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Position Paper

Evaluations of countering violent extremism programs: Linking success to content, approach, setting, and participants

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ABSTRACT

Since the September 11 attacks, prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs have rapidly increased worldwide, garnering significant interest among researchers. This paper is a systematic review focusing on the evaluations of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programs from 2001 until 2020. The review identified 74 program evaluations that included satisfactory measures and metrics. Only 32% of the studies deemed the intervention successful, 55% described limited success, and 8% deemed the program had failed. Many of the programs evaluated failed to reach their objectives; some generated negative outcomes such as community disdain and an increase in the likelihood of alienation and stigma. Success was largely a self-assessed measure by the facilitators or stakeholders of the programs or the evaluators of the study. Success indicators can be operationalized as the degree of enhanced sense of belonging (connectedness to the community, social connection), trust and willingness to engage in programs, development of critical thinking skills (integrative complexity theory), and a strong sense of worth (quest for significance). Without a generally accepted set of metrics and no cohesive framework for conducting evaluations, this review offers an important addition to the field on the evidence suitable for program evaluations. An important aim of this systematic review was to identify what makes an effective and successful countering violent extremism program. The key findings indicate that enhancing belonging, identity, trust and community engagement, acknowledging perceptions of injustice, religious mentoring, and the promotion of critical thinking/self-reflection are associated with successful programs. The findings press upon policymakers, funders, and researchers the need to consider and support high-quality evaluations of programs.

1. Introduction

Radicalization has historically garnered more research interest than deradicalization and disengagement (Bjørge and Horgan, 2009; Chernov, 2018; Koehler, 2017a). However, attention has increased since programs, known as prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs, began to emerge around five years after the September-11 attacks. P/CVE programs are common in Western countries as well as Muslim-dominant countries (Koehler, 2017a; Bell, 2015; Bjørge and Horgan, 2009). The United States' cumulative spending on counter-terrorism measures from 2002 to 2017 amounted to \$2.8 trillion, and in 2017 alone, it spent \$174

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million (Belasco et al., 2018). This has included a focus on preventing and countering violent extremism, and that has remained at the forefront of government policy since September-11. Much of the spending has been targeted at law enforcement frameworks designed to gather evidence against alleged offenders, and has had limitations (e.g. guardians not willing to report their children to authorities) (Ad'ha Aljunied, 2011). A main limitation of some of these "hard" approaches is that they do not dismantle the discourse or "justifications" used by extremists to persuade others to join their cause. Also, hard approach efforts by countries in maritime Southeast Asia to counter-terrorism could only address the terrorism problem when it has surfaced and crystallised instead of rupturing and reconfiguring its roots through the soft approach discourse before as well as after the challenge of terrorism has taken shape (Ad'ha Aljunied, 2011). In recent years, more primary interventions have been designed to prevent violent extremism, and they often hail from a public health approach. Many authors have underscored the benefits of using public health models in the prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) program analysis (Koehler, 2020). The levels of prevention in public health are primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The primary prevention identifies and targets risk factors leading to illness or disease (e.g. vaccination). This could involve resilience building or stopping the development of violent extremism in populations not yet affected by radicalization (Koehler, 2020). Secondary prevention is the prevention of disease or injury after exposure. This involves tailored and early interventions for those at risk (e.g. those exposed to extremist discourse or closeness to a radical group), designed to disengage, deradicalize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate those affected by violent extremists (Williams, 2021). Tertiary prevention focuses on rehabilitating those with disease to minimise aggravation (e.g. vocational rehabilitation). This intervention seeks to deter recidivism or other recurrences of violent extremism (Koehler, 2020). The public health perspective has been increasingly utilized in systematic reviews, especially reviews of assessments of programs (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022).

This current study, sought to a) identify the scale and scope and categorise the forms of evaluated studies that meet the inclusion criteria (see method section) since 2001, b) extract insights from those studies about what works and best practices. That is, aspects associated with effective programs, and c) identify areas for further research and propose evaluation metrics. To undertake such a task, it is important to i) outline and explain essential features of an effective P/CVE program as highlighted in the literature, ii) list the current systematic reviews on P/CVE programming and how they differ from this systematic review and the gaps that need addressing, iii) discuss the evaluation metrics used to evaluate impact and changes in behaviour or attitude and iv) define key terms like violent extremism, terrorism and radicalization.

Knowing the P/CVE programs that work, as well as the key components, is essential (McBride et al., 2022). Policymakers and government agencies have sought to identify what is effective in P/CVE programs since the early 2000s (especially violent extremism from Muslim adherents) (Koehler, 2019). More than a decade ago, Horgan (2008) identified the limited information on the most basic facts surrounding deradicalization programs worldwide, the need to address claims of success and to examine effective elements in their design. Since the early 2010s, there has been increasing agreement among experts in the field as to the concepts and theories that should underly P/CVE programs and the methodologies employed (Barrelle, 2014; Horgan and Braddock, 2010), suggesting perhaps the field of research on these programs is maturing (Romaniuk, 2015). However, many programs remain under-evaluated, and assumptions of success have continued to remain unverified (Romaniuk, 2015). These questions, coupled with the constant threat of terrorism and the degree of investment in P/CVE programs, have served as strong motivators for evaluation. Experts in the field have encouraged evaluations to sit at the heart of this field (Schmid, 2013; Weine et al., 2016). John Horgan, for example, deems a P/CVE program as "worthless" without an evaluation (Eye on Radicalization, 2018). The importance of evaluations also represents a pattern in public policy. Fisher and Busher (2024) hold that evaluation is essential to advance evidence-based policy.

There are still substantial gaps in the evaluation literature. Despite the field picking up pace in the last decade or so (Madriaza et al., 2022), there remain substantial gaps around key questions on P/CVE programs, design, policy and success. Gielen (2019) stresses this point, holding that empirical evidence of what works in P/CVE programs is thin, suggesting only modest improvement since Lum et al. (2006) noted more than a decade earlier that there was an "almost complete absence of evaluation research on counter-terrorism interventions" (p. 489). So, while the evidence base has expanded there has still been far too little review of evaluations (Romaniuk, 2015). Fisher and Busher (2024) note that while there has been a rapid growth in evaluation studies since 2015 that have mainly focused on evaluations of outcomes in P/CVE programs, there is general agreement that the field requires a greater number and quality of evaluations if it is to advance. Some of the persisting gaps include the question of success and the factors associated with successful programs. A growing number of experts have begun investigating the claims of success made about deradicalization programs worldwide. However, little is known about their design, specific day-to-day workings, and participants' backgrounds (O'Halloran, 2017). Defining what "success" looks like in P/CVE programs is challenging. Some programs, for example, consider "success" as disengagement from violent extremist groups (Aly, 2007). In contrast, others hold that success goes beyond disengagement and includes attitudinal change. Furthermore, identifying appropriate metrics to measure and evaluate success is an intricate process, as outcomes are long-term or non-tangible, such as attitude changes or reduced radicalization rates. This gap highlights the need for more evaluations to develop the field of P/CVE further. Koehler (2017a) called for more research into the content and subjects addressed in P/CVE programs, citing a lack of information concerning content and how different elements are operationalized in practice.

Another immaturity in this field is the lack of empirical studies on the different aspects of P/CVE programs that have the most impact. A thorough systematic review conducted in 2021 (see Morrison et al., 2021) highlighted program evaluation as a gap and also the poor state of knowledge concerning "what elements of the different programs have the most impact" (p.43) and that "greater efforts are required to improve this area" (Morrison et al., 2021, p.43). Effectively, Morrison et al. noted that it is crucial to distinguish not only those programs that work but also the elements contained within the different programs that work. While we acknowledge the need for more work on program evaluation and assessment, this study is focused on studies that directly concern the evaluations of prevention or intervention programs intended to disengage, deradicalize, rehabilitate and/or reintegrate violent extremists. The focus not only seeks to identify the existing evaluations of such programs but also to identify details about the effective program components

where possible.

Some of the existing research regarding content and subjects in P/CVE programs highlights the significance of trust, credibility and respectful relationships (Jones, 2022). Building trust-based activities that demonstrate trustworthiness is also essential to communities in which there is an absence of trust (Spalek, 2010). Impactful programs have included the strengthening of social inclusion and the importance of avoiding P/CVE programs that stigmatize individuals (Centre for Child Wellbeing, 2011). One study (Amit and Kafy, 2022) held that teaching and developing some ability (e.g. critical thinking or self-reflection) could serve as a protective mechanism from engaging with violent extremists. This could include developing critical thinking, media literacy, and opportunities to engage with many religions and cultures (Amit and Kafy, 2022). As a consequence of this literature, this systematic review examined the extent to which these aspects are associated with successful P/CVE programs. In other words, the literature indicates that P/CVE programs are successful when they are associated with certain features. These include trust and building trust-based relationships, openness about social justice concerns (Charkawi et al., 2020), and openness about geopolitics (foreign policy) (Sageman, 2017). Consequently, this review was cognisant of the variables mentioned in the literature when reading and assessing the evaluations and sought to determine the extent to which they impacted P/CVE programs. The assumption is that they will aid the success of P/CVE programs.

1.1. Essential features of effective P/CVE programs

Research has identified a number of individual and design factors that make violent extremism less likely. P/CVE programs typically seek to boost factors that are believed to lower violent extremism. Thus, they seek to enhance social identity (Sageman, 2017), increase resilience (Grossman, 2021), enhance a sense of being significant and belonging within the society (Webber and Kruglanski, 2018), strong cultural identity combined with openness to other sources of belonging (Cherney et al., 2018), and trust with the community (Hirschfield et al., 2012). Equally, acknowledging perceptions of injustice (e.g. foreign policy) is crucial (Taylor, 2018). Many P/CVE programs involve community engagement and participation with programs and government personnel (Dunn et al., 2015).

Many studies highlight the concept of “increasing resilience” as a crucial part of P/CVE programs (Gielen, 2019). Spalek and Davies (2012), for example, discuss building resilience on an individual and group level. They hold that mentoring programs for individuals make use of concepts like trust and relationships and that building empathy in vulnerable groups is essential in altering support for violence. Family and network support further enhance resilience in the deradicalization process by allowing family members to stay connected to an extremist loved one and provide positive environments and alternatives (Gielen, 2019). Charkawi et al. (2020) found that strong identification with Australian national identity was associated with a rejection of violent extremism, and adverse political rhetoric that seemingly targeted Muslims appeared to cause a sense of alienation that increased susceptibility with sympathisers.

Overall, the literature suggests that effective P/CVE programs address specific key content areas (e.g. personal significance and sense of belonging), adopt a trust-based approach (e.g. trust relationships with practitioners), enhance critical thinking skills, address perceptions of injustice, and are structurally sound. Trust-based approaches in P/CVE programs can include cooperation between the police and communities. Preventing violent extremism programs particularly involves collaboration between state and non-state entities (Schanzer and Toliver, 2016). Another example includes the help of local leaders (religious, social or political) who may be helpful to the success of the P/CVE projects (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2013). The youth generally consider respect community leaders and follow them (Amit and Kafy, 2022). From this, indicators of critical areas of impact can be used to gather evidence of an effective and successful P/CVE program. This review identified what factors assist in the success of P/CVE programs.

Understanding the distinction between “outcomes” and “outputs” in the context of P/CVE programs is essential for program evaluation and the different evaluation methods used. Lindeskilde (2012) discusses “outcomes” and “output” to separate the findings from P/CVE program evaluations. Outputs (also referred to as process evaluations) can involve the number of participants enrolled in the program, the number of community engagement events and total hours of counselling. Outcomes, however, refer to the impacts, effects and changes resulting from the activities and content of the program (Cherney et al., 2018). They can have direct effects (e.g., (Johns et al., 2014) on participants (e.g. enhancing resilience, reduction in the number of people joining violent extremist groups) and how well the programs met their listed objectives. These outcomes can then be measured through pre/post-intervention surveys and pre/post-interviews to gauge changes in attitudes or statistical analysis of recidivism rates (Cherney et al., 2018). This systematic review focused primarily on studies that evaluated the “outcomes” of P/CVE programs.

1.2. Existing systematic reviews of P/CVE programming

As Koehler (2019) highlights, despite some progress in the field of terrorism studies, policymakers and practitioners are now more than ever in need of empirical evidence to guide program design and expenditure. There are many programs sponsored by governments and states across the world to counter violent extremism. Programs entail emergency preparedness, airport screening, investigation strategies, military hardware, and warfare. Systematic reviews of counter-terrorism programs up until the early years of 2000 consisted primarily of assessments of processes and the effect of government strategies; among the most notable was the 2006 Campbell Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of terrorism programs (Lum et al., 2006). Over the past ten years, many literature reviews on violent extremism have been published, but with little focus on evaluations of prevention programs and their outcomes. Most are theoretical in nature, focusing on conceptual understandings of the possible root causes of violent extremism or on the various forms of radicalization (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). These reviews include, for example, Doosje et al., (2016); McGilloway et al., (2015); Rahimullah et al., (2013); Schmid (2013).

The existing systematic reviews mostly focus on prevention programs and on theoretical understandings of violent extremism rather than evaluations of prevention programs and their outcomes. The earliest of these was published by The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. Christmann (2012) looked at the results of programs in preventing violent extremism. They reported on only two tertiary prevention programs, which limited their scope due to the number. Madriaza and Ponsot (2015) reviewed the various prevention programs and strategies, although they did not examine the results. Gielen (2019) undertook a realist review of evaluations of the prevention of violent extremism programs. While Gielen was broad in its scope, “it only groups the results of evaluations that are comparable” Gielen’s review (2019) is a realist review—in contrast to a fully-fledged systematic review. A realist review does not consider studies according to their methodological quality and is neither standardized nor reproducible. (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022, p.121). The RAND Corporation (Belasco et al., 2018) concentrated on providing recommendations to researchers and program assessors concerning design and evaluation methods without focusing on the outcomes. Andersson Malmros (2018) was a complete systematic review of prevention programs that have not yet been published after its presentation at a conference. Silke et al. (2021) was a systematic review of tertiary prevention programs; it was limited to recent tertiary program evaluation, summarizing research since 2017. Jugl et al. (2020) comprised a meta-analysis of outcome evaluations in all the levels of programming (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary programming), and a meta-analysis necessarily excluded qualitative assessments made in the field. Brouillette-Alarie et al. (2022) was a robust and sound systematic review that focused on harmonising the outcomes of primary and secondary prevention programs from 2009 to 2019. It did not report on tertiary-level prevention.

More recent systematic reviews have focused on policing approaches, family-related risk, protective factors, and the role of multi-agency partners in reducing radicalization to violence (Mazerolle et al., 2020, 2021; Carthy et al., 2020; Zych and Nasaescu, 2021). McBride et al. (2022) is another systematic review that focuses on the evaluation of tertiary prevention programs and evaluation methods themselves. The primary objective was to provide an overview of academic and grey literature evaluating programming in the violent extremism field. It did not, however, venture into program features and outcomes.

The available systematic reviews are limited in scope, focusing on further research rather than practice and impact, and never encompass primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programs in the same review. By contrast, this systematic review focuses on all the evaluations of P/CVE programs across all levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary) from the year 2001–2021, including the manner of approach and themes and content addressed. It thus offers specific, evidence-based recommendations for effective programs and metrics of evaluation (Lum et al., 2006).

1.3. Evaluation metrics for P/CVE programs

Changes in behaviour, attitude, and relationships, whether in an individual or group, are key objectives in P/CVE programs. Thus, measuring such elements is a good way to evaluate the impact of P/CVE programs (Holmer et al., 2018). Studies that measure attitudes and changes in certain beliefs, attitudes towards extremism, level of support for extremists, and willingness to commit violent acts (Losel et al., 2018) generally assess the sense of self. Integrative complexity theory has recently guided such assessments (Holmer et al., 2018). This theory is an empirical, peer-reviewed, and cross-culturally validated measure of the complexity of thinking (Nemr and Savage, 2019). One of the reasons this relates to violent extremism is because low complexity of thought is one of the crucial features of extremist beliefs, such as perceiving issues in binary terms (Conway and Conway, 2011).

The metrics by which we might evaluate P/CVE programs include measuring changes in behaviour, attitudes, relationships, integrative complexity, and activities such as disengagement from or participation with violent extremist groups or engaging in violence. Measures of behaviours have included surveys, interviews, case studies, and anecdotal evidence; collecting data on incidents of violence and violent offenders is also a way to study the impact of interventions (Holmer et al., 2018). Some studies measure *recidivism* and *rehabilitation* of program participants. The former is one of the most widely used measurements of program effectiveness in criminology (Koehler, 2017). Recidivism measures how many or what proportion of released extremists are implicated in subsequent new terrorist acts (Webber et al., 2017). While some deem it to be the only “hard evidence” of deradicalization, it is viewed as an imperfect indicator (Horgan and Braddock, 2010) and rates of recidivism pose a number of practical challenges. First, there are no base rates for recidivism in this form of criminality, and thus, it is difficult to state what numbers would amount to success (Mullins, 2010). Second, effectiveness and success are often over-determined by recidivism rates. Third, recidivism should be measured over the course of years after completion of a program, which requires the resources to implement a longitudinal study and maintain contact with participants. Fourth, it is difficult to capture all recidivism, which might include, for example, providing tacit support (not illegal) to other violent extremists, which no government agency may have quantified. Webber et al. (2017) point out that recidivism is, at best, an estimate of disengagement from violent action and does not assess deradicalization, which is the ultimate goal of many P/CVE programs.

Beyond recidivism, other factors that have been identified as relevant indicators of success include successful reintegration into civil society, more inclusive identity (i.e., more inclusive identity alongside Islam; Marsden, 2015), uptake of alternative ways to respond to grievance, attendance of participants in programs and the distance travelled to attend (Spalek and Davies, 2012), and visible changes in participants’ lifestyle (Spalek and Davies, 2012). One program that sought to measure the impact of personal significance and its connection to violence sought to measure insignificance from the outset and then tracked increases in positive attitudes about the government based on the understanding that such attitudes would encourage participants to set aside violence (Webber et al. (2017).

1.4. Defining terms

Violent extremism, terrorism, and radicalization are distinct but overlapping terms. Among these, violent extremism is perhaps the most ill-defined and misunderstood. This is because, within the definition of terrorism, there are characteristic similarities to that of violent extremism.¹ Both terrorism and violent extremism definitions state that motivations are political, religious or ideological in nature. However, terrorism is the physical act or threat, while violent extremism is an ideology that accepts violence. The Australian Attorney-General's Department's *Resilient Communities* website defines violent extremism as:

[T]he beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence and some forms of communal violence. All forms of violent extremism, no matter what their motivation, seek change through fear and intimidation rather than constructive democratic processes.

Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011, p. 9 quoting the National Counter-Terrorism Committee) state that violent extremism is "a willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature. This may include acts of terrorism."

Striegher (2015) suggests that identifying terrorism as a type of violent extremism causes confusion. Thus, we define violent extremism as an ideology that accepts the use of violence for the pursuit of goals that are generally social, racial, religious, and/or political in nature. Violent extremism is, therefore, a belief system that encourages the use of violence to further its cause. Radicalization is the process by which a person comes to endorse such a belief system. There are many ways in which one may come to support a violent extremist belief system. Sageman (2017), for example, states that the first step in the turn to violent extremism is a politicised social identity. Oakes (1987) and Taylor and Moghaddam (1987) hold that radicalization (or political violence) relies strongly on the constructs of the group, such as group social identification and in-group/out-group comparisons, all of which can be utilized to inspire group-based prejudice, animosity and condemnation. The use of violence in line with violent extremism is a manifestation of an ideology (Striegher, 2015). *Deradicalization*, then, is defined as "the process of changing one's belief system, rejecting the extremist ideology, and embracing mainstream values" (Windisch et al., 2016, p.4). Sageman (2017) distinguished attitudinal radicalization (having extreme ideas) from behavioural radicalization (committing violence). Taylor and Horgan (2006) maintain that radicalization is clearly a process whereby an individual's belief system and ideology shift over a period of time. We have included evaluations regardless of the definitions they use if they meet our minimum criteria.

2. Method

The PRISMA 2020 statement guidelines for systematic reviews were used as a general guideline for this systematic review. The PRISMA 2020 statement is a set outline and checklist addressing the introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections for systematic review. Below, we discuss the search strategy, initial search terms, inclusion/exclusion criteria, details of coding strategies, PRISMA diagram, full-text coding assessment and the minimum criteria to be an evaluation.

2.1. Search strategy

Western Sydney University's online library resource links were the main search location for this review. Multiple databases were utilized to conduct the search. These were PubMed, Library of Congress, Western Sydney University Library holdings, Lista (EBSCO), Australian National University, ProQuest Central, DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals, Taylor & Francis Current Content Access, Wiley Online Library, EBSCOhost EJS, and ETH Library Portal. Google Scholar was also used to conduct the search. Counterterrorism organizations such as the Rand Corporation and the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) were also utilized. Additionally, we manually searched the main journals in the field of terrorism, namely.

- *Critical Studies on Terrorism*
- *Journal for Deradicalization*
- *Journal for Policing Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*
- *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*
- *Perspectives on Terrorism*
- *Terrorism and political violence*

Initial search terms. We used the keywords: terror* Or "extrem*" Or "radicali*" Or extreme* Or counter terror* Or violent extremism* Or jihad* Or engage* Or desist* for studies published between January 2002 and November 2021. These search terms were also those utilized in the work of McGilloway et al. (2015) and Losel et al. (2018). The results initially yielded 791,106 documents.

¹ Australia defines terrorism as "an act or threat, intended to advance a political, ideological or religious cause by coercing or intimidating an Australian or foreign government" (National Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2012, p. 4).

2.2. Screening

Title and abstract screening. Only original primary research studies were included in this review. Filters were applied to refine the search to the relevant field. Subjects and categories removed included artificial intelligence, computer software, classical music, fiction, documentary films, animals, market research, newspaper articles, unknown authors, medicine, biology, video recordings and non-English studies. All disciplines were included, and no other exclusion criteria were set at the initial point. The entries included articles, reviews, books, book chapters, government documents, and online reports. The search results were recorded in Covidence software, which is designed for systematic reviews, as well as in EndNote for secondary screening. All studies were imported into Covidence. Covidence allows for pre-set criteria, tags, filters, highlights and notes. The options i) include, ii) exclude, or iii) maybe are available. Three researchers had their own access to check the work independently of the other. Detailed notes were made about each study at each step of the process, from importing the sources into Covidence, identifying duplicates, title and abstract screening, full-text review, and extraction. In total, there were **791,106** documents from the word search. A thorough assessment was made to extract evaluations of programs about prevention or countering violent extremism.

The inclusion criteria can be broadly outlined as follows.

- Topic of study (extremism, protective factors, radicalization, deradicalization disengagement)
- Type of extremism (Religious/ethnic extremism, left-wing extremism, right-wing extremism)
- Design of the primary study (quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, interventions with quantitative data)
- Outcomes (violent extremist behaviour against others and structures/property, willingness to use violent extremist behaviour, attitudes towards extremism)
- Publication characteristics (English language, published and unpublished, all types of reports, all types of disciplines, all countries)

Irrespective of the program’s content, evaluations of any program the author(s) referred to as terrorism-related or described as a terrorism prevention program, disengagement program, or deradicalization program passed the title and abstract screening. Any evaluations conducted on programs that were designed to intervene, prevent, manage, and/or mitigate risks and risk factors of terrorism-related events, reduce susceptibility, increase resilience, and respond to violent extremist events also passed the initial screening. In other words, the study frame was broad in how it initially defined prevention and intervention. For example, if a program was designed to deter or mitigate a possible future event (utilising sporting projects or social programs outside of school, especially those at-risk youth), it was initially considered in this study. The conceptualisation of terrorism and the varied ways of understanding causes and drivers did not impede inclusion at this point. However, articles concerning counter-terrorism programs around increased security of people, events, or places, such as metal detectors at venues or increased security measures at embassies, were eliminated at

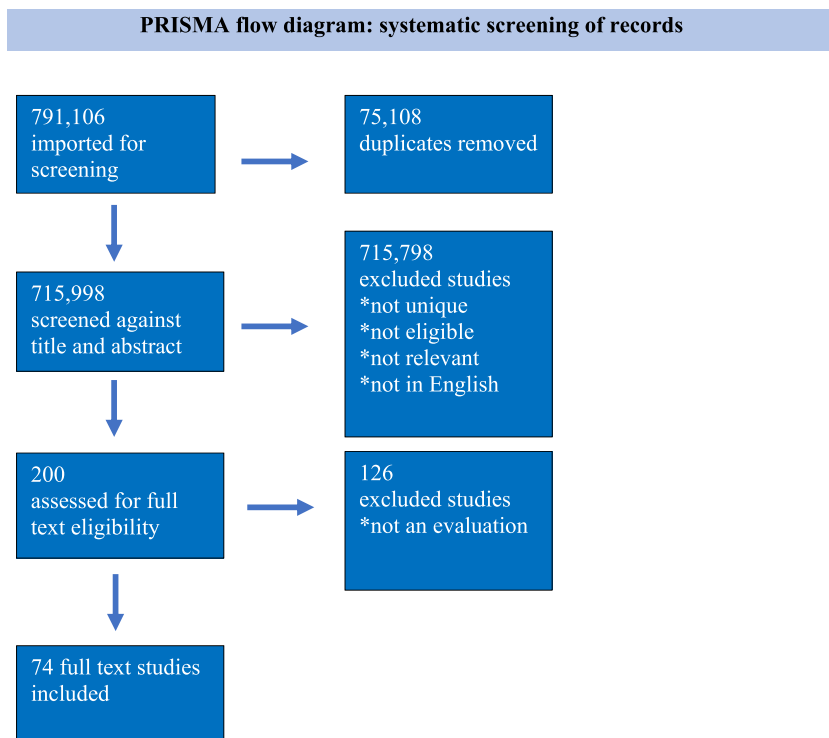


Fig. 1. PRISMA flow diagram: systematic screening of records.

this point. Our systematic review differed from the Campbell Systematic Review (Lum et al. 2006). Programs designed to address societal problems and general crime were only included in the study if the author described them as designed to prevent P/CVE specifically, although such programs might have a virtuous impact on violent extremism even if they were not described as such.

Before assessing the eligibility of any studies, the first stage commenced with title and abstract screening of all documents found in the search. We utilized Covidence, a software for systematic reviews as well as Clarivate Analytics for EndNote, which allowed us to import our reference and screen for keywords. All duplicate documents were removed. Following this, the titles and abstracts were then subjected to our set criteria to determine acceptance. The exclusion criteria were based on the following.

- The document did not relate to violent extremism or terrorism
- The document was a newspaper article
- Ineligible document type
- Duplicate studies or documents. A significant effort was undertaken to remove all duplicate studies. Covidence (software for systematic reviews) refined the search from the mass studies and documents accumulated through the search. Key words like *evaluation, effective, program, success, successful, assess, outcome* were used to locate evaluations. Many studies and articles were excluded on the basis of the heading alone as they were clearly not an evaluation of a counter-terrorism program.

The PRISMA diagram (Fig. 1) details the systematic reading of records.

Full-text eligibility screening. Assessing the entire text at this juncture was the next step for final eligibility. We applied our exclusion criteria during this screening. The following exclusion criteria were followed.

- It was not an evaluation of a program.
- The evaluation did not discuss the outcome of the program but merely discussed aspects of the program. If, for example, the evaluation did not speak about behavioural or attitudinal aspects of the participants as an outcome, then it was excluded.
- Ineligible document type.
- Duplicate studies and documents.

Engaging and reading the content was the final step in excluding studies and documents that were not an evaluation of a program. From stage one and the initial search of databases to the last stages, the number of documents reduced substantially, to 200 full-text screening documents and then to 74 that met the inclusion criteria (see PRISMA diagram).

We analyzed the remaining 200 identified studies to determine if they qualified as an evaluation. First, studies not investigating an outcome as a result of the program or comparison of the participants before and after, for example (Lum et al. 2006), were eliminated. To establish this connection, each study or document was fully read and assessed. Some of the reasons for excluding studies and articles were that the study was not an evaluation of a program designed to intervene, prevent, deradicalize, etc. For example, some detailed key elements that should make up the process of an evaluation or advocated for evaluation without actually conducting an evaluation, and some made claims about the effectiveness of a program without any minimal empirical examination. From the 200 studies, only 74 were identified as having met these minimum criteria. Studies based on correlations were automatically included, as well as before and after comparisons (Lum et al. 2006). This did not mean that only studies with statistics, correlations and time series were accepted.

Full-text coding assessment. The 74 documents that met our criteria were coded using a defined set of questions across all the studies and are not dissimilar from the questions used in the companion form utilized in past research exploring similar research questions (Littell et al. 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2020, 2021). The studies were coded by the following areas.

- Characteristics of the study (e.g., book, journal or review, name, and location of the project).
- The type of intervention conducted
- Impact and outcome (e.g., behavioural, attitudinal change, length of time). Assessments of consultation and of changed dispositions and perspectives were critical indicators of success, as well as any metrics on behaviour such as recidivism.
- Metrics of success used, such as disengagement from violent extremist groups or re-offending of those previously charged with terrorism-related offences.
- Points in time in which evaluation was conducted (e.g. right after program completion or 12 months after).
- Participants (e.g., faith background) and practitioners (e.g., skill level).
- Methodology (e.g., the approach taken (soft/hard), the metric of evaluation).
- Professional involvement (e.g., psychologist or clergy).
- Government-led or community-led program.
- Areas of concern addressed (e.g., foreign policy, perception of injustice, social identity, belonging, socioeconomic factors).
- Family involvement.
- Changes in identity.
- Whether the program addressed adverse political narratives.
- Trust aspects (e.g., between practitioner and participants or community and government institution responsible for the program),
- Mental health of participants.
- Criminal history of participants.
- Practitioner comments.
- Stakeholders (police, government, consultants).

Coding. A code document was developed by the principal researcher and project team members. The code document was reviewed for its adequacy after the first 10, 20 and 30 articles. If changes or additions were required, they were made by the entire project team. The coding variables were adapted from past research exploring similar research questions (Littell et al., 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2020).

Each of the full-text documents was coded by two coders to ensure inter-rater reliability. Each full-text document was read by the principal researcher and then subsequently read by an assistant researcher to ensure reliable coding. The finalised coding for each entry was decided upon through meetings with the principal researcher and project team members.

Coding programs as successful or failures. The level of success of the programs was assessed and coded as success, limited success, or failure. The determination of success or failure in this systematic review was not based on the views of the authors. Rather, success/limited success and failure was either self-assessed by the facilitators and stakeholders of the programs or the evaluators of the study. It is for this reason that this systematic review reviewed measures of success in order to assist future evaluations. Different studies used different methods and tools to evaluate the success and effectiveness of the P/CVE programs, including MAUT, utilization-focused evaluation, multi-dimensional approach, and realist evaluation. Evaluators often discussed markers of success through attitudinal or behavioural change, recidivism, identity changes (e.g. more inclusive identity), engagement of participants in the program, and significance change (Webber et al. (2017)). The data were placed into a software program, SPSS, to determine the existence of correlations, associations, and potential causes of success or failure. If, for example, most of the programs that were characterised as successful included the enhancement of belonging, this would appear in results run by SPSS.

2.3. Evaluation approaches

Different papers use a variety of evaluation approaches and methods to evaluate P/CVE programs. While a meta-analysis that would provide a thorough overview of these methods was not the objective of this review, we identified some of the following evaluation tools used to determine the success and effectiveness of programs.

Multi-Attribute Utility Technology (MAUT). MAUT is a core quantitative assessment evaluation tool used in the field (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). MAUT identifies and weighs the goals and objectives held by the program's stakeholders and assesses the achievement of these goals.

Utilization-focused evaluation. The utilization-focused evaluation perspective has also been widely used (Patton, 2008; Williams and Kleinman, 2013). Williams and Kleinman (2013) argue that any evaluation should be conducted for (and with) specific intended users for their specific purposes (see also Patton, 2008) and that evaluation should go beyond a binary view of success and failure, recognizing that impact would naturally vary among participants.

The realist evaluation. Gielen (2019) developed the realist evaluation for P/CVE programs to "move away from the 'what works?' question and towards: 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how?'" (p.114). As with other forms of social programs, it may be that interventions need to be locally specific and relevant for them to have the optimum effect (Nelson and Dunn, 2017).

2.4. The global scale and state of evaluation research on P/CVE

Our review found that 13 programs could be classified as primary prevention programs, 24 classified as secondary and 37 tertiary. Across the 74 studies in this systematic review, the cumulative number of individuals participating in the evaluated programs was 70,134 participants. Most of the studies provided sufficient data to extract conclusions about the effectiveness and success of the relevant programs by the researcher. While there were instances of limited information concerning the personal backgrounds of practitioners, there was usually sufficient information relating to practitioner knowledge, training, and experience in the field. Programs like Prevent, Aarhus, and The Norwegian Action Plan that were run in the community drew heavily on non-government service providers, who could not access bespoke training for dealing with those vulnerable to violent extremism. Some of the common gaps throughout the assessments included details around religious instruction (e.g., the number of times clergy visited detainees to provide such instruction), and a thorough history of participants (e.g. did they have criminal pasts?). In some instances, evaluation researchers had to rely on data supplied by the government responsible for running the P/CVE program. This is possibly due to the reluctance of governments to provide access to sensitive information to researchers. Governments may be reluctant to acknowledge any problems arising from programs they have funded ((Charkawi et al., 2020).

The next sections provide a detailed look at the evaluations and programs. This includes the nature of the evaluations (e.g. books, journals, chapters in books), the locations of programs (e.g. Western/Non-Western countries, prison/non-prison), the methods used to conduct evaluations (e.g. interview or survey), content and aims (e.g. foreign policy addressed, sense of injustice by participants), what

Table 1
Discipline, output and method of CVE evaluations, as at table November 2020.

Discipline	Psychology	Sociology	International Political studies	Criminology	International Business
	29%	28%	13%	12%	11%
Type of output	Journals 44%	Review/Report 25%	Chapter of book 25%	Books + thesis 6%	
Method	Interviews 55%	Government provided data 32%	Case notes 3%	Surveys 10%	

the programs were targeting (e.g. countering violent extremism or deradicalization), and the outcomes and success of the programs and challenges to programs (e.g. distrust in governments).

2.5. The nature of the P/CVE evaluations

It is important to note here that some programs were assessed more than once by different authors. For example, Saudi Arabia's counselling program was assessed in three journals and two book chapters. When duplicate assessments were taken into consideration, there were only 48 assessed programs. However, our base unit of study in this report is the evaluations of the programs (n:74) rather than the programs themselves.

Table 1 details the type of programs (e.g., deradicalization program), the academic discipline of the study (e.g., psychology), the outlet in which the study was published (e.g., book or journal), and the research method used to evaluate the program (e.g., interview or survey). Most papers and research evaluating P/CVE have emerged from the disciplines of psychology (29%) and sociology (28%) (Table 1). Most of the studies were published as journal articles (44%), but reports on programs (25%) and chapters of books (25%) were also common.

Table 2 details the location and nature of the P/CVE programs, including the national location of the program, whether it was a prison or community program, the type of program (e.g., deradicalization) and the metric of evaluation (e.g., recidivism). Just under half of the evaluations (45%) were from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, with the rest of the programs based in Western settings. It would be interesting in future research to map this geography of evaluation against the geographies of program distribution and also of actual violent extremism.

Almost half (48%) of the assessments analyzed in this study (i.e., 35/74) pertained to prison-based programs (i.e. tertiary-level prevention). We categorized the 74 assessments into prison and non-prison in terms of Western and non-Western countries. The number of assessments reviewed in this study pertaining to prison programs was 35. Most of these assessments (i.e., 24/35 or 70%) pertained to non-Western countries. Only a third of the prison-based assessments (i.e., 11/35 or 30%) were of Western country programs. This suggests that Western countries have more community-centred programs and are less prison-centric, certainly in terms of the evaluated programs.

Most of the programs within *prisons* involved a psychologist (i.e., 73%, see Table 4), a member of the clergy providing religious mentoring (see Table 4), and the promotion of self-reflection (see Table 4), offering insights and the development of pro-sociality. An example is Australia's PRISM program, in which the promotion of self-reflection about one's violent actions was seen as a "hook for change" ((Giordano et al., 2002). The ideological component and response to it was considered essential in most of the prison programs, as identified in this systematic study (i.e., 78%, Table 4), as well as those outside of the prison system. For example, in the West Midlands UK one-to-one program, mentors explained to participants that people with violent extremist views would draw attention to the importance of the ideological component. Violent extremist mentors were viewed as credible and articulate in debate, and therefore, articulating the counter-narrative and retaining trust and credibility with participants were both challenging and essential (Spalek and Davies, 2012).

Over half (56%) of the programs could be defined as deradicalization programs (Table 2), and almost a quarter (24%) of programs were designed as counter-radicalization programs. It should be noted that it was not necessarily clear that all participants were radical. Some may have been sympathizers rather than people who were involved in extremist groups. As well, some were in prison and unable to have direct involvement, and some were not in prison because of violent extremism; indeed, some may have become sympathizers while in prison. Finally, about 15% of the programs canvassed in this study were general community or sports programs designed to build resilience against the reach of violent extremism.

Table 2
Location, type of program and metrics of CVE evaluations (by November 2020).

Location of the programs	Western countries	Europe	Africa	Asia	Middle East/ Arab Lands
	31%	25%	17%	15%	13%
Prison or non-prison	Prison program	Non-prison (community)	Early release from prison		
	48%	52%	29%		
Type of program	Deradicalization	Counter-radicalization, prevention, disengagement	Counters the harm of CV (e.g., fear)	Re-integration	
	56%	24%	15%	5%	
Metric of evaluation	Recidivism	Attitude change (beliefs)	Desistance (behaviour)	Reach of the program	
	19%	38%	20.6%	5.5%	
Counsellors Government or non-Government	Both Gov and non-Gov involved	Government only	Non-Government only	Police	
	69.9%	12.3%	6.8%	7.0%	
Was the program Government led or community led?	Government	Community	Both government and community		
	63%%	9.6%	27.4%		

Table 3
Summary points (November 2021).

- 60% of the programs focused on attitudinal change (i.e., beliefs)
- 70% of the programs focused on directly challenging the ideology of violent extremists
- 56% of the programs aims to build trust relationship with communities.
- 90% aimed to build trust relationship with the mentor.
- 20% focused on disengagement (i.e., behaviour)
- 8.2% focused on addressing drivers of terrorism
- 6.8% focused on building capacity in communities
- 2.7% aimed to create the sense of belonging.
- 2.7% focused on immobilisation

Table 4
Nature and content of CVE programs evaluated, as at November 2020.

Sense of perceived injustice identified	Yes	No	Unknown		
	48%	8.2%	44%		
Experienced racism	Yes 26%	No 9.6%	Unknown 64.4%		
Participant religion	Muslim 79%	Christian 6%	Other 10%	Unknown 6%	
Psychological intervention overall	Yes 73%	No 10%	Unknown 17%		
Psychological intervention in prison	Yes 80%	No 3%	Unknown 17%		
Religious Instruction	Yes 65%	No 15.5%	Unknown 19%		
Religious instruction from Muslim clergy	Yes 64.4%	No 15.1%	Unknown 18%		
Specific communities targeted by programs	Yes 26%	No 53%	Unknown 11%	Not applicable 9.6%	
Religious narrative to join addressed	Yes 66%	No 12.3%	Unknown 13.7%	Not Applicable 8.2%	
Belonging addressed	Enhanced belonging 51.6%	Reconcile between religious and national 12.5%	Enabled participant to see options 8%	Not addressed 3%	Unknown 14%
Violent extremist narrative challenged	Yes 78%	No 13%	Unknown 9%	Not Applicable 4.1%	
Ideology challenged	Yes 74%	No 18%	Unknown 5.5%	Not Applicable 2.7%	
Foreign policy addressed	Yes 45%	No 12%	Unknown 36%	Not Applicable 6.8%	
Foreign policy views deemed as support for VE	Yes 29%	No 8.2%	Unknown 54.8%	Not Applicable 8.2%	
Approach taken	Experiential and interactive 69%	Positive (strength based) 5.6%	Empathetic, understanding 8.5%	Focused on negatives 2.8%	Coercive 4.2%
Could the program be individually tailored?	Yes 53.4%	No 40%	Unknown 6.5%		
Family involvement in program	Yes 56%	No 33%	Unknown 11%		
Program run in schools	Yes 15%	No 76.7%	Unknown 4.1%	Not Applicable 4.1%	
Multidisciplinary Team	Yes 53.4%	No 32.9%	Unknown 13.7%		
Faith of practitioner	Muslim 35.6%	Christian 2.7%	Non-Muslim or other 6.8%	unknown 53.4%	
Pre-Existing Social Identity Conflict (them and us)	Yes 60%	No 4.2%	Unknown 35.2%		
Training provided for mentors	Yes 60.3%	No 15%	Unknown 18%		
Pre-Existing Social Identity Conflict (them and us)	Yes 60%	No 4.2%	Unknown 35.2%		

2.6. Content and aims of the P/CVE programs evaluated

Nearly all evaluations in this systematic review were focused on Muslim participants and Muslim communities, and they comprised nearly 80% of participants across programs (see Table 4). There were a few exceptions, such as the Sri Lankan program and white

supremacist programs administered in Norway and Sweden. While other exceptions might exist, this finding may suggest that the keywords used in the search, such as “violent extremism,” “deradicalization,” and “terrorism”, have produced results connected mainly to Muslims and Muslim communities.

Most programs were aimed to challenge the ideology of participants (70%, to change their attitudes (60%) and/or to build trust relationships with communities (56% – see Table 3). One of the ways it appears programs aimed to achieve attitudinal change was to build trust-based relationships with a mentor, which accounted for almost all of programs (90%, see Table 3). This also aligns with the majority of programs seeking to challenge the ideology of violent extremists (78% see Table 4).

2.7. Program outcomes and success

After careful examination of the 74 assessments made on the 48 P/CVE programs, we found that only 32% of the studies deemed the intervention successful, 55% described limited success, and 8.2% deemed the program had failed (see Table 5) (see Table 6).

3. Discussion

3.1. Distrust in government and programs

General distrust of government and programs is a significant barrier to the voluntary uptake of programs amongst the extremist cohort (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017). Many programs, such as the Compact Program in Australia (Wise et al., 2018), dedicated time to winning over community trust, recognizing that communities look at P/CVE programs with suspicion. Just over half of the evaluations (55%) found that programs had established trust relationships with the communities in which they sought to intervene. Practitioners also held that establishing trust between the practitioner and the program participant was a successful element of P/CVE programs (Ponsot et al., 2018). A large majority (88%) of the programs deemed successful found that trust between mentors and participants had been developed. Nonetheless, at least one-third of the evaluations did not describe programs as successful. This raises significant concern about the failure of public investment across the globe.

A common concern in the literature and public debate has been that P/CVE programs unfairly stigmatize minority communities, including Muslims, in Western settings. For example, community concern about being stigmatized blocked referrals to the Channel Program, part of the UK’s Prevent program (Rosen, 2010). The word “Prevent” achieved some notoriety and opprobrium as communities came to view the program as anti-Muslim (Rosen, 2010). Our review found that only 15% of evaluations reported that Muslims felt the focal P/CVE program stigmatized them. However, another 19% of studies focused on programs targeting Muslims did not address this question, and 10% were focused on programs aimed at other groups. Further, six reports in this systematic study indicated a belief amongst Muslims that accepting government funds to organize programs and engage in projects damages the credibility of the faith leaders and organizations involved (Rosen, 2010). This may be one of the reasons for secrecy around some P/CVE programs. For example, in the Dutch Initiative (Schuurman and Bakker, 2015), the faith details regarding external consultants within prisons were not revealed to protect those leaders from community criticism.

3.2. Targeting communities based on religion and ethnicity

The study revealed that targeting communities based on their religious background or ethnicity, in most cases, Muslim

Table 5
Outcomes of CVE program evaluations, as at November 2020.

Successful programs	Overall success	Qualified Success	Fail	
	32%	55%	8.2%	
Was there behavioural change?^a	Yes 89%	No 2.7%	Unknown 5.5%	
Was there attitudinal change?	Yes 75.3%	No 11%	Unknown 11%	
Sense of perceived injustice addressed in program by mentor	Yes 44%	No 8.2%	Unknown 43%	
Foreign policy addressed	Yes/No 27% 2%	Yes/No 28% 6%	Fail 5%	
Were trust relationships with community established?	Yes 55%	No 27.4%	Unknown 2.7%	Not applicable 15%
Developed trust-based relationship with mentor	Yes 87.7%	No 8.2%	Unknown 4.1%	
Muslim community felt targeted by programs	Yes 15%	No 56%	Unknown 19%	Not applicable 9.6%
How many people reached?	70,134	This is the approximate number tallied from all the studies assessed in this systematic review		

^a Note: despite identifying behavioural change in those who went through the program, this did not necessarily amount to success of the program. In some cases, behaviour was sincere, whilst in other cases, behaviour was insincere and done merely to avoid further punishment.

communities were viewed negatively and generated greater negative outcomes (Thornton and Bouhana, 2017; Bowie and Revell, 2018; HM Government, 2011; Rosen, 2010; Sheikh et al., 2012; Liht and Savage, 2013). While some had positive results and may have been successful, they were still viewed in a negative light by the communities that were targeted by the intervention, including the stakeholders and facilitators (Johns et al., 2014; Feddes et al., 2015; Dunn et al., 2015; Wise et al., 2018). Negative outcomes may produce unintended consequences because the literature has revealed that violent extremists in Western countries rally individuals around themes of injustice, discrimination, and racism (Piazza, 2011). Associating certain religious and ethnic backgrounds with the potential for violent extremism appeared to be the main reason for the negative perceptions of targeted primary prevention programs. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Muslim community has experienced an increased sense of apprehension and the perception of being "under siege" (Aly, 2007) or "under attack" (Cherney and Murphy, 2017). Studies have indicated that Muslim minorities residing in Western countries have a heightened perception of injustice (Smelser, 2009).

The core error of targeted primary prevention programs is the conflation of religious background or ethnicity with the risk of violent radicalization. This conflation results in the assumption of risk in the absence of validated empirical indicators, which may lead to feelings of prejudice and stigmatisation of communities. In contrast, secondary prevention programs specifically designed to address violent extremism did not raise suspicion. These programs were tailored for individuals actively targeted by violent extremist groups or those already on a path towards violent extremism.

3.3. Addressing foreign policy, perceptions of injustice and socio-economic circumstances

This review found that the inclusion of both geopolitics and perceptions of injustice was associated with successful outcomes (see Table 5). The programs that were deemed to show limited success by their evaluators tended not to include nor address these. It is reasonable to posit that programs that include one of these are more likely to include the other. Also, the reference to injustice can be locally focused or geopolitical, including, for example, the policy of Western nations towards the Middle East (Aly, 2007). The importance of addressing foreign policy for success in programs aligns with the findings of Wilner and Dubouloz (2011) that foreign policy (towards the Middle East) is one of the motivating drivers of violent extremists and one of the precursors to home-grown radicalization. Programs that included addressing perceptions of injustice and geopolitics included the Indonesian prison-based deradicalization program (Horgan and Braddock, 2010), the Iraq Detainee Rehabilitation program (Speckhard, 2020), OTI's Kenya Transition Initiative (Khalil and Zeuthen, 2014), Malaysian Religious program (Aslam, 2018), Malian Project (Aldrich, 2014), Saudi Arabia's Counselling Program (Boucek, 2008), the Singapore program (Abuza, 2009), USA's Montgomery County Model (Williams et al., 2016) and Australia's PRISM program (Cherney, 2018). These associations underscore the need for governments to acknowledge and address the perceptions of injustice and pay attention to geopolitics.

Responding to socio-economic conditions was featured throughout successful programs in this review. It is not unreasonable to posit that it helped to enhance the success of the program. In this review, the failed programs did not respond to socio-economic circumstances. The Australian Government's website states that socio-economic factors can serve as push factors for individuals leaning towards extremist ideas (Australian Government, 2024). This aspect may benefit from further investigations as part of the development of future and current P/CVE programs.

3.4. The outcomes of primary and secondary prevention programs

The evaluated studies revealed that primary and secondary prevention programs improved openness towards others (integrative complexity), communications skills, understanding of violent extremism, empathy, belonging, identity, self-esteem, community participation and religious knowledge (Feddes et al., 2015; Johns et al., 2014; Broadbent, 2013; Wise et al., 2018; Danish Ministry of Children, 2014; Savage, 2014; Aldrich, 2012; El-Said, 2015; Spalek and Davies, 2012; Liht and Savage, 2013; Williams et al., 2016; Department of Justice, 2016). Outcomes were measured by assessing changes in the willingness and cooperation to engage in activities, changes in beliefs and behaviour, enhanced sense of belonging and greater community engagement. These impacts, however, underscore the need to differentiate between results in the intermediate term (e.g., openness towards others) and how that contributes to long-term and final outcomes (e.g., the risk of engaging in violent extremism). While a program may achieve its set targets, further clarity is required concerning whether it succeeded in minimising violent extremism. A handful of the evaluated programs demonstrated the bridge between the short-term/intermediate and final results (Liht and Savage, 2013; Feddes et al., 2015; Hirschfield et al., 2012; and Mercy, 2015), enhancing protective factors, decreasing susceptibility of those at risk, increasing disengagement, and decreasing/reshaping extreme attitudes. This study highlights the need or difference between evaluating outcomes in the intermediate term and long-term final outcomes. There were only a handful of studies that measured long-term final outcomes. This could be a focus of future review work and be used in evaluations.

3.5. Tertiary prevention programs (e.g., prison P/CVE programs)

Concerning tertiary prevention programs (e.g., prison programs), the study found that prison programs in the West differed from those conducted in the Middle East and Asia (e.g., Indonesia and Singapore). For example, the Indonesian program (Istiqomah, 2011) took a soft approach and focused on building trust with inmates. Family involvement was critical, highly encouraged and paid for by the government. Western programs did not offer early release to participants, but some programs in other regions did. The Saudi program (Boucek, 2009) primarily focused on religious rehabilitation, a feature also adopted by the Malaysian program. Participants would partake in six sessions (sometimes more), each session lasting between 90 min and 3 h. The sessions would span up to six weeks,

sometimes longer. The Malaysian program (Aslam, 2018) focused on re-education and rehabilitation by targeting the political and religious views of participants. Families were provided with financial assistance and educated about the cycles and patterns to combat any lapses that might occur. Imprisonment, however, appeared to be a recurring aid of the disengagement and deradicalization process. This is because prison physically disengages the violent extremists from the group and because prison is an opportunity for reflection and opportunity to engage with a prevention or deradicalization intervention. The detachment from group members who could influence, reinforce or encourage violent behaviour provides inmates with an opportunity to think and reflect upon held beliefs and associations. Certainly, P/CVE programs across the world differ in approach, content, and target areas depending on the geographical location of the program. Some of these differences include the significant role played by Islamic clerics in Middle Eastern and Asian countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, and Malaysia). Muslim scholars/theologians focus on changing the ideology of extremists, either through challenging participants, coercion or clarifying religious textual distortions. In Western countries, such as Australia, for example, chaplains, instead of theologians, have assumed this role, in addition to counselling, education, vocational training, and psychological support to help inmates disengage from extremism. Also, Western countries generally have a structured approach post-release. This includes ongoing support and monitoring, probation services, counselling and reintegration programs.

3.6. The outcomes of tertiary prevention programs

The evaluated studies showed **positive attitudinal change** during the course of the program (Cherney and Belton, 2019; Cherney, 2018; Danish Ministry of Children, 2014; Istiqomah, 2011; El-Said and Harrigan, 2013; Boucek, 2008; El-Said, 2015), **skill development through vocational training** (El-Said, 2015; Van der Heide and Schuurman, 2018; El-Said, 2015; Yunus, 2018; Chalmers, 2017), **self-reflection** (Hirschfield et al., 2012; Cherney and Belton, 2019; Cherney, 2018a) and **social reintegration** (Boucek, 2008; Suratman, 2018; Krafchik, 2011; El-Said, 2012; Schuurman and Bakker, 2015).

3.7. Aspects associated with effective programs

No one factor contributes to the effectiveness and success of a P/CVE program. Rather, success is associated with some key content themes (see Table 6), together with a trust-based approach, as well as well-trained professionals and a sound structure. Regarding the former, effective and successful P/CVE programs included a combination of i) trust with both the mentors and the community, ii) addressing the sense of injustice, iii) identity and enhancing the sense of belonging, and iv) addressing socio-economic circumstances. These could be broadly classified as personal, social, and political dynamics. Nearly all assessed successful programs included religious instruction by Muslim clergy. The review also found that programs that could be tailored to individuals were more effective than those that could not.

There is a crucial role for identity in the success of P/CVE programs. While outcomes may differ from person to person, this review identified identity as a main theme in the process (see Table 4). Different aspects were identified across the studies in relation to the role of identity. These included the transformation from a political militant identity into a peaceful identity that still held similar values, the rejection of an extremist identity, and the search for an alternative identity.

Where it concerned staff and mentors, the review shows that effective P/CVE programs included i) qualified practitioners and ii) a multi-disciplinary team. A multi-disciplinary team could include a psychologist, religious leader, youth justice expert, elite sports person, and others. For example, the Singapore Rehabilitation Program consisted of rehabilitation in the psychological, social, and religious spheres and included community involvement and family support.

The element of trust in P/CVE programs has been found in many studies that lead to success (Jones, 2022) and a lack of trust reduces cooperation and engagement with P/CVE programs. Recent studies reveal that building political trust could have a positive impact on the perception and engagement with P/CVE programs (Al-hammadin et al., 2023). Further, even though many programs were aimed at building trust relationships with communities (56% – see Table 3), this did not immediately amount to success. Building trust takes a significant amount of time (Grueber and Mello, 2022), a holistic effort and recognizing the diversity of communities

Table 6
Features of success.

	Successful programs N:24	Qualified successful programs N: 44
Qualified practitioners	21	23
Psychologist intervention (5 unknown)	16	30
Religious instruction	21	23 (8 unknown)
Foreign policy addressed	18	19 (10 unknown)
Belonging and social identity	24	36 (4 unknown)
Social support provided programs	18	26 (5 unknown)
Sense of injustice addressed (9 unknown)	15	22 (12 unknown)
Countered the violent extremist narrative	22	38 (4 unknown)
Trust based relationship with mentor	24	37
Family involvement	15	22
Non-punitive (soft approach)	24	30
Directly challenging ideology of participants	20	28

(Monani et al., 2023). Enhancing trust or earning community trust in government, particularly within communities with high levels of perceived injustice and discrimination towards the government, is challenging. Grueber and Mello (2022) posit that to earn community trust, it is crucial that the government directly involve community members and leaders to both co-define problems and co-develop solutions. This systematic review found that community-designed and led programs were associated with success. An example is the Montgomery County Model developed by WORDE (see Department of Justice, 2016).

Also, the results of this study clearly show that feeling targeted and discriminated against on the basis of faith or religion has negative impacts on P/CVE programs. The sense of stigmatisation runs counter to what the literature argues enhances programs, namely, the strengthening of social inclusion (Centre for Child Wellbeing, 2011). This study appears to confirm some of the reasons found in the literature for producing negative effects. In the UK, for example, evaluators assessing the PREVENT program found that the focus on Muslim communities (i.e. stigmatisation) leads to isolation and defensiveness (Romaniuk, 2015). The PREVENT program inadvertently became known for creating a “suspect community” (Romaniuk, 2015). This suggests that framing and categorising, as well as communication and consulting with the Muslim communities, is essential to the impact of P/CVE programs. Stigmatising effects have also been reported elsewhere in Western nations, such as the United States pilot programs in Minneapolis and Boston, where Muslim community groups reported the stigmatising effect of P/CVE (Thomas, 2011). In the Pathfinder Fund program in the United Kingdom, facilitators did not use the words ‘preventing violent extremism’ in their activities, given that participants reported feeling personally responsible for extremism or supporting it (Thomas, 2008). Given that studies have reported Muslims feeling targeted based on their faith (Charkawi et al., 2020) and that Muslims in Western countries feel a strong sense of discrimination (Victoroff et al., 2012), an alternative approach that avoids these effects may be a better approach for P/CVE programs.

The theme of enhancing the sense of belonging, in addition to identity, appears crucial to successful programs. This is a reasonable assertion, given the studies showing that in violent extremist groups, a sense of meaning and belonging is found by joining members. Luckabaugh et al. (1997) argued that the essential need to belong is a psychological motivation that symbolises the “first real sense of belonging” after some form of rejection (Post, 1984). Membership alone in a violent extremist group provides a sense of belonging and identity (Post, 1987). Hence, enhancing belonging through activities and functions is an important component of P/CVE programs.

Not surprisingly, the review reveals that the design of programs (i.e. using the structural integrity framework, such as trained staff, risk assessment, and meticulous planning) was important for effectiveness and achieving access. Therefore, the present systematic review suggests that a structurally sound designed program addressing core issues (cited above) with the flexibility to utilize and stress some aspects for different participants, applying trust with the participants and community, and having skilled partitioners running the programs is likely to produce effective P/CVE programs.

3.8. Proposed evaluation metrics

Regarding P/CVE evaluation metrics, this review identified important metrics that have been tested in the field and are theoretically informed and established concepts. These are detailed below. However, successful programs were associated with an enhanced sense of belonging, social circumstances, trust, identity, family, and community engagement, acknowledging perceptions of injustice, and religious mentoring. Thus, it is crucial to identify the metrics that could measure these parameters.

The *religious mindset* was also identified as a key metric for attitudinal change, particularly in non-Western countries. We identified in some of the religious rehabilitation programs, such as in Iraq (see Speckhard, 2020), that after spending time with Muslim scholars, participants no longer felt like heroes for their violent acts but rather like murderers and became physically sick, requiring psychological assistance. The Saudi, Indonesian, Singaporean, and Indonesian programs all have focused on aspects of religion in their P/CVE programs. Measuring the religious mindset using the 3N model of radicalization would be well-suited for P/CVE programs. This is because the 3N model of radicalization provides a framework for understanding how individuals become radicalized, identifying *need*, *narrative* and *network* as the three aspects involved in producing radicalization toward violence. *Need* refers to the motivational aspect, which could be psychological, social, or economic. Kruglanski (2018), for example, talks about the significance quest (i.e. to be someone) as an important goal when it is lost (e.g. social alienation, experiencing failure, rejection). *Narrative* refers to the ideology or worldview that an individual adopts, while *network* refers to the group dynamics or social connections of like-minded people. Together, these three factors can create a powerful force that drives individuals towards radicalization. By comparing before and after attitudes and feelings in these areas, through interviews or surveys, for example, the assessor would be able to infer if changes have occurred.

Another measure refers to *enhanced personal skills*. In several programs, participants are taught how to accept multiple interpretations of Islam (e.g. the Malaysian program, see El-Said, 2012). The idea was not to challenge or convince participants that their interpretations had been erroneous but rather that a single concept could be legitimately interpreted another way. This method seeks to equip participants with the skills to think instead of telling them what to think (Gregg, 2010; Cauchy et al., 2015). This is also known as integrative complexity theory. Integrative complexity was used as a metric of evaluation of the *Being Muslim Being British* project (Liht and Savage, 2013) and the *Being Kenyan Being Muslim* project (Savage, 2014). Based on data and the effectiveness of integrative complexity, our review suggests integrative complexity theory as a metric to measure the effectiveness of programs, given its conceptual strength and successful use in the field. Measuring changes in critical thinking would require assessing the general attributes of critical thinking as well as the application to the type of violent extremism (far right/left or Muslim adherent) one has inclined (Cherney et al., 2018).

Our review further proposes the metric “quest for significance” in evaluations of P/CVE programs. This metric was utilized in Webber and Kruglanski (2018) and Kruglanski et al. (2017) and tested in the intervention program in Sri Lanka (Webber and Kruglanski, 2018). The quest for significance posits that, for some people, violence is used to acquire significance. Significance loss can occur because of individual humiliation unrelated to any intergroup conflict or due to an affront to one’s social identity and also due to

the perception of bias and smear against one's group (Kruglanski et al., 2017). Measuring whether the provision of alternative routes to significance has buffered participants from feeling insignificant and, therefore, reduced the inclination towards violent extremism (Webber and Kruglanski, 2018) thus appears to be a robust and emerging metric in the field.

Another proposed metric is an *enhanced sense of identity/belonging* (Charkawi et al., 2020). The sense of identity and belonging has been outlined in the literature on violent extremism as a pathway both toward and away from violent extremism. Strong identification with identity has been associated with a rejection of violent extremism (Charkawi et al., 2020). Therefore, measuring the sense of citizenship, identification with national belonging, and the sense of social inclusion are essential features for evaluations of P/CVE programs. Another way to capture this metric is by assessing social relationships and social networks (Holmer et al., 2018). Measuring changes in relationships and social networks can identify community identification as well as integration and engagement at a community level and participation. Further, the Australian Identity Scale, which measures the strength of Australian identification, has demonstrated good reliability (Cherney and Murphy, 2017a).

Finally, another potentially important metric proposed is *active community participation, engagement, trust and cooperation*. This was highlighted in a number of programs in this review, such as the NSW Community Policing Program's successful use of liaison officers (Dunn et al., 2015). The liaison officers worked mainly with the Muslim communities and gained access through local leaders and organisation heads and participated in community events. The relationships forged between the community and government institutions were considered effective. Community liaison officers are an important metric because they indicate a level of engagement and trust between law enforcement agencies and the community. Trust and engagement are both crucial to combating negative perceptions of being targeted through P/CVE programs. We found that specific communities who felt targeted influenced the effectiveness of P/CVE efforts.

4. Limitations

The following possible limitations must be considered when interpreting the finding of this systematic review. The first is that evaluations in the English language were specified in the search. This decision meant that relevant evaluations of P/CVE programs that were methodologically sound could have been omitted. We opted for evaluated studies in the English language because it was common to the project team and ensured that we could properly peer review the study. Second, some of the authors of the evaluated studies relied upon internal evaluations where the methods were not publicised (e.g., government-led programs). This does raise transparency questions about the data collection. Third, different studies relied on different metrics by which to measure success. There is no consensus on what success looks like. Defining what success looks like in evaluation studies and how this links in theory and practice to violent extremism is a challenge (Mastroe and Szmania, 2016; Williams, 2021). While recidivism is one metric used to assess impact and success, it is difficult to measure due to the lack of data (e.g., terrorism is a rare event) and methodological challenges (e.g., requires longitudinal studies). From a public health care standpoint, it is better to evaluate violent extremism programs for their ability to reduce the risk through primary, secondary and tertiary level programs. Fourth, programs designed to address societal problems and general crime were only included in this review if the author described them as designed to prevent violent extremism specifically. This meant that although such programs might have a virtuous impact on violent extremism because they were not described nor designed as prevention programs, they were not included. Lastly, the time frame of the research (i.e., 20 years from 2001 to 2021) is a long period covering enormous changes in research and programming. What worked in 2010 may not work in 2020. Likewise, changes in the design of programs and the definition of success. This is one of the reasons that Morrison et al. (2021), focused on studies post-2017. Some of these changes include the way evaluations have developed over time and how success is defined.

5. Conclusions

The unique contribution of this review to the field of P/CVE is the broad scope of evaluations included in the selection. Evaluations of all three forms of P/CVE programs (primary, secondary and tertiary) were included, unlike earlier reviews, which focussed on a specific category. Many systematic reviews of P/CVE have a very singular focus, such as police-led programs with the community. By including a holistic selection of evaluations, this systematic review was able to identify the important variations in scale, scope and application of P/CVE programs. The insights from evaluated studies about what works and the elements that are associated with effective programs were better enabled. Finally, this broader review has also generated a rare understanding of the available evaluation metrics and offers a view of what could be useful measures to be in used evaluations across the P/CVE program suite.

This review revealed that programs differ in significant ways, although there are commonalities. Differences were correlated with the region of the world in which they were conducted and their content, approach, and duration. Western programs, for instance, were less prison-focused, although psychologists were prominent features, while non-Western governments emphasised their prison programs with clergy and family as prominent features. The Saudi Rehabilitation prison program, for example, was a religious rehabilitation drawing on religious text, which differed from PRISM, an optional Australian (NSW) prison program provided by a team of psychologists who work with others who may assist in the intervention plan. Some commonalities included the approach of participants from an attitudinal and cognitive aspect. For example, Indonesian prison programs focused on broadening the scope of religious thinking and understanding towards others, while Western-based programs like PRISM sought to enhance openness towards others by developing critical thinking (integrative complexity) and self-reflection. Further commonalities included dedicated one-on-one sessions where that involved prison programs, building trust-based relationships across all programs, enhancing the sense of belonging and addressing grievances.

This systematic review revealed that the greatest portion of evaluated studies (55%) produced qualified success, and a lesser

proportion (32%) were seen as unqualified in their success. The remainder (nearly 8%) were assessed as having failed. It is important to note that an assertion of success is one thing. It was important to rigorously assess each study using the PRISMA guidelines to determine what was associated with success. The evidence reveals that P/CVE of primary and secondary programs improved openness towards others (integrative complexity), communication skills, understanding of violent extremism, empathy, belonging, identity, self-esteem, community participation and religious knowledge. The evidence also revealed that tertiary programs improved positive attitudinal change and skill development through vocational training, self-reflection and social reintegration. The aspects associated with successful programs that appeared consistently within those programs were taking a trust-based approach to programs and community, addressing the sense of injustice, enhancing the sense of identity and belonging, religious mentoring, developing personal skills (i.e. critical thinking, religious knowledge, self-reflection) to build resilience where it concerns religious text or messages from violent extremists, and addressing socio-economic circumstances. Where it concerned the execution of programs and facilitators, common features associated with successful programs included qualified and skilled practitioners, a multi-disciplinary team (e.g. psychologist, religious leader, youth justice expert and social worker) and the flexibility to adapt as required for different participants.

As previously noted, there are key challenges in evaluating P/CVE programs. One of these challenges includes a lack of clarity concerning the scope and objectives of P/CVE programs. Robust evaluation typically necessitates a clear, shared and realistic understanding of what success looks like (Gajda and Jewiss, 2004). Adding to this are the varying discussions of how P/CVE programs ought to be understood from the perspective of whether or not they should or should not be connected with behavioural outcomes, attitudinal outcomes or both (Busher et al., 2024). Certainly, if programs are positioned towards different outcomes, there will inevitably be different ways of establishing success, making comparisons challenging. This may partly explain why there has not been a unitary/cohesive framework to determine what success is and how it can be measured. Based on this review, a robust evaluation of a P/CVE program should be conscious of the complexity of aims (e.g., learning new ways of responding to grievances) and the various forms of success not restricted to recidivism. Horgan and Braddock's (2010) MAUT called for testing a program by measuring objectives against outcomes. That is uncontested, but if the objectives are narrow (e.g., they pay no attention to community engagement and trust), then a program should be criticised for that lack. Others have asserted that the depth and breadth of measures are important (Koehler, 2017a; Romaniuk and Fink, 2012). We agree, although we would support Gielen's assertion that what works where and for whom will vary across settings and societies. Context and background are, therefore, important evaluation information, including the geo-political context or setting (e.g., programs conducted during wartime, peacetime, world location, prison, or probation).

Another challenge to evaluation identified by this review is the variation in how success is defined in P/CVE or deradicalization. Many governments and researchers, for example, regard recidivism or a decrease in violent extremist acts (Koehler, 2017b) as the solitary metric of success in P/CVE programs, although it is inherently difficult to measure across programs, given that recidivism is a non-event. Further, this can only be tested after the participant has finished the program, requiring post-intervention tests after many years that may require intelligence services to follow participants (Porges and Stern, 2010). In this regard, this review proposes a suite of indicators used to capture success for future deployment for which there is some emerging consensus. These include: enhanced changes in critical thinking (integrative complexity) and resilience, changes in the levels of trust, cooperation and community engagement, and no immediate reoffending, which is regarded by many as a marker of recidivism (Björge and Horgan, 2009). Other indicators include: changes in behaviour (i.e., desistance and disassociation), changes in attitude (i.e., beliefs and outlook), reintegration into civil society, balanced identity (i.e., more inclusive identity alongside Islamic identity), enhanced sense of belonging, uptake of alternative ways to respond to grievances, attendance and cooperation of participants in programs and the distance travelled to attend (Spalek and Davies, 2012), visible changes in the participant's lifestyle (Spalek and Davies, 2012) and improved social networks and social relationships.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Wesam Charkawi: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Kevin Dunn:** Supervision. **Ana-Maria Bliuc:** Supervision, Methodology.

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