

DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES: INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

A guide to deradicalisation programmes, setting out the types of interventions in operation, the methods they use, and how to evaluate their effects.



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KEY POINTS

- Deradicalisation programmes aim to prevent ongoing engagement in violent extremism and are an expanding feature of counter-terrorism work.
- Interventions use a range of methods including mentoring, engagement with ideological or theological issues, help into employment and education, and social and psychological support.
- Programmes which offer a comprehensive range of activities tailored to the individual are better able to address the complex and diverse needs of those involved in violent extremism.
- Partnership working between third sector organisations and statutory bodies is increasingly common and enables a more holistic approach.
- There are very few publicly available evaluations of deradicalisation interventions which makes determining what works difficult.
- Effective programme design and evaluation is supported by developing a ‘theory of change’ which explains how a programme’s methods relate to its aims and outcomes.
- More work is needed to define the aims of deradicalisation programmes and identify specific measures by which progress might be assessed.

WHAT ARE DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES?

Efforts to move people away from violent extremism have been in place for several decades. As well as traditional counter-terrorism approaches focused on interdiction and arrest, in the past, countries such as Italy and Spain provided amnesties and inducements to encourage people to disengage from militancy.

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In the early 2000s, there was a shift in focus and intervention programmes began to try and change the ideas and attitudes believed to be associated with violent extremism. Some of the earliest initiatives were developed in the Middle East and South East Asia. Since then,

deradicalisation programmes have become an increasingly important part of counter-terrorism efforts across the world.

Deradicalisation programmes seek to address the ideological, social, and personal issues that led someone to become involved in violent extremism. Their aim is to support the move away from terrorism in order to protect the public, reduce the risk of reengaging in violent extremism, and enable the individual to pursue a more positive future.

Deradicalisation programmes are targeted at those convicted of terrorism or people assessed to be meaningfully involved in violent extremism. These interventions are distinct from other areas of Countering Violent Extremism focused on earlier stages of the radicalisation process.

Deradicalisation programmes are often described as tertiary interventions which seek to prevent ongoing involvement in militancy. This is in contrast to primary interventions which aim to prevent radicalisation by increasing awareness about violent extremism and addressing ‘root causes’, or secondary interventions focused on those considered at risk of engaging in violent extremism.



DEFINITIONS

- Deradicalisation is a term commonly used to describe attitudinal and ideological change associated with a reduced commitment to extremism.
- Disengagement refers to behavioural change connected with the move away from extremism.
- Reintegration is focused on broader social, political, and economic involvement with wider society.

WHAT METHODS DO TERTIARY INTERVENTIONS USE?

Decades of work with non-politically motivated offenders has identified a series of factors which are associated with a reduced risk of reoffending. This knowledge informs the design and selection of activities to rehabilitate offenders. However, the evidence base about those factors associated with reengagement in violent extremism is still developing. Consequently, tertiary interventions with violent extremists have often evolved without an evidence-based account of how a programme's methods relate to its aims and outcomes.

Frameworks which link aims, methods, and outcomes are known as theories of change (ToC). These can inform programme design and determine whether interventions are effective. ToCs are now considered an important feature of deradicalisation work.

Depending on how well developed the programme is, tertiary interventions can combine one or more of the following activities: efforts to address ideological or theological issues; one-to-one mentoring; psychological support for those traumatised by violence or with mental health issues; improving the individual's socio-economic situation, for example through employment; developing skills through education or training; delivering sports and recreational activities; or supplying wider social support, for instance to his or her family.

Some activities are part of standard criminal justice interventions. Others, for example relating to theology, are specific to those involved in violent extremism. A number of intervention programmes rely heavily on one or two methods, often centred on the use of a mentor, whilst others employ a more comprehensive range of activities. Together, interventions try to address the reasons someone became involved in

extremism and provide support to help him or her pursue a positive future.

Because of the diversity of people who become involved in violent extremism, current good practice tailors the intervention to the individual. Ideally, the intervention is informed by an assessment which identifies specific risks or needs and selects the most appropriate methods by which to address them.

Ongoing assessment is important as the programme may need to adjust to take account of an individual's changing needs and priorities. Further refinement of tertiary interventions is now necessary to learn which methods are effective, on what factors, for which kinds of individual, under what circumstances.



KEY POINTS

- Interventions able to offer a comprehensive range of activities can better address the diverse needs of those who become involved in violent extremism.
- Taking an individualised, holistic approach helps ensure that interventions are appropriately tailored.
- Ongoing assessment of progress ensures the intervention remains responsive to the individual's evolving needs.
- Developing a theory of change which specifies how an intervention's methods relate to its aims and outcomes helps inform effective programme design and evaluation.

WHO DELIVERS TERTIARY INTERVENTIONS?

Interventions are typically delivered in the context of the criminal justice system and are commonly led by statutory bodies such as the prison or probation services. However, partnership working with third sector organisations or representatives from faith communities is not uncommon. The capacity to deliver this work differs depending on a country's experience of militancy, government priorities, and available resources.

Where tertiary interventions are delivered varies and is informed by the characteristics of the country's criminal justice system and the type of individual the programme is engaged with. Some interventions, for instance in the Philippines, are delivered primarily in prison. In other cases, such as Saudi Arabia, there are dedicated rehabilitation centres, whilst countries like the Netherlands work with offenders in the community after they have been released from prison on licence. Voluntary engagement with intervention programmes is preferable, but in many cases, involvement is mandated.

Third sector organisations are often involved in delivering interventions. These organisations can connect individuals to new social networks through their links to the community. They can also provide mentors who work on a one-to-one basis to address personal, ideological or theological issues, and provide individualised support around the reintegration process.

Ensuring non-statutory bodies have the necessary expertise and organisational resilience to deliver this work sustainably is key. Governments can play an important role in building the capacity of third sector organisations in this area.

Non-statutory partners are typically supported by the government. Nevertheless, their relative independence can enable them to engage with individuals more effectively. Third sector organisations and mentors are more effective when they are perceived to be legitimate and credible. Legitimacy is often informed by the organisation's relationship to the community, for example if they have a history of public service. Credibility can come from their knowledge or experience.

Many mentors have expertise in theology or ideology or have themselves been involved in extremism. More work needs to be done to know what makes an effective mentor, and how to match mentors and mentees appropriately.



KEY POINTS

- Partnership working between statutory and third sector organisations can enable a more holistic intervention programme.
- Third sector groups often need support to develop the organisational capacity to deliver this work sustainably.
- A better understanding of what makes mentoring effective is needed.
- Encouraging voluntary engagement with tertiary interventions is preferable to mandatory involvement.
- The most comprehensive programmes combine work in the prison setting with interventions delivered following the individual's release into the community.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF TERTIARY INTERVENTIONS

Assessing the impact of tertiary interventions is challenging. There is limited evidence about what supports positive change, which makes it difficult to determine if an intervention's approach is likely to be successful.

Further challenges revolve around determining what success looks like and identifying the most appropriate outcome measures. These issues are compounded by the dynamic nature of risk which demands a flexible and ongoing process of assessment and review.

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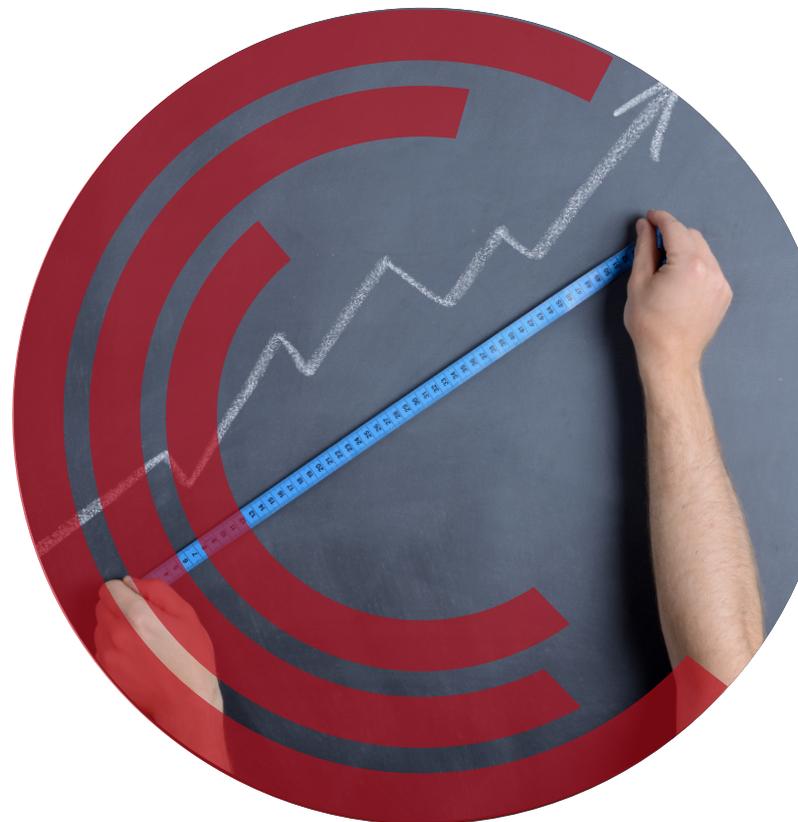
The diverse nature of the experiences, pathways, and motivations of those involved in violent extremism makes developing broadly applicable evaluation measures a complex task.

Measures such as reengagement with an extremist network or reoffending are useful but are less able to interpret the change process. There are also few reliable recidivism rates for terrorism offenders to compare such figures against. Equally, tolerance for reoffending by violent extremists is lower than for other offenders which impacts how success is judged.

Outcomes such as deradicalisation, which focuses on ideological change, or disengagement,

which describes behavioural change, can be useful. However, these remain relatively broad measures. Deradicalisation can be difficult to assess and more work needs to be done to learn what informs this process. Breaking down deradicalisation and disengagement processes to identify and test specific criteria by which to interpret change will enable a more nuanced assessment of what works. A better understanding of the relative importance of deradicalisation for successful long-term reintegration is also needed.

Outcome measures have been developed which try to interpret individual level change across a number of domains. It is common to assess measures of risk believed to be linked to reoffending, such as commitment to violence, or dehumanising the enemy.



Alongside risk, it is important to consider the presence and strength of protective factors such as family support. Broader measures of social reintegration, for example into pro-social networks or through community volunteering, or economic integration into the workforce, are also helpful in developing a more holistic understanding of progress.

As well as interpreting outcomes, it is important to assess the process by which interventions are delivered. Process evaluations examine how the intervention is developed and delivered. They assess the structure of the programme to understand the evidence that underpins it and assess how well its methods relate to the outcomes it seeks to promote. Process evaluations can also determine whether the organisation delivering the intervention has the necessary expertise, legitimacy, capacity, and support.

A challenge to assessing sustainable change is the unpredictable impact of external events, such as political conflict, which can alter the risk of reengagement in a short space of time.

More work is needed to understand why people reengage with militancy after a period of disengagement. There is also much to learn about voluntary disengagement that takes place away from formal interventions.

Understanding this will help to ensure interventions support the natural disengagement process effectively. It is also important to recognise that those with a history of violent extremism face significant barriers to reintegration, including stigma, family trauma, and difficulty finding employment. These should be taken into account when assessing the likelihood of a successful outcome.



KEY POINTS

- More evidence is needed to understand what supports positive outcomes and determine how progress might be assessed.
- Clearly conceptualising what tertiary interventions are seeking to achieve is vital to effective evaluation.
- A comprehensive evaluation strategy includes process and outcome assessments which are informed by an evidence-based theory of change.
- The ongoing development and refinement of comprehensive, empirically validated, risk and reintegration assessment tools is a priority.
- An individualised approach to assessment, which monitors change at different stages of an intervention will provide a more detailed understanding of progress.
- Intervention programmes should include a monitoring and evaluation framework, and where possible, evaluations should be made publicly available.
- Recidivism rates for extremist offenders should be interpreted in the context of wider reoffending rates, accompanied by a well thought out approach to identifying and communicating what a realistic outcome might be.
- The significant barriers facing those moving away from violent extremism should be taken into account when designing interventions and assessing their impact.

FURTHER READING

For further reading see our two guides on Countering Violent Extremism.

The first is an introductory guide to CVE initiatives, setting out the types of interventions and methods they use. This introductory guide can be found at following address: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/countering-violent-extremism/

The second guide, CVE II: A Guide to Good Practice, provides an overview of what best practice in CVE should look like, giving examples that help explain the need for an evidence-based theory of change, as well as targeting, delivery and evaluation. This guide can be found: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/countering-violent-extremism-two/

To see all current CREST resources on CVE:
www.crestresearch.ac.uk/tag/CVE



READ MORE

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