



What are the outcomes  
of primary and secondary  
prevention programs  
in the field of violent  
radicalization?  
**A systematic review**

**DECISION MAKERS' PAMPHLET**

## Context

Over the past decade, there has been a rise in concerns regarding attacks, hate crimes, and hate incidents attributed to extremist organizations and “lone actors.” These concerns have prompted governments to invest massive sums of money in preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE/CVE).

The rapid deployment of prevention programs can be useful in times where urgent responses are needed. To date, however, the effectiveness of these programs in reducing vulnerability and risk factors related to attacks, hate crimes, and incidents remains unknown.

This means that large sums are currently being invested in programs whose impact remains unverified, which poses significant social, scientific, and ethical problems.

## CPN-PREV's Systematic Review

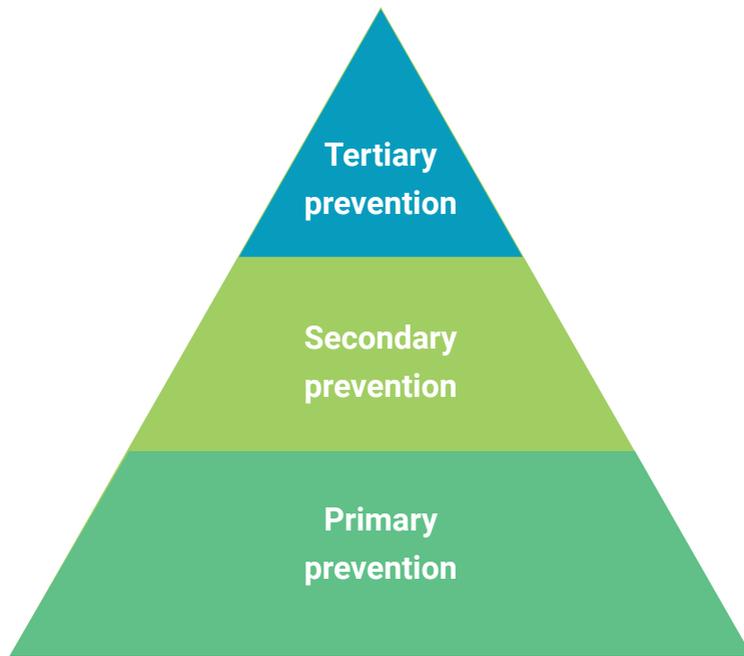
To address this limitation in the field of PVE/CVE, CPN-PREV's latest systematic review critically analyzed the current state of knowledge on the effectiveness of primary and secondary PVE programs.

### **The systematic review examined the literature on prevention programs, specifically looking at:**

- a) Programs targeting right-wing, extreme-left, and religiously inspired radicalization;
- b) Outcomes of both primary and secondary programs; and
- c) Benefits/harms, costs, transferability, and community-related implementation issues.

### **It thus provides information on:**

- 1) The effectiveness of prevention programs in countering violent radicalization;
- 2) Specific modalities associated with a higher chance of success or failure;
- 3) The quality of the literature, in order to identify less reliable evidence knowledge gaps, and studies which should be given more weight when interpreting results.



### Target population, stakeholders and objective

- Persons with extremist/violent behavior (security and specialized clinical teams)  
*Objective: reduce sequelae*
- Persons with at-risk pre-clinical and/or pre-criminal behaviors (health social services, education, and communities)  
*Objective: reduce prevalence*
- General public (education, community spaces)  
*Objective: reduce incidence*

### Key Definitions

**Violent radicalization:** A non-linear process by which an individual, a group, or a State undergoes behavioral, social, economic, psychological/systemic, and/or ideological transformations that lead them to delegitimize the status-quo, and which necessarily includes a plan to resort to, support, or facilitate the use of violence to bring about changes in society.

**Primary prevention:** Initiatives directed towards the general population.

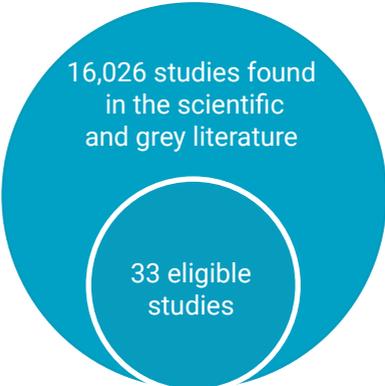
**Targeted primary programs:** Initiatives intended for members of a specific community, regardless of whether or not they have been identified as “at risk.”

**Secondary prevention:** Initiatives directed towards individuals considered vulnerable to violent radicalization and extremism.

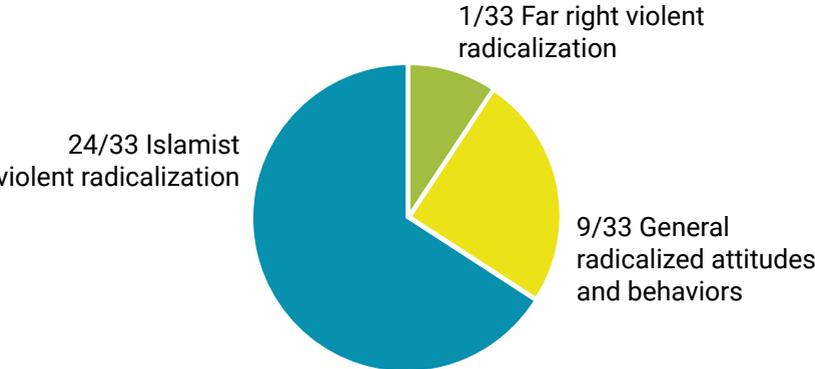
**Tertiary prevention:** Initiatives targeting individuals who are already on a path towards radicalization, have committed acts of political violence, or have joined a violent extremist group. They are also called intervention, disengagement, or deradicalization programs.

# Results

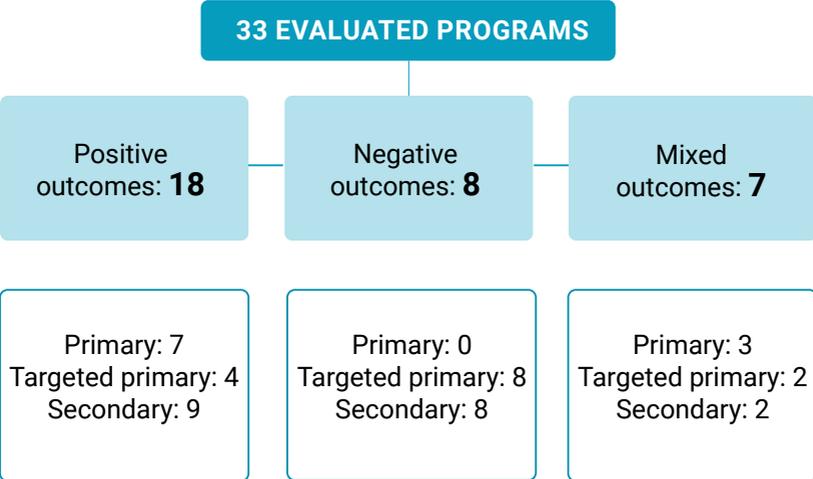
## Eligible Studies



## Focus of Evaluated Programs



## Outcomes of the Evaluated Programs



\*Some programs fit both within primary and secondary prevention.

# Key Findings

◆ Prevention programs that target a specific minority group or focus on surveillance-based methods (e.g., monitoring and control) lead to negative side effects (e.g., stigmatization and suspiciousness) and may only have a limited number of positive outcomes.

◆ Primary and secondary prevention programs are effective in fostering personal and/or interpersonal characteristics considered as protective factors against violent radicalization. These include integrative complexity, vocational skills, education, empathy, conflict management skills, openness towards others, and improved understanding of radicalization and extremism. However, we cannot assume that possessing such characteristics will ultimately reduce the risk of violence or engagement in a path towards violent radicalization.

◆ Studies on the outcomes of police-community partnerships have produced mixed findings. These are in part due to problems with research design, methods, measures, and conflicts of interest.

◆ The evidence on the outcomes of counternarrative programs is limited. While evaluation studies for this type of program reported mostly positive results, only a few of evaluations were found. In addition, these studies did not directly measure the impact of counternarrative campaigns on violent radical attitudes and behaviors, therefore limiting the positive conclusions of these studies.

◆ Very few of the reviewed studies focused on the evaluation of prevention programs targeting right-wing or left-wing violent radicalization. This shows that some prevalent types of violent radicalization do not receive appropriate consideration at the researcher, funder, and decider levels.

◆ Studies rarely mention the cost of programs even though such information could be helpful in improving resource allocation.

# What Does This Mean for Decision Makers?

**Based on the conclusions of the systematic review, we suggest that policymakers should:**

♦ Be wary about funding and implementing programs that arbitrarily target a specific minority group or conflate surveillance with clinical work as these programs seem counterproductive.

♦ Support the evaluation of police-community partnerships as these seem promising in theory. However, keep in mind that data on the effectiveness of such partnerships with respect to PVE is not yet robust.

♦ Continue funding a variety of primary and secondary prevention programs that foster the documented personal or interpersonal protection factors against violent radicalization.

♦ Support and fund prevention programs that address right-wing, left-wing, and single-issue (e.g., Incels) violent radicalization.



♦ Request that program designers implement an evaluation model from the project's onset to assess the implementation, updates, and outcomes of the program.

♦ Provide the necessary funding for program evaluation studies, and request that the evaluation team demonstrates how it will reduce conflicts of interest.

## Useful Links

[What is a systematic review?](#)

[To read the full systematic review report](#)

Follow us in:

