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# What Can Work (And What Has Not Worked) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives

Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Emily Winterbotham



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# Introduction to the Publication Series

THE TERM ‘COUNTERING violent extremism’ (CVE) first began to circulate in policy circles under the George W Bush administration as part of a policy associated with the ‘War on Terror’, rather than a ‘softer’ approach aimed at countering terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Since then, CVE – and its contemporary adjunct ‘PVE’ (preventing violent extremism) – have grown in popularity, embodying one of the most important lessons of the last two decades: military and security-focused operations, in isolation, do not end terrorist movements.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS and by its Arabic acronym ‘Daesh’) and the global counter response, US President Barack Obama’s hosting of the first international White House Summit on CVE and the release of the 2015 UN Secretary-General’s ‘Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism’<sup>3</sup> further heightened the focus of policymakers, security officials and donors on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels.

Despite the proliferation of P/CVE interventions, the field has been met with criticism for being overly reactive and externally imposed, infringing on civil liberties and targeting specific communities.<sup>4</sup> It has also been accused of lacking a coherent strategy and for being imbued with definitional and conceptual problems, including the prevailing failure to create a globally accepted definition of either terrorism or violent extremism.<sup>5</sup> P/CVE programmes also tend to be wide-ranging in scope, involving a variety of different interventions. These might include, for instance, community debates on sensitive topics, media messaging, interfaith dialogues, empowerment programmes (particularly of women), training of government and security officials, or programmes aimed at individuals deemed to be ‘at risk’ of joining or being attracted to violent extremism groups. In practical terms, this means that P/CVE practitioners

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1. Randy Borum, ‘Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories’, *Journal of Strategic Security* (Vol. 4, No. 4, 2012), pp. 7–36.
  2. Elizabeth Young, ‘Decade of War: Enduring Lessons from a Decade of Operations’, *Prism* (Vol. 4, No. 2, 2012), pp. 123–42.
  3. UN General Assembly, ‘The United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy: Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Report of the Secretary-General’, 24 December 2015, <<https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/70/674>>, accessed 31 March 2020.
  4. Jessica Wolfendale, ‘Terrorism, Security, and the Threat of Counterterrorism’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 30, No. 1, 2007), pp. 75–92.
  5. Eric Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda’, The Prevention Project and RUSI, 2018, <<http://organizingagainstve.org/roadmap-progress-state-global-p-cve-agenda>>, accessed 31 March 2020. See also J M Berger, ‘Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption’, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, 26 May 2016.

have struggled to draw clear boundaries between P/CVE programmes and those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, peacebuilding, governance and education.<sup>6</sup>

The emerging practice also lacks a strong evidence base and is instead dominated by limited project descriptions or evaluations. Implementation impact is rarely well described,<sup>7</sup> leaving the effectiveness of different approaches or programmes undetermined. A restricted approach to data and intelligence represents another barrier to the engagement of many researchers in the analysis and understanding of P/CVE. Consequently, interventions tend to rely on assumption-based logics with little empirical grounding, exposing the field to a range of practical, conceptual and ethical problems.<sup>8</sup>

This research project, which started in January 2018 and ran for over two years, aims to fill this evidence gap. The project was primarily funded by the Norwegian government. The main question underlying this research is ‘what can work and what has not worked’ in P/CVE interventions, including those implemented by national or local governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. The research, which aims to explore the evidence base of different P/CVE interventions, is based on a literature review which applied systematic techniques to evaluate and synthesise findings across a range of public studies, as well as internal documents provided by donors and practitioners. At the time of writing, the 463 unique publications<sup>9</sup> included in this review, which are primarily public, include: peer-reviewed publications; independent evaluations; programme documents; and analytical and discursive grey literature (materials and research produced by organisations outside the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels). As part of this research, the team has mapped over 1,500 projects implemented by around 900 organisations across 100 countries.

As outlined in the methodology in the annex of this paper, the research included English-language studies, published between 2005 and 2020, that focused explicitly on P/CVE interventions.<sup>10</sup> We do not distinguish between ‘preventing’ or ‘countering’ interventions. This is largely because

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6. Steven Heydemann, ‘Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice’, United States Institute of Peace, *Insights* (No. 1, Spring 2014), p. 11; Berger, ‘Making CVE Work’.
  7. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, ‘Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs: Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security’, March 2016; Lasse Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money? Problems of Impact Assessment of Counter-Radicalization Policies on End Target Groups: The Case of Denmark’, *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research* (Vol. 18, No. 4, 2012), pp. 385–402.
  8. Rosand et al., ‘A Roadmap to Progress’.
  9. 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.
  10. The review only included initiatives that identified ‘vulnerable’ groups and individuals, articulated explicit P/CVE objectives in their theory of change/intervention logics, or addressed identified factors contributing to violent extremism in a particular context.

although development organisations, practitioners and scholars have individual preferences for applying these terms, others use them interchangeably.<sup>11</sup> The lack of a consistent definition means it is not possible to draw comparisons between the relative benefits of ‘preventing’ or ‘countering’ approaches.

The studies have been grouped into nine thematic intervention areas, reflecting the literature gathered, with an accompanying paper for each. This paper is the first in the series, and addresses P/CVE and women-centric interventions. It will be followed by papers on: education initiatives; P/CVE communications; religious-based mechanisms; mentorship interventions; youth empowerment interventions; human rights and law enforcement activities; economic empowerment initiatives; and activities focused on building resilience and community cohesion. These are accompanied by two case studies exploring P/CVE in practice in Kenya and Lebanon. These countries were selected for study as they are areas where there has been particular 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>12</sup> A concluding paper that synthesises the learning from each of those nine papers will then be developed to answer the underlying question of this research: what works (and what does not) in P/CVE?

All nine thematic papers include specific recommendations for policymakers, donors and civil society organisations operating in the field. Each provides:

1. An introduction to the thematic intervention area.
2. A brief summary of the methodology used in this paper and a description of the body of evidence for each thematic area (namely, a breakdown of the publications included, and an assessment of their quality and of the effectiveness of the programmes reviewed in the papers) for each intervention area.
3. A summary of the key assumptions or theories of change underpinning each thematic intervention.
4. An analysis of the validity of these assumptions and the effectiveness (or not) of the intervention approaches.
5. A conclusion summarising the key findings and conclusions, which highlights the gaps and limitations of existing interventions and approaches.
6. An annex containing the methodology for the whole project.

The paucity of independent evaluations and peer-reviewed material challenged the methodological rigour of this paper’s research and analysis, including the application of systematic literature review methods (outlined in more detail in the methodology). Despite formal requests to at least 10 donors, none shared unpublished evaluation material. Acknowledgement and thanks for their valuable contribution go to the six civil society organisations and research institutes

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

12. RUSI, ‘STRIVE’, <<https://rusi.org/projects/strive-horn-africa>>, accessed 27 April 2020.



that did provide access to internal documentation. It is also important to note that although the research interrogates the evidence base for different P/CVE interventions, the intention is not to discourage donors from funding some of the important work discussed in this publication series.

The team sought to mitigate these limitations through our quality and impact assessment approach. We believe that the publication series is a contribution to existing knowledge and research in the field of P/CVE, particularly in relation to the evidence base of what types of interventions can work (and what has not worked).

# Introduction

**T**HIS PAPER FOCUSES on women-centric efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) – in other words, interventions that seek to work with, or target, women and girls specifically. The use of ‘women-centric’ rather than ‘gender-centric’ is deliberate. While understandings of gender norms, relations and behaviours underpin many of the assumptions explored in this paper, the explored initiatives all focus on engaging women. Interventions and accompanying literature on the specific roles of men in P/CVE are hard to come by.

The increasing commitment to incorporating ‘gender’ at the highest institutional levels of international counterterrorism over the past 20 years has focused on women’s roles in terrorist groups and in preventive security efforts.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the UN passed UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, a ground-breaking resolution on women, peace and security that advocated the role of women across four security-related pillars in relation to conflict.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, UNSCR 2242 called for the inclusion of women in devising P/CVE programmes.<sup>3</sup> The UN Secretary-General’s 2015 ‘Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism’ included a pillar dedicated to the role of women and girls, and urged member states to mainstream gender perspectives, empower women and women-led organisations, and strive for gender equality.<sup>4</sup> In 2017, UNSCR 2396 on foreign terrorist fighters emphasised that ‘women and children associated with foreign terrorist fighters returning or relocating to and from conflict may have served in many different roles, including as supporters, facilitators, or perpetrators of terrorist acts, and require special focus when developing tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies’.<sup>5</sup>

Part of the increased emphasis on including women in P/CVE policy and practice is linked to the evolving security landscape – in particular, the emergence of the Islamic State and the waves of migration of predominantly young men and women to its so-called ‘Caliphate’. At the global level, this has been one factor in an increasing number of initiatives focusing on the capacity of women, and particularly mothers, to spot and react to extremism in their families or communities, tackling the root causes of violent extremism, including in relation to gender,

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1. OSCE, ‘Women and Terrorist Radicalization: Final Report’, February 2013, <[www.osce.org/secretariat/99919?download=true](http://www.osce.org/secretariat/99919?download=true)>, accessed 15 June 2019.
  2. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000.
  3. UNSCR 2242, S/RES/2242, 13 October 2015.
  4. UN General Assembly, ‘The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Report of the Secretary General’, 24 December 2015, <<https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/70/674>>, accessed 31 March 2020.
  5. UNSCR 2396, S/RES/2396, 21 December 2017.

and taking on a more active role in the community, family and economy.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, the migration of thousands of women to Syria and Iraq inspired a new wave of research exploring female motivations for joining the Islamic State.<sup>7</sup> It also generated public and policy awareness that women, as well as men, are vulnerable to violent extremism.

Despite this ongoing and increasing attention, however, there are limited women-centric P/CVE programmes and correspondingly few evaluations of these initiatives.<sup>8</sup> This shortcoming is compounded by a reluctance to make such evaluations public,<sup>9</sup> as is common across the entire P/CVE field. As a result, critics point to the lack of publicly available evidence to support these activities and highlight that some of the assumptions underpinning P/CVE initiatives are based on untested or weak assumptions about women's allegedly 'peaceful, moderate and maternal' natures as the basis for engaging them in preventive efforts.<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that some women do not demonstrate these characteristics. However, initiatives based on these presumptions of womanhood are unhelpful. If P/CVE efforts fail to consider the complex realities of women's roles and relationships within their own families and communities, as well as their potential or actual roles in violent extremism itself, such limitations will be impossible to overcome.

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6. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger and Rafia Bhulai (eds), 'A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism', Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016.
  7. Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 162, No. 3, 2017), pp. 60–72; Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, 'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part, Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon', Institute for Strategic Dialogue and International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), 2015; Sofia Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women: Exploring Female Roles in Perpetrating and Preventing Violent Extremism', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2017.
  8. Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): The Role of Women and Women's Organizations', in Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), 'A Man's World?', pp. 18–35.
  9. James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation', *Whitehall Report*, 2-16 (June 2016); Iffat Idris and Ayat Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism', GSDRC, Helpdesk Research Report, 4 May 2017, <<https://gsdrc.org/publications/women-and-countering-violent-extremism/>>, accessed 31 March 2020.
  10. Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Katherine E Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization: Women and Emerging Counter-Terror Measures', in Margaret L Satterthwaite and Jayne C Huckerby (eds), *Gender, National Security and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives* (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, 'Afghan Women and Violent Extremism: Colluding, Perpetrating, or Preventing?', United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 396, November 2016, <<https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/USIP-Afghan%20Women%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf>>, accessed 7 May 2020.

## Structure

The first chapter of this paper presents the key assumptions which underpin much of the current efforts to engage women in P/CVE initiatives. The second chapter analyses the evidence base for women-centric P/CVE efforts, which is split into four intervention areas:

1. Interventions focused on *mothers* and on building their capacity to recognise signs of radicalisation, and providing them with skills to influence thinking and behaviour in their children, families and communities.
2. Interventions focused on the *economic and social empowerment of women*, raising their status and voice in their families and communities so that they have a greater capacity to engage in P/CVE and ensure that their personal vulnerability to violent extremism is reduced.
3. Efforts to ensure that *women are consulted* and can actively participate in setting P/CVE, peace and security agendas.<sup>11</sup>
4. Interventions targeting the *recruitment of women and girls*.

The conclusion summarises the key research findings and reflects on the gaps identified, pointing to the implications for future research or interventions. It provides some concluding remarks on what the existing evidence tells us about what can work (and what does not) in women-centric P/CVE initiatives. The methodology for the entire publication series can be found in Annex II of this paper.

## Methodology and Data

For this paper, 42 English-language studies that explored P/CVE interventions involving women were reviewed.<sup>12</sup> These include: peer-reviewed publications; independent evaluations; programme documents; and analytical and discursive grey literature (materials and research produced by organisations outside the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels). As outlined in Annex II, each study was assessed according to quality (high, medium or low) on the basis of their conceptual framing, transparency, methods used, research design, validity, cogency and independence. Although publications have been graded according to quality, the authors have refrained from associating 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 in the limitations section in Annex II.<sup>13</sup>

The findings of each available study were subsequently coded as ‘effective’, ‘potentially effective’, ‘mixed’, ‘ineffective’ or ‘inconclusive’ (for a description of these categories, see Annex II).

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11. Idris and Abdelaziz, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’.

12. See Annex I for full details.

13. For further information on this grading for educational or research purposes, please contact the author.

Of the 42 papers reviewed, 38 focused exclusively on women-centric interventions, and four focused on engaging women as part of wider interventions. As Table 1 shows, there were 13 high-quality studies, but none identified the intervention(s) explored to be effective, five assessed interventions as potentially effective, two suggested mixed effects, three found interventions to be ineffective and three were inconclusive. Nineteen moderate-quality studies were included. Of these, three categorised interventions as potentially effective, four noted mixed effects, seven found the interventions explored to be ineffective and five were categorised as inconclusive. Ten low-quality studies were included, with two categorising interventions as potentially effective, two finding them to be ineffective and six as inconclusive.

**Table 1:** Summary of the Team’s Assessment of the Evidence Base of Women-Centric Interventions

Intervention Impact	Quality of Evidence			Total
	High	Moderate	Low	
Effective	0	0	0	0
Potentially effective	5	3	2	10
Mixed	2	4	0	6
Ineffective	3	7	2	12
Inconclusive	3	5	6	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>42</b>

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

The literature revealed a preference for certain geographical contexts. The UK and its Prevent programme featured most frequently (in seven studies), followed by Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Kenya, with three studies each. There was also a tendency in the literature to interrogate the same set of interventions. The dominance of Prevent in the literature is unsurprising – in part due to the authors’ focus on English-language publications, but also due to the longevity of Prevent (which was launched in 2003) in comparison to other P/CVE programmes worldwide. The visibility of other interventions reflects how well known these organisations are in the field. It is therefore important to note from the outset that the visibility of these efforts, including the public availability of reports covering their work, inevitably means that these interventions are critiqued most frequently in this review. This is not in an attempt to discredit or undermine their work. We understand that organisations and projects are likely to have compelling data in support of their associated theories of change that were not included in publicly available documents. We were therefore only able to analyse and draw conclusions on the basis of the available evidence gathered during the review.

The limited number of programmes reviewed reflects, as noted above, the lack of evaluations that are publicly available. It also adds weight to Iffat Idris and Ayat Abdelaziz’s conclusion that although women’s roles in P/CVE are increasingly recognised as important in donor policies,

actual programmes do not reflect this.<sup>14</sup> At best, programmes have a few women-centric components, but ‘gender-blind’ programmes still appear to be the norm. Exemplifying this, Idris and Abdelaziz noted in 2017 that the US Agency for International Development has CVE programmes in a number of regions, none of which were targeted at women, and the majority did not have women-centric components. The EU’s frameworks and documents on extremism acknowledge the essential role women play in preventing radicalisation and call for women’s empowerment. Though gender is considered at various levels in programme design, Idris and Abdelaziz identified only one women-centric component in an EU-led CVE programme, STRIVE for Development.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Idris and Abdelaziz, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’.

15. *Ibid.*



# I. Common Assumptions

**T**HE LITERATURE DEMONSTRATES a growing acknowledgement among policymakers and in programme implementation of the need to include women in the field of P/CVE. Yet, many authors featured in this review argue that the approach to engaging women has often been based on false or incomplete assumptions, or theories of change, which remain untested during programme or project implementation. This is not unique to interventions engaging women, but rather, is prevalent in all P/CVE activities. The risk of not testing or questioning an intervention's hypothesised logic during implementation is that programmes may not only prove ineffective in preventing violent extremism but could also do harm. Interventions working with women could actually increase their vulnerability by, for example, triggering a response from violent extremist groups or increasing the hostility and opposition of men to these efforts.<sup>16</sup>

Three key assumptions underlie much of the current preventive work with women:

## **Assumption 1: Women are More Peaceful and Moderate than Men**

Violent actors in extreme movements, as in state armed forces, have predominantly been men.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, a key assumption guiding P/CVE interventions is that women, perceived as inherent peacebuilders, can positively influence violent men if empowered to do so.<sup>18</sup> Implicit in this are the justifications, stemming from the 'War on Terror', around the need to protect peaceful Muslim women from Muslim men, by empowering women, specifically mothers, with security measures aimed at their communities.<sup>19</sup> If women are more peaceful, the interlinked assumption is that they are also more religiously moderate than men. These understandings

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16. Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

17. Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in which they Joined the Jihad: An Exploratory Study* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2006), p. 36; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, 'Homegrown Terrorists in the US and UK: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process', Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2009, p. 63.

18. Emily Winterbotham, 'Do Mothers Know Best? How Assumptions Harm CVE', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 17 September 2018, <<http://institute.global/insight/co-existence/do-mothers-know-best-how-assumptions-harm-cve>>, accessed 31 March 2020; OSCE, 'Women and Terrorist Radicalization'.

19. Vasuki Nesiah, 'Feminism as Counter-Terrorism: The Seduction of Power', in Margaret L Satterthwaite and Jayne Huckerby (eds), *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives* (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); Krista Hunt, "'Embedded Feminism" and the War on Terror', in Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (eds), *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).



of women are evident in numerous P/CVE and counterterrorism programmes, both in the West and elsewhere. Given that it is not possible to assume that women will be peaceful or moderate at all times or under any circumstances just by virtue of their gender, designing and implementing programmes on the basis of these characteristics could undermine their effectiveness. Meanwhile, the narrative that women are peaceful and need protecting also runs the risk of interventions failing to identify women who are themselves at risk of radicalisation.

### **Assumption 2: Mothers are Better Able to Spot Signs of Radicalisation**

Many P/CVE schemes have centred on mothers having a perceived innate ability, as primary caregivers and as ‘first teachers’,<sup>20</sup> to better spot signs of radicalisation. Katherine E Brown argues that, as a result, counter-radicalisation programmes in the UK have been set within the context of wider discourses about deviant youth masculinities – in particular, youthful Muslim masculinities organised around the gendered logics of maternalism and paternalism.<sup>21</sup> It is assumed that children listen to their mothers because they view them as figures of respect and authority and that women, situated at the heart of families, can be critical in stopping their children or even husbands from following a radical path.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, some mothers-based P/CVE programmes overemphasise the role women can play as matriarchs. Where women are not viewed as authorities in families or communities, the solution often proposed is to integrate self-confidence and empowerment approaches alongside P/CVE skills.<sup>23</sup> These can fail to acknowledge the structural barriers to women’s engagement outside the home – dynamics that are unlikely to change in the course of one project lifecycle. There is also the implicit assumption that mothers are not engaged in promoting any of the traits, such as encouraging warrior-based masculinities, that lead to vulnerability to radicalisation – for example, cases where mothers actively encourage their engagement in violent groups.<sup>24</sup>

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20. Ségolène Dufour-Genneson and Mayesha Alam, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2014, <<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/women-and-countering-violent-extremism/>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

21. Brown, ‘Gender and Counter-Radicalization’.

22. Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), ‘A Man’s World?’, pp. 6–17; Krista London Couture, ‘A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Women in Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Applied Successfully in Bangladesh and Morocco’, Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security and Intelligence, Policy Paper, July 2014, p. 11; Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), ‘The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Strategic Recommendations and Programming Options’, 2016, <<https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Lifecycle%20Toolkit-documents/English-The-Role-of-Families-in-PCVE.pdf?ver=2016-09-13-141058-860>>, accessed 20 April 2020; Dufour-Genneson and Alam, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’.

23. Idris and Abdelaziz, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’.

24. Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc and Stéphane Lacombe, ‘The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism: Motivations, Experiences, and Methods of Engagement’, in Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), ‘A Man’s World?’, pp. 168–69.

### Assumption 3: Gender Equality Reduces Violent Extremism

When women are empowered and gender equality is increased, it is often assumed that there will be positive impacts in P/CVE outcomes. Such thinking is based on lessons learned from the peacebuilding and conflict prevention fields.<sup>25</sup> This ‘has translated into theories of change that the empowerment of women and closing the gap on gender inequalities will make a positive contribution to countering violent extremism’.<sup>26</sup> Correlations, however, are not causations. If P/CVE responses are to be designed to respond to the factors of violent extremism relevant to particular contexts, the priority is to identify causality, as far as possible. The literature highlights a gap in establishing a causal relationship between gender inequality and violent extremism. Some scholars also fear that equating gender empowerment efforts with those designed to tackle violent extremism means that UNSCR 1325 and its follow-on resolutions are being subordinated to the counterterrorism agenda.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Marie O'Reilly, 'Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies', Inclusive Security, Report, October 2015; Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism', p. 17.

26. Ahmadi and Lakhani, 'Afghan Women and Violent Extremism', p. 12; Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism', p. 17.

27. De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', p. 19; Jayne Huckerby, 'The Complexities of Women, Peace, Security and Countering Violent Extremism', *Just Security*, 24 September 2015, <<https://www.justsecurity.org/26337/womens-rights-simple-tool-counterterrorism/>>, accessed 31 March 2020; Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), 'Prioritise Peace: Challenging Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Women, Peace and Security Perspective', April 2018.



## II. Assessing the Evidence Base

### Mothers-Based Interventions

#### The Moderating Influence of Mothers

Interventions focused on working with mothers view them as assets for fighting extremism. As they are often the primary caregivers, the theory is that mothers are well placed to identify early warning signs and indicators of radicalisation.<sup>28</sup> A research brief by Jacqui True and colleagues at Monash University based on UN Women's work in Indonesia and Bangladesh highlighted that interviewees in both countries perceived mothers to have the most important role in P/CVE since they were responsible for children's activities, whereabouts and wellbeing.<sup>29</sup> Women in their traditional roles as mothers, wives, sisters and caregivers are also assumed to be well positioned to serve as effective voices to counter the extremist narrative, speaking either as victims or as family members who sustain the adverse impact of terrorist actions.<sup>30</sup> The Global Counterterrorism Forum's (GCTF) guide, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', claims that former female violent extremists and victims of terrorism can help highlight the violence and trauma inflicted by terrorism, and help to clarify the impacts of terrorism on families and communities.<sup>31</sup>

At the government level, the US government's first P/CVE strategy, launched in August 2011, included gender stereotypes – such as women being more peaceful and moderate – as the basis

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28. Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism: Avoiding Instrumentalisation and Furthering Agency', *Gender & Development* (Vol. 25, No. 1, 2017), pp. 103–18; Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture: Mothers Included!', in Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), 'A Man's World?', pp. 54–76; Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Dufour-Genneson and Alam, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', 2014, <<https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/GCTF%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Women%20and%20CVE.pdf?ver=2016-03-29-134644-853>>, accessed 31 March 2020; Jayne Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts: Looking Back and Forward', in Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), 'A Man's World?', pp. 76–99.
  29. Jacqui True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities: A Case Study of Bangladesh and Indonesia', Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre, 2019.
  30. Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism'; GCTF, 'The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism'; Anne Speckhard, 'Drivers of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo: Women's Roles in Supporting, Preventing and Fighting Violent Extremism', International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, 2017.
  31. GCTF, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

for their inclusion in the initiatives.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the UK government's Prevent programme, up until its June 2011 revision, included one objective which aimed to challenge violent ideology by supporting 'mainstream voices'.<sup>33</sup> For policymakers, women, based on the belief that they represented these moderate voices, represented an entry point to the home through their role as mothers, wives and sisters, enabling P/CVE programming to reach individuals and groups that were often difficult to access and thus influence them away from extremism.<sup>34</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, women are also presented as naturally moderate with a pacifying influence. Brown writes that Saudi Arabia assists beneficiaries (including 31 of 60 Guantanamo returnees) to get married, paying associated wedding costs on the assumption that through marriage, men may become civilised and their wives will have a pacifying or deradicalising influence. Although women have been arrested for terrorism-related offences, including involvement in bomb preparation, they have been returned home without charge or trial and their families have been asked to 'supervise' them.<sup>35</sup>

Mothers-based interventions examined in the literature include Mothers for Life,<sup>36</sup> a global network of parents who have experienced violent jihadist radicalisation in their own families, coordinated by Christianne Boudreau and Daniel Koehler. Currently, 12 countries are represented in the Mothers for Life network: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia, the UK and the US. In 2015 and 2016, Mothers for Life released two open letters to the Islamic State on various social media sites,<sup>37</sup> which were subsequently transmitted by news outlets globally. According to Seran de Leede and colleagues in their study for the European Parliament, the letters proved to be a powerful warning and preventive tool reaching out widely to parents, young people and the general public.<sup>38</sup> While the study claimed that this was an effective approach, we assessed the impact as 'inconclusive' on the basis that the indicator of success used was the reach (the scale) of the campaign, rather than an assessment of its preventive effects on radicalisation on the ground. This is not to say that the approach had no impact, but rather that the publication did not present outcome-level or substantive reach data.

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32. Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHR&GJ), 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism: The US and UK Experiences', 2016, <<https://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Women-and-Violent-Extremism-The-US-and-UK-Experiences.pdf>>, accessed 27 April 2020.

33. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 77.

34. CHR&GJ, 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism', p. 5.

35. Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'.

36. Mothers for Life, 'About the Mothers for Life Network', <<http://www.mothersforlife.org/en/about-us>>, accessed 14 April 2020.

37. Mothers for Life, 'An Open Letter', <<http://www.mothersforlife.org/en>>, accessed 14 April 2020.

38. Seran de Leede et al., 'Radicalisation and Violent Extremism – Focus on Women: How Women Become Radicalised, and How to Empower Them to Prevent Radicalisation', Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament, December 2017, <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)596838\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf)>, accessed 3 March 2020.

If the theory is that mothers have specific ‘assets’ to identify emerging violent extremism, some interventions acknowledge that they might not have the necessary tools to stop children from being radicalised. These tools include knowledge about how to act on possible signs of radicalisation and where to address these concerns. The literature covers several interventions, which therefore assume that if they provide these tools to mothers, they can have a positive impact on preventive efforts. In this study, six papers reviewed the creation of ‘MotherSchools’ by WwB.<sup>39</sup> These employ a curriculum focused on building the existing unique capacity of women to spot and address violent extremism in their families and developing their self-confidence by giving them the skills and knowledge to counter extremist narratives and change mindsets in their families and communities. The programme prioritises building the capacity of ‘mothers to take action rather than relying on the authorities who may lack proper training, drawing on their inner resources, to help their children effectively’.<sup>40</sup>

Through building their ability to recognise early warning signs of radicalisation, mothers are said to have gained confidence and determination to move beyond the family sphere by engaging with the community, the media and communications technology.<sup>41</sup> A pilot study supported this theory of change: beneficiaries said that the curriculum provided information and targeted skills relevant to radicalisation whilst interaction with like-minded women built their self-confidence, improved their parenting skills and gave them more credibility in their homes and communities. Beneficiaries felt this would improve their ability to intervene in cases of radicalisation.<sup>42</sup> Though these are positive findings, it should be noted that beneficiary perceptions do not necessarily mean that these mothers are effective in preventing violent extremism.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of MotherSchools was claimed by Ratna Ghosh and colleagues in their review of the role of education in P/CVE. The authors concluded that ‘since its launch in 2008, the Mothers’ Schools project has yielded great success in strengthening women’s resilience, power and confidence in dealing with radicalisation issues in their own families and communities’.<sup>43</sup> Ghosh and colleagues, however, did not provide data in support of this conclusion. Two other reports noted that a possible indicator of effectiveness was the expansion of these programmes from outside Tajikistan to India (including Kashmir), Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Zanzibar, Austria, England, North Macedonia and Germany.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, De Leede and colleagues conclude that the MotherSchools model is sustainable and transferable.<sup>45</sup>

39. Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism? Mothers’ Perceptions and Attitudes of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism* (Vienna: Women Without Borders, 2015), p. 6; Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, ‘A New Security Architecture’.

40. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, ‘A New Security Architecture’, p. 69.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 64; Giscard d’Estaing, ‘Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism’.

42. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, ‘A New Security Architecture’, p. 65.

43. 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, February 2016, p. 49.

44. De Leede et al., ‘Radicalisation and Violent Extremism’; Idris and Abdelaziz, ‘Women and Countering Violent Extremism’.

45. De Leede et al., ‘Radicalisation and Violent Extremism’.

Our review, however, assessed De Leede and colleagues' analysis as 'inconclusive' – the fact that the model has been transferred to other contexts does not necessarily mean that it has worked, but simply that the approach itself has been attempted elsewhere. Indeed, beneficiary perceptions included in the pilot study mentioned above<sup>46</sup> are a far better sign of effectiveness.

In the UK, the British government funded two organisations: Inspire and Women Against Radicalisation Network (WARN), which were specifically created to address the problem of radicalisation and Islamist extremism. Inspire's #MakingAStand campaign was launched in September 2014 and was accompanied by workshops across the country – including Birmingham, Luton, Cardiff, Leeds, Burnley, Bristol and London. The programme focused on equipping mothers with theological counternarratives to extremist ideology, on the assumption that this would increase their confidence in challenging their children's views at home.<sup>47</sup> This was based on the assumption of women's 'unique position of influence over their loved ones'.<sup>48</sup> Acknowledging criticism of the campaign's focus on Islamist extremism – unsurprising given that the campaign took place amid growing concerns about the Islamic State – De Leede and colleagues note that Inspire's road-trip campaign simultaneously tackled difficult topics that were generally not discussed within many Muslim communities and aimed to equip women to defend themselves and their children against extremist recruiters. WARN does similar work in the form of workshops which train mothers to spot the signs of radicalisation and to help their children stay safe online. De Leede and colleagues conclude that there was a high likelihood that the recent decrease in numbers of young women wanting to join the Islamic State can be attributed to some of Inspire and WARN's work within schools and communities.<sup>49</sup> Further data is required to support these conclusions, however.

In the Netherlands, the non-profit organisation, Steunpunt Sabr, the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, and experts in the fields of psychology and theology created a radicalisation awareness programme for mothers called Oumnia Works.<sup>50</sup> The inspiration for the programme came from the mothers of radicalised boys and girls who, according to director Karima Sahla, had told Steunpunt Sabr that they had suspected something was wrong, but had ignored it.<sup>51</sup> Oumnia Works was launched in November 2015 and is offered in 10 municipalities in the Netherlands. The programme includes modules to raise awareness of the danger of radicalisation, the appropriate responses to it and the role of social media. It also provides information to mothers on existing support facilities, and helps them build connections with local authorities, community workers, teachers and local police officers<sup>52</sup> to address women's social isolation or lack of access to the public space.<sup>53</sup>

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46. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture', p. 65.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 77.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Oumnia Works, 'Welkom', <<https://www.oumniaworks.nl>>, accessed 15 April 2020.

51. De Leede et al., 'Radicalisation and Violent Extremism', p. 33.

52. *Ibid.*

53. GCTF, 'The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism'.

Similarly, in the UK, Prevent departments and partners repeatedly stressed that the programme's engagement with women was based on the understanding that mothers were most likely to see and influence changes in their children's behaviour, but that they may not have the confidence or ability to share these concerns.<sup>54</sup> De Leede and colleagues provided measures of success for Oumnia Works: the programme has reached over 1,000 mothers in the Netherlands and participants state that their knowledge of radicalisation (and parenting) has increased significantly. They claim to be more involved with their communities, are better aware of where to turn with their concerns, and have more trust in local authorities and support facilities.<sup>55</sup> The programme has, therefore, evidenced some impact from the perspective of beneficiaries. No information about how this subsequently impacted on preventing violent extremism was found.

In sum, these programmes point to some positive impacts in relation to beneficiaries' confidence in their ability to discuss and address radicalisation issues with their children, and to access support from within the community, including with local police, when concerns arise. These are positive findings and suggest that programmes working with mothers and providing them with the necessary skills have some impact, at least on their own confidence in participating in preventive efforts. Further evidence is, however, required to assess whether this has actually increased mothers' ability to observe signs of radicalisation and to intervene appropriately. In particular, as outlined in the following section, the effectiveness of these interventions is likely to be determined by the context in which these take place.

### The Validity of Mothers-Based Programmes

Despite some evidence of success outlined above, mothers-based interventions are frequently criticised in the literature.<sup>56</sup> Even in the studies mentioned, evidence of success in relation to preventing violent extremism was largely related to the reach of projects and, at best, the perceptions of the beneficiaries themselves. Other studies argue that the assumptions underpinning these interventions are based on gender stereotypes of women as mothers, wives and innate peacemakers, which do not necessarily hold true.<sup>57</sup> The concern is that they are also reductive: viewing women only in relation to (predominantly) male relatives and limiting their activities primarily to the domestic sphere. Sophie Giscard d'Estaing notes the worrying parallels between these efforts and the use by violent extremist groups of women's 'relational

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54. CHR&GJ, 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism'.

55. De Leede et al., 'Radicalisation and Violent Extremism'.

56. Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories: A Five-Country Study Challenging Assumptions Around Muslim Women and CVE Interventions', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 161, No. 5, 2016), pp. 54–65; Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'; Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts'; Denoix de Saint Marc and Lacombe, 'The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism', pp. 168–69.

57. GAPS, 'Prioritise Peace'; Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism'; Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', pp. 87–88; Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'.



capacities' in their recruitment, reflecting the dangers of essentialising women and confining them to pervasive and entrenched gender stereotypes.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to note that none of these studies were based on independent evaluations of mothers' programmes by the authors themselves. Instead, the authors explored the validity of the assumptions involved in programmes of this nature and assessed the potential harm that these assumptions and ensuing programmes could do to women. Clearly, this is a gap in the literature that needs reconciling in order to assess whether these programmes do in fact have such negative consequences. In an ideal world, the process of testing theories of change should assess not only whether these are valid, but whether the interventions themselves may have unintended consequences – such as entrenching stereotypes or reducing women's roles. Those unintended consequences should then be considered in programme design and implementation.

Exploring the validity of the assumptions underlying mothers' programmes, research with women who have actually experienced radicalisation shows they tend to be disillusioned with and sceptical of preventive measures and their own unique expertise as mothers. Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg conclude that this stems from a desire to not be blamed for failing in their duties, resulting in an emphasis on external and intrinsic factors. Contradicting this, participants in Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson's research suggested that all parents lose the ability to have an impact on children after a certain age, when peers and other influences matter more – a fact emphasised by participants whose children or family members had travelled to join the Islamic State.<sup>59</sup> Qualitative empirical research conducted in the Netherlands based on 21 in-depth interviews with former radicals and their family members also found that neither recognised the direct influence of parents on radicalisation or deradicalisation.<sup>60</sup>

Another assumption challenged in the literature is that women, as primary caregivers, are more likely to spot signs of radicalisation. Winterbotham and Pearson interviewed women in areas where radicalisation and P/CVE interventions had taken place. Whilst none of these women said they had participated in a mothers' programme, they noted that they were not any more present in the home than, for example, their husbands, and therefore no more likely to be able to identify or respond to radicalisation concerns.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, criticising Prevent's 'maternalistic logic', Brown challenges the assumption that women are guided by maternal instincts and that they are more present in the home and can therefore spot signs of radicalisation in their children.<sup>62</sup>

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58. Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism'.

59. Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?*, p. 36; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories', pp. 54–65.

60. Elga Sikkens et al., 'Parental Influence on Radicalization and De-Radicalization According to the Lived Experiences of Former Extremists and Their Families', *Journal for Deradicalization* (Vol. 12, 2017), pp. 192–226.

61. Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

62. Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'; *Ibid.*

The literature also challenged the assumption embodied in P/CVE strategies and interventions (such as those noted about the US strategy on PVE, about Prevent in the UK pre-2011 and in Saudi Arabia) that women and mothers are pacifist moderates who naturally wish to tackle male violence. Respondents in Winterbotham and Pearson's study flagged that it would be wrong to assume that violent actors were always men or that mothers would naturally agree with governments or ally with the state.<sup>63</sup> These women challenged a key basis on which programmes like pre-2011 Prevent and Oumnia Works are formed by suggesting that women would not necessarily work with governments no matter how much training they received. In Winterbotham and Pearson's research, a small number of participants suggested that if women were, as assumed, primary caregivers, this would actually deter mothers from approaching the police or local authorities – a key aim of many P/CVE programmes.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Jayne Huckerby interviewed women who said that they 'won't come forward to report relatives they think may travel to Syria to fight for fear that their relatives will be arrested'.<sup>65</sup> Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc and Stéphane Lacombe also argue against overestimating mothers' roles in P/CVE, providing information on several cases where their interventions hindered counterterrorism engagements.<sup>66</sup>

Other authors challenge the assumption that even if women *could* spot the signs of radicalisation, and are willing to respond, they would be able and have sufficient power to do so, regardless of whether they have been provided with P/CVE training.<sup>67</sup> In Nigeria, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat terms as 'fallacy' the belief, popular in Western policy circles, that in many cultures – particularly Islamic cultures – women may not be very visible in the public sphere but are still powerful forces in the domestic sphere. Her research reveals their frequent lack of power, and the fact that children and husbands often show real disrespect for their mothers and wives.<sup>68</sup> De Jonge Oudraat's work demonstrates that the historic and entrenched gendered power structures in Nigeria, which are unlikely to be tackled in a P/CVE project, reduce women's preventive abilities. Under those circumstances, the coping mechanism of many women, particularly mothers, is denial.<sup>69</sup>

Similar conclusions are drawn from Afghanistan. One research paper from Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani and another from Sarah Ladbury reveal that P/CVE programmes engaging women in Afghanistan face severe operational challenges because they are not viewed as having

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63. Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 86.

66. Denoix de Saint Marc and Lacombe, 'The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism', pp. 168–69.

67. De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)', pp. 23–24; Ahmadi and Lakhani, 'Afghan Women and Violent Extremism'; Sarah Ladbury, 'Women and Extremism: The Association of Women and Girls with Jihadi Groups and Implications for Programming', Department for International Development, January 2015, p. 42.

68. De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)', pp. 23–24.

69. *Ibid.*

authority. Ahmadi and Lakhani's study included Afghan women who had no prior knowledge of their husbands' or sons' decision to join the Taliban, and therefore no ability to intervene in their decision-making.<sup>70</sup> Ladbury concludes that the influence of poor women in patriarchal communities is rarely guaranteed – boys, in particular, are more likely to be influenced by their peers than their mothers. In these communities, women's preventive actions are further limited by the fact that they cannot offer the same benefits – for example, financial or social status – which a jihadi group, like the Taliban, may be promising. She argues that despite the assumption that mothers are the 'natural influencers' of their children, this ignores the complex role of women in the Taliban insurgency and the 'deeply patriarchal nature of Afghan society'.<sup>71</sup>

This analysis speaks to the conclusions of True and colleagues, who argue that context is crucial in determining women's participation in P/CVE. In Sumenep, Indonesia, where there is strict gender segregation due to the conservative nature of the community, some women may still be prevented from participating in community activities by their husbands.<sup>72</sup> Even in the West, research with women revealed the prevalence of traditional patriarchal norms within their families, in addition to wider societal patriarchy, as a potential limiting factor to preventive efforts engaging women.<sup>73</sup>

Other authors have concentrated on exposing the potential negative consequences of these programmes.<sup>74</sup> The UK's Prevent programme came under particular criticism. Authors argue that Prevent embodied gendered and racialised stereotypes about Muslim women's educative role in their families: Muslim women as moderate (the 'good liberal Muslim woman') or innately peaceful who will mitigate rather than foster violent extremism; Muslim women as more 'British' than Muslim men; and Muslim women as inherently disempowered by Islam.<sup>75</sup> These assumptions and the programmes they foster, the authors argue, is not only 'patronising',<sup>76</sup> but could undermine P/CVE efforts by 'perpetuating dehumanizing stereotypes of the "oppressed Muslim woman"'.<sup>77</sup> As noted previously, programme- or project-level data about these associated harms is largely missing from these conclusions.

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70. Ahmadi and Lakhani, 'Afghan Women and Violent Extremism'.

71. Ladbury, 'Women and Extremism', p. 42.

72. True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities'.

73. Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'; Pearson and Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation'.

74. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 86; CHR&GJ, 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism'; Naaz Rashid, 'Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice? Initiatives to Empower Muslim Women as Part of the UK's "War on Terror"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Vol. 37, No. 4, 2014), pp. 589–604; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

75. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 86; CHR&GJ, 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism'; Rashid, 'Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice?'; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

76. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', pp. 87–88.

77. Rashid, 'Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice?'.

In Winterbotham and Pearson's five-country research study, a quarter of the women surveyed in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK spoke about the disempowering effect of these types of P/CVE programmes – although most of these women had not participated in a P/CVE intervention. Participants felt portrayals of women as more caring by nature, and of their specific role in childcare, needed to be challenged within communities, not further supported.<sup>78</sup> Sofia Patel raises concerns that the UK approach, exemplified by a Metropolitan Police campaign aimed at Asian mothers to help prevent daughters from joining the Islamic State, has consolidated the idea of racial and ethnic profiling of those considered vulnerable to or at risk of extremism, which has done little to inspire faith in the programme. Patel, however, did not provide further data on how this had impacted support for the programme.<sup>79</sup>

Gender stereotypes embodied in these programmes could also have damaging consequences for securing male support in preventive efforts. In a 2011 review of Prevent, it was 'overwhelmingly felt that men would be most negatively impacted by the *Prevent* strategy on the basis that they are perceived to be at greatest risk of radicalisation'.<sup>80</sup> If women are identified as peaceful and moderate, the concern is that the perception developed is that men are the opposite. Similar findings were noted by Winterbotham and Pearson in their research with interviewed men, who expressed particular concerns about the framing of these types of interventions.<sup>81</sup> To counter this, some authors argue that there is a need to engage fathers and other respected men in the community to gain access to vulnerable individuals, and to shape existing cultural narratives, which violent extremist organisations (VEOs) manipulate.<sup>82</sup> The GCTF therefore suggests that the same tools and programmes that help support mothers should be extended to fathers to help build their capacity and skills – including how to communicate with children.<sup>83</sup> The review did not find any programmes specifically focused on engaging fathers. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude whether fathers-based programmes would have any greater chance of success or would help mitigate against the potential negative consequences of P/CVE interventions working with women.<sup>84</sup>

Another potential negative consequence of mothers-based programmes is that positioning women as key vehicles to counter radicalisation shifts the state's responsibility to prevent violent

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78. Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'; Pearson and Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation'.

79. Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women'.

80. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 81.

81. Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

82. GCTF, 'The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism'; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

83. GCTF, 'The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism'.

84. It should be noted, however, that WwB released a major research study in 2019 on fathers and P/CVE. The organisation is also piloting FatherSchools in Austria and Germany. See WwB, 'FatherSchools Austria', <<https://wwb.org/activity/fatherschools-austria/>>, accessed 10 August 2020; WwB, 'Can Fathers Challenge Extremism?', <<https://wwb.org/activity/can-fathers-challenge-extremism/>>, accessed 10 August 2020.

extremism onto women's shoulders. A focus on mothers was perceived by some interviewees in Winterbotham and Pearson's research as a way of 'letting the government off the hook'.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted that this criticism could also be extended to P/CVE efforts targeting religious actors, education professionals or civil society organisations. In fact, the argument that efforts to engage actors not traditionally associated with security efforts can transfer the onus of responsibility from the government to these actors challenges the very basis of P/CVE itself. That said, the specific issue in relation to mothers is, as Brown outlines, that perceived poor parenting, including the failure to provide a good religious education or to live up to the ideals of a good wife, correlates with the radicalisation of sons or husbands.<sup>86</sup> This may put women at risk within their communities if they fail to emulate the alleged characteristics of 'good mothers'. This, Brown argues, puts women's lives and rights at risk – and particularly those women with lower social, economic and cultural status.<sup>87</sup> Winterbotham and Pearson also raise concerns that the preference for mothers-based programmes does not lead to women being blamed for the radicalisation of family members that might occur. Claims in Brown and Winterbotham and Pearson, however, failed to provide sufficient evidence and data about these dangers materialising in specific programmes.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Winterbotham and Pearson's analysis includes interviews with women who have experienced violent extremism first hand and who expressed little faith in their ability to engage effectively in preventive efforts. Some of the rationales for this, such as women not actually being the primary caregivers in the home, are contextually defined. Assessing whether assumptions hold true in different contexts is, therefore, key. In particular, some contexts might present insurmountable operational obstacles to women's ability to intervene, even where they might want to.

The literature also highlights the broader negative consequences of programming of this nature, which can be based on gendered and racialised stereotypes that could be disempowering and potentially harmful for women, and which might alienate men.

## Gender Inequality and P/CVE Efforts to Empower Women

Several major programmes in countries such as Morocco, Bangladesh and the UK have explicitly been based on a theory of change that the empowerment of women – and closing the gap on gender inequalities – will make a positive contribution to P/CVE. This is based on the belief that the social, political and economic empowerment of women will enable them to become contributing members of society and give them the ability to better target violent extremism.<sup>89</sup>

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85. Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism'; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

86. The 'MotherSchools' curriculum and Steunpunt Sabr, for example, focus on improving parenting skills. See Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'.

87. Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization'.

88. *Ibid.*; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories'.

89. Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism'; GCTF, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism'.

This theory draws on the body of literature showing a strong correlation between gender inequality, the status of women and violent conflict, and the impact of involving women in peace processes.<sup>90</sup> There is also evidence that terrorist groups exploit the victimisation of women in patriarchal societies,<sup>91</sup> and that some women join extremist groups to overcome feelings of victimisation and to react against gender-based inequality and discrimination, violence, and the denial of rights and opportunities.<sup>92</sup> VEOs are also identified to mobilise women with the (albeit largely false) promise of increased agency and empowerment.<sup>93</sup> Pearson and Winterbotham's research found that women joining the Islamic State were asserting their independence from their families, as well as from Western notions of feminism and equality.<sup>94</sup>

This has led to a programmatic logic that, in order to effectively engage with the gendered dynamics of violent extremism and reverse its effect, prevention and response efforts must prioritise women's rights, empowerment, participation and leadership – both at the community level, as well as in national decision-making.<sup>95</sup> This has inspired a range of P/CVE interventions focused on promoting gender equality in various countries to empower women through livelihoods, skills and education programmes. In Pakistan, the PAIMAN Trust first raises the status of women by giving them skills to earn a livelihood, then equips them with the knowledge and capacity to recognise and tackle radicalisation in their families and communities.<sup>96</sup> The approach is focused on mothers, and is therefore also subject to the same criticisms noted in the previous section. A key difference, however, is that the approach rests on the assumption that women can be effective in transforming conflict and addressing violent extremism if they are economically empowered in addition to being knowledgeable about the issues and having the necessary discussion and negotiation skills.<sup>97</sup>

Two papers included in this review, one by Idris and Abdelaziz and another by Emily Myers, highlight the effectiveness of the PAIMAN Trust's approach in terms of outputs. As of April 2016, PAIMAN had trained 745 mothers and helped them form 30 mothers' peace groups – called

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90. Valerie Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012); Mary Caprioli, 'Gendered Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research* (Vol. 37, No. 1, 2000), pp. 53–68; Mary Caprioli and Mark A Boyer, 'Gender, Violence, and International Crisis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Vol. 45, No. 4, 2001), pp. 503–18; Patrick M Regan and Aida Paskeviciute, 'Women's Access to Politics and Peaceful States', *Journal of Peace Research* (Vol. 40, No. 3, 2003), pp. 287–302.

91. De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)', p. 21.

92. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

93. Emily Myers, 'Gender & Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)', Alliance for Peacebuilding, April 2018, <<http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Gender-and-CVE-FINAL-1.pdf>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

94. Pearson and Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation'.

95. True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities'; De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'; Myers, 'Gender & Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'.

96. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

97. *Ibid.*



Mothers Tolana ('together' in Pashto).<sup>98</sup> At least 15,000 female community members have been educated through the programme.<sup>99</sup> Measuring impact at the output level is not deemed to provide sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention, but Myers' analysis was assessed as having promising findings since she also included anecdotal success stories. Myers draws on one example of a Tolana member applying early warning signs of behavioural changes in youth to identify that her brother was in contact with a local group, which she subsequently reported to the local police.<sup>100</sup> Idris and Abdelaziz also reference PAIMAN's founder, Mossarat Qadeem, who argues that PAIMAN's experience found women to be very effective in transforming conflict and addressing issues of violent extremism once economically empowered and provided with the right skills.<sup>101</sup> Despite referring to useful indicators of project effectiveness, neither study provides convincing independent evidence of impact. In the first case, caution must be taken with anecdotal evidence; in the second, the reflections of the organisation's founder need to be assessed against the potential for bias.

In Bangladesh and Indonesia, UN Women are implementing a programme called 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities'.<sup>102</sup> This rests on a theory of change that promotes women's economic empowerment and increases their leadership and participation in local communities in order to challenge extremist ideology and violence. In Bangladesh, for example, UN Women partnered with BRAC, the largest non-governmental development organisation in the world, to promote women's economic empowerment through women-owned and -operated businesses and to build their capacities to identify the early signs of the radicalisation of adults and children in their own communities, whilst finding solutions for prevention. At the output level, 600 women are reported to have received funding to start or expand their own businesses. UN Women also supports a 'popular theatre' initiative that seeks to raise awareness of the importance of social cohesion and preventing violent extremism through theatre. To date, over 90,000 individuals have attended 226 community theatre shows, which promote messages of women's empowerment and community harmony.<sup>103</sup>

At the outcome level, UN Women commissioned Monash University to conduct an independent evaluation of the programme's impact using experimental methods. True and colleagues' study revealed that nearly 49% of people in programme sites claim they know what to do to prevent violent extremism in their families, compared to 32% in non-programme sites. Significantly, 57% of Bangladeshi and 45% of Indonesian women in programme sites reported that they were also more confident than men to report concerns about family members. On the basis of a mid-term evaluation, the authors suggest that Bangladesh is potentially a more suitable context for engaging women in P/CVE activities due to cultural norms that enable informal engagement

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98. *Ibid.*

99. Myers, 'Gender & Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'.

100. *Ibid.*

101. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

102. UN Women, 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities', <<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/02/pve-brochure>>, accessed 7 May 2020.

103. True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities'.

with women – including women being more able to take part in community activities. Even though Sumenep, as a conservative and gender-segregated site, poses more challenges for engaging women, the authors still observed positive findings there in the women's increased ability to engage in P/CVE. It should be noted that, similar to the impact of the mothers' programmes discussed in the previous section, the assessment of effectiveness is based primarily on the perception of the beneficiaries rather than independent variables related to radicalisation. As these findings are based on a mid-term evaluation, further evidence may be forthcoming.

A further point of comparison with the programmes discussed in the previous section is that the evaluation noted a strong positive relationship between women's self-efficacy or confidence to join a P/CVE initiative, reporting concerns about violent extremism and having greater trust in public institutions. This seems to suggest that enhancing women's knowledge of and skills in community actions had an impact on their ability and willingness to engage in P/CVE efforts.<sup>104</sup> It therefore partly validates the theory of change on which these programmes are based. The finding also supports the theory that reducing women's social isolation and increasing engagement with local authorities can increase their preventive ability. It is noted that the links between these outcome levels change and the impact on violent extremism is not evident – an unsurprising result given that this was a mid-term evaluation, and that impact-level change is hard to measure and therefore prove. Identifying the different contextual factors of violent extremism and drawing stronger links between these and outcome-level changes in future evaluations could assist the creation of a credible contribution story about the possible impact of programming on violent extremism, which will strengthen the evidence base for this programme in due course.

Krista London Couture's analysis of Bangladesh and Morocco explored the efforts of the governments in both countries to economically, socially and politically empower women as integral components of the P/CVE strategic objectives of both Bangladesh and Morocco.<sup>105</sup> In Bangladesh, women have been empowered through micro-lending programmes, increased attention to improving girls' primary school attendance, and providing ready-made garment factory jobs. This is designed to provide greater access to financial, economic and educational resources and to increase women's social networks and bargaining power in comparison with their husbands, leading to greater mobility. The theory is that in doing so, there will be a positive impact on tackling violent extremism. Comparing women's literacy levels, maternal and infant mortality rates, education levels and empowerment in the public space, Couture argues that improvements in these indicators in Bangladesh appeared to coincide with increased security and stability. However, Couture only claims a correlation between the empowerment of women and a reduction in violent extremism.<sup>106</sup> Considerable care should be taken with assumptions in this process as correlation does not imply causality. Empowering women does not necessarily mean that violent extremism will decrease, at least in the short term. Meanwhile, violent extremism does happen in equal societies, including in countries in most of the western democratic world.

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104. *Ibid.*

105. Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism'.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 30.



Couture's claim that the number of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh has dropped significantly since 2005 can also be challenged, and there are other criticisms that the government has done little to address the root causes of violent extremism.<sup>107</sup> This is not to say that these types of empowerment programmes do not have positive benefits in relation to women's rights and tackling gender inequality. It is also possible that these programmes could impact positively on violent extremism levels in the long term. The issue is that the path between these broad-based programmes and violent extremism is complex and hard to prove. Moreover, it is also possible that these initiatives could, in the short term, increase the danger to women as patriarchal societies and VEOs react to these efforts.<sup>108</sup>

Morocco is also supporting a broader effort to place women at the centre of its national CVE strategy – the second tier of Morocco's three-pillar strategy for CVE focusing on the expansion of legal rights, political empowerment of women and youth education.<sup>109</sup> A core aspect of this is a state-wide *Murshidat* programme to train women to become female preachers so that they can offer religious counselling to other women. The *murshidat*<sup>110</sup> play expansive roles in communities working in mosques, schools, hospitals, prisons and other institutions, and their responsibilities span from counselling female prisoners and serving as community mediators to providing religious education.

Two studies explore the *Murshidat* programme – although neither produces strong evidence about its impact. Myers claims it has output-level impact solely on the basis that the programme graduates 50 female preachers and 150 imams annually.<sup>111</sup> As noted previously, this says little about the actual impact on reducing violent extremism in Morocco, and Myers does not include data on whether these preventive efforts by female preachers are effective. A review of the programme by Meriem El Haitami concludes that it has opened new avenues for women to access information on Islam, including those who might subsequently turn to VEOs to seek answers to their religious questions. El Haitami posits the success of the programme in that it represents a new model of activism that is opposed to Western and secular perceptions of female religiosity. As a result, she concludes that the programme has succeeded in doing more to attract a more diverse following than women's rights groups that have a limited outreach capability. She also assesses that the intervention may have supported gender equality efforts, in part reinforcing and restructuring the role that women have always fulfilled in mosques and other institutions, while disrupting the commonly held assumptions that male official religious authority is more legitimate.<sup>112</sup> Yet, El Haitami does not provide data nor examples of where this has helped to prevent women from turning to violent extremism.

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107. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

108. RUSI, 'STRIVE: Lessons Learned', April 2017, <<https://rusi.org/publication/other-publications/strive-lessons-learned>>, accessed 7 May 2020.

109. Myers, 'Gender & Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'.

110. *Murshidat* is the plural of *murshida*, which refers to a female guide, preacher or leader.

111. Myers, 'Gender & Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'.

112. Meriem El Haitami, 'Women in Morocco: Re-Conceptualizing Religious Activism', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (Vol. 30, No. 4, 2013), p. 134.

It is also not valid to assume that female preachers or *murshidat* can serve as the voice of a tolerant and moderate Islam, and therefore counter or prevent the hard-line conservative narratives of VEOs – a theory of change which underpins the Murshidat programme.<sup>113</sup> First, as noted in the previous section, the assumption that women are tolerant and moderate can be challenged and should not be taken as a given. Second, the intervention assumes that the promotion of moderate Islam and moderate voices can minimise violent extremism. This assumption is challenged in RUSI's forthcoming papers in this series, which focus on P/CVE communications and on engaging religious actors. As will be noted in these papers, the normative boundaries prescribed as 'moderate' are inevitably subjective and contentious, particularly when sanctioned by the government. This has led to a backlash across various contexts, with many stakeholders, including pre-eminent grassroots leaders, protesting the perceived 'criminalisation of ideology'.<sup>114</sup> Crucially, it also assumes that vulnerable populations consider moderate or mainstream authorities as credible or legitimate voices – in reality, they often have limited access to those most at risk or they may exacerbate the problem.<sup>115</sup> El Haitami acknowledges this limitation, accepting that questions can be raised about whether the *murshidat* are perceived as legitimate authorities in Morocco. She also notes that the programme faces criticism that it is driven by a desire to improve Morocco's image in Western media.<sup>116</sup>

Though by no means conclusive, the interventions presented here suggest that efforts to increase women's roles in P/CVE, alongside efforts to increase their economic and social empowerment, are potentially effective. Although impact might be hard to demonstrate in the short term, it is possible that over time these interventions could become more effective, particularly if they are able to challenge conservative and patriarchal norms. Further evaluations will be needed to demonstrate the impact of these interventions on preventing violent extremism.

### **Challenging Assumptions Behind Gender Empowerment Efforts and the Unintended Negative Consequences**

Further research is essential. Although the interventions outlined above are promising, other studies included in this review questioned the efficacy of empowerment efforts in improving women's response to terrorism. As one literature review concluded, the impact of female empowerment efforts on countering violent extremism was defined as 'ambiguous'.<sup>117</sup> A further concern raised in the literature is that these interventions might have unintended negative consequences. Huckerby and De Jonge Oudraat express concerns that gender empowerment could be seen as a tool for P/CVE,<sup>118</sup> and that UNSCR 1325 and its follow-on resolutions are

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113. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism', p. 3.

114. International Crisis Group, 'The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North', Africa Report No. 254, 2017; RUSI, 'STRIVE: Lessons Learned', April 2017.

115. *Ibid.*

116. El Haitami, 'Women in Morocco', p. 134.

117. Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism', p. 6.

118. Huckerby, 'The Complexities of Women, Peace, Security and Countering Violent Extremism'; Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism', p. 2; De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing

being subordinated to the counterterrorism agenda and consequently securitised. The fear, which is not based on an evaluation of any specific intervention, is that this increases local opposition, which potentially increases women's insecurity at the same time as effectively deprioritising broader efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment efforts. These broader efforts should be pursued in their own right and according to national and international commitments.<sup>119</sup>

Some authors suggest that the potential for negative consequences when linking P/CVE objectives with gender empowerment efforts increases when they are driven by the implicit assumption that the failed assimilation of Muslims in the West and more general failures of multiculturalism contribute to radicalisation, as well as that gender equality is an important part of integration.<sup>120</sup> Naaz Rashid's paper argues that P/CVE interventions engaging women are ineffective because they are based on assumptions about the position of Muslim women, which have stemmed from countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. These have then been homogenised and extrapolated to Muslim women globally, irrespective of geopolitical and socio-historical specificities and internal heterogeneity.<sup>121</sup> Reflecting this, in the Netherlands, Sarah Bracke's paper categorises as 'ineffective' P/CVE programmes, which have been linked to initiatives integrating Muslim women through secularisation. These have been criticised for seeking to impose a particular understanding of equality on Dutch Muslim women.<sup>122</sup>

Huckerby also noted that when integration or resilience activities are blurred with counterterrorism and Muslim communities are only engaged on counterterrorism issues, this can undermine the effectiveness of P/CVE interventions since women's willingness to engage with authorities (a core P/CVE objective) decreases.<sup>123</sup> This can also increase women's insecurity. In part, these effects happen because women can feel discouraged from accessing all services for fear of exposing themselves and family members to undue scrutiny by security agencies.<sup>124</sup> Although this is not unique to women-focused integration or resilience activities, the fact is that gender equality is frequently attempted as a core objective of these activities. One of the core outcomes of the 2011 Prevent review was, therefore, that the programme should be refocused to 'make a clearer distinction between our counter-terrorist work and our integration strategy'

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and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)'.

119. De Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)', p. 19; Huckerby, 'The Complexities of Women, Peace, Security and Countering Violent Extremism'; Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; GAPS, 'Prioritise Peace'.

120. Brown, 'Gender and Counter-Radicalization', p. 42; CHR&GJ, 'Women and Preventing Violent Extremism'; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, 'Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 33, No. 9, 2010), pp. 797–814; Winterbotham and Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories', p. 56.

121. Rashid, 'Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice?'.

122. Sarah Bracke, 'Subjects of Debate: Secular and Sexual Exceptionalism, and Muslim Women in The Netherlands', *Feminist Review* (No. 98, 2011), pp. 28–46.

123. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 85.

124. *Ibid.*

because ‘failure to appreciate the distinction risks securitising integration and reducing the chances of our success’.<sup>125</sup> Although the new Prevent strategy released in June 2011 moved away from identifying women as having moderate voices and as possible entry points to the home,<sup>126</sup> efforts to achieve gender equality in order to combat extremism remained. Where gender equality is seen as a British norm, gender inequality is conversely seen as indicative of dangerous ideologies and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.<sup>127</sup>

Gendered differences are embedded in most violent extremist ideologies, and it is crucial to recognise that these differences can include violence against women.<sup>128</sup> How groups construct norms, including the ways in which they produce masculinity, is key to understanding violence in this context. The literature, however, exposes a gap in establishing a causal relationship between gender inequality and violent extremism. To design counter-responses more effectively, further research is required on how gender inequality, the construction of group norms in relation to gender, and women’s desire for agency and empowerment can contribute to their recruitment into VEOs.<sup>129</sup>

Providing further evidence of the ineffectiveness of empowerment efforts in the UK, Huckerby explores how in January 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government (now known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) supported several empowerment programmes to prevent violent extremism, which included the Hounslow Muslim Women’s Community Leadership Training project run by Sizanani Africa, and the Muslims Making a Difference project. The Preventing Violent Extremism Community Leadership Fund also funded Faith Matters to provide a UK tour of Muslim women role models from the US and to incentivise mosques to improve their engagement and inclusion of women.<sup>130</sup> A review of this approach found that although women’s projects brought some benefits, such as improving access to services, education and the arts, this did not inevitably translate into improving women’s response to terrorism.<sup>131</sup> It is noted that no data was provided to support this conclusion. Other efforts at this time in the UK included the establishment of the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group in 2008. The goal was to give Muslim women a voice and representation in the construction of P/CVE programmes, but Rashid argues that, in reality, it continued to constrain Muslim women’s voices to a limited number of speakers initially from a similar ethnic background discussing a narrow range of issues.<sup>132</sup>

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125. CHR&GJ, ‘Women and Preventing Violent Extremism’, p. 9.

126. Huckerby, ‘Women, Gender, and the UK Government’s CVE Efforts’, p. 79.

127. Huckerby, ‘Women, Gender, and the UK Government’s CVE Efforts’.

128. Elizabeth Pearson, ‘The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad’, *Policy & Internet* (Vol. 8, No. 1, 2015), pp. 5–33; Elizabeth Pearson, ‘To What Extent Does Gender Matter in UK Extremism?’, King’s College London, PhD thesis, 2018.

129. De Jonge Oudraat, ‘Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)’.

130. Huckerby, ‘Women, Gender, and the UK Government’s CVE Efforts’, p. 78.

131. CHR&GJ, ‘Women and Preventing Violent Extremism’, p. 4.

132. Rashid, ‘Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice?’.

In Australia, Patel's report notes that the conflation of P/CVE, social cohesion and community resilience means that the general approach to programmes has been broad.<sup>133</sup> In relation to engaging women, they do not necessarily exclusively tackle issues of violent extremism but aim to change frameworks around the roles of women within their communities. In 2010, the Attorney-General's Department funded three grassroots and community-level programmes (under the Building Community Resilience Grants Programme) directed at understanding the roles of Muslim women within society as well as preventing their involvement in violent extremism. These included: the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria's Youth for Peace Building project; the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights' 'Dialogue Across Sectarian Divide' project; and the Women Against Violent Extremism (WAVE) project, which was run by the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC). The current projects within the VIRWC are dedicated to encouraging ethnic and social diversity within communities, and the priority is to empower immigrant and refugee women and families through various training and leadership initiatives from cyber safety to identity concerns.<sup>134</sup>

Patel notes though that although information exists regarding what the programmes aim to achieve, there is a lack of assessments or evidence-based reviews of how effective they have been.<sup>135</sup> For example, the WAVE project lacked a post-project evaluation to assess the status of participants in the year following their involvement with the programme. Despite the good work and progress that may have been made during this time, lack of funding and resources meant that necessary project assessments and evaluations were not possible. Patel therefore recommends that it might be more useful to allocate recurrent funding to fewer programmes, so that the work being done can be consolidated through phased elements of the same project, rather than moving on to something new.<sup>136</sup> Though not referenced by Patel, it is important to note that these programmes potentially have similar negative impacts in terms of increasing women's insecurity by subsuming or framing interventions as part of counterterrorism efforts, as outlined by Huckerby.

It is not evident, at least not in all contexts, that there is sufficient evidence of effectiveness for a theory of change which centres on empowering women socially and economically whilst increasing their skills and engagement in P/CVE efforts. In fact, there is the potential that linking empowerment programmes, integration efforts and efforts to tackle violent extremism could in some cases decrease women's willingness to engage with authorities. There are also legitimate concerns that broader gender equality and empowerment agendas, which could have long-term benefits in terms of tackling violent extremism, risk being repackaged in short-term, security-focused projects. In some contexts, it may be important before engaging women in P/CVE to first induce a broader cultural shift in local perceptions of gender and to concentrate on achieving gender equality. It is acknowledged that this is a substantial, cross-generational undertaking but one that might be more beneficial in the long run.

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133. Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women'.

134. *Ibid.*

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*

## Gender Mainstreaming and Promoting Women's Participation in P/CVE, Peace and Security Agendas

There is a general agreement among the authors of the studies included in this review on the need for gender mainstreaming across the P/CVE, peace and security agendas. Women – including mentors, community organisers, intervention officers, policy advisers, educators and healthcare professionals – should be included at all stages of the design and implementation of P/CVE-related policies and programming.<sup>137</sup> Efforts are also needed to engage diverse groups of women, such as through forming partnerships with local women's groups and NGOs to reach those who would not usually participate in international or state-run outreach programmes for personal or cultural reasons.<sup>138</sup>

To properly monitor and evaluate the impact of counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts, sex-disaggregated analysis and data on relevant communities, tools and outcomes can be used to better inform P/CVE initiatives. It can also be used to avoid unintended impacts that can undermine community trust, such as ensuring that P/CVE does not contribute to an increase in human rights violations, including gender-based violence, by all parties.<sup>139</sup> Positively, gender was included in the post-2011 Prevent strategy as a way to monitor and evaluate the programme's delivery.<sup>140</sup> In 2006, the Moroccan government proposed to 'integrate gender in the context of developing performance objectives and indicators (gender analysis and sex disaggregation) in so far as possible'.<sup>141</sup> However, no public information in English on the results of either of these monitoring processes could be found for this review.

In Kenya, UN Women facilitated the development of gender-sensitive P/CVE plans at the county level. Mohamed Abdilatif's evaluation found that the impact had been potentially effective in Kwale County's strategy, which recognises and articulates the importance of engaging women in prevention and response efforts due to the technical support provided by UN Women.<sup>142</sup> UN Women has also provided technical support in Indonesia to promote a gender-sensitive National Action Plan to counter and prevent violent extremism. This includes identifying opportunities to promote the participation and leadership of women in P/CVE programmes and working with

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137. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat and Liat Shetret, 'The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors', Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Policy Brief, April 2013; Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), 'A Man's World?'; Idris and Abdelaziz, 'Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women'.

138. Fink, Barakat and Shetret, 'The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism'.

139. GCTF, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

140. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 82.

141. Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism'.

142. Mohamed Abdilatif, 'Evaluation of UNDP's Engaging Women in Preventing and Countering Extremist Violence in Kenya', UN Women, June 2017, p. 18.



powerful national champions, such as President Joko Widodo and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to promote women's empowerment and the role of women in P/CVE.<sup>143</sup>

Another area explored in the literature is the need for gender-sensitive security reform as part of reframing government approaches to security policy and programmes. The literature reviewed calls for better cross-sector cooperation that seeks to incorporate women within hard security practices (such as law enforcement, criminal justice and intelligence). They point to evidence from the conflict studies field that including women in police forces not only provides increased opportunities to access marginalised communities but limits the excessive use of force, which helps to address grievances held by local communities due to negative experiences with security entities. The literature reviewed therefore supports capacity-building efforts to promote the recruitment, training and retention of female law enforcement officials, including in community policing efforts.<sup>144</sup> One example of work with female police officers was identified in the literature: in Somaliland, as part of STRIVE Kenya, RUSI's local partner (UNITA) trained women police officers. The evaluation concluded that the work with female police officers improved the conditions at police stations and made it more likely that women will go there. The assessments, however, were formed on the basis of female perceptions rather than any independent measure. The evaluation team also concluded that further results under this pilot will ultimately also depend upon uptake of the capacity building and that there are significant cultural barriers that need to be overcome in these regards.<sup>145</sup> It is also worth noting that some of the arguments for including women in the police appear to rest on the same longstanding assumptions of women being more peaceful, which have been previously challenged.

We found further evidence to support the theory of change that increasing local women's access to the public sphere and building their engagement with the police can boost their roles in preventing violent extremism. This builds on some of the potentially effective findings from UN Women's work in Bangladesh and Indonesia, which suggests a positive relationship between women's self-efficacy or confidence to join P/CVE initiatives, reporting concerns about violent extremism and having greater trust in public institutions.<sup>146</sup> Another UN Women programme in Kenya trained 645 women in preventive skills and facilitated dialogue between women in local communities and law enforcement. An independent evaluation noted that the intervention strengthened trust between these women, their local communities and law enforcement agencies, and ensured that the police were made more aware of local needs. By establishing

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143. True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities'.

144. GCTF, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'; Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism'; Rafia Bhulai, Allison Peters and Christina Nemr, 'From Policy to Action: Advancing an Integrated Approach to Women and Countering Violent Extremism', Global Center on Cooperative Security and Inclusive Security, Policy Brief, June 2016; Fink, Barakat and Shetret, 'The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism'; Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women'; Speckhard, 'Drivers of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kosovo'.

145. Julian Brett and André Kahlmeyer, 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism – STRIVE (Horn of Africa): Evaluation Report', TANA and Conflict Management Consulting, January 2017.

146. True et al., 'Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities'.

women's networks, the evaluation found that women were increasingly sharing security-related information with police and within the networks leading to the arrest of suspects and other early interventions. The evaluation did not comment on the risks of a backlash from the community or VEOs to women sharing such information, but this could be a serious, albeit unintended, consequence. Nor did the evaluation comment on whether all women were willing to share information. Instead, it posited that women, individually and through the newly established networks, were now able to reach out to other women in rural and remote areas who are reported to suffer in silence for fear of speaking out on violent extremism issues affecting their children and families.<sup>147</sup> This included delivering counternarratives by giving lectures in schools on P/CVE and the dangers of radicalisation.<sup>148</sup>

The evaluation also pointed to the success in developing both male and female understandings that they had an equal ability to engage in P/CVE, rather than viewing it as just a 'man's role'. A key development was that civil society organisations (CSOs) and women were now invited to P/CVE meetings and activities conducted at the county level – an outcome which was considered to be an indicator of the improved recognition, acceptance and engagement of women in P/CVE.<sup>149</sup> The evaluation did note that these networks should be strengthened to ensure sustainability.<sup>150</sup>

Similarly, STRIVE noted results from UNITA's work in Somaliland. This included the increased capacity of community committees and women groups to understand CVE, and the provision of training from women peace committees to more than 1,000 community leaders, elders, women and youth. However, the evaluation noted that the outcomes and impact of these activities were less clear and would need further examination among the communities concerned. In particular, it questioned the ability of family members (particularly women) to recognise radicalisation indicators and take appropriate action (including referral).<sup>151</sup>

Efforts to increase women's formal roles in the formation and design of security policies and strategies are clearly supported in this review. There are also some positive findings from efforts to bridge the gap between women's networks/CSOs, the police and local authorities in Kenya, such as the increased recognition of women's roles in this space. This suggests that interventions focused on increasing women's engagement in P/CVE can challenge conventional gendered understandings of male and female roles in the security field. Though this finding is likely to be contextually dependent, efforts to increase the number of women in the police and in the

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147. Abdilatif, 'Evaluation of UNDP's Engaging Women in Preventing and Countering Extremist Violence in Kenya', p. 22.

148. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

151. Brett and Kahlmeyer, 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism – STRIVE (Horn of Africa): Evaluation Report'.



security sector are a core component of achieving gender equality, which can, in line with UNSCR 1325,<sup>152</sup> lead to more secure societies.<sup>153</sup> This is an area, therefore, that warrants more work.

## P/CVE Programmes Targeting the Radicalisation of Women

The literature review found limited and sparsely documented interventions focused on preventing the radicalisation of women. Ladbury suggests that this stems from gender stereotyping of ‘men as militants’ and ‘girls as non-violent victims’, which means that most P/CVE programming targets men and boys.<sup>154</sup> In the online space, Erin Marie Saltman and Ross Frenett note that very few campaigns or initiatives address issues related to female radicalisation directly. The programmes that do exist often struggle with funding, sustainability and the ability to scale up their efforts,<sup>155</sup> despite growing evidence that women are more likely to be recruited online through better developed online social networks and an ability to snowball recruit via online friends.<sup>156</sup> These interventions are also found to rest on unhelpful stereotypes such as the jihadi bride or – as one response in the UK demonstrated – an over-dependence on counternarratives stressing the brutality of the Islamic State against women. These stereotypes are used in an attempt to dissuade female recruits, as opposed to proper efforts to address the push and pull factors of extremism for women.<sup>157</sup>

In the UK, programmes aimed at tackling women’s radicalisation such as Operation Nicole, Operation Hindsight and ACT NOW were referenced in the literature.<sup>158</sup> But public information about these programmes is scarce.<sup>159</sup> In Amsterdam, De Leede and colleagues discuss the DIAMOND programme, which is open to both boys and girls, and focuses on building resilience and self-awareness in order to provide participants with alternative life visions.<sup>160</sup> No independent evaluation of this work could be found as part of this review, nor was it apparent that the programme was targeted at those who were specifically ‘at risk’ of radicalisation.

A gap identified in the literature was the absence of female mentors to work with women, both those at risk of radicalisation or involved in deradicalisation.<sup>161</sup> Limitations to this were observed, including resource barriers that must be overcome, as well as challenges in fitting

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152. UN, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender, ‘Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security’, <<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>>, accessed 27 April 2020.

153. O’Reilly, ‘Why Women?’.

154. Ladbury, ‘Women and Extremism’.

155. Erin Marie Saltman and Ross Frenett, ‘Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE’, in Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai (eds), ‘A Man’s World?’, p. 156.

156. GAPS, ‘Prioritise Peace’, p. 8; Pearson and Winterbotham, ‘Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation’.

157. Huckerby, ‘Women, Gender, and the UK Government’s CVE Efforts’, pp. 87–88.

158. CHR&GJ, ‘Women and Preventing Violent Extremism’, p. 6.

159. Huckerby, ‘Women, Gender, and the UK Government’s CVE Efforts’, p. 78.

160. De Leede et al., ‘Radicalisation and Violent Extremism’.

161. Saltman and Frenett, ‘Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE’, p. 156; Patel, ‘The Sultanate of Women’.

women into a framework of mentoring designed for former *male* extremists.<sup>162</sup> Huckerby notes that of the 65 intervention providers approved by the Home Office in the UK, there are no more than four active female-specific deradicalisation mentors.<sup>163</sup> As this article was published in 2016, the figures may well be different now. This information was not publicly available. One organisation's evaluation of its work in the UK found that mentoring is particularly impactful when working with young women.<sup>164</sup> The intervention was focused more on building women's resilience than explicitly working with a cohort of at-risk individuals, but is still indicative of the potential effectiveness of this approach.

It is impossible to draw conclusions about the impact of interventions aimed at preventing women's radicalisation from the studies in this review. This is a gap both in the literature and in current programming efforts. Although men still make up the majority of members in terrorist organisations, women are being increasingly associated with violent extremism. It is possible that evaluations and analyses of programmes tackling women's radicalisation are lagging behind programme implementation. It is perhaps more likely that there is still an insufficient focus on addressing women's radicalisation.

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162. Patel, 'The Sultanate of Women'.

163. Huckerby, 'Women, Gender, and the UK Government's CVE Efforts', p. 89.

164. Olivia Cayley et al., 'Compass Pilot Project Baseline Evaluation', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2017, pp. 8–9.



# Conclusion

**T**HIS REVIEW INTERROGATED pertinent literature – including peer-reviewed publications, evaluations and grey literature – to explore the question of what can work (and what has not worked) in women-centric P/CVE interventions. It presented the evidence base for a variety of different interventions (mothers-based programmes, socio-economic empowerment efforts, interventions focused on increasing women’s engagement in and with the security sector, and programmes tackling women’s radicalisation) by testing the validity of some of the key assumptions and programmatic logics. Data was hard to come by and was sometimes poorly evidenced, meaning our findings are partial and subject to critique. Nevertheless, we trust that they significantly add to the growing body of work exploring ways to engage women in P/CVE efforts and contribute to the growing attention on women in the field of counterterrorism and PVE.

**Finding 1: The evidence base in the field is limited and restricted to a small number of interventions and contexts.**

The literature review only found a few independent evaluations focused on women-centric interventions. This is unsurprising given the paucity of public evaluations in the field. These included evaluations of UN Women’s work in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Kenya, and the evaluation of the women-centric component of STRIVE Horn of Africa. The review also revealed that authors tended to analyse the same set of programmes, which inevitably limits the lessons that can be learned. Moreover, the analysis often lacks information on programmatic specificities, which are required to establish conclusions related to effectiveness or impact. Activities targeting women in the UK’s Prevent programme were widely covered in the literature. The work of WwB, SAVE, the PAIMAN Trust and government-led efforts in Bangladesh and Morocco were also prominent. As a result, the first key conclusion is that caution is needed to avoid conflating contexts and drawing overly strong conclusions from these well-known interventions. This is particularly important since the literature suggests that women’s participation in P/CVE is determined by context. Given the vastly different roles of women in the public and private spheres – and at the family, community, national and international levels – further evidence across different contexts is needed.

**Finding 2: There is a scarcity of information, and therefore lack of evidence, on the effectiveness of programmes tackling women’s radicalisation.**

Programmes designed to tackle women’s radicalisation were notable in their absence. It is therefore not possible to draw conclusions on how best to prevent women from joining violent extremist groups. Instead, the review revealed a need for better mechanisms and infrastructure for women-specific prevention and deradicalisation programmes. This includes the better use of women’s engagement in campaigns and mentorship programmes countering radicalisation.

There is an accompanying need for more data on these types of interventions. Though such data may exist, it was not found as part of this review.

**Finding 3: The assumptions behind mothers-based programmes require further evidence particularly as these are likely to be context-dependent.**

Research provides some evidence that providing mothers with certain skills can have some impact on their confidence in participating in preventive efforts. However, the assumptions behind mothers-based interventions – for example, that women are more present in the home and have inherent maternal abilities to spot and respond to radicalisation – were poorly evidenced. It is possible that, in certain contexts, mothers can play a unique role in addressing radicalisation among their children, but further evidence of where this has worked is required. A key limitation in the effectiveness of this approach is posed by patriarchal and conservative societies where women’s voices and power to intervene may be limited – an obstacle unlikely to change during the course of a project lifecycle. A more promising approach includes efforts to reduce women’s and mothers’ social isolation and to build links between them and local authorities, including the police. It is still not inevitable, however, that mothers will gain sufficient trust as a result of programming to seek support from local authorities. The fear that these programmes can promote spying in particular communities and families is hard to overcome. Meanwhile, the prevailing perception that these interventions embody gendered and racialised views of women, particularly Muslim mothers, fails to recognise the complex realities of women’s roles and relationships within their own families and communities, as well as their potential or actual roles in violent extremism itself. This possibly limits the impact of programmes and the willingness of women to engage with them. This perception, however, needs further interrogation to evaluate whether these programmes do, in fact, have such negative consequences.

**Finding 4: Programmes focused on the economic and social empowerment of women, as well as on improving their skills and ability to engage in P/CVE efforts, have mixed results. There are also concerns that these could have unintended consequences by instrumentalising women’s rights and subordinating them to counterterrorism efforts.**

In some country-specific contexts – such as Bangladesh and Indonesia – there are promising and interesting outcome-level findings in terms of women feeling more confident and able to engage in preventive efforts. In Morocco, the Murshidat programme is worthy of further exploration, though it suffers from unproven assumptions regarding the promotion of moderate Islam and the legitimacy of female preachers. More generally, the review suggests that women’s voices are not being fully used.

The review also reveals unresolved tensions between concerns that P/CVE empowerment programmes risk instrumentalising women and women’s rights, as well as arguments that the ideologies and actions of violent extremist groups have the degradation of women’s rights at their core. This means that protecting and bolstering those rights is a pivotal response to violent extremism. The literature also fails to address the conundrum that supporting women’s

empowerment and equality efforts through P/CVE funding mechanisms can result in positive, including financial, benefits for women and women's groups even if they have a limited immediate impact on violent extremism itself. Moreover, these positives could have benefits for addressing violent extremism in the future. This is particularly significant where policymakers and donors demonstrate a preference for funding in the field of security rather than broader development activities. It is emphasised that the intention of this research is not to discourage donors from funding some of the important work discussed in this review.

**Finding 5: Whilst a gendered approach to understanding violent extremism is important, a causal relationship between gender inequality and violent extremism is underexplored in the literature.**

The literature highlights a gap in assessing the causal relationship between gender inequality and violent extremism. This includes the need for more research on how gender norms contribute to further violent extremism on a structural level and how these gender rigidities lead a person to become a violent extremist on an individual level. The relationship between violent extremism and male violence in both the literature and in programming appears to be left unconsidered and taken for granted. How violent extremist groups construct norms, including the ways in which they produce masculinity, is crucial to understanding violence and yet, until recently, has been a gender blind-spot.<sup>165</sup>

Meanwhile, interventions aiming to tackle issues of emasculation, humiliation and what is labelled 'toxic masculinity' are practically non-existent. This includes examining the impact of powerlessness, exclusion, trauma and humiliation on both men and women.<sup>166</sup>

**Finding 6: Interventions that include women and build their capacity to engage in security-related policies, strategies and programmes are supported but more evidence is needed about policing.**

The review revealed strong support for including women in national, subnational and local discussions on P/CVE strategies, policies and programmes. At the same time, sex-disaggregated analysis and data on relevant communities, tools and outcomes would help to properly evaluate the impact of P/CVE efforts. More evidence of P/CVE programmes which focus on increasing the numbers or capacity of women in the police and other related security sectors is needed before conclusions about the effectiveness of these type of interventions can be made. There was, however, some evidence that engaging women in the security sector more generally can be effective, as outlined below.

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165. Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism, Making Gender Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2020).

166. *Ibid.*

**Finding 7: There is a positive relationship between women's self-efficacy or confidence to join P/CVE initiatives, their reporting of concerns about violent extremism and trust in public institutions.**

This suggests that enhancing women's knowledge on, and skills in, community actions has an impact on their ability and willingness to engage in P/CVE efforts. There are also promising findings on efforts that aim to increase the engagement of women's networks with local law enforcement actors and P/CVE policies. Somewhat missing from the review were the security risks, from both the communities in which they operate and from VEOs, that could occur as a result of women participating in a P/CVE programme. This would need to be mitigated against. It is also worth further exploring programmes, such as the Murshidat programme in Morocco and the county-level work in Kenya, in terms of how efforts to disrupt traditional assumptions about male and female roles both in the religious and security spheres could have a positive impact. This includes further interrogating the impact of interventions that aim to broaden women's understanding of what their 'roles' are, which the majority of programmes – including the mothers-based interventions – essentially aim to do.

**Finding 8: Integrated approaches have a greater chance of impact.**

The literature highlights that a combined range of approaches – such as economic empowerment efforts, training women in P/CVE skills, increasing their interaction in the public sphere and tackling gendered narratives – have a higher chance of success. Efforts, such as UN Women's work in Indonesia and Bangladesh, should be carefully monitored. UN Women has adopted an integrated approach, which includes economic empowerment, training on identifying the early signs of radicalisation in adults and children, and alternative narrative programmes focused on raising women's profiles in their communities.

# About the Author

**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.





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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>1</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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1. 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>2</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>3</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>4</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>5</sup> to infringing on civil liberties, unfairly discriminating against ‘suspect communities’,<sup>6</sup> and producing unintended outcomes and negative externalities.<sup>7</sup> It has also been accused of lacking a coherent strategy and for being imbued with definitional and conceptual problems.<sup>8</sup>

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  3. *Ibid.*
  4. *Ibid.*
  5. 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.
  6. 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).
  7. 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.
  8. 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>9</sup> However, linguistic ambiguities and connotations 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>10</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>11</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>12</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>13</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>14</sup> Despite the tendency to frame radicalisation

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9. 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.

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

11. 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.

12. *Ibid.*

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

14. 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>15</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>16</sup> This is therefore distinct from, but may overlap with, the ‘belief modification’ associated with radicalisation.<sup>17</sup>

### Conceptual Problems

Crucially, P/CVE also faces constraints and ambiguities as VE ‘cannot be neatly packaged’<sup>18</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>19</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>20</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>21</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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15. RUSI, ‘Countering Violent Extremism Curriculum’.

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

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

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

19. 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’.

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

21. 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>22</sup>

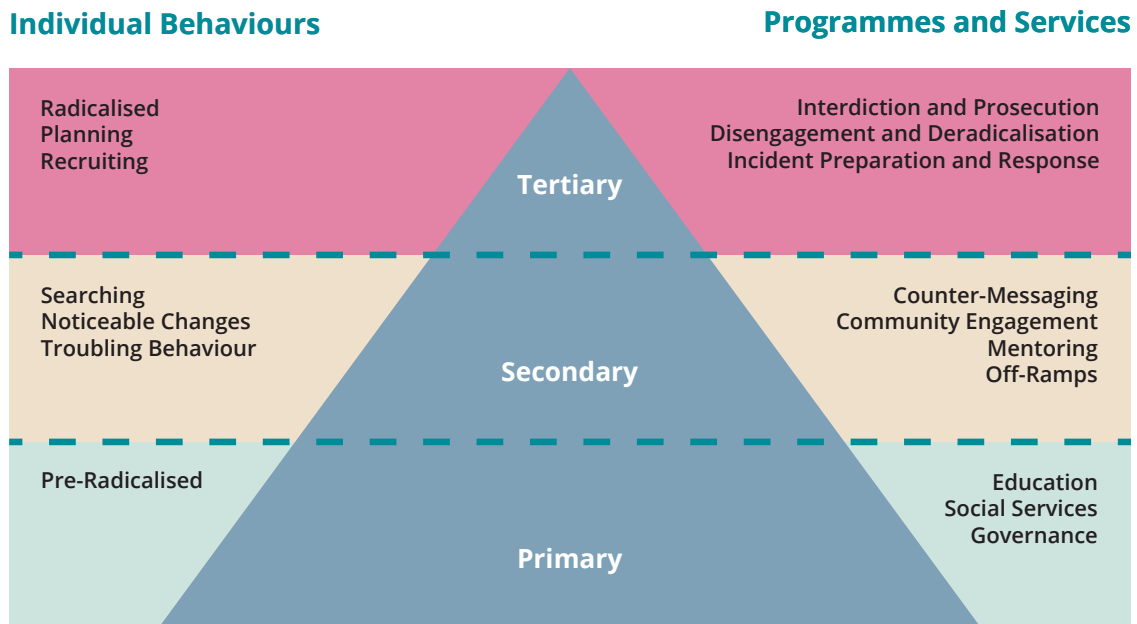
In such a confused context, the ‘public health model’<sup>23</sup> has become an increasingly prominent method for organising and reinterpreting P/CVE activity and agency, drawing on tested approaches for triaging ‘disease responses’ and healthcare. There are various iterations of this framework,<sup>24</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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22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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>25</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

25. 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>26</sup> and demonstrating how they interact and synchronise with one another.<sup>27</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>28</sup> and other studies highlight both the limited availability and questionable quality of a large proportion of P/CVE content.<sup>29</sup> This is the result of various methodological restrictions that are not unique to the P/CVE space<sup>30</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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26. 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.

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

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. 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>31</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>32</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>33</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>34</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>35</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>36</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>37</sup>

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31. 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.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

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

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

36. Lindekilde, ‘Value for Money?’.

37. *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>38</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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38. 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

<b>Search Terms 1</b>	PVE, CVE, P/CVE, counter-radicalisation, prevent [prevention], ‘preventing violent extremism’, ‘countering violent extremism’
<b>Search Terms 2</b>	evaluate [evaluating/evaluate/evaluation], impact, evidence, review; effective [effective/effectiveness], ineffective [ineffective/ineffectiveness], challenges, success [successes/successful], failure [failed/failing]
<b>Logical Operators</b>	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>39</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'.*

39. 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>40</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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40. 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>41</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>42</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>43</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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41. 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).

42. OECD, 'Evaluation Criteria'.

43. 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>44</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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44. 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>45</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>46</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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45. Mallett et al., ‘The Benefits and Challenges of Using Systematic Reviews in International Development’, p. 449.

46. *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.

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