BEHAVIOURAL-FOCUSED PROTECTIVE SECURITY PROGRAMMES

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INTRODUCTION

Crowded places continue to be significant targets for terrorists. Worldwide, terrorist attacks have shifted away from disruptive attacks on critical infrastructure assets toward sites where large numbers of people transit or congregate in an effort to maximise potential casualties.

Due to the high footfall and accessibility of locations such as transport hubs, retail centres or entertainment venues, the use of individual screening methods, such as those used in airports, is typically considered impractical. The diverse range of possible targets, and the increasing use of low-tech attack methods means it is difficult for security and law enforcement personnel alone to monitor and detect developing threats.

Public vigilance is seen to play an increasingly important role in protecting crowded places from terrorist attacks. Authorities routinely encourage civilians to monitor their surroundings for things out of place or out of the ordinary. Public announcements stress the need to report suspicious behaviour, such as hostile reconnaissance of potential targets and unattended items. The aim is to deter or detect potential attackers in order to prevent or mitigate harm.

Several high-profile campaigns have been implemented across the world. 'See it. Say it. Sorted', for example, has been used in France, the USA, Denmark, the UK and Japan. However, there has been little evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategic communication campaigns and understanding about what motivates people to report suspicious behaviours is weak. Campaigns to encourage vigilance also face considerable challenges. Communicating the severity of the threat whilst not unnecessarily increasing public fear or overwhelming authorities with spurious reports can be a difficult balance to strike. There is also the risk that sharing too much information might inform attack planning.

KEY POINTS

The evidence base for behavioural-focused protective security programmes is extremely shallow. The vast majority of research is descriptive with little evaluation of the effectiveness of existing campaigns or 'what works' in encouraging ordinary citizens to be vigilant against, and report, potential terrorism-related activities in public spaces. However, there is more evidence on barriers and motivations for reporting:

- Research on the motivations and barriers for public reporting of suspicious behaviours linked to terrorism – broadly defined as anything that appears out of place, or unusual so that it could reasonably be considered indicative of pre-operational attack planning – is limited. The most common barriers to reporting are the fear of retribution and concerns over getting an innocent person into trouble.

- Reporting barriers vary by gender and age. Younger and female reporters are more strongly dissuaded by fear of retaliation than older males.

- Clearly explaining that reports will be taken seriously increases the effectiveness of public messaging

campaigns which aim to encourage people to report terrorism-related suspicions that indicate hostile intent, for example relating to reconnaissance or attack planning.

- Airport passengers report feeling safer when they are aware of the opportunities to report suspicious behaviour and know who to contact if they see a suspicious item or have concerns about a fellow passenger.

- Younger airport users are as likely to notice suspicious activities at the airport as older passengers, but less likely to report these concerns to airport staff.

- Retail outlets located within or near mass transportation hubs have a role to play in maintaining security because members of the public view them as a means of reporting potential threats. Staff should be trained to respond appropriately to ensure that information reaches transport and security officials.

- Even pre-school age children can be taught to identify and report unsafe packages based on their physical characteristics and location and can retain this capacity for weeks after training.

- Terrorist decision-making when carrying out or preparing attacks is poorly understood, as is the effectiveness of deterrence by denial, an approach that seeks to demonstrate the low likelihood that an attack will succeed.

The emphasis in the Full Report is on academic literature from 2017 onwards, however due to the extremely limited research in this area, it draws from work published outside this period and grey literature. It also includes work from comparable fields, including studies relating to general criminality. To supplement the limited research, four studies are the subject of more detailed analysis.

The report is in two parts; the first focuses on public reporting and bystanders' motivations or barriers for doing so. Part two examines how hostile actors perceive and experience security measures. It is important to understand protective security from both perspectives to understand its effectiveness.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Executive Summary comes from the Full Report from the project *Knowledge Management Across the Four Counter-Terrorism 'Ps'*. You can find the Full Report *here*.