

The Prevention of Violent Radicalization: Evidence-Based Guidelines to Promote Efficient Interventions

Conference Report



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Introduction

In January 2019, select members of the *Canadian Consensus Guidelines* (CCGC; <https://cpnprev.ca/canadian-consensus-guidelines-committee/>) and *International Consensus Guidelines* (ICGC; <https://cpnprev.ca/international-consensus-guidelines-committee/>) Committees were invited to take part in a March mega-week, which comprised various conferences and workshops on themes related to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Among these, the *Canadian Practitioners Network for Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence* (CPN-PREV; <https://cpnprev.ca/>) hosted a workshop entitled “The Prevention of Violent Radicalization: Evidence-Based Guidelines to Promote Efficient Interventions.”

During this workshop, the advice of CCGC and ICGC experts was solicited on recommendations for practice resulting from systematic reviews conducted by CPN-PREV. Experts were asked to review these recommendations according to their research/intervention expertise, the scientific literature they knew, or if all else failed, their professional intuition. The ultimate goal was to transform these systematic-review-based recommendations into official clinical guidelines for practice.

Furthermore, when clinical practice guidelines cannot be grounded in a strong evidence base due to a lack of high-quality studies, it is common practice to refer to a combination of evidence and consensual expert opinion. Consensus-building methods such as the Delphi process (<https://www.rand.org/topics/delphi-method.html>) are available to reach expert consensus in a methodologically-sound way. Accordingly, the workshop aimed to lay the groundworks for a Delphi process open to all members of the CCGC and ICGC via online surveys during the year of 2019.

The three systematic reviews conducted by CPN-PREV were on the topics of 1) online radicalization, 2) primary and secondary PVE programs, and 3) tertiary PVE programs. Five recommendations were made per systematic review, for a total of 15, which were reviewed by experts during the workshop. Each expert indicated if they a) agreed with the recommendation as is, b) generally agreed with the recommendation but suggested modifications, c) disagreed and suggested we delete the recommendation, or d) suggested other evidence-based recommendation.

The 60 or so experts were split in round tables of +/- 8 participants, aiming for a good representation of each sector of practice. There were two French-speaking tables and six English-speaking tables. Experts were given a workbook to write their thoughts and a moderator, and a note-taker from CPN-PREV were assigned to each table to record discussions. The following report puts together the suggestions made by the experts for systematic reviews 1 and 2¹, and how these enabled us to update our initial recommendations.

Section 1 presents the general thoughts of experts about the systematic reviews as a whole, while sections 2 and 3, respectively, contain thoughts about the online radicalization and primary/secondary PVE programs systematic reviews. In sections 2 and 3, general comments are first presented, followed by comments concerning each of the individual recommendations. After that, updated recommendations informed by expert opinion are listed.

¹ The updated recommendations for systematic review 3 will be published in a later report.

Section 1: General Thoughts About the Systematic Reviews

- Issues with terminology:
 - Nonspecific (too generic) terms and definitions (e.g., holistic, sufficient training, surveillance/monitoring) could be interpreted differently by different categories of readers (or even confuse them), thus substantially decreasing their applied value.
 - Terms that are too targeted (too narrow) do not apply across programs and/or types of practitioners.
 - While articulating recommendations, take into account the multiple meanings of a word/concept. Try to use words which are less complex and are less likely to lead to multiple interpretations. Be aware of polysemic words since they can generate different meanings for different practitioners.
 - Think about the audience (type of practitioner and violently radicalized individual) when formulating recommendations.
 - Always use “violent radicalization” rather than “radicalization.”

- Provide concrete examples for each recommendation to make sure practitioners understand them correctly.

- We need to recognize that in their primary objectives, mandates, access to resources, and even professional background, policymakers are quite different from help providers. Within the latter category, it is also useful to distinguish between educators, law-enforcement professionals, psychologists, etc. Ideally, each group deserves a set of recommendations tailored for them, and, probably, guidelines about coordination and information-sharing with other types of professionals. This would require a clear lexicon of non-ambiguous terms.
 - How does it apply in the context of teachers? This opens up a broader conversation on the role parents and teachers can take in prevention and the obstacles they face.

Section 2: Does Online Exposure to Extremist Content Lead to Violent Radicalization?

Summary

Context

The Internet and social media are often described as vectors for the dissemination of hateful and discriminatory speech, thus playing a significant role in the process of violent radicalization among vulnerable individuals. But to what extent is this claim really supported by evidence? What does research tell us about this issue?

The Canadian Practitioners' Network for the Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (CPN-PREV) conducted a **systematic review** to evaluate the current state of evidence regarding the **link between exposure to extremist content on the Internet/social media and the risk of violent radicalization**.

What Is a Systematic Review? Why Is it Important?

A systematic review allows researchers to identify, synthesize, and evaluate the available literature on a specific subject. It makes it possible to determine the current state of knowledge, assess its reliability, identify its limitations, and ultimately define the needs of research and future practices. For these reasons, a systematic review is of critical importance to researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and also the general public.

A systematic review requires the application of a very rigorous methodology and predetermined research criteria. To this end, CPN-PREV followed the guidelines of the Campbell Collaboration (<https://campbellcollaboration.org/>) as they are the benchmark for systematic reviews in social sciences.

What Are the Main Results of the Reviewed Studies?

The bibliographic search strategy identified 5,178 documents (e.g., articles, organizational reports, case studies). Of these, only 78 discussed the link between exposure to extremist content and violent radicalization, with only 11 including actual empirical data—the others being mostly opinion pieces. Six of the 11 empirical studies employed quantitative research designs (e.g., questionnaires on the level of involvement in neo-Nazi forums) and five were qualitative in nature (e.g., in-depth interviews on the perceived influence of social networks on individuals who have committed terrorist acts).

The integrated literature showed that online exposure to extremist sites or videos:

- Generally, does not elicit positive **emotional responses** (e.g., being empathetic to or in agreement with conveyed messages or radicalized people) from people who are not engaged in a process of radicalization.
 - However, some individuals—either because they lack a sense of belonging to a social group or because they feel a cultural/linguistic proximity to the person conveying the message—are more vulnerable and may show an increased receptiveness to extremist messages.
- Tends to be associated with the adoption of **radicalized attitudes** by individuals who may or may not be engaged in a process of radicalization, regardless of the type of platform (e.g., website, online discussion forum) or extremist ideas (e.g., neo-Nazi or radical Islamist).

- Online interaction with groups that have similar ideologies can exacerbate extreme attitudes and negatively shape opinions about other groups or communities that differ from one's own.
- When individuals with radicalized ideas are confronted by those who have opposing views, their attitudes tend to become more radicalized.
- Is linked to the adoption of **extremist behaviors**—online (e.g., posting hate content) or offline (e.g., planning an attack, joining armed groups)—among individuals who may or may not be previously involved in a radicalization process.
 - Individuals **actively seeking** violent radical material online appear to be at greater risk of engaging in violence than those who have been unintentionally exposed to it.

What Is the Key Take-Home Message?

The Internet and social media play a role in the violent radicalization process of some individuals. Online exposure to extremist content, in conjunction with real-life factors, can influence or facilitate decisions to join a hateful or violent extremist group, to adopt violent extremist attitudes, or to act violently, particularly among individuals who actively seek such content.

However, the studies have not demonstrated an **independent causal relationship** because:

- The effect of the Internet and social media was not isolated from other factors such as personal crises, mental health problems, or belonging to a radical group.
- No study specified whether attitudes or behaviors follow, accompany, or precede exposure.

A distinction should be made between emotional responses (being receptive to extremist discourse), endorsed attitudes (promoting a radical message), and actual behaviors (taking action)—all different, but potentially related, phases of the violent radicalization process that must be taken into account in the design of prevention or intervention initiatives.

What Are the Most Significant Limitations of the Reviewed Studies?

- The number of studies that address the link between exposure to extremist content online and violent radicalization is very low, thus making the conclusions of this systematic review tentative (the weight of the evidence may change as studies accumulate).
- The wide range of definitions used by the surveyed studies to describe what constitutes extremist content and violently radicalized attitudes/behaviors makes integrating knowledge on the subject difficult.
- Most of the research is not based on conceptual frameworks that could help explain the process by which extremist content online can lead to violent radicalization.
- The studies have significant methodological limitations and raise ethical concerns that affect the reliability of the results.

What Are the Implications for Future Research?

- Develop conceptual and logic models that can help identify the processes through which exposure to extremist content online can contribute to violent radicalization.
- Conduct longitudinal or pre/post studies to clarify the link (causal, independent, mediated, moderated) between exposure to radicalized content online and violent radicalization.

- Support partnerships between research centers and data collection bodies beyond North America and Europe in order to obtain a less biased and more global picture of the phenomenon of online radicalization.
- Establish a multidisciplinary and multisectoral national committee to create evidence-based guidelines regarding best practices for the prevention of violent radicalization and extremism.

What Are the Implications for Practitioners?

CPN-PREV provides the following preliminary recommendations for practice:

- 1) Find out more about the online habits of the people you meet. Be interested in their use of social networks and seek to open dialogue by asking questions, without making value judgments regarding their online habits and without challenging them.
- 2) Refrain from confronting people who use extremist resources online or who clearly express radical ideas in your presence. Challenging people on their online habits or ideas may result in their views becoming more crystalized and their attitudes more entrenched, while destroying the relationship of trust between you.
- 3) Individuals who regularly visit online forums in which radical and homogenous ideas are discussed should initially be exposed to forums that promote a milder ideology, while remaining within a similar spectrum so as to ensure they remain open to dialogue. With time, you can expose them to other sources of information and alternative discourses so that their views do not become further entrenched.
- 4) Pay particular attention if you notice that someone is actively looking for violent extremist content online (e.g., regularly participates in radical forums, searches and shares violent content or hate speech on social networks, or expresses intentions or threats). Seek more information about these online behaviors and, if you are concerned, promptly consult local practitioners who specialize in violent radicalization AND the risk assessment of violent behavior.
- 5) Keep in mind that there is no causal link between online habits and engaging in radical and extremist behavior offline. These habits act as indicators and deserve your attention, but do not necessarily require immediate action.

General Thoughts

- We need to increase awareness on where to report problematic online material. A lot of people do not know where to report hateful content.
- The participants were worried to make new recommendations when there is limited evidence. More research is needed. Think about what would constitute compelling evidence beyond peer-reviewed articles (since so few are available).
- About training:
 - Lack of consistency among CVE approaches makes it more likely for practitioners to claim they are providing help but to make things worse in reality.
 - You need to be properly informed, know your position, and have the ability to reach out to the right resources.
- About practice:
 - Don't adhere yourself to radical ideology in order to build trust.
 - Maintain open dialogue and keep the conversation open; you don't have to disagree/agree with everything.
 - Identify internal brakes for violence and leverage them for intervention.
 - Report when the risk becomes too high.
 - It is important you understand the context in which someone has become engaged with violent ideas. Grievances can be legitimate; the problem is the method (violence).
- Quite often, people seek positive or negative reinforcement online to already existing systems of beliefs (find allies or a confirm fears of "the enemy"). As such, even using the word "could lead" may be a bit strong; rather, "could support" or "could enable" may be preferable.

Recommendation 1

Find out more about the online habits of the people you meet. Be interested in their use of social networks and seek to open dialogue by asking questions, without making value judgments regarding their online habits and without challenging them.

Level of agreement (34 responses/42 workbooks)

14.7% disagree

52.9% agree with modifications

32.4% agree as is

Comments and suggested modifications:

- Terminology/precisions:
 - Define what you mean by “online habits.”
 - Define “online” (e.g., does a video seen offline counts as online?).
 - Specify which social networks to investigate because the context can be different according to the media that is being used (e.g., LinkedIn vs. Facebook).
 - “The people you meet”: what people? Too general.
 - Define “value judgment.”
 - Remove “without challenging them.” Challenge with respect. There are ways to challenge that will not further radicalize them. Socratic questioning. Not coming across as too preachy. Leave them their agency: They must feel empowered in realizing the contradictions in their violent extremist discourse. Open them to other sources of information/literature.

- The key is the level of trust between the practitioner and the person, not necessarily the absence of value judgments.

- Things to keep in mind before and during interventions:
 - Asking solely about hateful material is not necessarily the best way to go, as online habits are more complex than consuming violently radicalized content or not. This could create the impression that the subject is being investigated. Therefore, an open and dialogic approach, as that suggested by the recommendation, would be the best way to preclude a wrong start.
 - Perhaps we need to ask questions about *how* individuals use the online space. Are they accessing news, using applications, engaging in interactive chats, sharing images/memes/shit-posts that communicate extremist ideas, etc.? Ask interactive questions that give them some agency. Allow them to narrate what they do and what they find interesting.
 - Assess the depth of the person’s network (including followers).
 - Pay attention to what goes on offline (i.e., nearest social environment) with the person of interest. When possible, go “beyond the client” to what is going with families and at school.
 - Let the person show them their material or ask to look at it and try to understand before being critical.

Recommendation 2

Refrain from confronting people who use extremist resources online or who clearly express radical ideas in your presence. Challenging people on their online habits or ideas may result in their views becoming more crystalized and their attitudes more entrenched, while destroying the relationship of trust between you.

Level of agreement (35 responses/42 workbooks)

37.1% disagree

40.0% agree with modifications

22.9% agree as is

Comments and suggested modifications:

- Participants agree that the use of the word “challenging” is not appropriate.
 - “Challenge while being respectful” is what should have been written.
 - Instead of confronting, maybe we need to speak about questioning, challenging, or encouraging critical thinking. Change the framing of the recommendation to be more positive.
 - Clinicians have a positive duty to confront (e.g., cognitive restructuring), as it fosters critical thinking.
 - Confrontation as conflict should not be used, but challenging extremist views through dialogue can deliver good results.
 - Escalation should be avoided more than confrontation itself.
 - Confrontation is more likely to succeed with lightly radicalized individuals.
 - Misinformation research shows that direct attempts to discredit false information can backfire. You have to give a better explanation of the phenomenon to replace the false one.

- Need to define “radical ideas.”
 - And use “violent radical ideas” rather than “radical ideas.”

- This recommendation seemed to be a repetition of Recommendation 1. The *judgment* question should be in this recommendation instead of the first one because here we are talking about confronting and judging.

- Mention that challenging people on their online habits should not be done prior to a trust-building process.
 - *Who* is confronting? Practitioners, mothers, religious figures, formers, etc.? Some actors will have a much better chance of success in “confronting” or challenging violent extremist views. Dialogue is possible when there is an existing social relationship between the practitioner and the at-risk individual. Some individuals are better positioned to confront extremist ideas, such as formers, Imams, rabbis, etc. The capacity to confront is contextual.
 - *When* is also important; establish a good trust relationship first.
 - *Where*? Practitioners should not always confront youth on their views and behaviors in clinical or formal settings. They could instead engage in informal settings (walk and talk, fast food restaurant, casual chat while driving in a car).

- A practitioner who works with addicted people provided an example of the approach used in his field: Rather than challenging and/or judging the individual’s addiction, he asked them what they got from the substances. What gaps or needs in their life were fulfilled by these substances. Try to understand the vacuum filled by addiction and, later on, address these needs in alternative, healthy ways.

Recommendation 3

Individuals who regularly visit online forums in which radical and homogenous ideas are discussed should initially be exposed to forums that promote a milder ideology, while remaining within a similar spectrum so as to ensure they remain open to dialogue. With time, you can expose them to other sources of information and alternative discourses so that their views do not become further entrenched.

Level of agreement (32 responses/42 workbooks)

50.0% disagree	28.1% agree with modifications	21.9% agree as is
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Comments and suggested modifications:

- This recommendation is dangerous, as promoting “milder” ideologies is both unethical and risky—and potentially illegal in some countries/states. Milder extremist ideologies are potentially more dangerous than “tougher” ones as they are able to reach more people.
- Also, what are “milder extremist ideas”?
- It’s not about providing a milder alternative, but a completely different one that will fill the same needs. Why go through the trouble of replacing it with a milder one when we could replace it with another one entirely?
 - Harm reduction may work in some fields (substance abuse). It does not mean it does in PVE.

Recommendation 4

Pay particular attention if you notice that someone is actively looking for violent extremist content online (e.g., regularly participates in radical forums, searches and shares violent content or hate speech on social networks, or expresses intentions or threats). Seek more information about these online behaviors and, if you are concerned, promptly consult local practitioners who specialize in violent radicalization AND the risk assessment of violent behavior.

Level of agreement (31 responses/42 workbooks)

19.4% disagree

38.7% agree with modifications

41.9% agree as is

Comments and suggested modifications:

- This recommendation could be split into two recommendations: one about paying attention when someone is actively looking for violent extremist content and one about reporting/seeking experts in the risk assessment of violent radicalization.
- Change the order of the recommendations to R1-R2-R4-R3.
 - Another similar suggestion: R1, then R4 (seek professional help if the risk assessment shows acute/elevated risk). If not, keep going with R3 and R5.
- Practitioners need to be trained on when and how they should report a case of violent radicalization. There is a balance to be kept between maintaining trust and gauging risk. Before having to escalate cases to the authorities, practitioners should be able to consult with other practitioners specialized in risk assessment in specific contexts.
 - There has to be less subjectivity in the evaluation of the need to call/involve the police.
 - Promote teamwork and specify when an expert in violent radicalization should be consulted.
 - Important aspects to consider in assessing the risk:
 - Pay attention to frequency, duration, and type of usage. How often, for how long, and in which forums/areas (hardline, hate-based, radical, and extremist). Also, how are they interacting, what are they saying? If there is active confrontation and encouragement of violence, there is a much greater need to intervene and report—especially when there is indication that ideas have turned into calls for action, active confrontation, and indication of violent intent (this is acute risk).
 - Differentiate between morbid curiosity and active seeking.
 - There is a difference between consuming violent extremist material online and actively propagating these materials. This could be telling about the individual’s commitment to his “cause.”
- The parents, teachers, and friends are paramount in identifying at-risk online behaviors (and doing the appropriate referrals).
 - Make sure to provide resources that people can refer to.
- This recommendation is in opposition to the third one. Consulting a specialist as soon as you are worried seems a bit extreme. Before going to authorities, parents and teachers should be consulted. Then, check with specialists already working with the client and his entourage.
- In addition to specialists in violent radicalization and risk assessment, consult experts in new technologies used by the youth. Do not be afraid to ask experts of other disciplines.

Recommendation 5

Keep in mind that there is no causal link between online habits and engaging in radical and extremist behavior offline. These habits act as indicators and deserve your attention, but do not necessarily require immediate action.

Level of agreement (34 responses/42 workbooks)

38.2% disagree

23.5% agree with modifications

38.2% agree as is

Comments and suggested modifications:

- This recommendation could be removed and added as an introduction to the other recommendations.
- Some participants mentioned that this recommendation does not fit with the cases of violent extremism they have seen locally since roughly 2013, where the processes of radicalization have taken place primarily online. Many online groomers/recruiters are using social media and Skype/Zoom to emulate offline radicalization. They do this to reduce costs and avoid risks/detection. Although this may not be accurate for all cases and violently radicalized groups, most of the cases going to law enforcement were not involved in offline processes.
 - Online leakage is probably the strongest indicator we have in lone-actor terrorism (cf. the New Zealand attacker) and need to be acted on.
- Opposite advice: there is no short-circuit between online engagement and offline activity. Presupposing the contrary and acting upon it would potentially open the door to multiple societal risks, such as engaging in surveillance that would violate freedom of rights.
 - In situations where we only have evidence about online activity, there is no need for overcommitment. Nevertheless, any serious concern about the online activity should be a motive to dig into the offline activity of an individual.
- Should be rephrased: The statement “no causal link” may be equally misrepresentative. We do not know if there is a causal link or not. We only know that none has yet been demonstrated. Analogy with Type I and Type II errors in statistics.
- This recommendation needs to be expanded: What are indicators, how do we know what needs immediate action, etc.?

New Recommendations Suggested by Participants

Recurrent Recommendations

- Explore the motivations that lead to extremism. Ask specific straightforward questions to the patient during intervention. Example: Why did you go to your first extremist meeting?
- Multidisciplinary teams with diverse resources, established means of communication, and coordination among its members have the highest chances for success.

Others

- There were several suggestions on how to replace recommendation #3. For example:
 - Introduce broader view of the world (not black/white ally/enemy), i.e., broaden horizons, remove blinds.
 - Refer to classical texts/stories.
 - Engage in motivational interviewing.
 - Underline the complexity of world issues and human relationships.
- There should be more work done on protective factors; for instance, on the availability of digital literacy education.
- Stay vigilant for an authority figure influencing your patient.
- Promote educational teams, involve educators, and take moral complexity into account.
- Traditional media should also be examined, not only the Internet.
- Do your intervention in non-formal settings and build a trust relationship.

Final Recommendations

- Build and maintain your trust relationship (or therapeutic alliance) with your clients. Trust remains the key element.
- Be interested in the online habits of your clients. Find out how, when, and for how long they use the Internet and social media. Ask:
 - Which sites and forums they visit.
 - How they react and respond to the content they consume.
 - What content they share and how widely they share it.
 - What needs are being fulfilled by their use of the Internet/social media.
- Avoid direct confrontations if you do not have a strong enough therapeutic alliance and refrain from value judgements. If you want to challenge the extremist views of your clients, do so while being respectful and open. Avoid escalation of conflict.
 - Acknowledge that the grievances of your clients and their group may be legitimate, even if their means are not.
 - Do not only ask questions to your clients about their consumption of violent/hateful material; doing so may give them the impression that they are being investigated. Ask questions about offline and non-radicalized aspects of their lives.
 - Seek an open dialogue by asking interactive questions that help develop your clients' sense of agency and problem-solving skills.
 - Think about using non-formal settings to reduce wariness.
- Pay particular attention if you notice that your clients are actively consuming and/or propagating violent extremist content online (e.g., regularly participates in radical forums, searches and shares violent or hateful content on social media, expresses violent intentions or threats). If so, before taking immediate action, consult a local multidisciplinary team specialized in violent radicalization and risk assessment of violent behavior (<https://cpnprev.ca/themap/>).
- Pay attention to the overlap between online and offline behaviors, as they are intrinsically linked in our modern world.
- Help develop the critical thinking and digital literacy of your clients by referring them to resources such as the following:
 - SERENE-RISK (<https://www.serene-risc.ca/en/>)
 - Microsoft Digital Literacy course (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digitalliteracy/home>)
- Ensure that as an expert, you are adequately trained in issues surrounding violent radicalization, Internet/social media, risk assessment, and cultural competency/sensitivity, in addition to typical clinical training. Do not hesitate to ask more experienced colleagues or teams if you feel overwhelmed by a situation (while maintaining confidentiality).

Section 3: Primary and Secondary PVE Programs

Summary

Introduction

Over the past decade, attacks attributed to extremist organizations or “lone actors” have intensified and spread to many parts of the world, amplifying the fears of local populations and prompting several governments to invest significant sums of money in preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE/CVE). In spite of such massive investments, our current knowledge of the best practices in terms of prevention remains disparate, and the effectiveness of currently-used practices has not yet been clearly established. This means that millions of dollars are being spent on funding programs whose effectiveness and potential iatrogenic effects are unknown.

Objectives

Considering the above, the Canadian Practitioners Network for Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (CPN-PREV; <https://cpnprev.ca/>) has conducted a systematic review on the effectiveness of primary and secondary prevention programs in the field of PVE/CVE. The goals of this review were threefold: 1) to determine if prevention programs are able to prevent or counter violent radicalization; 2) to identify specific program modalities associated with a higher chance of success or failure for the targeted populations; and 3) to assess the quality of the literature in order to identify less reliable evidence, knowledge gaps, and studies which should be given more weight in the interpretation of results.

Our review integrated evidence on the following: a) right-wing, extreme left, and Islamist radicalization; b) outcomes classified by primary and secondary prevention levels; and c) benefits/harms, costs, transferability, and community-related implementation issues when mentioned by the authors.

We used well-established systematic review methods by leaders in the domain, such as the Campbell and Cochrane collaborations. The logic model driving the review is grounded in the eco-systemic public health model, dividing programs into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. For more information on methods, please consult the full report.

Results

Of the 10,496 studies generated from the searches, only 30 were eligible for this review (i.e., included an empirical evaluation of a prevention initiative using primary data). The final set of 30 studies reached a total sample of 3,632 individuals from 11 countries, with sample sizes ranging from 5 to 1,149 participants ($M = 134.5$, $SD = 284.0$).

Most of the studies (19) evaluated programs targeting Islamist radicalization. Eleven studies assessed the outcomes of “general” prevention programs, that is, programs that do not target a specific type of violent radicalization but rather openness towards others, respect, civic education, etc. Surprisingly, none of the studies assessed programs that exclusively target far-right or far-left radicalization.

Among the 30 program evaluation studies, 12 reported positive outcomes, 5 reported negative outcomes, and 4 reported mixed outcomes (both positive and negative). This indicates that, on average, PVE programs led to more positive than negative outcomes. Of note, around a third of the reviewed studies (9) had a quality rating of 3 or less, making their results unreliable and largely inconclusive. This indicates multiple problems in the state of the literature.

On average, primary (4 positive, 1 negative) and secondary (7 positive, 3 negative, 2 mixed) prevention programs seemed more effective than targeted primary prevention programs (i.e., programs that target a specific community; 1 positive, 4 negative, 4 mixed). Targeted primary prevention programs yielded more negative than positive outcomes and were overall less successful than other types of prevention.

Key Findings

- There is enough evidence to suggest that prevention programs that target a specific minority group, as well as programs that focus on surveillance methods (monitoring and control), generate more negative/iatrogenic effects (e.g., stigmatization, suspiciousness) than benefits.
- Studies on the outcomes of police-community partnerships have produced mixed findings, likely in part due to problems with research design, methods, and measures. Most evaluations collect the satisfaction rates and subjective perceptions of police officers, stakeholders, and community partners.
- Evaluation studies report that small-scale primary and secondary prevention programs are effective in improving personal or interpersonal characteristics reported in the literature as potentially protective against violent radicalization (e.g., empathy, conflict management skills, openness towards others, improved understanding of radicalization and extremism).
- Of the 30 studies reviewed, none has focused on the evaluation of prevention programs targeting right-wing or left-wing violent radicalization. This result is worrisome as it suggests that some prevalent types of violent radicalization do not receive appropriate consideration at the researcher, funder, and decider level.
- Studies rarely mention the challenges, facilitators, and successes arising during the implementation of primary and secondary prevention programs. This obfuscates the avenues by which these programs may be improved in the future. Furthermore, none of the reviewed studies mentioned the costs of program or evaluation research, which makes it hard to improve resource allocation in relation to expected outcomes.

Limitations of Studies

- Reliable empirical data on prevention programs for violent radicalization is limited at present. Nearly a third ($n = 9$) of the reviewed studies did not achieve a score of more than 3/10 on the Quality of Study Assessment tool, even though the measure was purposely designed to be lenient. The reviewed empirical studies generally suffer from weak experimental designs, small or biased samples, and heterogeneity of definitions, measures, and outcomes. This makes integration of evidence quite challenging, especially since several manuscripts had multiple sections missing.
- Conflicts of interest also permeate evaluation studies of primary and secondary prevention programs. In 9 of the 30 reviewed studies, program providers, deciders, stakeholders, community partners, and police/correctional staff were solicited to assess the effectiveness of programs in which they were involved.
- Instead of operationalizing success as, for example, reducing empirically proven risk factors to violent radicalization, some studies have instead used outcome measures of user or program-provider satisfaction. This limits the conclusions that can be drawn concerning the real effectiveness of these programs in countering violent extremism.
- Taken together, these limitations mean that our ability to identify best PVE practices based on empirical evidence is limited due to the lack of theoretically and methodologically robust empirical evaluations. Generalizing findings across contexts is impossible, considering the lack of

evaluative studies on far-right or far-left prevention programs. The conclusions of this report can at most be applied to general prevention programs or those targeting Islamist radicalization. They may, however, significantly inform future research designs and funding.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Given the current state of evidence on PVE programs, this systematic review can provide the following tentative preliminary recommendations:

- 1) Prevention programs based on surveillance and repression-based models should be avoided, as they are counterproductive for prevention (i.e., they cause more harms than benefits).
- 2) Interventions should be inclusive and should not target a particular cultural, ethnic, or religious group.
- 3) Practitioners should not replicate a given program from one context to another without adapting it to their local context and monitoring its effects, due to lack of data on the generalizability of these programs.
- 4) The lack of prevention programming towards left- and right-wing extremism is in stark contrast with its prevalence. Such programs should be designed, implemented, and evaluated.
- 5) Practitioners should be adequately trained to deal with the complex issues that this type of work involves, including group dynamics for group-based programs. A successful program may become harmful if handled without due sensitivity.

General Thoughts

- Recommendations should be split between primary and secondary prevention—they are not identical in terms of scope, objectives, and outcomes. This suggestion was highly recurrent.
- Recommendations should guide and tell practitioner what to do rather than *not* to do (e.g., recommendation #3). Recommendations should be more positively oriented.

Recommendation 1

Prevention programs based on surveillance and repression-based models should be avoided, as they are counterproductive for prevention (i.e., they cause more harms than benefits).

Level of agreement (35 responses/42 workbooks)

22.9% disagree

68.6% agree with modifications

8.6% agree as is

Comments and suggested modifications:

- Remove mentions of repression programs as there is none.
- Surveillance and repression are not the same thing and should not be confounded.
 - “Surveillance” should be replaced by “intelligence gathering.”
 - Need to specify the type of surveillance we are talking about. What do we mean by “surveillance”?
 - Surveillance by whom? Law enforcement? Community? This is very important to know.
 - What constitutes surveillance? Community engagement programs? Hotlines (programs to report suspicious activity in your neighborhood)? Educating, training, and monitoring teachers?
 - Nuance this recommendation by specifying when surveillance should be avoided and when it would be appropriate (exceptions).
- For one-on-one interventions, tell the client beforehand which kind of information you are obligated to share with the police. This is especially relevant for secondary prevention.
- One of the key qualities for programs at primary and secondary levels is transparency, i.e., clearly stating the goals and procedures of a given program. Who is involved in the program implementation, why, with what purpose, and how. This is especially relevant when the police is one of the actors.

Recommendation 2

Interventions should be inclusive and should not target a particular cultural, ethnic, or religious group.

Level of agreement (36 responses/42 workbooks)

5.6% disagree	72.2% agree with modifications	22.2% agree as is
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Comments and suggested modifications:

- The recommendation should include other variables such as age, gender, and others along “particular cultural, ethnic, or religious group.”
- Clarify wording: Targeting and tailoring do not mean the same thing. Targeting = assuming that a specific religion (e.g., Muslim) is a risk factor, which is clearly wrong. However, that does not mean that tailoring intervention to a cultural group, gender, etc. is bad (specific responsivity principle, knowing your audience, avoiding one-size-fits-all). The goal is to avoid stigmatizing interventions or programs. Practitioners have to actively fight the feeling of injustice experienced by individuals on a path towards violent radicalization.
- R2 doesn’t seem compatible with the next ones (e.g., R4) even though they make sense on their own. We should find a way to reconcile them as they can be contradictory.
- What do you mean by “interventions”?
 - Are we talking about primary prevention, secondary prevention, or both?
 - “Intervention” should be replaced by “primary prevention”. This opens the question: what do we consider to be intervention? If it is only tertiary prevention, then we only need to change the wording of this recommendation. If it includes secondary, then we have to separate primary from secondary in the recommendations, as suggested multiple times by the participants.

Recommendation 3

Practitioners should not replicate a given program from one context to another without adapting it to their local context and monitoring its effects, due to lack of data on the generalizability of these programs.

Level of agreement (34 responses/42 workbooks)

2.9% disagree	50.0% agree with modifications	47.1% agree as is
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Comments and suggested modifications:

- This recommendation should be rephrased to be positive. Instead of recommending what not to do, it should recommend what to do.
- Experts thought that “generalizability” was not a good term. We should use another word.
- PVE programmes should also not be transplanted from a country to another; too often, Western countries finance the creation of a program in another country, then leave. This shows the problem of short-term PVE programs. It would be interesting to see which parts of PVE programs work cross-nationally. What are the features that work when they are exported/imported?

Recommendation 4

The lack of prevention programming towards left- and right-wing extremism is in stark contrast with its prevalence. Such programs should be designed, implemented, and evaluated.

Level of agreement (33 responses/42 workbooks)

15.2% disagree	42.4% agree with modifications	42.4% agree as is
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Comments and suggested modifications:

- Include references to other forms: single issue (e.g., Incel), ethno-national (e.g., Khalistan), anti-government (e.g., Freemen-on-the-Land).
- Another way to proceed would be to say “programs should target forms of violent extremism present in your geographic region” without clearly naming far right and far left, as there are other types of violent extremism.
- We must specify that we are talking about *violent* radicalization.
- We must consider how the media representation of some violent extremist groups or acts has an effect on the allocation of funding. Therefore, we must try to intervene with the media, not only deciders.

Recommendation 5

Practitioners should be adequately trained to deal with the complex issues that this type of work involves, including group dynamics for group-based programs. A successful program may become harmful if handled without due sensitivity.

Level of agreement (31 responses/42 workbooks)

6.5% disagree	29.0% agree with modifications	64.5% agree as is
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Comments and suggested modifications:

- “Dynamics for group-based programs” could be changed to “cultural competency and sensitivity.”
- What does it mean, to be “adequately trained” in P/CVE?
 - When talking about “sufficient training” (vague descriptor) for practitioners involved in program implementation, add or consider the following competencies (areas of expertise): motivational interviews, analysis of group dynamics, cultural competency/sensitivity, training quality control (policymakers should consider developing some standards for training), etc.
 - Specify which kind of training. Cultural sensitivity, risk management, digital media literacy, etc.
- What are these “complex issues” that this type of work involves?
- Politicians and deciders should also have access to training about violent radicalization.

New Recommendations Suggested by Participants

- Make sure to have an evaluation model for your work on intervention and prevention.
- Independent evaluation is desirable to counteract potential bias of evaluating programs' success by those who administer them, but 'independent' requires clarification—there are potential issues with either 'academic' evaluation or evaluation by another governmental body. There is also the issue of resources—any independent evaluation may be costly and divert resources from addressing the program major goals. Some reasonable compromise is needed here.
- Capacity building should be universal, not limited to a particular problem.
- Conduct “gap map” analysis.
- Create and support professional networks.
- Rely more on multidisciplinary teams.

Final Recommendations

- Researchers and practitioners may benefit from reframing primary and secondary prevention programs from a public health perspective. Clearly, such programs are not designed to prevent an attack from occurring, but rather to reduce the risk, on the mid- to long-run, that an individual may engage on a path towards violent radicalization.
- Prevention programs based on surveillance or intelligence gathering (e.g., censorship programs in universities or hotlines to report “suspicious activity”) should be avoided, as they appear counterproductive (i.e., they cause more harms than benefits).
- Primary and secondary prevention programs should not arbitrarily target any specific gender, cultural, religious, or ethnic group. This does not mean that programs should not be tailored for a specific audience. Rather, programs should avoid stigmatizing groups by assuming that membership of any of the above groups constitutes a risk factor for involvement in violent extremism. Programs must, however, be age appropriate.
- Programs must be tailored for local contexts. The state of the available evidence makes it impossible to generalize the results of prevention programs developed in one context to another location.
- Programs must include an evaluation model from the commencement of the program. Stronger data and evaluation studies of primary and secondary PVE programs are urgently needed, and future programs need to evaluate implementation, adaptation, and outcomes.
- Programs need to reduce bias in the assessment and reporting of outcomes by engaging independent evaluation teams with minimal conflicts of interest.
- The lack of prevention programs towards violent radicalization and extremism from the far left, far right, anti-government, and/or single issue is in stark contrast with the prevalence of such phenomenon in many regions around the globe. Such programs should be designed, implemented, and evaluated in areas where these forms of violent extremism exist.
- A successful program may become harmful if handled without due sensitivity. Practitioners should therefore be adequately trained to deal with the complex issues that this type of work involves, including risk assessment, case management and follow-up, cultural sensitivity, and the supervision of group dynamics in group-based programs.

Conclusion, and what's next?

We want to thank the participants for being part of this structured, motivating, and necessary process to improve our understanding and ability to counter violent radicalization and extremism.

The CPN-PREV team has finalized the synthesis of expert feedback, which has been used to review the recommendations. Some recommendations were deleted, some were reworded, and others were clarified with additional details. Following this revision, CPN-PREV will launch the Delphi process for systematic reviews 1 and 2 in the fall of 2019. The objective is to build consensus- and evidence-based best practice guidelines. Consensus will be built across a number of online surveys and video-conference meetings involving all members of the CCGC and ICGC (not only those present at the workshop).

In these surveys, experts will be asked if they agree or disagree with each updated or new recommendation, and, if not, how to modify them accordingly. Then, we will integrate this feedback and start another round of review, until adequate consensus is reached.

On behalf of the CPN-PREV team, we would like to express our gratitude for the precious contributions of the CCGC and ICGC experts in this first worldwide scientific effort.