring. Mentors in the West Midlands agreed that mentoring was not about changing a mentee to a particular school of thought but involved a range of approaches from referring to specific scriptural sources to asking questions.103 The UK’s Channel programme, a multi-agency approach which is part of the UK’s Prevent strategy, which seeks to identify and provide a range of support including mentoring to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism, provides specialist theological mentoring guidance where required, as part of a wider package of possible interventions.104 The success of the Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET) mentoring programme in London, which

99. Ibid.
100. Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’.
101. Ibid.
103. Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’.
claimed a zero per cent recidivism rate, rested in part on its ability to meet the multidimensional nature of radicalisation by a response tailored to each individual’s needs and circumstances.\textsuperscript{105} This included the availability of STREET staff with an Islamic Salafist orientation, given that the key concerns were VE related to Al-Qa’ida and to refute extremist ideas on a high theological level alongside wellbeing support, such as counselling, social and welfare support and personal development.\textsuperscript{106}

STREET’s experience, however, reveals that working with mentors with certain religious backgrounds presents its own challenges. In 2011, the new coalition government stopped funding STREET. No official reason was provided but the prevailing view of sources interviewed by Jack Barclay attributed this to a shift in government policy, which had evolved to working only with moderate actors who supported liberal values such as democracy, equality and pluralism. The Salafi orientation of many in STREET placed them at odds with core British values, rendering them unsuitable partners.\textsuperscript{107} This approach inevitably has implications for who can be mentors and their capacity to address the theological issues that might arise.

Building Resilience Should Be a Long-Term Goal of Mentoring

The objective to ‘build resilience’ to VE is often associated with mentorship (and other P/CVE) programmes. Programme objectives of increasing confidence, diversifying networks, creating life skills and other attributes are all considered to enhance resilience. The literature reviewed does not, however, suggest that developing resilience is a particularly effective goal of mentorship programmes. In fact, while many programmes talk about resilience positively, there is often no description of what resilience building entails nor any measurement of effectiveness in this regard.

Even where resilience is defined, it is not always applied appropriately. One of the objectives of the LGT model is to build individuals’ resilience to narratives and networks that promote radicalisation (for example, by inoculating individuals against extremist rhetoric).\textsuperscript{108} In practice, efforts to inoculate individuals against VE narratives have often been found to have little effect and can be counterproductive.\textsuperscript{109}

Meanwhile, the independent evaluation of RUSI’s STRIVE I project, which revealed that STRIVE had ‘marked successes’, raised questions about whether resilience was a realistic goal of

\textsuperscript{105} The veracity of the claim has not been tested, but the organisation’s success rate was supported by the testimonials of multiple public sector officials. See Jack Barclay, ‘Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET): A Case Study in Government–Community Partnership and Direct Intervention to Counter Violent Extremism’, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Policy Brief, December 2011.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{108} Kruglanski and Bertelsen, ‘Life Psychology and Significance Quest’.

\textsuperscript{109} Jones, ‘Through the Looking Glass’.
short-term P/CVE initiatives. The evaluators instead suggested that such effects often require a longer and more sustained intervention.\textsuperscript{110} Programmes aimed at improving resilience need to be introduced and implemented through partners who are ‘trusted’ by community members and trust is difficult to develop in such a short period of time.\textsuperscript{111} Adding weight to this conclusion, the internal mixed-methods evaluation of STRIVE II noted higher levels of improvement at the end-line compared to the mid-line, which suggests that a long-term design may be more appropriate for mentorship-oriented interventions.\textsuperscript{112}

This paper reveals a number of limitations of existing mentoring approaches. In particular, boosting confidence levels of (Muslim) youth might not always be a useful mechanism against extremism, radical thoughts or influence by radical people.\textsuperscript{113} There are also concerns that this approach is underpinned by an assumption of mental vulnerability primarily associated with Islamist radicalisation rather than right-wing extremism. Meanwhile, linking mentoring activities to democracy and liberal values also creates the perception that certain groups (namely young Muslims) are in particular need of role models or that they do not believe in democracy. This can, therefore, have unintended negative consequences for radicalisation by alienating the individuals the programmes are targeting. However, an over-emphasis on religion in mentorships can fail to address the full array of factors that contribute to radicalisation.

\textsuperscript{110} Brett and Kahlmeyer, ‘Evaluation Report’.
\textsuperscript{112} Sahgal and Kimaiyo, ‘An Evaluation of a Mentorship Intervention in Kenya’.
\textsuperscript{113} Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.
III. Mentoring and Effective Implementation

THE EXTENT TO which mentoring proves to be useful for P/CVE is influenced by the different elements involved in programme design. These include: identifying mentees; selecting mentors; and connecting mentoring to a broader range of resources.

Identifying Mentees

Mentorships take place between an individual who has been identified by the relevant authorities or programme implementers to be ‘at risk’ of VE (the ‘mentee’) and more experienced people (the ‘mentor’). The identification of those ‘at risk’ often involves a referral process followed by some form of risk assessment. Both these processes need to be carefully managed to ensure that they do not further alienate vulnerable individuals while also ensuring that informed consent is achieved for participation.

Research conducted in the Prevention Project identified a range of referral practices. For more established interventions, referrals are often more formalised and come from established institutional partnerships with organisations, such as prisons, schools and law enforcement agencies. In 2018, listed sources of referral for the Channel programme were: educational institutions (32%); the police (32%); local authorities (12%); healthcare institutions (8%); the community (4%); family and friends (4%); and prison services (5%). This referral process is fairly common for other mentoring programmes. Some programmes also assist those who reach out unprompted to intervention providers. The study by Jacob Davey, Henry Tuck and Amarnath Amarasingam, which evaluates intervention approaches from the perspective of practitioners, reveals that the referral mechanism likely impacts on programme effectiveness. Programmes are likely to be more successful if they only deal with individuals who come to them. If referrals come from a wider variety of sources, the intake and success rates will likely be lower.

Practitioners generally agree that stakeholders with a thorough understanding of the target group’s social setting and context are crucial to identifying who is ‘at risk’ in the community. Parents, employees or even front line practitioners do not always understand the warning

117. Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’; Ibid.
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signs of radicalisation, and might overreact, or do not know what to do in response, which can lead to inappropriate referrals. During a process evaluation of P/CVE programmes for young people in the UK (of which the majority included mentoring activities), only a minority of practitioners felt that their intervention was effective in reaching those young people most at risk of becoming involved in VE. None of the interviewees said that they had received referrals of young people who were considered already radicalised or indicated some involvement in VE. The evaluators noted that the success of a mentoring approach is dependent on staff having sufficient training and confidence to determine whether changes in behaviour or attitudes are actually symptomatic of radicalisation.

Risk assessment frameworks can assist the identification of ‘at risk’ individuals. Two programmes that were classed as potentially effective were driven by well-developed risk assessments. In the UK, STREET’s risk assessment included five core factors: emotional wellbeing; social exclusion and estrangement; perceived grievance and injustice; foreign policy; and religious extremist ideology. The framework also included resilience factors (emotional, social, persecution, geopolitical and theological resilience). This allowed for regular monitoring of mentees.

In Kenya, STRIVE II’s ‘at risk’ framework was developed in partnership with community stakeholders. Critical factors identified included a person who has a close peer or relative who: has been recruited to a violent extremist group; is engaged in violent extremist activities; is associated with violent criminals or gang members; holds radical or extremist views and tendencies; and affiliates themselves with holders of extremist views and tendencies. This defined set of criteria was regarded by the independent evaluators as having ensured that the programme was successful at identifying and working with at-risk youth whose circumstances fit well with the mentee criteria.

One issue that was insufficiently addressed in the literature was why individuals agree to participate in mentoring programmes and what impact this could have on programme effectiveness. Reportedly, the most difficult structural hurdle that the police must overcome when working within the UK’s Channel programme, which involves mentoring in the pre-criminal space in England and Wales, is that of informed consent and privacy. If mentoring is viewed as a ‘get out of jail free card’ with mentees agreeing to participate in order to avoid other forms of sanction, how does this impact effectiveness?

118. Davey, Tuck and Amarasingam, ‘An Imprecise Science’; De Meere and Lensink (eds), ‘Youth Counselling Against Radicalisation’.
120. Ibid.
121. Ranstorp et al., ‘Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism’.
122. Barclay, ‘Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET)’.
Selecting Mentors

The careful selection of mentors is a crucial component of mentorship success. A good mentor is generally thought to be someone who is mature, respected, reflective, aware of local issues and sets a positive example. Mentorship programmes try to use mentors who share the same cultural, religious, class, ethnic and political backgrounds as the mentees. The assumption is that mentors whose backgrounds align with youth can be effective because they have shared experiences of identity formation and understanding of (religious) beliefs in the case of Islamist extremism or, in the case of far-right extremism, knowledge of far-right politics, gang violence and football clubs. The evaluators of STRIVE II observed that a strength of the programme was that mentors are drawn from the communities in which they work and that they are, in many cases, people who have experienced relevant and similar challenges and difficulties of their own. In particular, ‘robust local capacity’ or ‘street skills’ are identified to be pivotal to programme success. For instance, Robert Lambert notes:

I think it’s their street skills; I would put that at number one on the list of importance. They [STREET] might say it’s their religious understanding, but from seeing them at close quarters, it’s a combination [of the two] that matters. Their religious position wouldn’t count for very much without the street skills, the cultural understanding. That seems to me to be the crucial factor when dealing with an individual.

Mentoring programmes often choose peer mentoring. The theory is that this ensures that mentors are closer in age and may often be better able to relate to mentees and have a more favourable effect on changing their behaviour than when approached by someone who is not from this age group, such as teachers or other adults. This is evidenced by several evaluations in this review. A process evaluation of 48 youth programmes in the UK found that projects engaging peer mentors and youth leaders believed their approach to not only be successful, but also of greater longevity. An evaluation of WORDE – a US-based multi-component programme that includes a peer gatekeeping training programme – also revealed that peer

128. DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’; Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’.
131. Robert Lambert, a former head of the Metropolitan Police Service Muslim Contact Unit with more than 10 years of close contact with STREET and the South London Salafi community, quoted in Barclay, ‘Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET)’, p. 5.
132. DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’; De Meere and Lensink (eds), ‘Youth Counselling Against Radicalisation’.
mentors may be well positioned to play an important role in recognising signs of radicalisation and then intervening.\textsuperscript{134}

Although ‘matching’ is the preferred approach, it is not always essential. Broader research has failed to reveal consistent differential benefits between same-race/ethnicity and cross-race/ethnicity mentoring relationships.\textsuperscript{135} Interviews with female mentees in the STRIVE II programme also indicated that matching mentors and mentees across genders provides men and women an opportunity to learn about each other’s challenges, thoughts and lives.\textsuperscript{136} Spalek, Davies and McDonald’s evaluation also noted that ‘elements of similarity and dissimilarity are key, and can be an important way through which the client can explore their own multiple identities’.\textsuperscript{137} This is not to ignore that there are some issues that participants prefer to discuss in homogenous groups.

Programmes Need to Be Connected to Community Resources

Robust local capacity also applies to the ability of the mentor to connect to available material and human resources in the community. In the UK, around 45\% of individuals referred are ultimately passed on to other services, including community groups, healthcare, local authorities and educational or employment support.\textsuperscript{138} Denmark’s approach is based on Schools, Social Services and Police, a unique legal institution that enables this grouping to work together and exchange information, facilitating a whole-of-society approach.\textsuperscript{139}

The evaluation of the West Midlands programme noted promising findings from programmes that linked individual mentorships to the notion of the community. It was identified to be beneficial for mentors to have established relations with service providers to refer these clients back to their home communities and also to consider the mentee in relation to the broader set of communities that they belong to or associate with.\textsuperscript{140} The evaluation of the More Than a Game programme in Australia similarly identified links between local communities, government and non-government entities as a key contributor to programme success. Dubois and Alem also identified that ‘outreach/peripatetic mechanisms and multiagency working’ were prominent among factors linked to apparent effectiveness.\textsuperscript{141} Finally, local connections are also significant from a sustainability perspective. Experiences from both STRIVE programmes indicate

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{134} DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’, p. 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Davey, Tuck and Amarasingam, ‘An Imprecise Science’; De Meere and Lensink (eds), ‘Youth Counselling Against Radicalisation’.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Kruglanski and Bertelsen, ‘Life Psychology and Significance Quest’.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Spalek and Davies with McDonald, ‘Key Evaluation Findings of the West Midlands (WM) 1-2-1 Mentoring Scheme’.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} DuBois and Alem, ‘Mentoring and Domestic Radicalization’, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
that connections to a broader range of programmes implemented by either government or non-government organisations can ensure that mentees remain motivated even after the programme ends.\textsuperscript{142} This was also a recommendation of the independent evaluation of STRIVE II:

The programme should consider providing more formalised linking of mentees to employment or training opportunities, either through consortium partners or other means (e.g. partnerships with other civil society organisations). In future iterations of the programme, this could be an expected or likely outcome at the end of the mentorship process rather than a possible outcome.\textsuperscript{143}

It is clear from the above discussion that mentoring is becoming increasingly professionalised.\textsuperscript{144} This is particularly important when it comes to referral and risk assessment processes, which are dependent on the staff involved having sufficient and appropriate training. Programmes that have well-developed risk assessments are also potentially more effective. A professional approach should not, however, detract from the significance of ensuring that programmes are credible and resonate with local communities. A programme will also be more credible if it is seen to be rooted in the local community. It is noted that the risk that mentorships could create perverse incentives or generate local discontent if mentees are seen as getting preferential access to jobs or training was not addressed in the literature.

\textsuperscript{142} Wilchen Christensen, ‘Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship’.

\textsuperscript{143} Fisher, Range and Cuddihy, ‘Evaluation of “Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism”’, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{144} Davey, Tuck and Amarasingam, ‘An Imprecise Science’.
Conclusion

This paper presented the strengths and weaknesses of mentorship programmes, exploring the validity of some of the key assumptions and programmatic logics. The available data – though partial and lacking in methodological rigour in places – was of sufficient quality to draw some pertinent findings and conclusions. While it is difficult to be too conclusive about causation and the impact of mentoring on P/CVE, the Prevention Project research team trusts that this paper adds to the growing body of work exploring the role of mentoring in efforts to prevent and counter VE.

Finding 1: The focus on Western contexts in the literature raises questions about how transferable the findings included in this paper are for other contexts

Nearly all the interventions reviewed in this paper were implemented in Western, developed contexts. This is not to say that mentoring does not exist and will not work outside the Western world, but that these interventions were not captured by this review. This is a research limitation, and a priority for future work should be to gather more evidence in different countries and contexts. It is therefore recommended that organisations publish or raise awareness of existing evaluations of mentorship activities, particularly in non-Western contexts. Future work would also likely benefit from moving beyond the prevention focus to include interventions with radicalised individuals including in prisons or conflict zones.

The focus on Western contexts clearly limits the generalisability of conclusions around effectiveness. It is hard to know how transferable the lessons learned from this study are to non-Western countries. The heavy cost in terms of time and resources associated with tailored and targeted mentorships was underexplored in the literature. However, the research suggests that it would be more difficult to transfer the results of mentoring programmes in Denmark, for example, to fragile or conflict-affected states and countries where existing infrastructure, particularly multi-agency cooperation, is lacking. RUSI’s experience in Kenya also highlights the significance of ensuring that mentoring is connected to broader programmes or service providers in mentees’ home communities.

Finding 2: Mentorship programmes can be stigmatising

As a targeted intervention, mentoring runs the risk of being perceived as stigmatising or discriminatory. The benefits of targeting PYD programmes, for example, at youth from marginalised communities and those with recent immigrant backgrounds need to be weighed against this risk. PYD interventions, when framed as having P/CVE objectives, could be less effective if they are perceived to be stigmatising. In Western countries, in particular, mentorship programmes need to be cautious about the assumption that mental vulnerability is primarily associated with Islamist radicalisation rather than right-wing extremism. The assumption that
young Muslims frequently struggle with their identity and are therefore more vulnerable to radical thoughts or influence by radical people needs to be viewed with caution.

Similarly, mentoring schemes linked to the promotion of democracy and liberal values can give the impression that certain groups (namely young Muslims) are in particular need of role models or that they do not believe in democracy. These assumptions could have unintended negative consequences in terms of contributing to radicalisation processes.

**Finding 3: To be effective, mentorships do, however, need to be targeted at those most ‘at risk’**

Despite the challenges with stigmatisation, mentoring programmes are likely more effective – at least in terms of tackling VE – when they are targeted at those identified to be ‘at risk’ of radicalisation. Where mentees are poorly selected, the impact on VE will likely be reduced. Identification of ‘at risk’ communities and referral services, however, needs to be carefully managed to ensure that they do not further alienate vulnerable individuals. Programmes that have well-developed risk assessments and referral services are potentially more effective. There is also value in finding avenues to signpost the support available from intervention providers to individuals who need support and encourage them to reach out proactively. A comprehensive risk assessment framework can also be a useful monitoring tool to evaluate a mentee’s personal development.

Identifying individuals in a sensitive manner could help increase receptivity to the intervention among potential mentees. Consensual participation is likely more effective. The impact of the decision to participate on programme effectiveness, however, needs further exploring in the literature.

**Finding 4: Equipping individuals with life skills can be an effective way forward**

While mentoring cannot change situational, socio-political factors or life conditions, the review revealed (some) evidence that it can help to develop balanced life skills (for example, vocational capabilities, social concerns or realisation of life options) by which the mentee can face and handle the positional challenges of significance and life in a civil and non-violent way. This approach is worthy of further research and evaluation in diverse contexts to strengthen the empirical foundations of this conclusion. In particular, it is worth exploring how transferable the model is to countries that lack multi-agency infrastructure.

**Finding 5: Positive findings exist in regard to positive youth development, but confidence-building or self-esteem enhancement interventions can lead to problematic behaviours**

Enhancing PYD (for example, rewarding social connections with diverse peers, confidence in being able to successfully pursue post-secondary education and obtain employment) may reduce susceptibility to radicalisation or VE. Though mentoring is generally well-evidenced to improve mental, social and physical wellbeing, further evidence is still required to demonstrate that...
mentoring can help forestall or interrupt the emergence of attitudes or behaviours associated with radicalisation. The evidence that interventions that unilaterally aim to boost self-esteem can encourage narcissism, aggression or anti-social behaviour should also be considered. Meanwhile, the risks and assumptions involved with boosting the confidence levels of youths need to be examined, including the idea that Muslim youths lack confidence and that this heightens their radicalisation risk.

**Finding 6: The mentor–mentee relationship is key to intervention effectiveness but creating alternative social networks to violent extremist groups is challenging**

It is possible that the influence of VE ‘pull factors’ such as the need for belonging or identity can be mitigated by engaging young people in pro-social pathways of development, including creating new or enhanced social ties. A positive mentor–mentee relationship is evidently key to the process of meeting such needs. A mentor can effectively represent an alternative worldview, which is important for programme effectiveness. The literature does not explore the potential harm that results from programmes where this bond is not realised. Creating alternative peer and social networks is also more challenging. Whether this is a good proxy of success in any case is less clear.

**Finding 7: Building awareness of the risks of VE and broadening the perspectives of individuals can be promising aspects of mentorship interventions but are likely insufficient by themselves. Religious arguments are likely to have limited effectiveness**

Research suggests that it is easier to build awareness of the risks associated with violent extremist groups than achieving attitudinal or behavioural change. Though only briefly explored in this paper, building integrative complexity and critical thinking skills can reinforce this approach by helping broaden mentees’ perspectives in order to challenge the narratives espoused by violent extremists. However, these approaches are likely to be insufficient by themselves. The appeal of violent extremist groups is hard to combat particularly when their narratives are often far from irrational. Even if mentees gain a greater appreciation of the risks involved in participating in VE, there is no guarantee that this is sufficient to prevent radicalisation.

Using religious arguments to dissuade people from radicalisation also fails to acknowledge the full array of factors, including socio-economic ones, that contribute to radicalisation. Instead, it is more effective to ensure that theological questions can be addressed if and when they arise in mentoring.

**Finding 8: Mentoring needs to be cautious about creating unfulfilled expectations**

An underexplored issue in the literature is the potential for mentorships to raise expectations and develop aspirations for lives and circumstances that are unlikely to be met. If mentors fail to follow through on commitments or if life aspirations are not met, this can lead to diminished self-confidence or a decrease in feelings of connectedness, hence increasing the potential for radicalisation.
Finding 9: Mentors need local knowledge and links

For mentorship programmes to be successful, stakeholders with a thorough understanding of the target group’s social setting and context are crucial to identifying who is ‘at risk’ and working effectively with these individuals. This requires local knowledge and capacity. Peer mentors, though not essential, may be well positioned to play an important role in recognising signs of radicalisation and intervening. A programme’s and mentor’s local capacity, including connections to local material and human resources, and services and links between local communities, government and non-government entities, were recognised as important for programme effectiveness and sustainability.

Finding 10: The reviewed literature is silent on the risks associated with mentoring in terms of potentially generating discontent or perverse incentives

The risk that mentorship programmes could create perverse incentives or generate local discontent among non-radicalised individuals and communities if mentees are seen as getting preferential access to jobs or training was not addressed in the literature and needs more attention in intervention evaluations.

Finding 11: Monitoring and evaluation systems need to be strengthened

This review was able to draw on a good number of evaluations, but more are needed. All but one of the projects reviewed was an end-line evaluation and none of the evaluations were based on experimental or quasi-experimental methods – though it is acknowledged that these are costly, difficult to implement because of the challenges of finding a comparable control group and potentially unethical in the field of P/CVE. Several evaluations were also conducted from the perspective of mentors rather than from the perspective of mentees or on objective measurements regarding the impact of programmes on pre-identified areas of development. This undermines the potential good work of mentorship programmes. Changes take time and ongoing monitoring of mentees is crucial to capturing those changes. This will need to be reflected in the length of projects. Significantly, this could help to mitigate against future risks, such as cases where mentees are able to persuade mentors that they are no longer a threat, essentially ‘gaming the system’.
Emily Winterbotham is Director of the Terrorism and Conflict group and a Senior Research Fellow at RUSI focusing on extremism and radicalisation, countering violent extremism and peacebuilding. Between 2009 and 2015, she worked in Afghanistan, most recently as Political Adviser for the European Union Special Representative. Emily has over 10 years’ desk and field experience in an international policymaking environment and is a Deployable Civilian Expert for the UK government’s Stabilisation Unit.
Annex I: Bibliography

Screened Studies Selected for the Review of this Thematic Paper


RUSI, ‘Street Mentorship and Social Media Campaign Project Kenya, Nairobi and Mombasa: Final Project Results and Operations Report (Annotated Outline)’.


General


Annex II: Research Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

The Literary Landscape and its Limitations

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

147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
A Confused Vocabulary

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

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

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

\(^{154}\) Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.
\(^{156}\) Ibid.
as a recognisable and consistent phenomenon, it is a concept that is often applied loosely to an eclectic mix of cases and situations.\textsuperscript{159}

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

**Conceptual Problems**

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

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

\textsuperscript{159.} RUSI, ‘Countering Violent Extremism Curriculum’.
\textsuperscript{162.} Georgia Holmer, ‘Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective’, Special Report No. 336, United States Institute of Peace, September 2013, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{164.} Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.
exposes clear discursive, conceptual and theoretical problems with ‘violent extremism’ as a distinct analytical category due to its overlap with wider conflict ecologies.

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

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

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

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

168. Some versions add a fourth level – ‘primordial’ prevention – at the base of the pyramid, meaning social and economic policies which affect health.
Figure 1: The Public Health Model for P/CVE

- **Primary**: Broad-based and community-focused prevention programmes addressing a range of social ills including, but not specifically focusing on, factors contributing to radicalisation and/or recruitment into VE.

- **Secondary**: P/CVE activities that either target populations/individuals identified as being ‘at risk’ or vulnerable to radicalisation and/or recruitment, or address individual incentives, enabling factors and structural motivators contributing to VE. This category has been expanded from the original model proposed by Jonathan Challgren and colleagues, described as activities focused towards ‘individuals and groups identified as at-risk for violent extremism’. The addition of interventions that include P/CVE objectives in their explicit or implicit theory of change and/or those addressing factors specifically contributing to recruitment and radicalisation helps reflect contextual and programmatic heterogeneity in what is a sprawling, largely ill-defined domain.

- **Tertiary**: Engaging individuals who have already joined terrorist groups or are identified as violent extremists, these activities typically include disengagement, deradicalisation, isolation and redirection, or counterterrorism.

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

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169. Challgren et al., ‘Countering Violent Extremism’.
reconfiguring an otherwise convoluted P/CVE sector, highlighting the goals, mechanisms and target audiences of various activities as they respond to different stages of radicalisation and recruitment,\textsuperscript{170} and demonstrating how they interact and synchronise with one another.\textsuperscript{171}

**Problems in Data Collection and Quality**

Stakeholders working in the P/CVE space have long described a general lack of good-quality data, especially in relation to monitoring and evaluation. For instance, the University of Maryland’s National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism found only five studies reporting outcome data assessing preventive programmes/interventions between 2005 and 2015,\textsuperscript{172} and other studies highlight both the limited availability and questionable quality of a large proportion of P/CVE content.\textsuperscript{173} This is the result of various methodological restrictions that are not unique to the P/CVE space\textsuperscript{174} but remain pronounced:

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

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

\textsuperscript{171} Challgren et al., ‘Countering Violent Extremism’.

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


How Effective Are Mentorship Interventions?

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

- **Indicators of Success:** Given the diversity of focus areas, confused or contested models of radicalisation, and congruently vague policy objectives, it is hard to formulate indicators of success that relate concrete measures to impact on beneficiaries. Many expected outcomes in P/CVE involve ephemeral changes related to cognition, perception and opinion, which are challenging to track, especially with a paucity of secure baselines for comparison.

- **Operational Challenges:** Stakeholders are often reticent to divert resources away from core programming and there is little appetite on the part of local practitioners to publicise their ‘failures’ as this could compromise future funding opportunities. Similarly, evaluations are encumbered by the immaturity of preventive projects: many long-term interventions have not yet concluded, and completed programmes are frequently designed with short time horizons, limiting avenues for longer-term or longitudinal analyses. Information sharing also relies on a culture of transparency and receptivity, which is difficult to manage when data is sensitive, securitised or heavily regulated.

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

176. Ibid.
177. Ibid.
178. Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.
180. Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money?’.
181. Ibid.
Given these limitations, it is therefore important that any enquiry into what can work and what has not worked in the P/CVE space establishes how robust the evidence base actually is, identifying not only what the literature claims but interrogating what these claims are based on.

Methodological Approach

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

1. Search Terms and Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

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

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

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

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

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

2. Identification of Potential Sources

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

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

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

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

Table 3: Search Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Terms 1</th>
<th>PVE, CVE, P/CVE, counter-radicalisation, prevent [prevention], ‘preventing violent extremism’, ‘countering violent extremism’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search Terms 2</td>
<td>evaluate [evaluating/evaluate/evaluation], impact, evidence, review; effective [effective/effectiveness], ineffective [ineffective/ineffectiveness], challenges, success [successes/successful], failure [failed/failing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Operators</td>
<td>And/Or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

4. Identification of Additional Material Through Snowballing

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

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

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

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

Table 4: Quality Scoring Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-Category</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conceptual Framing</td>
<td>• Does the study acknowledge existing research?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study lay out assumptions and describe how they think about an issue?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study pose a research question or outline a hypothesis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>• What is the geography/context in which the study was conducted?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study present or link to the raw data it analyses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>• Does the study identify a research method?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study demonstrate why the chosen design and method are well suited to the research question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>• Does the study employ primary research methods?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study employ secondary research methods?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the study rely exclusively on a theoretical or conceptual premise?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(As explained in DFID’s ‘How to Note’, ‘most studies (primary and secondary) include some discussion of theory, but some focus almost exclusively on the construction of new theories rather than generating, or synthesising empirical data.’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>• To what extent is the study internally valid for achieving its objectives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cogency</td>
<td>• Does the author ‘signpost’ the reader throughout?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent does the author consider the study’s limitations and/or alternative interpretations of the analysis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Are the conclusions clearly based on the study’s results?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>• Is the assessment conducted by an independent party (to those conducting the intervention itself)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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184. Anyone interested in obtaining information on these gradings for educational or research purposes can contact the authors directly for more information.
assessments; and the quality grading of each paper. Each paper was then coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’: 185

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

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

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

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

185. Our definition of (in)effectiveness drew on OECD, ‘Evaluation Criteria’, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>, accessed 15 March 2020. However, given that significant numbers of the reviewed studies were not evaluations, the categories of effectiveness and ineffectiveness were expanded to include ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’ and ‘inconclusive’. This is in line with a similar analysis into the effectiveness of conflict prevention programmes in C Cramer, J Goodhand and R Morris, Evidence Synthesis: What Interventions Have Been Effective in Preventing or Mitigating Armed Violence in Developing and Middle-Income Countries? (London: DFID, 2016).
A concluding paper synthesised the learning from each report in order to answer the question driving this research: ‘what can work and what has not worked in P/CVE?’ This final study includes constructive recommendations for policymakers, donors and civil society organisations operating in the field.

Results and Challenges

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Publication</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Study</td>
<td>153 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Evaluation</td>
<td>99 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Report</td>
<td>93 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Report</td>
<td>15 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Report</td>
<td>76 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>23 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Data Type</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>190 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>192 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical/Conceptual</td>
<td>81 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>285 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Methods</td>
<td>79 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Methodology Given (N/A)</td>
<td>90 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research.

188. Please note that this number is likely to increase to over 500 given that further snowballing of data related to several thematic P/CVE intervention areas will still take place.
The design and application of this approach was not without challenges, and the team concedes that despite subjecting its methodology to critical review by P/CVE experts in a consultative workshop convened by RUSI in February 2018, the project may still have been susceptible to some shortfalls and inconsistencies.

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

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

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

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

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**Table 8: Research Design and Number of Studies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Emily Winterbotham is Director of the Terrorism and Conflict group and a Senior Research Fellow at RUSI focusing on extremism and radicalisation, countering violent extremism and peacebuilding. Between 2009 and 2015, she worked in Afghanistan, most recently as Political Adviser for the European Union Special Representative. Emily has over 10 years’ desk and field experience in an international policymaking environment and is a Deployable Civilian Expert for the UK government’s Stabilisation Unit.