Secondary Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Interventions: A Rapid Review of the Literature

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OVERVIEW

This guide examines the evidence base underpinning countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions working with individuals perceived to be at risk of radicalisation, commonly known as secondary CVE interventions (Elshimi, 2020). The guide seeks to identify relevant lessons for the UK context by reviewing empirical research conducted in the UK, as well as research conducted in other countries in Europe, North America, and Australasia.

METHODOLOGY

This report builds on a previous CREST report that explored contemporary research relating to CVE interventions more broadly (i.e. primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions) (Lewis & Marsden, 2021). The evidence cited in this report draws from that previous research and studies identified through literature searches conducted in June 2022. Searches included forward and backward citation searches of relevant studies cited in our previous report, and of other review articles (e.g. Bellasio et al., 2018; Pistone et al., 2019; Cherney, De Rooy & Eggins, 2021; Hassan et al., 2021a; 2021b), and searches in Google Scholar and PsycNet. In focusing on the most contemporary research, this guide primarily examines literature published between January 2017 and June 2022. Earlier studies are referenced where relevant.
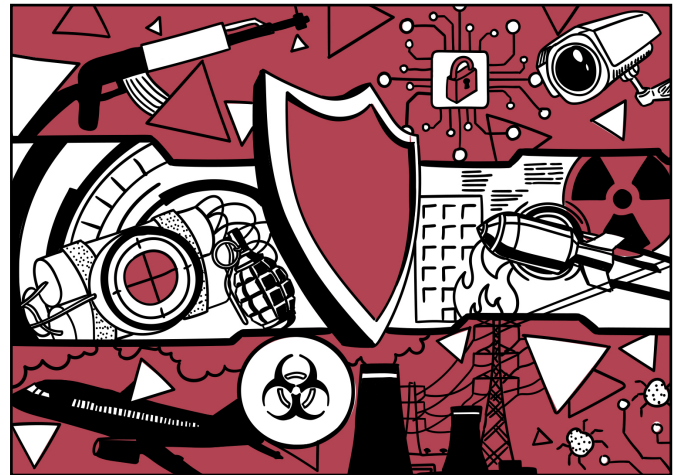
STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS IN THE UK

There remains a notable evidence gap relating to the use of secondary CVE interventions in the UK. Only six relevant, robust studies were identified: five peer-reviewed studies drawn from three research projects that focused on Channel, and one study that examined the experiences of Prevent police officers. One further study which included interviews with CVE stakeholders in the UK as part of a broader analysis of interventions across Europe was also identified. Whilst these studies provide useful insights from practitioners, robust evidence relating to experiences of individuals supported by interventions in the UK is lacking.

More anecdotal evidence relating to the experiences of intervention clients, as well as practitioners and community organisations working within Prevent, was also identified through the literature searches. Although these sources are referenced in this guide where relevant, they are not discussed in any detail as they are based on anecdotal data/ and or descriptive accounts.

SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Research conducted in other countries has examined interventions using comparable case management models to Channel. The strength of this research varies across different countries. The most robust evidence on case management interventions is found in Australia. Whilst rigorous evaluations of interventions in other countries are lacking, six studies have been published that examine data from evaluations of PRISM and 'Intervention 1 and 2' (Cherney & Belton; 2020; 2021a; 2021b; Cherney, 2018; 2020; 2022). These evaluations are notable as they draw on client-level data, although such data is not presented in every published study.

A small number of studies have explored the development and/or implementation of case management programmes in different countries. This research provides useful insights into processes of intervention design and delivery, as well as some of the key challenges that case management approaches might face. However, it is not possible to comment on the effectiveness of these interventions based on the evidence presented in these studies.

The largest body of research explores individually tailored approaches that are not explicitly defined as case management interventions, but which align with the core principles of case management models. This research provides useful insights into ways of working that are believed to contribute to positive outcomes, particularly those related to building relationships and motivating clients. However, robust impact evaluations of client-oriented interventions are largely absent.

Several relevant interventions that engage families and peer groups when working with clients were also identified. The evidence base underpinning these interventions is not yet robust. However, a small number of relevant interventions have been subject to a preliminary evaluation, and have reported positive results, and are therefore discussed in this guide.

KEY FINDINGS

SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS IN THE UK

Robust empirical research into secondary interventions in the UK – including the UK's Channel programme – is lacking. Research into Channel identifies useful insights relating to client assessment, and intervention design and delivery, although this evidence cannot yet be considered robust due to the small sample sizes. Key insights include:

- Client assessment is a subjective process. Practitioners have pointed to subjectivity in the process by which individuals are referred to Channel, and in decision-making around whether to adopt an individual as a Channel case.

- Practitioner feedback on using the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) to inform risk assessment and case adoption decisions is mixed. Gill and Marchment's (2022) process evaluation suggested that practitioners find the 22 factors contained within the VAF to be useful for assessing risk, and see the use of a standardised risk assessment tool as important for informing their decision-making. However, practitioners argued that the VAF needs to be more user friendly, and suggested a number of improvements – including reviewing and re-sorting the 22 factors; and adding sections to capture summary conclusions, to link risk assessments to management plans, and to record significant changes between assessments. More research is required to understand practitioners' needs in relation to risk assessment tools.

- Practitioners cite the ability to tailor interventions to the needs of individual clients as a key strength of Channel. Practitioners may use formal (e.g.,

psychological counselling) and informal (e.g., less structured sessions) methods to support clients, depending on their needs.

• A number of potential challenges have been identified by practitioners. These include questions over the quality assurance when employing intervention providers, and the potential difficulties of maintaining credibility with clients and communities.

It is not yet possible to comment on the effectiveness of Channel. The experiences of individuals supported through Channel are under-researched, and research exploring the individual and community-level impacts of the programme is lacking.

More research is needed to understand the potential unintended consequences of Channel. Whilst the potential consequences of being incorrectly referred to Channel have been widely discussed, empirical evidence relating to these effects is lacking. Similarly, research has yet to explore whether being supported through Channel produces any unintended consequences.

INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS IN OTHER CONTEXTS

A number of secondary interventions operating in other countries use comparable case management models to Channel. Similarities include tailoring support to the needs of the individual client, and the use of multi-agency approaches.

A range of other interventions tailor their content to individual clients. Whilst not explicitly underpinned by case management models, interventions such as France's CPDSI intervention, alongside a range of approaches in other European countries, are tailored to each client.

The evidence base relating to these secondary interventions is mixed. The research relating to some case management interventions – particularly those operating in Australia – is stronger than for Channel. However,

much of the relevant research in other countries suffers from the same limitations as research on UK provision.

KEY INSIGHTS INCLUDE:

• Practitioners elsewhere in Europe align with those in the UK in pointing to the subjectivity of assessing risk. Whilst a variety of risk assessment tools may be used to support these assessments, they are not used consistently within or across countries.

• The adoption rates of most programmes are unclear. Only one identified study cited a specific figure based on a small caseload of 15 referrals.

• Motivating clients to engage with voluntary programmes can be challenging and time-consuming. There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that secondary programmes benefit from being mandated, whilst practitioners working across different countries have expressed a preference for voluntary approaches.

• Practitioners emphasise the importance of tailoring interventions to individual clients. This may expand beyond simply tailoring the specific forms of support offered, and involve taking the client's own perspective about their circumstances into account.

• Trust between practitioners and their clients is considered a key component of intervention effectiveness. A range of different rapport building techniques may be used to foster these trusting relationships.

• More research is needed to understand how multi-agency working arrangements operate in practice. A key area for future inquiry relates to the potential challenges of collaboration between the police and other sectors.

• The effectiveness of current approaches is unclear. Results from the limited number of evaluations published to date are generally positive, but the evidence base is not yet robust.

- A number of evaluation challenges can be identified. These include a lack of clarity around what success 'looks like'; the fact that intervention goals often vary across individual clients; and the absence of clearly defined theories of change.

SECONDARY INTERVENTIONS WORKING WITH PEERS AND FAMILIES

The evidence base underpinning interventions that formally engage with family members and peer groups is not yet robust. However, positive engagement with family members and peer groups is often identified as a core component of long-term intervention success.

A number of promising approaches to working with and in communities are reflected in the evidence base. Particularly notable approaches include the Tolerance Project, an educational intervention in Sweden, and mediated dialogue approaches that have been trialled in the UK.

Informal peer support has been identified as potentially impactful in the secondary prevention space. Research in Scandinavia in particular has pointed to the positive effects that interventions from peers might have on interrupting radicalisation processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LEARNING FROM OTHER CONTEXTS

Case management approaches used in other contexts are directly comparable to Channel. Whilst the effectiveness of most interventions remains unclear, Channel appears to align with some of the good practices (as defined by practitioners) identified in other countries in that it:

- Tailors the support to individual clients;
- Is offered on a voluntary basis; and
- Uses a multi-agency approach.

A range of methods identified in other countries may in turn be transferable to the UK context, although more research is needed to understand the potential applicability of such methods:

- It may be beneficial to integrate socio-ecological models of prevention into current practice in order to support the identification of risk and/ or protective factors existing in an individual's broader social environment.

  a. Socio-ecological models may provide the foundation for identifying community- and family-level sources of resilience that might be utilised to support intervention outcomes.

  b. These models may in turn provide a foundation for more explicitly integrating engagement with family members and peers into intervention plans.

  c. Specific approaches that could be used to embed socio-ecological models into interventions might include adapting client assessment tools to better capture risk and protective factors existing at the social and ecological level; adapting case planning tools to ensure that intervention plans consider how best to mitigate risk factors and/or harness protective factors existing at the socio-ecological level; and training practitioners to consider the intersection between different levels of analysis – for example, encouraging practitioners to consider how changes in someone's social ecological context might influence individual-level risk factors; and more formally integrating peer, community and familial engagement into case management plans where relevant.

- Motivational techniques are likely to be important in encouraging individuals to agree to participate in, and engage fully with the support delivered through voluntary interventions. Less formal types of support have the potential to be particularly impactful in this regard.

- Case management approaches in other countries appear to place less emphasis on ideological interventions than in the UK. However, programmes such as France's CPDSI intervention illustrate how tackling the underlying, individualised factors that

motivate each client's engagement with extremist ideology – as opposed to focusing heavily on challenging the content of their extremist beliefs – may be important.

- Models for facilitating multi-agency working – most notably the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) – could be used to evaluate and inform the processes of multi-agency collaboration that underpin Channel.

Future evaluations of Channel could potentially learn from evaluations of international case management interventions, most notably Cherney and Belton's (2021a; 2021b) evaluations of PRISM and Interventions 1 and 2 in Australia. The data used to evaluate these interventions – case notes and results from risk assessments – could also be used to evaluate Channel provision.

EVIDENCE GAPS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

KEY AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH TO ADDRESS IDENTIFIED EVIDENCE GAPS WILL INCLUDE:

- Impact evaluations of existing interventions, including Channel.

- Process evaluations of existing interventions to capture, for example, how risk assessment tools are used in practice; how multi-agency working arrangements operate in practice; and how the impacts of interventions are assessed and captured.

- Research exploring the experiences of individuals supported through secondary interventions, including any unintended consequences of such support, as well as the potential unintended consequences of inappropriate referrals to interventions.

- Research testing the assumptions underpinning socio-ecological models of prevention.

- Evaluation studies examining the impact of family, community, and peer-led interventions on radicalisation processes.

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