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# Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Through Education Initiatives

Assessing the Evidence Base

Claudia Wallner



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**Royal United Services Institute**  
for Defence and Security Studies  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2ET  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0)20 7747 2600  
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# Introduction

**I**N THE CONTEXT of the broader global shift towards ‘softer’ approaches to countering terrorism, education has gained increasing prominence in combating radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist groups and offering positive alternatives to it.<sup>1</sup> While the relationship between education and violent extremism remains ambiguous, the potential of educators and school systems to increase the resilience of students against violent extremism has been highlighted by policymakers and practitioners alike.<sup>2</sup> Given that it is often young people who are associated with violent extremist groups and activities, the prospect of reaching a majority of youths – including those who might be at risk of radicalisation or recruitment – through education interventions could be a central element in the reduction of terrorism globally.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, interventions in this space are not without challenges. The research for this paper demonstrates that preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) education interventions are often based on assumptions and not on rigorously tested models and theories. Given the paucity of publicly available evaluations of interventions,<sup>4</sup> the research observed that little evidence to support these assumptions has been generated so far and the popularity of certain intervention sub-types appears to have been taken as a proxy for effectiveness, thus encouraging replication or repetition. Nevertheless, the lack of empirical evidence for the effectiveness of P/CVE education interventions cannot automatically be assumed to mean that these interventions are ineffective.

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1. Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., ‘The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism’, Meeting Note, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and Hedayah, December 2013; Agnese Macaluso, ‘From Countering to Preventing Radicalization Through Education: Limits and Opportunities’, Working Paper 18, Hague Institute for Global Justice, October 2016; UNESCO, *Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017); Floris Vermeulen, ‘Suspect Communities – Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014), p. 295.
  2. UNESCO, *Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education*; Götz Nordbruch, ‘The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation’, Issue Paper, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), December 2016.
  3. RAN, ‘Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools’, 2015; Francesco Farinelli, ‘RAN EDU Meeting on Dealing with Religion-Inspired Extremist Ideologies in School’, Ex Post Paper, RAN, 2019.
  4. Lynn Davies, ‘Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally: What Works?’, Report 5, Segerstedt Institute, University of Gothenburg, January 2018; Ratna Ghosh et al., ‘Education and Security: A Global Literature Review on the Role of Education in Countering Violent Religious Extremism’, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2016.

The aim of this paper is to review and analyse the existing literature on education and P/CVE, and identify and analyse some of the key assumptions that constitute the basis for interventions in the education sector. The paper interrogates the evidence base for these commonly used assumptions and for the interventions that have emerged on a global level. Despite the differences between national education systems and local contexts, a global analysis of different approaches can reveal general mechanisms and patterns of the effectiveness of interventions and provide lessons and insights for future programming. In doing so, this analysis will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on what works (and what does not) in education-focused P/CVE interventions.

The main focus of this paper is on P/CVE interventions, initiatives and practices in the formal education sector. This includes initiatives implemented in schools and educational institutions covering a broad age range, extending from primary and secondary education to higher and further education. The project did not define an age range, and includes all interventions based in the formal education sector that were covered in the literature, regardless of the age of students targeted. This was to ensure inclusivity and to account for the differences in educational contexts and age groups that typically receive formal education in different countries.

Similarly, no limitations were set with regard to terminology. While concepts such as ‘violent extremism’, ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’, ‘vulnerability’ and ‘resilience’ have distinct – albeit not universally accepted – definitions, it is beyond the remit of this paper to delve into the rigour and limitations of these concepts. Hence, this paper’s understanding of these concepts reflects how they were used and understood in the literature reviewed.

## Structure

The first chapter summarises the key assumptions which underpin the majority of the education initiatives in P/CVE. These assumptions refer to different mechanisms through which the education system is thought to contribute to P/CVE objectives. The second chapter analyses the evidence base for education efforts in P/CVE, based on the identified mechanisms, and is split into five sub-thematic intervention areas, in line with the identified assumptions:

1. Interventions addressing **the knowledge of students** about values of citizenship, human rights and historical narratives.
2. Interventions focused on **the way students think**, and on building their critical thinking skills and capacity for integrative complexity.
3. Interventions addressing **the way students engage with each other** through intergroup contact, peer mediation and other techniques.
4. Interventions focused on **educators** and on building their capacity to recognise signs of radicalisation in their students, as well as providing them with the skills to facilitate lessons relevant to P/CVE.
5. **Cross-cutting interventions** that aim to achieve P/CVE objectives through several approaches at the same time.

The conclusion summarises the key findings of the paper and points to gaps and potential areas of opportunity for interventions in the field of education-related P/CVE. It provides concluding remarks on what the existing evidence reveals about what works (and what does not) in education interventions in P/CVE.

## Methodology and Data

The paper reviewed 67 studies that explored P/CVE interventions through education.<sup>5</sup> In line with the inclusion criteria set out in the project methodology, outlined in Annex II, initiatives were included on the basis of their relevance to P/CVE. Only education initiatives that articulated explicit P/CVE objectives in their theory of change, addressed education as a factor contributing to violent extremism in a particular context, or identified groups/individuals ‘vulnerable’ to radicalisation and recruitment using risk assessment tools or other methods are included. Broader projects on racism or bullying with no reference to violent extremism or radicalisation are not included.

The decision to include education interventions targeting all students in the education system reflects the challenges of distinguishing between broad-based projects tackling a range of societal ills that may (or may not) contribute to violent extremism and those that are targeted at specific risk factors associated with violent extremism. This in itself reflects a limitation in the research and data collected, which is acknowledged in the project methodology in Annex II.

As outlined in Annex II, the quality of all reviewed papers is graded as high, moderate or low, on the basis of their conceptual framing, transparency, methods used, research design, internal validity, cogency and independence. In addition, the findings of reviewed studies on the impact of specific interventions are coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’. However, given the limitations of the approach (detailed in Annex II), quality and effectiveness scores for specific studies included in this paper are not listed.

As Table 1 shows, of the 67 papers reviewed, 30 are high-quality studies, 29 are moderate-quality studies and eight are low-quality studies. Notably, none of the studies provided sufficient evidence on the effectiveness of the reviewed interventions. Twenty-nine studies provided evidence that the reviewed interventions were ‘potentially effective’, and 19 studies found ‘mixed’ effects. Eight studies found interventions to be ‘ineffective’ and 11 were ‘inconclusive’.

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5. See Annex I for full details.



**Table 1:** Summary of the Team’s Assessment of the Evidence Base on Education-Focused Interventions

Intervention Impact	Quality of Evidence			Total
	High	Moderate	Low	
Effective	0	0	0	0
Potentially effective	12	11	6	29
Mixed	12	6	1	19
Ineffective	2	6	0	8
Inconclusive	4	6	1	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>67</b>

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

There was a clear tendency in the literature to focus on Europe (35 studies), with 19 studies focusing on the UK. This focus in geographical coverage is likely due to this review being limited to English-language sources and the fact that the UK’s Prevent policy was one of the first global P/CVE policies. Because of this, it has been discussed and critiqued in the literature more than other national policies.

Of the 67 studies reviewed, 20 had no particular geographical focus or dealt with more than one region. Three studies examined interventions in Australia, another three focused on the Middle East and North Africa, and three studies focused on Asia. One study examined interventions in sub-Saharan Africa and another had a global focus but derived lessons for Canadian P/CVE interventions, while no study focused exclusively on North America. The lack of studies focusing on North America can be partially explained by the fact that the role of education in the preventive strategy of the US is minimal compared with, for example, Scandinavia, where education holds a central role in the fight against violent extremism.<sup>6</sup> The number of studies on interventions in South America was low for all thematic areas covered in this publication series, given the relatively low priority of violent extremism compared with other societal problems and the fact that reports and evaluations of existing interventions are usually published in Spanish or Portuguese.

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6. Trees Pels and Doret J de Ruyter, ‘The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization: An Exploration of Theoretical Presumptions and Empirical Research’, *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 2012), pp. 311–25.

# I. Common Assumptions

**A**S IS THE case with other intervention areas in the field of P/CVE, education approaches have been based on a number of assumptions about the role the education sector can play in the onset and prevention of violent extremism.

The author has observed that the evidence base to support some of the underlying assumptions of interventions in this field is relatively weak.<sup>7</sup> For example, in a review of 73 studies in P/CVE which aims to assess what works in the field, Amy-Jane Gielen examines only two evaluations of education-focused projects compared to six evaluations examining exit programmes and another six examining programmes aimed at increasing resilience via community engagement.<sup>8</sup> If interventions are structured on the basis of generic assumptions rather than a rigorous assessment of local pathways to violent extremism, interventions that effectively address local factors are generally less likely to emerge. In addition, relying on untested assumptions may, in the worst-case scenario, also lead to the implementation of P/CVE interventions that have harmful consequences for participants or the entire education sector.

The research for this paper suggests that the majority of P/CVE education interventions are developed on the basis of one or more common assumptions about how education can increase the resilience of students to violent extremism. In this context, ‘resilience’ refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to resist violent extremist narratives and influences and reject recruitment (the process of joining a group or movement that is engaged in violent extremism).<sup>9</sup> There is no universal agreement in the field about what these common assumptions are, but this paper identifies five basic mechanisms that are frequently applied in the P/CVE education interventions included in this review.

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7. Martine Zeuthen, ‘Countering Violent Extremism – Can Education and Vocational Training Play a Role?’, NORRAG, 11 April 2016, <<https://www.norrag.org/countering-violent-extremism-can-education-and-vocational-training-play-a-role/>>, accessed 16 June 2020; Martin M Sjøen and Christer Mattsson, ‘Preventing Radicalisation in Norwegian Schools: How Teachers Respond to Counter-Radicalisation Efforts’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (Vol. 13, No. 2, 2019), pp. 218–36.
  8. Amy-Jane Gielen, ‘Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances, and How?’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 31, No. 6, 2017), pp. 1149–67.
  9. Michele Grossman et al., ‘Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure: Final Research Report’, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Australia, and The Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University, Canada, 2017.

**Assumption 1: By promoting historical awareness and values of citizenship and civic participation, the education system can help young people resist violent extremism.**

The research found that a number of P/CVE approaches in the education sector have been developed, explicitly or implicitly, on the assumption that equipping students with certain facts and values can help them resist violent extremist propaganda and recruitment attempts. Such approaches tend to promote values of citizenship, tolerance and inclusion, and historical consciousness.<sup>10</sup> By improving pupils' understanding of democratic processes and the ways in which they can participate in them, these approaches offer non-violent alternatives of activism and civic participation, which is assumed to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism.<sup>11</sup> Based on the premise that ideological beliefs and value systems are acquired in childhood and youth, they aim to provide youth with a moral compass and the historical and factual knowledge necessary to scrutinise ideas and ideologies with which they are confronted.<sup>12</sup>

Implicit in this approach is the assumption that a single truth or narrative with regard to national identities, historical events and current global and regional conflicts can be identified and conveyed to students. As this is often not the case, the decision of what is deemed to be 'correct' is made by the state or by the institution designing and implementing the intervention. The risk, therefore, is that such interventions are then used to control and spread certain narratives.<sup>13</sup>

**Assumption 2: By developing the critical thinking skills of young people, the education system can make them more resilient to violent extremism.**

Violent extremism tends to be associated with a simple, black-and-white and all-or-nothing perception of the world. Therefore, it is assumed that improving the ability of young people to think critically and analyse arguments they are confronted with will increase their resilience to

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10. UNESCO, 'A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism', 2016; RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Approaches and Practices', 2016; Ivo Veenkamp and Sara Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism: Program and Policy Approaches to Youth Through Education, Families and Communities', in Marco Lombardi et al., *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015); Ratna Ghosh et al., 'Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* (Vol. 23, No. 2, 2017), pp. 117–33; Ghosh et al., 'Education and Security'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.
  11. Mark A Bellis and Katie Hardcastle (eds), *Preventing Violent Extremism in the UK: Public Health Solutions* (Cardiff: Public Health Wales NHS Trust, 2019); RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.
  12. Ghosh et al., 'Education and Security'.
  13. Carolyn Nash et al., 'Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education', UNESCO, 2017.

violent extremism.<sup>14</sup> While education in itself does not always build these skills, teachers can contribute to this if they focus on teaching young people to critically analyse and question the world around them. This can be done by discussing topics of interest, including sensitive and controversial issues, from different perspectives and highlighting the fact that single and universal truths rarely exist. By allowing for a plurality of opinions and viewpoints and encouraging pupils to consider how other people come to hold certain views, it is assumed that their ability to see through black-and-white narratives and simple answers to complex issues can be developed. In doing so, approaches that build on this assumption are moving away from traditional learning styles where the authority of the teacher is not to be questioned and knowledge is meant to be imparted to students.

**Assumption 3: By facilitating contact between different population groups, schools can reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members and thereby contribute to P/CVE objectives. This is referred to as the ‘contact hypothesis’.**

Numerous interventions in the education space are based on the ‘contact hypothesis’ – the assumption that by bringing students who identify with different groups together in the same setting and on equal status, their understanding of each other and of concepts of identity, and therefore their ability to empathise with people who belong to other groups, will increase.<sup>15</sup> This is thought to reduce prejudice between groups and lower biased perceptions of intervention participants toward the perceived out-group. According to Gordon Allport, to whom the contact hypothesis is often credited, this positive effect of intergroup contact is enhanced if the contact is mediated and sanctioned in an institutional setting and if it highlights shared interests and common humanity between members of the different groups.<sup>16</sup> The reduction in prejudice is then thought to make young people less likely to adhere to violent ideologies and narratives that are directed against other groups.

**Assumption 4: By building the capacity of teachers to effectively implement lessons relevant to P/CVE, education interventions can contribute to P/CVE objectives.**

While P/CVE education approaches tend to focus on students as the intervention recipients, the role of teachers in delivering the intended outcomes of these interventions is often less clear. A number of interventions are built on the assumption that in order to deliver P/CVE interventions based in the education system, educators themselves need to be specifically trained and knowledgeable in this area. This is also thought to be necessary in contexts where teachers are already well trained for the delivery of non-P/CVE lessons. This includes investing resources in building teacher competence and awareness as well as capacity-building activities

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14. Lynn Davies, ‘Educating Against Extremism: Towards a Critical Politicisation of Young People’, *International Review of Education* (Vol. 55, No. 2/3, 2009), pp. 183–203; *Ibid.*

15. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Adison-Wesley, 1954).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

for educators on causes and manifestations of violent extremism and prevention methods before and during service.<sup>17</sup>

**Assumption 5: Teachers can effectively identify signs of radicalisation and recruitment in their students.**

A related assumption on the role of educators in P/CVE is that teachers have the ability to spot the signs of radicalisation in their students and intervene in the radicalisation and recruitment process. This implies that criteria for the identification of those most at risk of being drawn into violent extremism, as well as indicators of radicalisation, can reliably be identified and applied by educators. It also implies that radicalisation is a linear process and that individuals gradually become more and more involved in violent extremism – a process that educators are thought to be able to intervene in.<sup>18</sup> While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the validity of different models of radicalisation, it is worth noting that this is not an uncontested theory.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Nordbruch, 'The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation'; UNESCO, 'Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education'; RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools'.

18. Adrienne Moffat and F Jeane Gerard, 'Securitising Education: An Exploration of Teachers' Attitudes and Experiences Regarding the Implementation of the Prevent Duty in Sixth Form Colleges', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (Vol. 13, No. 2, 2020), pp. 197–217.

19. *Ibid.*; Joel Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges in England: An Analysis of Educationalists' Experiences', Aziz Foundation, July 2017.

## II. Assessing the Evidence Base

**H**AVING DISCUSSED SOME of the common assumptions and mechanisms that comprise the foundation for many of the interventions included in this paper, this chapter assesses the evidence base for the effectiveness of these mechanisms in interventions aimed at P/CVE.

### Interventions Focused on the Knowledge of Students

Several programmes discussed in the literature on education and P/CVE are primarily based on the assumption that equipping students with certain knowledge and values can help them resist violent extremist propaganda and recruitment. This includes approaches that focus on civic and historical education, promoting values of citizenship, tolerance and inclusion, and historical consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Such interventions are often delivered in the form of curriculum-based programmes aimed at encouraging these attributes in learners. Many curriculum-based interventions are delivered by NGOs and other actors rather than national education systems. However, some curricular initiatives are also implemented in the form of nationwide school subjects, as in Denmark, where human rights, citizenship and extremism were expanded in the national curriculum as part of the 2014 'Prevention of Radicalisation and Extremism Action Plan'.<sup>21</sup>

Two interventions included in this paper aim to reduce the likelihood of young people joining violent extremist organisations by increasing their knowledge about the dangers of violent extremism. This includes an intervention that was developed in Saudi Arabia, where a knowledge-based campaign targeted young children in schools as well as their parents through information leaflets, and one in Pakistan, where university students were targeted with a similar approach.<sup>22</sup> While the programme in Saudi Arabia was not formally evaluated beyond assessing the reach of the informational leaflets, the intervention in Pakistan was quantitatively assessed

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20. UNESCO, 'A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism'; RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism', 2016; Veenkamp and Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism'; Ghosh et al., 'Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?'; Ghosh et al., 'Education and Security'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

21. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'; Danish Government, *Prevention of Radicalisation and Extremism Action Plan* (Copenhagen: Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs, 2015), originally published in Danish in 2014.

22. Sanah Sheikh, Shama Sarwar and Chris Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism: Rapid Evidence Assessment', Research Report DFE-RR120, UK Department for Education, 2010.

using an experimental evaluation design.<sup>23</sup> The findings of this evaluation indicate that the intervention was successful in making participants more resilient to recruitment efforts, but as very little information is available on the methodology of this evaluation, these results should be interpreted with caution.<sup>24</sup>

Other knowledge-based approaches to addressing the likelihood of individuals embracing violent extremism focus on civic education and aim to improve students' understanding of democratic processes and the ways in which they can participate in a non-violent way.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, given the centrality of historical and current global and regional conflicts in the narratives of violent extremists, addressing and discussing these conflicts as well as the failures and inconsistencies associated with them in the education system is thought to be essential in countering these narratives.<sup>26</sup>

In Kyrgyzstan, teaching on the 'History of Religions' was first piloted by the Ministry of Education and the State Commission for Religious Affairs in 2016 and rolled out to 56 schools in 2019.<sup>27</sup> This school subject aims to 'teach students different religions, principles of a secular state and freedom of religions' and build their civic awareness and understanding of different religious and social issues.<sup>28</sup> A mixed-methods study examined, among other things, the resilience of students in pilot and non-pilot schools on the basis of the Building Resilience against Violent Extremism (BRAVE) measure developed by Michele Grossman and colleagues.<sup>29</sup> While the study found no statistically significant difference between overall BRAVE scores of students in pilot and non-pilot schools, students of pilot schools scored higher (indicating higher levels of resilience) on violence-related beliefs and behaviours than students from schools where the subject was not piloted. This means that students from pilot schools were less likely to, for example, believe that violence is an effective means of asserting strength and gaining respect from others. They were also more likely to be willing to speak out against violence in their own communities.<sup>30</sup>

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23. Naumana Amjad and Alex M Wood, 'Identifying and Changing the Normative Beliefs About Aggression Which Lead Young Muslim Adults to Join Extremist Anti-Semitic Groups in Pakistan', *Aggressive Behavior* (Vol. 35, No. 6, November/December 2009), pp. 514–19.

24. *Ibid.*; Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism'.

25. Bellis and Hardcastle (eds), 'Preventing Violent Extremism in the UK'; RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'; Lilla Schumicky-Logan, 'Addressing Violent Extremism With a Different Approach: The Empirical Case of At-Risk and Vulnerable Youth in Somalia', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* (Vol. 12, No. 2, 2017), pp. 66–79.

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

27. Kanykey Jailobaeva et al., 'Research on the Role of Educational Institutions in Building Resilience of Adolescents to Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic', Hedayah and EU, 2020.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Grossman et al., 'Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism'.

30. *Ibid.*

Interestingly, student-centred teaching – respecting the autonomy of students and their ability to construct knowledge rather than teachers authoritatively imparting knowledge – was found to be a significant factor in explaining BRAVE scores. In other words, the perception of students and teachers on the delivery of the subject played a significant role in the resilience outcome of the intervention.<sup>31</sup>

In Germany, political and civic education – with a focus on historical political education and democratic awareness – is a central part of the education system. For example, in the context of the Live Democracy! Active Against Right-Wing Extremism, Violence and Hate programme, the German government, in collaboration with over 700 civil society organisations across the country, is delivering events and training activities aimed at civic participation, acceptance of diversity, and historical and political education.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the compulsory subjects on political and civic education in German schools aim to prevent violent extremist attitudes and behaviours by addressing issues such as the Holocaust, human rights, immigration, or hostilities and violence between different groups on a long-term basis.<sup>33</sup> While these activities are reaching a vast majority of students from all backgrounds and can, unlike many other interventions in this field, be sustained over long periods of time, evaluations of governmental programmes in this area indicate that the effectiveness of these lessons is sometimes hampered by the fact that students appear to be oversaturated by content on the country's history, which limits their interest in the topic.<sup>34</sup> This finding highlights the need to design interventions in creative and participatory ways that make them interesting and relatable for students. This echoes the finding from the teaching on the 'History of Religions' in Kyrgyzstan on the importance of delivery in the effectiveness of the lessons.<sup>35</sup> That is not to say that interesting and creative delivery alone can make students more resilient to violent extremism, but it indicates that carefully designed curricula on topics relevant to P/CVE alone will not make a significant difference if they are not delivered in a way that resonates with students.

In Italy, the Memoria Futura (Future Memory) training programme, which is being used in the education system to promote active citizenship and make pupils aware of the national history with regard to terrorism, aims to make its content interesting by using stories and testimonies of victims and survivors of terrorism in Italy.<sup>36</sup> However, no evaluations of this programme were found in the research of this paper.

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31. Jailobaeva et al., 'Research on the Role of Educational Institutions'.

32. Bellis and Hardcastle (eds), 'Preventing Violent Extremism in the UK', p. 54.

33. Susanne Johansson, 'Innovative Methods and Models of Collaboration in the Field of Pedagogical Prevention of Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Right-Wing Extremism: Chances and Perspectives for a Better Cooperation Between Formal and Non-Formal Education in Germany', German Youth Institute, 2013.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Jailobaeva et al., 'Research on the Role of Educational Institutions'.

36. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'.



Similar to interventions promoting civic awareness and historical knowledge, approaches based on imparting certain values aim to get all young people to subscribe to a standardised set of beliefs and values. For example, in the UK, the teaching of fundamental British values (FBVs) is a core element of prevention policy in schools. While this approach aims to promote a common understanding of universal human rights and foster empathy, it has been criticised for being vague, unnecessarily securitising education, and stigmatising individuals and communities of different heritages by highlighting the ‘Britishness’ in these values.<sup>37</sup> As Davies argues, there is an implicit assumption that immigrants do not adhere to British values and that they are therefore a threat.<sup>38</sup> Correspondingly, Paul Thomas criticises the ‘clumsy attempts at “social engineering” through a “values-based” approach’ and the heavy focus on Muslim communities.<sup>39</sup> As Laura Taylor and Anita Soni argue, ‘in light of the extensive criticisms of FBVs, it can be assumed that the translation of this aspect of policy into pedagogical reality is proving limited in its efficacy to intervene with the radicalisation process’.<sup>40</sup>

The research for this paper suggests that while some knowledge-based interventions show promising outcomes, the evidence on the impact of civic participation in reducing violent extremism is limited.<sup>41</sup> As knowledge-based approaches do not fundamentally challenge how students think, there is a risk that any measurable effects of these interventions might be short term.<sup>42</sup> This might be the case if interventions purely focus on the transfer of knowledge rather than fostering participation in democratic processes and a broader understanding of the concepts that are taught. Also, there is a risk of citizenship education and similar educational approaches being used to mandate how students should think and act in order not to become terrorists, rather than encouraging independent thinking (see below).<sup>43</sup> The review indicates that curriculum-based approaches that are delivered through textbooks – particularly history books – can perpetuate or counter perspectives of bias, prejudice and hostility toward certain cultures, ethnicities or groups of people, depending on the way they are phrased and delivered.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, educational curricula focusing on national identity, history and values can

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37. Diane Webber and Alison Struthers, ‘Critiquing Approaches to Countering Extremism: The Fundamental British Values Problem in English Formal Schooling’, Commission for Countering Extremism, 2019.

38. Lynn Davies, ‘Security, Extremism and Education: Safeguarding or Surveillance?’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* (Vol. 64, No. 1, 2016), pp. 1–19.

39. Paul Thomas, ‘Failed and Friendless: The UK’s “Preventing Violent Extremism” Programme’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Vol. 12, No. 3, August 2010), p. 445.

40. Laura Taylor and Anita Soni, ‘Preventing Radicalisation: A Systematic Review of Literature Considering the Lived Experiences of the UK’s Prevent Strategy in Educational Settings’, *Pastoral Care in Education* (Vol. 35, No. 4, 2017), p. 247.

41. Bellis and Hardcastle (eds), ‘Preventing Violent Extremism in the UK’.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Sjøen and Mattsson, ‘Preventing Radicalisation in Norwegian Schools’.

44. Nash et al., ‘Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education’; Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Devin Cowick and Melinda Holmes, ‘Education, Identity and Rising Extremism: From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism

be (mis)used by the state and any non-state actors involved in designing and delivering these curricula to overtly assert the dominance of a specific group over others by excluding references to linguistic and ethnic minorities and banning education in minority languages.<sup>45</sup>

In order to avoid alienating certain segments of the population through narrow constructions of a national identity and history, one approach could be to focus on global citizenship and human rights education and the teaching of world history from multiple perspectives.<sup>46</sup> Also, given the demonstrated importance of delivery for the effectiveness of knowledge-based education approaches, it is essential that interventions are engaging students, have clearly defined goals, and create a safe space for dialogue and interaction.<sup>47</sup> As proposed by Sanah Sheikh, Shama Sarwar and Chris Reed, this can, for example, be achieved by making activities non-prescriptive and allowing students to co-produce initiatives and get involved in defining the content of the planned activities.<sup>48</sup>

## Interventions Focused on the Way Students Think

In contrast to civic and historical education initiatives, which tend to mandate what pupils should think, interventions aimed at building pupils' resilience to violent extremism by encouraging the development of critical thinking skills address the way in which young people process and interrogate information with which they are confronted.

In the UK, three projects in this category were discussed in the reviewed literature. The Digital Disruption project, a series of counter-extremism workshops delivered in schools across the country, aims to enable young people to identify online techniques and narratives that are being used by recruiters to manipulate their ideas and opinions.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the Zak initiative, part of the government's Prevent strategy, familiarises young people with online grooming and radicalisation techniques, and raises awareness about signs of radicalisation.<sup>50</sup> So far, evaluation efforts have not gone beyond measuring the opinions of participating teachers and

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(PREP)', International Civil Society Action Network, 2017; Safet Mušić, 'The Role of Education in Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalism', paper presented at the Changing Reality Through Education Conference, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 2016.

45. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, 'Education, Identity and Rising Extremism'.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Joe Bonnell et al., 'Teaching Approaches That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism Among Young People', Research Report DFE-RR119, Department for Education, 2011; Jailobaeva et al., 'Research on the Role of Educational Institutions'; Johansson, 'Innovative Methods and Models of Collaboration in the Field of Pedagogical Prevention'.

48. Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism', p. 24.

49. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'; Bonnell et al., 'Teaching Approaches That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism Among Young People'.

50. Jane Reeves and Alamgir Sheriyar, 'Addressing Radicalisation into the Classroom – A New Approach to Teacher and Pupil Learning', *Journal of Education and Training* (Vol. 2, No. 2, 2015).

students about programme impact.<sup>51</sup> All of the participants who provided feedback claimed that there were benefits to the techniques used by the Zak initiative, 71% of teachers reported that the issues it addressed were relevant to the school context they were working in, and 64% of participants were reported to have engaged highly with the programme.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the measured level of engagement arguably does not say much about the impact of the intervention on pupils.

In addition, as part of the Digital Citizenship initiative, a school-based pilot workshop series was delivered to 75 students to strengthen their critical thinking skills, their ability to detect online propaganda and their sense of digital citizenship.<sup>53</sup> The workshop resources were created on the basis of a review of existing digital citizenship programmes in the P/CVE space and related fields, and include interactive materials based on real-life propaganda and online dialogue on topics ranging from homophobia to Islamist extremism, anti-Semitism and far-right extremism. An impact and process evaluation of the pilot intervention found positive results across the tested measures, including improved confidence and understanding of participants of the techniques that extremists use to manipulate people on social media. These were tested through pre- and post-surveys with the 75 intervention participants and an additional 90 students in comparison groups.<sup>54</sup>

Another way interventions aim to change the way pupils think is through integrative complexity and value pluralism – an approach based on broadening the perspectives of individuals with regard to values, thinking and identity.<sup>55</sup> Integrative complexity is measured on a scale that was developed by psychologist Peter Suedfeld,<sup>56</sup> and ranks from one (indicating a tendency of individuals or groups for binary, categorical thinking) to seven (indicating the ability of individuals or groups to acknowledge multiple viewpoints on a particular topic).<sup>57</sup> Low scores on this scale are thought to correspond to a higher susceptibility to extremism, as extremist ideologies usually understand the world in binary terms.<sup>58</sup> Efforts to operationalise these findings into interventions aimed at increasing integrative complexity scores have been led by IC Thinking, a research and intervention science group based at the University of Cambridge, where researchers have developed concrete interventions and assessment methods based on integrative complexity.<sup>59</sup> Delivered by trained facilitators, these school-based courses are

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51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

53. Louis Reynolds and Ralph Scott, *Digital Citizens: Countering Extremism Online* (London: Demos, 2016).

54. *Ibid.*

55. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

56. Peter Suedfeld and Philip E Tetlock, 'Integrative Complexity at Forty: Steps Toward Resolving the Scoring Dilemma', *Political Psychology* (Vol. 35, No. 5, 2014).

57. Christina Nemr and Sara Savage, 'Integrative Complexity Interventions to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism', Policy Brief, Global Center on Cooperative Security, February 2019.

58. *Ibid.*

59. IC Thinking, <<https://icthinking.org>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

currently being delivered in England, Scotland, Pakistan, Kenya, Sweden, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo.<sup>60</sup>

Integrative complexity has also been used as part of the work done by Social Welfare, Academics and Training (SWAaT) for Pakistan at the Sabawoon Rehabilitation Centre, which works to deradicalise and rehabilitate young men who were apprehended in the Swat region for involvement in violent extremist activities.<sup>61</sup> The programme that was set up to improve the reasoning capabilities of these young men and enable them to question the militant narratives confronting them was subsequently also extended to five secondary schools in the region that struggled with high levels of recruitment.<sup>62</sup> Test results in integrative complexity as well as general school grades reportedly improved as a result of the intervention.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the Being Muslim Being British programme in the UK – a multi-media course designed to raise the integrative complexity of Muslim students by confronting them with different Muslim viewpoints – addressed questions of identity and measured effectiveness by testing integrative complexity scores of the young participants before and after the intervention.<sup>64</sup> It found a consistent increase in critical thinking and complex perspective-taking scores following the course over a five-year period.<sup>65</sup> These results look very promising and if such positive impacts can be maintained in the long term, upscaling and expanding interventions using this approach should be considered.

In Australia, the Beyond Bali curriculum package aims to build the cognitive resilience of students by confronting them with the stories of victims of the 2002 Bali bombings.<sup>66</sup> The curriculum tries to enhance empathy for the victims, thereby building resilience to the process of moral disengagement, which is assumed to be a main part of radicalisation.<sup>67</sup> According to two studies on the curriculum package, the programme had some success in building resilience to violent extremism.<sup>68</sup> However, similar to evaluation efforts of the Zak initiative, this assessment was based on opinions of student participants regarding the effectiveness of the programme.<sup>69</sup>

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60. IC Thinking, 'Interventions', <<https://icthinking.org/where-we-work>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

61. Sara Zeiger (ed.), 'Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism', Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, 2016.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–104.

63. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

64. Zeiger (ed.), 'Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism'.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Elisabeth (Lily) Taylor et al., "'Beyond Bali': A Transformative Education Approach for Developing Community Resilience to Violent Extremism', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* (Vol. 37, No. 2, 2017), pp. 193–204.

67. Anne Aly, Elisabeth Taylor and Saul Karnovsky, 'Moral Disengagement and Building Resilience to Violent Extremism: An Education Intervention', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 37, No. 4, 2014), pp. 369–85.

68. *Ibid.*; Taylor et al., "'Beyond Bali'".

69. *Ibid.*

No attempts at measuring a change in empathy levels or establishing how empathy serves to increase resilience to violent extremism were found as part of this review.

There is evidence to suggest that improving students' ability to critically evaluate the arguments, content and perspectives they are confronted with can improve their rational thinking instead of following the simplistic, binary worldviews commonly shared by violent extremists.<sup>70</sup> Bringing up controversial topics of local relevance in classroom settings and debating them openly and respectfully can take some leverage away from extremist recruiters who are otherwise able to capitalise on more controversial and sensitive discussions.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, reducing vulnerability through critical thinking does not work in all contexts, as extremist narratives are often far from irrational and critical thinking skills alone can do little to decrease the popularity of certain types of narratives. For example, grievances voiced by extremists on structural inequality, poverty, injustice, marginalisation and discrimination are often real, making ideas of overcoming these injustices through violence – as advocated by violent extremists – a legitimate argument for rational and educated individuals in some situations.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, when violent extremist organisations promise financial benefits, protection or educational opportunities to populations that otherwise have no access to these resources, it takes more than rational thinking alone to resist recruitment.<sup>73</sup>

## Interventions Addressing the Way Students Engage with Each Other

Interventions focused on facilitating contact between groups of students with different backgrounds build on contact theory – the assumption that recurring positive engagement with perceived outgroups reduces 'us versus them' thinking.<sup>74</sup> If they learn to understand and empathise with the 'other', it is assumed that young people will be less susceptible to extremist narratives which demean and vilify outgroups. Interventions building on this premise aim to forge relationships between young people identifying with different groups by facilitating interactions in day-to-day school life or in intervention settings in specific projects or activities.<sup>75</sup>

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70. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism', 2018; Nash et al., 'Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education'; Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism'; Macaluso, 'From Countering to Preventing Radicalization Through Education'.

71. Davies, 'Educating Against Extremism'.

72. Nash et al., 'Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education'; Nemr and Savage, 'Integrative Complexity Interventions to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism'.

73. Nash et al., 'Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education'.

74. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

75. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'; Jonathan Doney and Rupert Wegerif, 'Measuring Open-Mindedness: An Evaluation of the Impact of Our School Dialogue Programme on Students' Open-Mindedness and Attitudes to Others', Tony Blair Institute

For example, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change's Generation Global programme assumes that increased interactions with the 'other' cultivates open-mindedness which can make individuals resilient to the black-and-white thinking of violent extremists.<sup>76</sup> By facilitating contact with others through global video conferences and digital dialogue, the intervention aims to foster dialogue skills and encourage tolerance. The effects of these activities were measured in an evaluation assessing data from 89 schools in 15 countries in terms of the language that was used by programme participants in reference to other groups of people, including the transformation of the use of the words 'us' and 'them'.<sup>77</sup> The programme evaluation found a modest but statistically significant positive impact in terms of increased dialogical open-mindedness and claims that the intervention has the 'potential for transformative effects on teachers, students and whole classes'.<sup>78</sup> This is positive, though the findings about open-mindedness and radicalisation processes would need to be tested in different contexts and over longer time periods, particularly where there is a presence of strong structural causes of violent extremism.

Three reviewed studies analysed a project that was implemented by the US Institute of Peace in Taliban-influenced areas of Afghanistan. The project brought together students from high schools and religious schools (also known in some contexts as *madaress* or *madrassas*) for journalism training to build critical thinking and reporting skills, while simultaneously reducing biases and stereotypes between the students.<sup>79</sup> The evaluation looked at differences in the content and tone of the news stories reported by the young journalists before and after the training to evaluate changes in attitudes, knowledge and interactions between the students.<sup>80</sup> The studies concluded that while biases were strong at the beginning of the project, the intervention had some success in reducing prejudices, claiming that contact theory holds up in this context.<sup>81</sup> It was concluded that the project was successful in focusing the intervention on those most at risk,<sup>82</sup> but it was also acknowledged that the project did not always yield the same results as predicted at the outset.<sup>83</sup> This is not necessarily negative, but does demonstrate that it is difficult to foresee how P/CVE interventions would impact beneficiaries. Also, it is difficult

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for Global Change, 2017; Katie Moffett and Tony Sgro, 'School-Based CVE Strategies', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 668, No. 1, November 2016), pp. 145–64.

76. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'; Doney and Wegerif, 'Measuring Open-Mindedness'.

77. Doney and Wegerif, 'Measuring Open-Mindedness'.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

79. Casey Johnson, 'Journalism Training to Counter Violent Extremism: Developing Critical Thinking Skills and Counter Narratives in Eastern Afghanistan', United States Institute of Peace (USIP), unpublished, 2015; Eliza Urwin, 'Evaluation Report Maktab and Madrasa Project 2015-2017', USIP, unpublished, 2017; USIP, 'Internal Study of USIP's Contributions to Addressing Violent Extremism', unpublished, 2016.

80. Johnson, 'Journalism Training to Counter Violent Extremism'.

81. *Ibid.*; Urwin, 'Evaluation Report Maktab and Madrasa Project 2015-2017'.

82. Johnson, 'Journalism Training to Counter Violent Extremism'.

83. Urwin, 'Evaluation Report Maktab and Madrasa Project 2015-2017'.

to establish a clear link between a reduction in social divisions, measured through attitudes and interactions, and an enduring change in behaviour.

In the Netherlands, the Expedition Friend & Foe programme – which aims to equip young people with skills to navigate diversity and intergroup conflict – was found to change the perspectives of student participants in the intervention areas on bullying, exclusion, discrimination, conflict escalation and social pressure immediately after the programme.<sup>84</sup> Rather than thinking of their peers and society more broadly in terms of ‘friends and foes’, students reported being able to focus on commonalities they might have with other people and to constructively deal with diversity following their participation in the programme.<sup>85</sup> However, these attitudinal changes were only measured on the basis of questionnaires filled out by participants immediately following the intervention, which limits the ability to generalise the findings.<sup>86</sup> No evaluations were found indicating a follow-up to measure the long-term impact of these interventions as part of this review. As a result, only short-term outcomes reported by intervention participants themselves are considered, and long-term impacts – as significant as they may be – can only be speculated about.

The Peer to Peer (P2P) initiative, a global intervention in the university system, brings students together in developing social media P/CVE campaigns in cooperation with project partners.<sup>87</sup> The initiative assumes that young people are best positioned to reach peers who might be at risk of radicalisation, and expects to affect both the participating university students through intergroup contact and the audiences reached by the campaigns.<sup>88</sup> In reviewing the impacts of P2P, Katie Moffett and Tony Sgro call into question the empirical clarity of the goals of the campaign and note the lack of measures for intervention impact.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, peer mediation works on the assumption that young people are better equipped to mediate in conflicts and polarised relationships in the school environment than adults.<sup>90</sup> While evaluations of peer mediation tend to consider it a successful technique, the most significant impact has been witnessed in relation to mediators themselves, while the impact on mediated students is estimated to be much smaller.<sup>91</sup> Positive impacts in peer mediators include improved conflict resolution skills and social skills, which can likely be attributed to the mediation training and the professional support the mediators receive. The available evidence on school-based peer mediation programmes indicates that mediation tends to reduce conflicts and polarised

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84. RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’, 2018.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

87. Moffett and Sgro, ‘School-Based CVE Strategies’; Davies, ‘Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally’.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Moffett and Sgro, ‘School-Based CVE Strategies’.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Vasco Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy: Evaluating the Theories of Change’, *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research Debate and Practice* (Vol. 9, No. 2, 2013), pp. 165–83.



relationships, but this review found no evidence to indicate that this positive change is more pronounced when the mediation is performed by peer mediators rather than adults.<sup>92</sup>

*Wie wollen wir leben?*, a programme in Germany led by the NGO Ufuq.de, is an example of a peer-based approach. Through workshops conducted in classroom settings by peers with predominantly Muslim backgrounds, the programme aims to address questions and preconceptions young people have about Islam, which is thought to simultaneously make students more resilient to Islamism and anti-Muslim racism.<sup>93</sup> The workshops aim to provide a platform for the discussion of questions on religion, identity and belonging and encourage open debate between students and peer facilitators. Over the past decade, Ufuq.de has delivered over 1,000 workshops in several cities across Germany as part of the programme, in addition to training sessions and conferences for educators.<sup>94</sup> The workshops are evaluated on an ongoing basis and improved in response to the evaluation results, but evaluation reports are currently only available in German.<sup>95</sup>

Focusing specifically on integration in school systems through forced intergroup contact, two studies came to the conclusion that attempts to prevent extremism through forced integration and assimilation in schools are counterproductive and exacerbate existing tensions.<sup>96</sup> Drawing on ethnographic research in a Danish school, Reva Jaffe-Walter criticises what she refers to as an 'orientalist logic that collapses diverse groups of Muslims and those who are considered "Muslim-like" into a racialized category of "Other"' that is at the root of many integration strategies.<sup>97</sup> She also criticises the understanding that in order to effectively integrate students, schools must transform 'Muslim youth into more acceptable, modern, liberal subjects'.<sup>98</sup> These attempts, Jaffe-Walter argues, are built on the construction of Muslims and other minority groups as the 'other', rather than aiming to break down categorisations of 'us' and 'them'.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, studying the attempts at forced integration through school mergers of majority white and majority ethnic minority schools in the UK, Shamim Miah found that the mergers in two pilot locations led to a deepening of divisions and intense racial violence against minority pupils: white pupils perceived the externally manufactured integration of minorities as a threat

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92. *Ibid.*

93. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

94. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'.

95. Ufuq.de, 'Evaluationsbericht 2017 der Präventionsarbeit von ufuq.de', 30 July 2018, <<https://www.ufuq.de/evaluationsbericht-2017-der-praeventionsarbeit-von-ufuq-de/>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

96. Reva Jaffe-Walter, "'The More We Can Try to Open Them Up, the Better It Will Be for Their Integration": Integration and the Coercive Assimilation of Muslim Youth', *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 2017), pp. 63–68; Shamim Miah, 'School Desegregation and the Politics of "Forced Integration"', *Race & Class* (Vol. 54, No. 2, October 2012), pp. 26–38.

97. Jaffe-Walter, "'The More We Can Try to Open Them Up, the Better It Will Be for Their Integration'", p. 63.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*



to their privileges, which reinforced the perception of in- and outgroups and resulted in riot-like clashes, rather than aiding integration.<sup>100</sup>

Overall, the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions using approaches that are based on contact theory is mixed. While some of the interventions had promising outcomes, others failed to achieve their goals. Although schools are a natural place to facilitate intergroup contacts, Trees Pels and Doret J de Ruyter argue that even if this is forced in a school setting, students are more likely to stick with their own ethnic groups outside of school.<sup>101</sup> Correspondingly, in a study assessing interventions focusing on intergroup contact, Vasco Lub concludes that the positive effects of intergroup contact in intervention settings cannot be generalised into everyday contact between young people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds within educational contexts.<sup>102</sup>

The authors of the UNESCO guide on P/CVE in education argue that school environments can perpetuate racism and discrimination, thereby contributing to some of the factors driving individuals into violent extremism, including perceived injustice, social isolation and ‘othering’.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, as the discussed school mergers and forced integration approaches showcase, not all contact between different groups leads to greater understanding of one another.<sup>104</sup> However, the overall impacts of intergroup contact approaches in intervention settings have been found to be significantly more promising than the impacts of forced interactions between different groups of young people in everyday school environments.<sup>105</sup>

The discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours makes it difficult to establish whether an intervention in this area has achieved its goals, thereby complicating the development of an evidence base for such interventions. For example, students might change their attitudes about other groups without changing their behaviour towards them. Different tools exist for the measurement of attitudes and behaviours,<sup>106</sup> but as behaviours are more difficult to measure in short project timeframes, accurate measures of behaviour changes are often not available. Furthermore, as the effectiveness of interventions based on contact theory depends to a large extent on the existing relations between different groups, the local context matters greatly in the design and implementation of such interventions. Interventions that work well in improving relations between different groups in one context might exacerbate intergroup tensions in another.

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100. Miah, ‘School Desegregation and the Politics of “Forced Integration”’.

101. Pels and de Ruyter, ‘The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization’.

102. Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.

103. Nash et al., ‘Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education’.

104. Gielen, ‘Countering Violent Extremism’.

105. Lub, ‘Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy’.

106. Georgia Holmer, Peter Bauman and Kateira Aryaeinejad, *Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2018).

## Interventions Focused on Building the Capacity of Educators

Many of the educational interventions discussed thus far were developed to be delivered by education professionals rather than specifically trained facilitators. Yet, the role of teachers is not always clear as the focus of the intervention is usually on the students. This raises the question of whether ‘good teaching’ is enough for the successful delivery of P/CVE-related content or whether special training for teachers is needed to ensure they have the capacity to achieve P/CVE objectives.<sup>107</sup>

### Educators’ Abilities to Facilitate Lessons With P/CVE Content

Several interventions address this issue and include components on training teachers alongside the intervention activities focused on students. This is based on the assumption that teachers’ abilities to convey P/CVE-relevant content in creative ways and engage pupils in debates about sensitive and polarising topics is essential to the successful delivery of P/CVE interventions in the education sector.

The work that was done by SWAaT for Pakistan included teacher-training workshops in five different schools in the region. In combination with the provision of learning resources and library materials, it was found that the improved capacity of educators resulted in a significant decline in dropout rates in schools and an improvement in logical reasoning skills among pupils.<sup>108</sup> The wider applicability of such findings is hard to assess because the impact of teacher training on the effectiveness of interventions depends on numerous contextual factors, as well as on the baseline level of teacher capacity and the specific goals of the intervention. As Ivo Veenkamp and Sara Zeiger caution, particularly for teachers working in conflict-affected areas, the additional burden of integrating P/CVE into their daily work is hard to balance with existing challenges, which could lead to unintended negative effects.<sup>109</sup>

Ratna Ghosh and colleagues argue for the necessity of critical pedagogy in the delivery of P/CVE interventions through formal education systems, requesting teachers to evaluate their own biases and opinions before engaging with students about their beliefs and values.<sup>110</sup> This includes the unwillingness to encourage debates about controversial topics relating to religion, ethnicity or culture, if such perspectives conflict with the teachers’ own beliefs.<sup>111</sup> Not openly and respectfully discussing extreme and sensitive topics or perspectives in the safe space that a

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107. Davies, ‘Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally’; Alida Skiple, ‘The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism: The Philosophy and Practice of the Swedish Tolerance Project’, *Young* (April 2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820914828>>.

108. Zeiger (ed.), ‘Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism’.

109. Veenkamp and Zeiger, ‘Countering Violent Extremism’.

110. Ghosh et al., ‘Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?’.

111. Pels and de Ruyter, ‘The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization’; Nash et al., ‘Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education’; RAN, ‘Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism’.

classroom ought to provide could arguably feed into violent extremist narratives and reinforce feelings of isolation. As Pels and de Ruyter argue, the ability of teachers to deal with controversial issues and give students from different backgrounds a voice is essential in ensuring the inclusion of students who grow up in multi-ethnic contexts.<sup>112</sup>

However, evidence from the UK indicates that educators often lack confidence about having the skills to successfully engage in difficult conversations with students and parents.<sup>113</sup> Teachers report that discussing P/CVE-related issues in the classroom setting makes them uncomfortable as they feel that they lack knowledge about the subjects of discussion and are concerned about offending pupils and dealing with uncomfortable situations.<sup>114</sup> Uncertainties also exist with regard to religious education over what exactly should be taught and how teachers should integrate preventive discourses in classroom-based activities.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, if teachers are expected to deliver this type of content, it appears to be necessary to provide them with adequate support and training to improve their confidence in performing these tasks.

One intervention that directly aims to promote the teaching of controversial topics is the Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Training Pack.<sup>116</sup> Piloted from 2014 onwards, the training pack is freely available online in all languages of member states of the Council of Europe and gives background on the rationale for bringing controversial debates into schools. It also contains a supporting programme of training activities that can be used as needed. In addition to the dissemination of the training pack online, the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre organised a series of training sessions on the contents of the training pack.<sup>117</sup> While quantitative and qualitative feedback on the pilot training pack was reportedly taken into account for the final draft of the training pack, no evaluation of this intervention was found as part of this review, which makes it impossible to make conclusive statements about its effectiveness.<sup>118</sup>

In the Netherlands, the Dialogue in Citizenship Education programme was introduced in a number of teacher-training colleges to support future teachers in tackling polarising and sensitive topics

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112. Pels and de Ruyter, 'The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization'.

113. Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges in England'.

114. John Higon et al., 'Prevent and Counter-Extremism in General Further Education Colleges', Department for Education, Research Report, December 2018.

115. Angela Quartermaine, 'Discussing Terrorism: A Pupil-Inspired Guide to UK Counter-Terrorism Policy Implementation in Religious Education Classrooms in England', *British Journal of Religious Education* (Vol. 38, No. 1, 2016), pp. 13–29.

116. Council of Europe, 'Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) – Training Pack for Teachers', 2015, <<https://edoc.coe.int/en/human-rights-democratic-citizenship-and-interculturalism/7738-teaching-controversial-issues.html>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

117. RAN, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism'.

118. *Ibid.*

in the classroom. Evaluations have been conducted and used to improve the curriculum, which is using a peer-education methodology, but they have not been made publicly available.<sup>119</sup>

The success of open debates about sensitive topics in the classroom setting also depends on skilful facilitation. Evidence from a small study with young male supporters of the far-right British National Party (BNP) who participated in school-based anti-racism programmes in North England indicates that the style of facilitation and the ability of educators to listen to and understand students' perspectives is essential in gaining their trust and avoiding simply 'switching off' when confronted with opinions that are different from their own.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, if teachers are to be trained in facilitating dialogue and discussions, this training should also emphasise the style and tone of facilitation.

In addition to findings from existing interventions in this space, the Radicalisation Awareness Network's 'Manifesto for Education', which is based on the opinions and feedback of around 90 educators and experts, suggests a number of approaches with regard to teacher training and support.<sup>121</sup> Their suggestions include: building educator networks and hotlines to enable teachers to share experiences and help each other in navigating difficult or sensitive issues; training educators in the use of online material and platforms that their students are exposed to and engage with; and encouraging teachers to use the testimonials of former extremists or victims of violent extremism, either online or in person, to open discussions about the topic in the classroom.<sup>122</sup>

While these examples do not provide conclusive evidence that training teachers in the facilitation of P/CVE content directly improves the outcomes of P/CVE interventions, the need for skilful facilitation was highlighted in numerous studies reviewed as part of this project and examined in previous sections. As the effectiveness of interventions ultimately depends on the design of the intervention itself rather than the capacity of the facilitators, teacher training alone cannot elicit successful P/CVE outcomes. Yet, without sufficient teacher capacity to facilitate interventions, the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes, even with well-designed projects, would be low.

### **Building the Capacity of Educators to Recognise Signs of Radicalisation and Recruitment in Their Students**

In addition to teacher training, a second set of interventions aimed at educators assumes that teachers are able to identify signs of radicalisation and recruitment in their students and aims to build their capacity to recognise these signs.

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119. *Ibid.*

120. Tom Cockburn, 'Performing Racism: Engaging Young Supporters of the Far Right in England', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Vol. 28, No. 5, 2007), pp. 547–60; Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism'.

121. RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools'.

122. *Ibid.*

In some countries, the responsibility of educators encompasses the identification and referral of students in the early stages of radicalisation and recruitment. Most prominently, the Prevent duty in the UK,<sup>123</sup> which came into force in 2015, placed a legal obligation on educators as well as employees of health and local authorities, the police and prisons to undergo training on extremist ideologies and signs of vulnerability to radicalisation, and to report cases of suspected radicalisation.<sup>124</sup> The policy was embedded in the safeguarding duty of educators, which was already in place before the Prevent duty was introduced. Therefore, as primary research with educators who are tasked with implementing the policy revealed, reporting concerns about students who educators believe are going through challenging or problematic life situations was not entirely unfamiliar to teachers in the UK.<sup>125</sup>

However, the Prevent duty has been met with ample criticism since its introduction, including criticism for the theoretical foundations on which it is based.<sup>126</sup> That is, the policy follows the assumption that radicalisation is a linear process during which individuals gradually become radicalised and involved in violent extremism. Such a linear process, it is then assumed, provides opportunities for educators to identify and refer young people who are in the early stages of this process. However, there is evidence that not all radicalisation and recruitment pathways are linear, and violent extremism is not always linked to radicalisation.<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, the policy is often criticised for its heavy focus on Muslim communities and its perception of the education system as a surveillance tool.<sup>128</sup> Although the guidance on the Prevent duty includes a paragraph on white supremacist ideology and extreme right-wing groups,<sup>129</sup> the evidence did not demonstrate that white or non-minority students are being targeted, which leads to the conclusion that the policy may be contributing to the stigmatisation and alienation of young Muslims.<sup>130</sup>

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123. UK Home Office, 'Prevent Duty Guidance for England, Scotland and Wales', March 2015, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

124. Robert Long, 'Counter-Extremism Policy in English Schools', Briefing Paper No. CBP 07345, House of Commons Library, 20 January 2017; Quartermaine, 'Discussing Terrorism'; Thomas, 'Failed and Friendless'; Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'; Didier Bigo et al., 'Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU', Study for the LIBE Committee, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament, 2014.

125. Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'; Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges'; Higton et al., 'Prevent and Counter-Extremism in General Further Education Colleges'.

126. Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'; Thomas, 'Failed and Friendless'.

127. Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'; Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges'.

128. Thomas, 'Failed and Friendless', p. 445.

129. UK Home Office, 'Prevent Duty Guidance for England, Scotland and Wales', March 2015.

130. Davies, 'Security, Extremism and Education'; Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'; Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges'; Paul Thomas, 'Youth, Terrorism and

Another criticism relates to the Prevent duty threatening the role of schools as safe spaces and limiting academic freedom.<sup>131</sup> The guidance acknowledges the need for open discussions in the classroom, but the policy is nevertheless reported to make students – particularly Muslim students – fearful to speak freely, and teachers are more likely to avoid discussions about controversial issues altogether.<sup>132</sup> Some teachers also reported fearing negative consequences for their students if they were (falsely) reported and labelled as potentially dangerous, and claimed that the uncertainty of the consequences of reporting students to the security services made them apprehensive to do so.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, despite the general reluctance of teachers to report suspicions about their students, there are indications that teachers are willing to report their students when they think they have clear evidence that a student has been radicalised.<sup>134</sup> In fact, between April 2017 and March 2018 a third of the referrals into the Channel programme – a multi-agency initiative offering tailored support to individuals who are considered to be in the early stages of radicalisation – came from the education sector.<sup>135</sup>

In addition to fears about the securitisation of the classroom setting, there are also uncertainties regarding the criteria for identification.<sup>136</sup> Teachers in primary, secondary and further education often voice concerns about their ability to identify signs of (or vulnerability to) radicalisation and distinguish between extreme views and violent or criminal intentions in their students without stigmatising them.<sup>137</sup> This uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that different assessment tools are being used with regard to violent extremism in different contexts. Some of these tools were designed for use by trained forensic psychologists or experienced and specifically trained professionals, which – as Rita Augestad Knudsen argues – limits their applicability to the education system.<sup>138</sup>

Educators in the UK do receive training on the implementation of the Prevent duty and the identification of students at risk of radicalisation and recruitment, but studies examining their experiences with the policy had mixed results. While some teachers were confident about its implementation given the training they received,<sup>139</sup> others reported frustrations with the

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Education: Britain's Prevent Programme', *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (Vol. 35, No. 2, 2016), pp. 171–87.

131. Nordbruch, 'The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation'.

132. Davies, 'Security, Extremism and Education'.

133. Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'.

134. *Ibid.*

135. Bellis and Hardcastle (eds), 'Preventing Violent Extremism in the UK'.

136. Long, 'Counter-Extremism Policy in English Schools'.

137. Harris Beider and Rachel Briggs, 'Promoting Community Cohesion and Preventing Violent Extremism in Higher and Further Education', Institute of Community Cohesion, 2010; Nordbruch, 'The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation'.

138. Rita Augestad Knudsen, 'Measuring Radicalisation: Risk Assessment Conceptualisations and Practice in England and Wales', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 12, No. 1, 2020), pp. 37–54.

139. Busher et al., 'What the Prevent Duty Means for Schools and Colleges'.

trainings and resulting confusion and uncertainty regarding the accurate identification of students at risk.<sup>140</sup>

Despite heavy criticisms, the longstanding experience of the UK with the Prevent policy – and gradual improvements and adjustments to it – has inspired replication in other countries. For example, based on the learnings from the UK, the Swedish National Coordinator to Safeguard Democracy against Violent Extremism recommended the implementation of similar preventive interventions in the Swedish education system.<sup>141</sup> As Christer Mattsson reports, these recommendations were translated into many of the local action plans that were developed to contextualise the national strategy and action plan.<sup>142</sup> A central element of these plans is the role of teachers in detecting pupils who might be radicalised and reporting them to the police or the security police. Applying critical discourse analysis to a total of 127 local plans, Mattsson argues that teachers are often compelled to simultaneously view pupils as vulnerable, and thereby entitled to protection, as well as a potential threat, and thereby legitimate targets of interventions.<sup>143</sup> As a result, there is a risk that this would create a culture of suspicion. In such a culture, rather than helping students develop their thinking and reasoning capacities, radical ideas are monitored and policed, even when no violent or criminal acts are considered or planned by the student. On the basis of his analysis of the local action plans, Mattsson makes the point that the framing of these plans alone threatens to undermine trusting relations in the education sector in Sweden, even without teachers actually reporting undesirable ideological positions of their students to the police.<sup>144</sup> As this study only analysed the content of the action plans rather than their impact, these findings should be treated with caution.

## Cross-Cutting Interventions

While a number of different interventions included multiple components that are based on different assumptions discussed in this review, only one project included components of all covered intervention types. The Swedish Tolerance Project, an elective course designed to reduce recruitment to racist and violent extremist organisations, was launched in the Swedish city of Kungälv following the murder of a boy by skinheads in 1995.<sup>145</sup> Given the success of the programme in Kungälv, the Tolerance Project became part of the national P/CVE policy as well as a central element in the Swedish resource centre for frontline professionals against violent extremism in 2015.<sup>146</sup> The success of the programme in Kungälv was documented in a 2013 study on the economic benefits of reducing racist activity in the municipality, which

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140. Moffat and Gerard, 'Securitising Education'.

141. Christer Mattsson, 'Policing Violent Extremism: How the Global War on Terror Meandered Into Local Municipal Policies in Sweden', *SAGE Open*, March 2019, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019837462>>.

142. *Ibid.*

143. *Ibid.*

144. *Ibid.*

145. Skiple, 'The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism'.

146. *Ibid.*



is only available in Swedish.<sup>147</sup> The course includes content on citizenship, human rights and participatory democracy, as well as a historical component on the Holocaust. It is open to 14- and 15-year-old students, and course participants are deliberately selected from the applicant pool to ensure they include young people with intolerant attitudes who cause unrest in the school, as well as students who perform well in school and are not causing any problems. This is done to enable the formation of positive relationships between the students (intergroup contact) and to enable dialogue and exchange between the students rather than excluding the perspectives of young people with intolerant attitudes from the discussion (integrative complexity). In order to make it relevant to the challenges facing troubled young people, the curriculum is contextualised in each participating school, based on a local problem analysis by the municipality in which the school is located.<sup>148</sup>

The course also includes a component that aims to train teachers in countering extremism. Teachers are taught about the history of neo-Nazi groups in the country and are provided with resources and information on the latest local trends and recruitment materials used by these groups. They are also trained to work with social and community workers to map local spots of recruitment and identify and work with students at risk of radicalisation.<sup>149</sup> Integral to the teaching of the course is also a close cooperation between teachers, students, the home and overall society. This is based on the understanding that many different actors are involved in the socialisation of young people and teachers alone cannot be expected to successfully spot and counter signs of radicalisation in every case.<sup>150</sup> A qualitative evaluation of the programme by Alida Skiple concludes that the localised nature of the teacher training and student activities – as well as the high level of training for professionals and inclusion of a selected, but mixed, group of pupils – makes the model well suited to preventing radicalisation.<sup>151</sup>

It is a relatively resource-intensive model, but the available evidence reviewed for this paper supports its effectiveness.<sup>152</sup> The contextualised nature of the project, the inclusion of various components that all have some potential of success and the involvement of different stakeholders to reduce the burden on teachers are approaches that could also work well in other settings. However, no evaluation was found during this research of the impact of the model across the country. If replication in other countries was to be considered, a thorough country-wide evaluation of the model would be essential.

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147. Eva Nilsson Lundmark and Ingvar Nilsson, 'Intoleransens Pris: En socioekonomisk analys av vit makt-rörelsen och Kungälvsmodellen' ['The Price of Intolerance: A Socioeconomic Analysis of the White Power Movement and the Kungälv Model'], Natur & Kultur, 2013, <<http://socioekonomi.se/Texter/Tolerans/Intoleransen%20pris.pdf>>, accessed 16 June 2020.

148. Skiple, 'The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism'.

149. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

150. Skiple, 'The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism'.

151. Alida Skiple, 'Youth Delinquency or Everyday Racism? Front-Line Professionals' Perspectives on Preventing Racism and Intolerance in Sweden', *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 14, Spring 2018).

152. *Ibid.*; Skiple, 'The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism'.





# Conclusion

**B**Y INTERROGATING THE existing literature on education and P/CVE, this paper identifies some of the key assumptions on which approaches in this area are based. It then groups interventions according to the mechanisms they apply to P/CVE in the education sector. In doing so, it presents and analyses evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches and tests the validity of the underlying assumptions. As the review is based exclusively on publicly available, English-language studies,<sup>153</sup> it is likely that relevant arguments for or against some of the discussed approaches are not sufficiently covered. Approaches that have been publicised and widely discussed in the literature are featured and critiqued most frequently in this review. This reflects the availability of studies and reports discussing this work rather than the author's judgement of the effectiveness of certain approaches. At the same time, the author understands that organisations implementing certain interventions in this field likely have compelling evidence for their effectiveness that has not been made public. Despite these limitations, the findings present a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on P/CVE interventions in the education sector.

**Finding 1: The evidence base for education initiatives in P/CVE is limited and existing evaluations tend to focus on short-term output measures rather than long-term outcomes.**

Preventive interventions in education are fairly popular with funders,<sup>154</sup> but limited evidence of their success was found. This is largely due to the lack of publicly available evaluations on which to base firm conclusions. Where evaluations were available, the evaluated projects were often concluded years earlier with no evidence of a follow-up, which limits the applicability of findings. Also, many of the available evaluations based their assessments on the short-term outputs of an intervention rather than its long-term effects, which is problematic as the effects of educational interventions cannot be expected to develop fully in the short term. Responses of project participants regarding the design of the intervention or the number of trained individuals cannot provide sufficient evidence about the effectiveness of P/CVE interventions to consider the replication or adaptation of projects. Efforts to follow-up evaluations some months or even years after the events to interrogate the question of impact further are missing, which can partly be explained by the large numbers of intervention recipients, particularly in interventions that are part of national school curricula. This is not to assume that subsequent evaluations would not demonstrate some positive findings: while the positive impacts of educational interventions might not be immediately measurable, they might well be observable in the long term.<sup>155</sup>

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153. For details on the limitations of the methodology, see Annex II.

154. Shahram Akbarzadeh, 'Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of De-Radicalisation Programmes in Australia', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (Vol. 33, No. 4, 2013), pp. 451–63.

155. Lynn Davies, 'Gender, Education, Extremism and Security', *Compare* (Vol. 38, No. 5, 2008), pp. 611–25.

**Finding 2: There is no conclusive evidence that the level of education attained by individuals directly affects their propensity for radicalisation or recruitment into violent extremism. However, evidence suggests that individuals with varying levels of education are affected by and targeted through violent extremist narratives and recruitment efforts differently.**

The available literature indicates that the understanding of violent extremism as a by-product of a lack of education is a misguided assumption. Various studies have examined the profiles of individuals convicted for terrorism offences and did not find a strong or direct correlation with lack of education.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, violent extremism has not been found to be limited to certain social milieus or to those on the margins of society.<sup>157</sup> In fact, some of the studies reviewed suggest that education, which builds skills and human capital in general, can increase the likelihood of a successful terrorist attack. For example, a study by Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi found that suicide attacks conducted by more educated terrorists tend to result in more casualties on average and are less likely to fail.<sup>158</sup>

While the reviewed literature does not suggest a direct link between education and the propensity of individuals to embrace violent extremism, it does suggest that individuals with varying levels of education are affected by and targeted through violent extremist narratives and recruitment attempts differently.<sup>159</sup> For example, in geographical areas where many people lack quality education, radicalisation and recruitment is often based on manipulative narratives and monetary incentives. In contrast, in localities where students benefit from high-quality education, violent extremists tend to appeal to individuals through emotional and intellectual narratives rooted in injustice and inequality.<sup>160</sup>

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156. Ghosh et al., 'Education and Security'; Samantha de Silva, 'Role of Education in the Prevention of Violent Extremism', Working Paper, World Bank, 2017; Veenkamp and Zeiger, 'Countering Violent Extremism'; Macaluso, 'From Countering to Preventing Radicalization Through Education'; Kartika Bhatia and Hafez Ghanem, 'How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism? Evidence from Eight Arab Countries', Global Economy and Development Working Paper 102, Brookings, March 2017; Abdullah bin Khaled Al-Saud, 'Saudi Foreign Fighters: Analysis of Leaked Islamic State Entry Documents', International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, 2019.

157. Nordbruch, 'The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation'.

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

159. Desirée Schmuck and Jörg Matthes, 'How Anti-Immigrant Right-Wing Populist Advertisements Affect Young Voters: Symbolic Threats, Economic Threats and the Moderating Role of Education', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Vol. 14, No. 10, 2015), pp. 1577–99.

160. Ghosh et al., 'Education and Security', p. 6.

**Finding 3: Education interventions that do not sufficiently address local factors of violent extremism can do more harm than good.**

Theories of change that have successfully been applied in some contexts may not be applicable in other settings. This is because additional variables that may be present in a conflict setting, for example, can negatively affect the applicability of theories of change that were tested in other settings. If interventions lack sensitivity to the context in question, they may even exacerbate conflict. Therefore, a balance is needed between cookie-cutter interventions that do not adequately address the local drivers of conflict and violent extremism and interventions that are entirely context-driven and do not allow for global or regional comparisons and the sharing of lessons learned.<sup>161</sup>

**Finding 4: Not all local drivers of radicalisation and recruitment can be effectively addressed through education initiatives and unnecessarily labelling education interventions as P/CVE can harm the education sector as well as the field of P/CVE.**

Labelling education interventions that are not relevant to the prevention of violent extremism as P/CVE can discredit P/CVE interventions in general and unnecessarily securitise the field of education. Equally, if the immediate objective of P/CVE goes against the long-term objectives of a particular educational system, adding a P/CVE component to educational activities can threaten the reputation and credibility of the education agenda.<sup>162</sup> Nonetheless, even if preventive goals cannot be reliably delivered through education systems, it is clear that the provision and improvement of education is in itself beneficial to society.

**Finding 5: Knowledge-based interventions can positively impact the historical awareness and civic participation of young people, but they can also be used to spread restrictive narratives of national identity and history that alienate parts of the population.**

If done right, knowledge-based P/CVE interventions can be a means of conveying positive values of citizenship, identity and history and promote an appreciation for political, religious and cultural diversity.<sup>163</sup> However, the substance of the curricula of knowledge-based interventions is crucial. While inclusive curricula covering multiple perspectives of historical, religious or other content can promote the understanding of a shared common identity, the promotion of narrow definitions of citizenship or national identity in textbooks or lessons can serve to marginalise those who are not included in these definitions. Similarly, if specific groups of young people are targeted by interventions aimed at promoting certain values, these interventions can lead to their stigmatisation.<sup>164</sup> Providing an inclusive sense of national identity requires a strategic

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161. Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

162. Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Wilton Park, 'The Search for Common Values and a Code for Inclusive Citizenship: What Role for Education in Building Resilience to Violent Extremism?', Report, WP1510, 14–16 December 2016.

163. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, 'Education, Identity and Rising Extremism'.

164. Webber and Struthers, 'Critiquing Approaches to Countering Extremism'.

approach and a comprehensive understanding of the different segments of society, their composition, their challenges and how they view their identity. Moreover, if civic and historical education and similar knowledge-based approaches are to be comprehensive, they should also examine the government's role in past human rights abuses and other injustices, which requires the willingness of the government to acknowledge past mistakes and move forward.<sup>165</sup>

**Finding 6: Critical thinking, integrative complexity and cognitive resilience interventions can offer a way to address *how* students think without policing *what* they think, but their applicability is limited to certain contexts.**

In comparison to some of the other approaches discussed in this paper, these non-prescriptive interventions show definite signs of success. Interventions in this area build up skills that young people can apply to question and analyse any information they are confronted with, unlike rote learning which only addresses the content covered in the lessons.<sup>166</sup> However, the underlying grievances that drive individuals to violent extremism sometimes have nothing to do with a lowered ability to think critically and acknowledge the viewpoints of others. Therefore, such interventions can only be one part of the effort and cannot replace interventions addressing other factors of violent extremism.<sup>167</sup>

**Finding 7: Intergroup contact can be an effective means of reducing prejudice between members of different groups, but it is not clear whether such interventions improve respect for the 'other' in general.**

Interventions bringing together members of groups that are experiencing conflict can be effective in diminishing prejudice towards members of opposing groups and fostering conflict resolution and dialogue skills.<sup>168</sup> By confronting students with different perspectives, including controversial opinions, such approaches can facilitate an understanding of the 'other' while ensuring that controversial opinions are debated rather than banned. However, it is unclear whether positive relationships between members of different groups can be generalised into everyday contact between the groups outside the intervention setting.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, it is uncertain whether the increased openness achieved through intergroup contact is generalisable to other groups that were not included in the intervention in question.

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165. Davies, 'Security, Extremism and Education'.

166. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, 'Education, Identity and Rising Extremism'.

167. Nemr and Savage, 'Integrative Complexity Interventions to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism'.

168. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, 'Education, Identity and Rising Extremism'.

169. Lub, 'Polarisation, Radicalisation and Social Policy'.

**Finding 8: Teachers acknowledge their role in safeguarding and protecting their students from a range of threats including violent extremism, but they need sufficient training to successfully meet this responsibility.**

Given that educators generally appear to accept that they have a responsibility to protect their students from violent extremism as well as other forms of extreme or violent behaviour,<sup>170</sup> resources should be provided to support them in this task. Educators are some of many stakeholders who have active roles in the lives of young people, and as such, they can have an active role in the prevention of violent extremism. However, this burden should not be expected to be carried by teachers alone, but preventive efforts should also involve other adults who play significant roles in the lives of young people.<sup>171</sup> In order to improve the effectiveness of education interventions in P/CVE, it is essential to improve the understanding of the relationship between socialisation, educational environments and radicalisation processes in various contexts.<sup>172</sup> It should also be acknowledged that while some teachers might be in a position to successfully reach their students with preventive content, the success of interventions often depends on the skills as well as the personality of teachers.<sup>173</sup>

By providing information and guidance, rather than establishing mandatory mechanisms for reporting suspicions directly to security services, some of the risks of securitisation associated with safeguarding in schools could be mitigated.<sup>174</sup>

**Finding 9: The success of P/CVE interventions in general, and education-focused interventions in particular, depends to a large extent on the design and delivery of the intervention.**

A large part of the success of P/CVE interventions depends on skilful facilitation.<sup>175</sup> This is especially true in the field of education, where special facilitation skills are required when working with young (and, in some instances, vulnerable) people. The style of facilitation as well as the ability of educators to listen to and understand students' perspectives is essential in gaining their trust and avoiding that they simply 'switch off' when confronted with opinions that are different from their own.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore, the design of interventions matters greatly in the effectiveness of the intervention. Interventions that are non-prescriptive, engaging and relatable for students have a much

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170. Martin M Sjøen and Sissel H Jore, 'Preventing Extremism Through Education: Exploring Impacts and Implications of Counter-Radicalisation Efforts', *Journal of Beliefs & Values* (Vol. 40, No. 3, 2019), pp. 269–83.

171. Skiple, 'The Importance of Significant Others in Preventing Extremism'.

172. Pels and de Ruyter, 'The Influence of Education and Socialization on Radicalization'.

173. *Ibid.*

174. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, 'Education, Identity and Rising Extremism'.

175. Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods that Help to Build Resilience to Extremism'; Davies, 'Review of Educational Initiatives in Counter-Extremism Internationally'.

176. Sheikh, Sarwar and Reed, 'Teaching Methods that Help to Build Resilience to Extremism'.

greater chance of generating positive change than those that are delivered in a way that is not appropriate for the intended audience.<sup>177</sup> The same is true for interventions that aim to instil the ‘right’ values from above to transform the entire population of students into ‘desirable, liberal-democratic’ young people. Instead, interventions should be bottom-up and student-centred.<sup>178</sup> Education initiatives that encourage ‘learning through doing’ have the potential to reach and engage pupils through emotional and cognitive channels, which could lead to more significant and long-lasting impacts.<sup>179</sup> Interventions should also come from a place of empathy for the uncertainty and instability that young people face in their lives, and take into account the living contexts of the young people they are trying to reach.<sup>180</sup>

Effective approaches will involve engaging young people in dialogue, even if it is controversial, rather than monitoring and spying on students. They will equip students with life skills that enable them to analyse the world around them more critically and engage with different groups in society with respect and empathy. Rather than promoting singular identities and one-sided histories, effective approaches will provide inclusive narratives, expose young people to different identities and gender roles<sup>181</sup> and teach students about the uncomfortable and regrettable parts of history and contemporary world events.<sup>182</sup>

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177. *Ibid.*

178. Sjøen and Jore, ‘Preventing Extremism Through Education’; Sjøen and Mattsson, ‘Preventing Radicalisation in Norwegian Schools’.

179. Naraghi Anderlini, Cowick and Holmes, ‘Education, Identity and Rising Extremism’.

180. Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Hilary Pilkington, ‘In Search of the Missing Link: Gender, Education and the Radical Right’, *Gender and Education* (Vol. 29, No. 2, 2017), pp. 133–46.

181. *Ibid.*

182. Nordbruch, ‘The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation’.

# About the Author

**Claudia Wallner** is a Research Analyst in the Terrorism and Conflict group at RUSI. Her research focuses on countering violent extremism, particularly far-right extremism. Prior to joining RUSI in 2018, she worked as a Research Assistant for the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime and interned with Chatham House, the Austrian Embassy in London, UNODC and the OSCE.

Claudia holds an MA in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London, and she is currently a part-time MSc candidate in Countering Organised Crime and Terrorism at University College London.





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# Annex II: Research Methodology

**I**N 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.<sup>183</sup> 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

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



review and the structure, variance and content of social science studies.<sup>184</sup> The reliance on non-positivist, qualitative methodologies which generally define these disciplines creates challenges: commensurate quality appraisal techniques lack consensus and remain relatively undeveloped.<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup> 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,<sup>187</sup> to infringing on civil liberties, unfairly discriminating against ‘suspect communities’,<sup>188</sup> and producing unintended outcomes and negative externalities.<sup>189</sup> It has also been accused of lacking a coherent strategy and for being imbued with definitional and conceptual problems.<sup>190</sup>

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

185. *Ibid.*

186. *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

## A Confused Vocabulary

P/CVE is generally considered to be a broad umbrella term to 'categorise activities implemented by governmental and non-governmental actors seeking to prevent or mitigate violent extremism through non-coercive measures that are united by the objective of addressing the drivers of violent extremism'.<sup>191</sup> However, linguistic ambiguities and conflation 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.<sup>192</sup> Some development organisations, practitioners and scholars may opt for the PVE label to help distinguish upstream preventive approaches from any 'security driven framework',<sup>193</sup> 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'.<sup>194</sup> 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'.<sup>195</sup> 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.<sup>196</sup> Despite the tendency to frame radicalisation

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

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

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

194. *Ibid.*

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

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

as a recognisable and consistent phenomenon, it is a concept that is often applied loosely to an eclectic mix of cases and situations.<sup>197</sup>

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’.<sup>198</sup> This is therefore distinct from, but may overlap with, the ‘belief modification’ associated with radicalisation.<sup>199</sup>

### Conceptual Problems

Crucially, P/CVE also faces constraints and ambiguities as VE ‘cannot be neatly packaged’<sup>200</sup> 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’.<sup>201</sup> 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’,<sup>202</sup> 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,<sup>203</sup> 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

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197. RUSI, ‘Countering Violent Extremism Curriculum’.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The genealogy of P/CVE as a concept and a policy domain are also inextricably tied to ‘Islamist-based terrorism’ given its association with the ‘Global War on Terror’. It has since grown in both popularity and scope, integrating other manifestations of VE, such as white 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.<sup>204</sup>

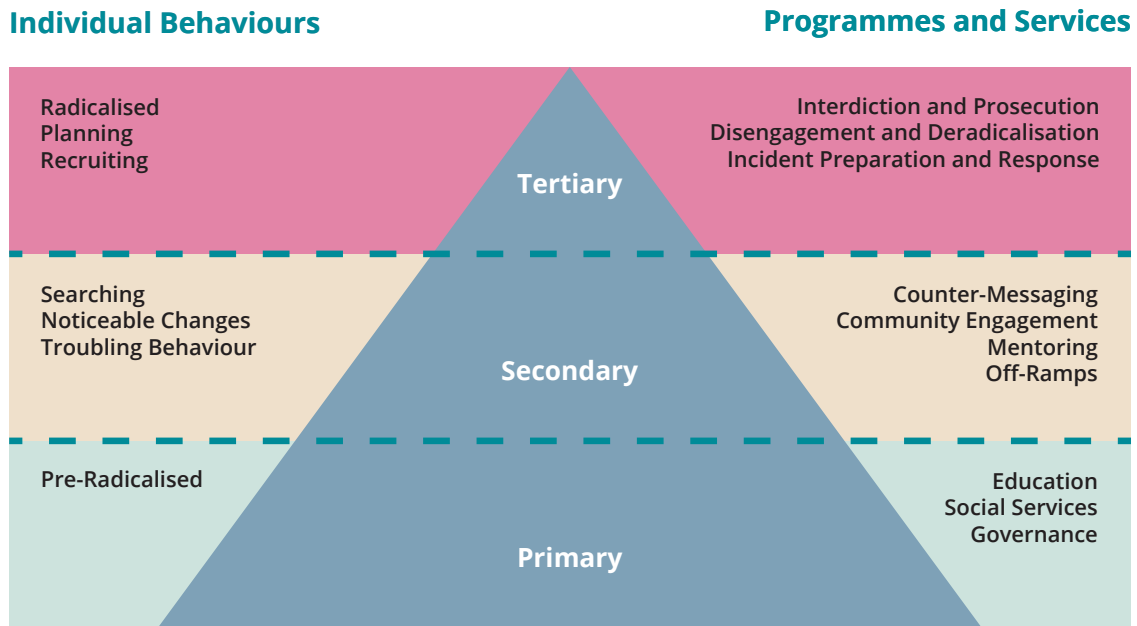
In such a confused context, the ‘public health model’<sup>205</sup> has become an increasingly prominent method for organising and reinterpreting P/CVE activity and agency, drawing on tested approaches for triaging ‘disease responses’ and healthcare. There are various iterations of this framework,<sup>206</sup> 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.

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204. 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.

205. 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.

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

**Figure 1:** The Public Health Model for P/CVE

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

- **Primary:** Broad-based and community-focused prevention programmes addressing a range of social ills including, but not specifically focusing on, factors contributing to radicalisation and/or recruitment into VE.
- **Secondary:** P/CVE activities that either target populations/individuals identified as being 'at risk' or vulnerable to radicalisation and/or recruitment, or address individual incentives, enabling factors and structural motivators contributing to VE. This category has been expanded from the original model proposed by Jonathan Challgren and colleagues, described as activities focused towards 'individuals and groups identified as at-risk for violent extremism'.<sup>207</sup> The addition of interventions that include P/CVE objectives in their explicit or implicit theory of change and/or those addressing factors specifically contributing to recruitment and radicalisation helps reflect contextual and programmatic heterogeneity in what is a sprawling, largely ill-defined domain.
- **Tertiary:** Engaging individuals who have already joined terrorist groups or are identified as violent extremists, these activities typically include disengagement, deradicalisation, isolation and redirection, or counterterrorism.

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

207. 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,<sup>208</sup> and demonstrating how they interact and synchronise with one another.<sup>209</sup>

### 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,<sup>210</sup> and other studies highlight both the limited availability and questionable quality of a large proportion of P/CVE content.<sup>211</sup> This is the result of various methodological restrictions that are not unique to the P/CVE space<sup>212</sup> 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

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208. 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.

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

210. 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.

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

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

convoluted.<sup>213</sup> 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.<sup>214</sup> 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.<sup>215</sup> 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.<sup>216</sup> 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.<sup>217</sup>

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.<sup>218</sup> 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’.<sup>219</sup>

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

214. *Ibid.*

215. *Ibid.*

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

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

218. Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money?’.

219. *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

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

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



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

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

## 2. Identification of Potential Sources

Having defined the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the team's experience, contact networks and well-known P/CVE knowledge hubs were leveraged to map out sources for a multi-track data-collection process. As outlined below, these not only included 'traditional peer review storage systems' but also 'alternative channels' to ensure adequate coverage of grey literature and other content typically omitted from the conventional 'information architecture' characterising both P/CVE and the wider development space.<sup>1</sup>

- **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.

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

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

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

Table 3: Search Terms

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

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

4. Identification of Additional Material Through Snowballing

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

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

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

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

The articles were then classified through a rapid evidence assessment to score each paper's 'quality'. Quality was assessed according to a fixed set of criteria: conceptual framing, transparency, method, research design, internal validity, and cogency, replete with a series of sub-questions as detailed below.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 4:** Quality Scoring Criteria

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

*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'.*

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

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

Two important aspects to this process need to be noted. First, quality was not an inclusion criterion in this study. Instead, the decision was deliberately taken to focus on quantity over quality in order to develop an evidence base. The quality grading was used during the analysis process to understand the weight and significance to ascribe to each paper’s findings and conclusions. Second, although quality was taken into account in the analytical process, the authors have refrained from associating (public) gradings to each reviewed study in the publication series out of respect for the work of other scholars in the field. It is also acknowledged that the grading system may have certain biases, as explained below.<sup>3</sup>

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

assessment; and the quality grading of each paper. Each paper was then coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’:<sup>4</sup>

- 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’.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

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4. 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).

5. OECD, ‘Evaluation Criteria’.

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

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

## Results and Challenges

To date, the team has collated 463 unique publications, with a current breakdown listed in the tables below:<sup>7</sup>

**Table 5:** Type of Publication and Number of Studies

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

Source: Authors’ research.

**Table 6:** Research Data Type and Number of Studies

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

Source: Authors’ research.

**Table 7:** Research Methods and Number of Studies

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

Source: Authors’ research.

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

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

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

*Source: Authors' research.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Relying on institutional and organisational websites also potentially undermined the objectivity of the search and retrieval process by introducing a degree of human bias.<sup>8</sup> 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'.<sup>9</sup> 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

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8. Mallett et al., 'The Benefits and Challenges of Using Systematic Reviews in International Development', p. 449.

9. *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.*

**Michael Jones** is a Research Fellow in the Terrorism and Conflict team at RUSI, examining political violence, conflict economies and the convergence of violent extremism and insurgent militancy in East and sub-Saharan Africa. He has led investigative fieldwork across various countries including Sudan, Kenya and Lebanon, and worked in RUSI's Nairobi office on a range of projects related to the EU's STRIVE Horn of Africa and STRIVE II programming.

**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.

