



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

RESEARCHERS' 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 or hate crimes and incidents remains unintegrated.

As such, large sums are currently being invested in programs that have not been properly evaluated, 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:

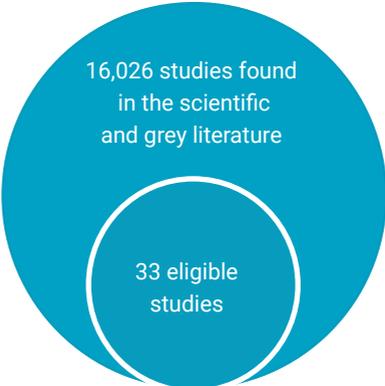
- a) Programs targeting right-wing, extreme-left, and religiously inspired radicalization;
- b) Outcomes of both primary and secondary programs; and
- c) Benefits/harms, costs, transferability, and community-related implementation issues.

Consequently, the review provides knowledge users with information on:

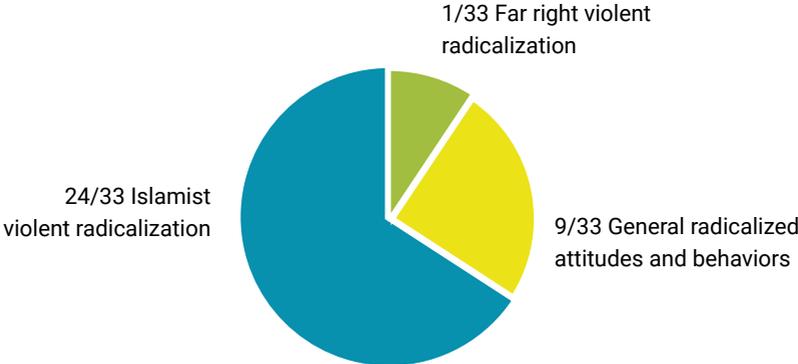
- 1) The effectiveness of prevention programs in countering violent radicalization;
- 2) Specific modalities associated with a higher chance of success or failure; and
- 3) The quality of the literature, in order to identify less reliable evidence, knowledge gaps, and studies that should be given more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

Results

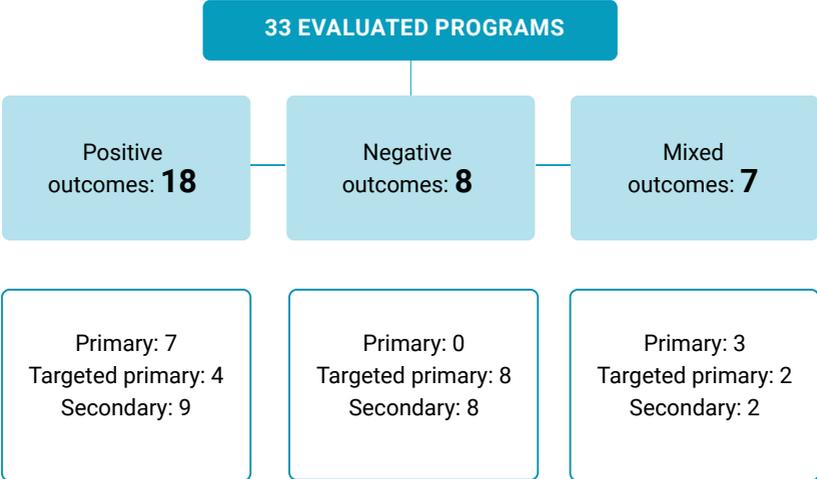
Eligible Studies



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 seem to have only 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 studies 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 challenges, facilitating elements, and successes arising during the implementation of primary and secondary prevention programs. The cost and evaluation of programs are also rarely mentioned, even though such information could help improve resource allocation.

Limitations of the Reviewed Studies

◊ **Reliable empirical data on PVE programs is limited due to methodological problems in several studies.**

◊ **Conflicts of interest abound in evaluation studies of primary and secondary prevention programs.** Stakeholders are often involved in evaluating a program and, in some rare cases, are the only participants of the study.

◊ **The operationalization of the success of a program often relies on subjective measures and user satisfaction data.**

◊ **Several studies did not assess programs' negative or iatrogenic outcomes.** This can bias the interpretation of the program's effectiveness and hinder its comparability with other programs.



◊ **Very few studies described or formulated a theory of change and logic model** to understand how a program's positive and negative outcomes operate and impact protective or risk factors and, ultimately, violent radical attitudes or behaviors.

◊ The lack of evaluative studies on far-right or far-left prevention programs means that **the evidence presented here is generalizable, at most, to programs that target violent Islamist or general radicalization.**

Recommendations for Program Evaluation

There is an urgent need for stronger data on primary and secondary PVE programs. Program design and implementation should, therefore, always be accompanied by a methodologically robust evaluation.

- 1** Keep conflicts of interest and potential biases to a minimum. However, if they are unavoidable, disclose them explicitly. Publishing and disseminating your findings independently can be helpful to achieve this;
- 2** Collect data from representative samples composed of program participants rather than staff, stakeholders, or community members who are not directly involved in the program;
- 3** Consider both intermediate (e.g., improved perspective taking) and final outcomes (e.g., reduction in violent radical attitudes or behaviors) that go beyond user satisfaction in your assessment of programs;
- 4** Assess the negative/iatrogenic effects of the programs you evaluate. Although rigorous program evaluations tend to report more negative outcomes, it does not mean the evaluated programs are any less effective. Informing about iatrogenic as well as positive effects enables policymakers, stakeholders, and funders to better understand the results of program evaluations;
- 5** Collect data about the monetary aspects, the facilitating elements of implementation, and the sustainability of projects;
- 6** Develop robust experimental designs when conducting quantitative evaluations, namely by collecting data on control variables and using pre-/post-measurements, control groups, and/or randomly assigning participants to groups if the procedure abides by ethical standards. If not, consider using quasi-experimental designs;

Recommendations for Program Evaluation

- 7** Ensure rigor in your qualitative evaluations to minimize potential confirmation biases by researchers. Rather than simply reporting quotes that confirm the main narrative of the research, clearly disclose the discourse analysis procedure;
- 8** Formulate an initial theory of change that can explain your program's expected effects and then build and disclose a logic model accordingly. If possible, as mentioned earlier, integrate intermediate and final outcomes in the model. With time, revise and complexify your model as needed.



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