

An Evidence Review of Strategies Targeting Youth Who Have Radicalised to Violent Extremism

Adrian Cherney^{a1}, Kathleen De Rooy^b, Ryan Williams^c

^aProfessor, School of Social Science, University of Queensland, ^bPhD Candidate, School of Social Science, University of Queensland, ^cSenior Lecturer, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, University of Queensland

Abstract

This paper reviews strategies and approaches aimed at assisting and rehabilitating youth who have been imprisoned for terrorist offences or identified as at risk of radicalisation, due to their behaviours and associations. The paper reports results from a review of evidence across radicalisation studies, the CVE academic and grey literature, and data collected from a small number of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), who work in youth CVE. The aim was to identify effective approaches, as well as issues and challenges that need to be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE) amongst youth. While it was found that evidence around youth CVE is limited in scope in relation to identifying what works, there were some consistent and overlapping findings across the sources of evidence in relation to youth intervention design and delivery. This included the importance placed on family involvement and participation in an intervention; that rapport building with youth and youth work approaches are essential when engaging radicalised youth; that interventions must be trauma informed and develop empathy and perspective taking; that interventions must be developmentally appropriate and include informal forms of engagement involving non-clinical and non-vocational/educational activities; that interventions must be transparent in how they operate and rely on multi-agency responses; that the evaluation of youth interventions need to focus on measuring a variety of cognitive and behavioural outcomes, including outcomes not necessarily related to reductions in specific offending/problematic behaviours; and that program evaluation of youth interventions need to assess change relating to psychopathology deficits and risks that have an impact on problematic behaviour.

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Introduction

Youth radicalisation has become an issue of increasing concern internationally, with countries implementing programs targeting youth who have committed terrorist offences and those identified as at risk of radicalisation (Baracosa & March, 2022; Bronsard, Cherney &

¹ Corresponding Author Contact: Adrian Cherney, Professor, School of Social Science, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4072, + 61 7 3365 6663, a.cherney@uq.edu.au, ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1114-7046>

Vermeulen, 2022). Like the broader field of countering violent extremism (CVE), little is currently known about the effectiveness of various youth specific approaches, with few interventions having been evaluated (Bronsard, Cherney & Vermeulen, 2022). Moreover, intervening with at risk or radicalised youth presents its own unique challenges that can be different to adults. This can include developmental and psychopathology deficits and challenges unique to young people (Baracosa & March, 2022; Beelmann, 2021; Campelo et al., 2022; Cherney, 2020; Duits, Alberda & Kempes, 2022; Koehler, 2020). Scholars argue that these youth related risk factors and vulnerabilities need to be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth CVE programs (Beelmann, 2021; Bronsard et al., 2022; Campelo et al., 2022; Cherney, 2020).

This paper provides results from research aimed at reviewing and collating existing evidence and research on youth CVE programs to identify what works. It also aimed to identify any specific issues and challenges that need to be considered in the implementation and evaluation of CVE programs aimed at rehabilitating youth convicted of terrorist offences or intervening with those identified as at risk of radicalisation. When using the term youth or young person, we are encompassing children and adolescences –individuals 18 years and younger. We used this parameter when searching for youth related studies. We now outline our method, then provide a summary of our results and conclude by identifying consistent findings relating to intervention design, implementation and evaluation.

Method

Three stages of investigation underpin this research. Due to space limitations relating to word length, results from only two phases are reported here. A third phase included examining evidence on youth interventions across mental health, substance abuse and violent and sexual offender to identify effective strategies of behavioural change and lessons for youth CVE interventions. These results are not reported here. Here we summarise results from the CVE academic and grey literature review and interviews with a small number of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the CVE field.

Review method for youth CVE programming

Phase 1 adopted a rapid review of international academic literature that pertained to CVE rehabilitation and reintegration interventions targeting youths convicted of terrorism and youths identified as at risk of violent extremism. This included both prison and community-based interventions. Seven databases were used to conduct searches for eligible studies: Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, Australian Criminology Database (CINCH), Criminal Justice Abstracts, the Campbell Collaboration and Directory of Open Access Journals. This aspect of the rapid review specifically aimed to identify and analyse the available evidence on youth CVE interventions.

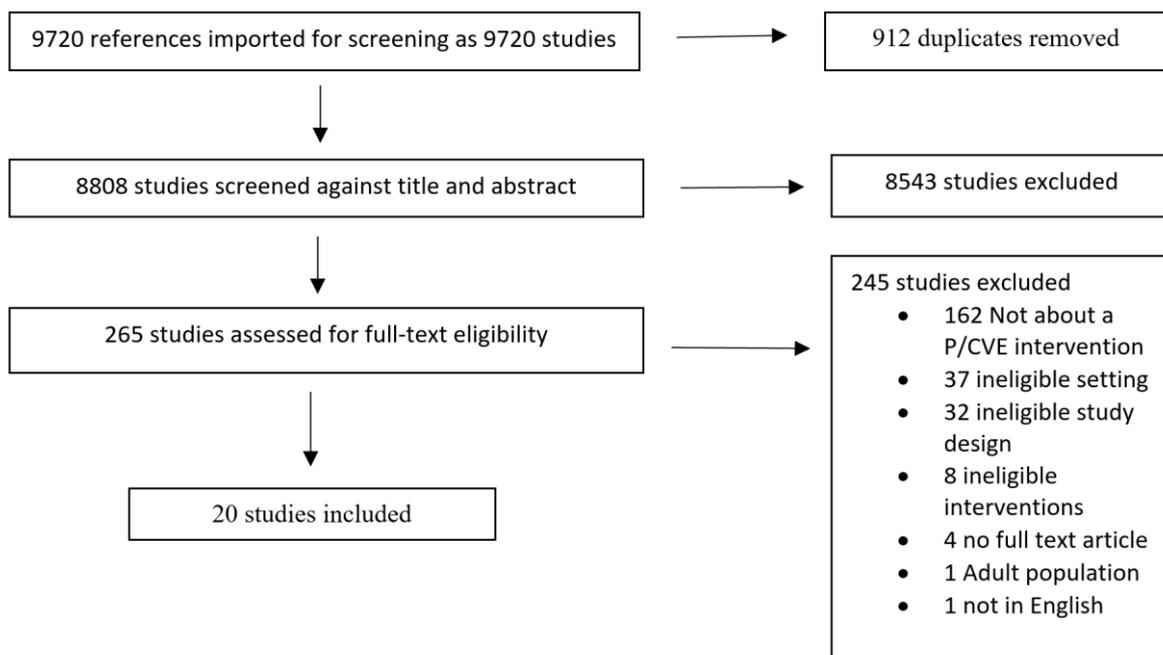
Phase 1 involved searching databases using a predefined search string comprised of the key words devised by the research team (see Appendix A). All search results were exported into EndNote and then imported into a system called Covidence, a systematic review software for managing large amounts of material and which allows researchers to undertake title and abstract screening and full text review (see <https://www.covidence.org/>). To guide the review, minimise bias, and ensure feasibility, a set of protocols was developed for phase 1 that guided the inclusion of documents in the synthesis of evidence. The key criteria were:

- documents were published between January 2000 and March 2022;
- publications were written in English;
- publications pertained to youth radicalisation;
- offenders may have been detained in prison, other custodial settings, within the community (e.g., probation or parole), or in the re-entry phase;²
- publications reported on an impact evaluation of an eligible youth intervention based in a custodial or community setting, delivered by government agencies or NGOs;
- publications evaluated an intervention's impact on reintegration, rehabilitation, effects on behavioural or cognitive change of young people; and
- publications focused on the problem and causes of youth radicalisation, and also identified specific implications for intervention design.

² Hence, we did not include social media campaigns as part of our settings for inclusion.

The rapid review process included three stages of screening. The first stage used title and abstract screening. Stage two focused on determining if the source material contained an evaluation of a youth focused intervention or canvassed youth radicalisation empirically or theoretically. Stage four included full-text eligibility screening that determined eligibility based on youth participation and eligible populations, intervention design, participants and any identified outcomes for intervention design and evaluation. Eligible studies were then coded and synthesised for review. Manual searches for recently published CVE literature were also conducted. A total of 20 studies were identified as eligible for review in this project (see Diagram 1). When it came to the selection of actual evaluation studies, we did not limit our review to one type of evaluation methodology (similar to McBride et al., 2022).

Diagram 1 – Flow chart of screening and study exclusion/inclusion



A grey literature search provided access to sources otherwise inaccessible through publication databases. Our search included grey literature from websites of agencies, government departments, and professional organisations which focus on radicalisation. Nineteen websites and agencies were identified from existing grey literature sources (Mazerolle et al., 2020, Zych and Nasaescu, 2021), researcher expertise, and manual internet searches. Individual websites were searched to meet broad criteria for inclusion (*youth, *radicalisation OR radicalization), yielding 1884 results. These results were manually reviewed, and inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Sources were included if they had an empirical foundation, best practice/integrity guidelines and/or evaluation metrics. Sources were excluded if they were government policy documents and reports without empirical evidence, blogs, news items, conference proceedings, roundtables, testimonials, memorandum, and minutes from subcommittees. Websites that archived research otherwise available through publication databases were also excluded from the grey literature search (e.g., National Criminal Justice Reference Service and Radicalisationresearch.org). The majority of sources were excluded with only 20 sources meeting the inclusion criteria (see Appendix A for source locations).

Subject Matter Expert Interview Method

To compliment the evidence review, interviews were also conducted with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the CVE field on perceived best practice in youth rehabilitation programs targeting violent extremists. The aim was to compliment the findings from the review of existing academic and grey literature and draw insights from practitioner experience to further ground the body of evidence that was reviewed. This phase was cleared by the University of Queensland Low and Negligible Risk (LNR) Ethics Committee and followed standard informed consent procedures relating to respondent anonymity and confidentiality (LNR clearance 2022/HE000065). Respondents were recruited through the authors contacts and via contacting agencies directly identified through web searches. A total of 20 potential respondents were contacted via email of which 6 agreed to be interviewed and comprised two international respondents, one from Austria who worked in the area of youth work and also managed a youth centre program that included targeting youth who had radicalised, another

from Germany, who conducted research on CVE and also worked in a counter-radicalisation program. The remaining four respondents were Australian state-based practitioners who were involved in the implementation of interventions targeting youth who had radicalised or had been convicted of terrorist offences. This modest number was a result of the unique and existing small number of experts with youth specific experience relating to radicalisation and intervention work. However, the small respondent sample is a limitation. Interviews were undertaken via zoom or Microsoft teams.

The SME interview data was analysed via thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011), across the five research questions below. A simple thematic approach to the coding of the interview data was adopted where answers were divided under the main themes reflected in each question. While this involved the use of predetermined codes as reflected in each interview question (e.g., design, implementation, and evaluation), this is best described as involving a mix of deductive and inductive coding. The main focus was to identifying consistencies across the interview data. Due to budgetary and time constraints the first author was the only person to undertake the coding of the interview data. This needs to be acknowledged as a limitation because it presents a possible source of bias, as no test for intercoder reliability was undertaken. The SME interviews focused on the following five key themes:

1. How should youth rehabilitation and intervention be different from adult CVE interventions?
2. In relation to program design, are there any issues/processes that should be considered when developing youth specific interventions?
3. In relation to program implementation, are there any issues/processes that need to be considered when implementing youth specific interventions?
4. In relation to evaluation, are there any issues/processes that should be considered when developing youth specific interventions?
5. Are there unique skills, training, or knowledge needed in interventions with radicalised youth?

Results

Academic research literature

To understand the significance of youth CVE interventions and programming, this review examined 20 articles from the academic literature screened through systematic review protocols. As stated, few studies were identified that involved an evaluation of youth CVE interventions and no study was identified that formally evaluated an intervention targeting youth convicted of terrorism. Only one paper specifically focused on engaging and intervening with radicalisation youth in detention (i.e., Barracosa & March, 2022). Eight studies in the academic literature described or reported on an existing intervention and canvassed youth programs that can best be described as forms of primary prevention - that is focusing on youth more generally than those already showing attitudes and behaviours in support of violent extremism. The remaining studies covered risks and vulnerabilities and drew conclusions about intervening with youth.

What appears effective

The importance of dialogue was a significant theme among the reviewed articles. The literature emphasised that interventions should focus on improving communication and raising awareness to create safe, respectful environments for discussion. This can provide youth with the space to freely ask questions, share their views and have their thought processes challenged (Cifuentes et al., 2013; Stephens et al., 2021). To achieve positive social impact Aiello et al. (2018) emphasises four core elements underlying a dialogical approach: providing guidance to explore radical messages, dialogue that rejects violence and is egalitarian (people get an equal say), and relationships built on trust (Aiello et al., 2018). Soler-Gallart (2017) further emphasised that youth should engage in dialogic-based action which fosters critical thinking about the rejection of violence. Programs which offer opportunities for dialogue and interaction with ethnically diverse groups were assessed to be effective in reducing anxiety towards out-groups, strengthening empathy amongst youth, and encouraging perspective taking (see Jugl et al., 2020).

The theme of relationships and social connections is another important topic in the literature, particularly in relation to the role of schools, peers, and family members in reforming extremist youth. For example, school and the family environment can become an important context where early signs of radicalisation become evident. Non-violent peers and family networks are regarded as key actors in countering such processes, as they can intervene before youth become too invested in extremist messages (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022.; Koehler, 2020). Meringolo et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of peer relationships in effectively countering violent radicalisation. Ellefsen & Sandberg (2022) determined that informal interventions by family members can play a decisive role in interrupting radicalisation.

Holistic multi-agency approaches were emphasised in the literature. The involvement of health and educational professionals is recommended in youth CVE, along with training on violent radicalisation amongst specialists (Bourgeois-Guérin et al., 2021). Multidisciplinary teams (incorporating psychologists, social workers and community members) are seen as good practice (Ellis et al., 2020). Strengthening and maintaining community ties – relevant to youth in detention - enables radicalised youth to maintain positive relations with family and peers who can also provide assistance (Cifuentes et al., 2013). The management of radicalisation risk is enhanced by engaging with professionals, community and family members, the latter identified as being a protective factor against youth radicalisation (Weine et al., 2009). However, it is vital that when involving family members in CVE work, it is argued that they are not perceived as colluding with authorities or other partners, as this can undermine the trust relationship they have with their child who is participating in an intervention (Ellefsen & Safberg, 2022).

Addressing a sense of belonging is identified as an important part of youth CVE (Ghosh, 2015; Puigvert et al., 2020). For example, a Canadian intervention targeting children in schools, termed the Ethics and Religious culture (ERC) program offered youths opportunities to explore their religious and cultural heritage, whilst also learning about other religions and cultures. This learning process is argued as assisting youth in strengthening a positive sense of identity and self-concept (Ghosh, 2018). Feddes et al. (2015) study on the impact of resilience training on adolescent attitudes toward ideological-based violence and

violent intentions, found that developing empathy and perspective taking can reduce sympathy and support for violent extremism. Stephens et al., (2021) states that interventions which aim to increase empathy can help shape attitudes towards ideological-based violence. Glaser (2016) argues that in the case of de-radicalising girls attracted to right-wing extremist ideologies, their racist views need to be confronted and empathy developed towards outgroups. Ghosh (2018) stated youth programs should encourage youth to exercise critical judgement. This theme of promoting perspective taking about other viewpoints (e.g., victims) and groups (e.g., racial/minority groups) is a significant theme in the literature. For example, the U.K. Think Project is a targeted intervention program which aims to educate youth about race, religion, and migration, delivering tailored workshops to challenge racism and refute stereotypes (Cifuentes et al., 2013). Such activities can even extend to educating youth on citizenship, democracy and democratic values (Feddes et al., 2019). The assumption is that instilling such values can increase trust in the political system, which then promotes resilience against radicalisation (Meringolo et al., 2019). Ghosh (2018) argues that offering opportunities to learn about religions and cultures through critical thinking and dialogical learning, assists youth in becoming independent, informed thinkers and helps build resilience against extremist messaging. Ways of improving youth resilience against violent extremism is also emphasised in the literature. One suggested approach is through sport. One Australian study indicated that engaging youth in sport can contribute to community resilience, increase civic participation of socially marginalised youth, and thus help to reduce the likelihood of them associating with groups engaged in violent extremism (Grossman, Johns & McDonald, 2014).

Implementation and Evaluation

No articles were found that specifically addressed the topic of evaluating youth CVE interventions. In the context of implementing youth CVE interventions, it is recommended that youth referred into programs have a clear understanding of what information will be shared with law enforcement, to ensure that trust in the program is maintained (Ellis et al., 2020). This is crucial to transparency and trust in intervention staff. Interventions need to be tailored to the relevant risk factors applicable to the developmental stages of each young

client (Barracosa & March, 2021; Cherney, 2020). Such considerations will moderate which youth are suitable to participate in a program and the type of support provided, and shape expectations around levels of client participation and engagement. Methods for identifying at risk radicalised youth should avoid the simple ranking of individual indicators on risk-assessment measures and instead be driven by a holistic approach, incorporating factors related to psychosocial and developmental vulnerability (Barracosa & March, 2021). To prevent the stigmatisation and labelling of youth, it is important to minimise the risk of inappropriate assessments, and rely on indicators which are evidence based and take account of a range of vulnerabilities (Barracosa & March, 2021; Bourgeois-Guérin et al., 2021)

The limited existing literature on the topic of implementation points to the need for multi-disciplinary team responses to underpin interventions and the involvement of community members (Barracosa & March, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020). Also, it is advised that youth CVE programs should be part of a broad suite of assistance that focuses on strengthening protective factors against extremism and re-establish trustworthy relationships that have potentially been lost amongst youth who have radicalised (Cherney, 2020; Koehler, 2020).

Barracosa and March (2021) highlight concerns surrounding the capacity of frontline staff to identify risk factors, thus concluding it is important that program providers are educated on the criminogenic, developmental, and psychosocial vulnerabilities associated with youth violent extremism. The skills and capacities of intervention providers to influence client change is a key theme in the literature (Cifuentes et al., 2013). Having a range of staff from diverse backgrounds is advocated as demonstrating to young clients that people from different backgrounds can work together (Cifuentes et al., 2013). Staff should understand a client's extremist ideology. For example, theological expertise and an understanding of Islam in the context of intervening with Muslims who have radicalised is recommended as important (Ellis et al., 2020).

Grey literature results

Two web-based toolkits identified in the grey literature search were targeted at practitioners and included evaluation methods and case studies. One toolkit from the Radicalisation Awareness Network included 14 examples (case studies) of best practice from 2020 that were subject to peer review.³ A second, web-based, toolkit was developed by Impact Europe and included an evaluation guide for designing and evaluating CVE initiatives and an interventions database.⁴ The toolkit included a collection of 69 interventions of case studies identified as having a supportive evidence base. However, the database at the time of consultation provided only incomplete information and no information on the specific evaluation methods used that would allow for independent appraisal. In summary this grey literature highlighted the following:

- The need for evaluation to be built into the development of initiatives and to incorporate an understanding of desired outcomes, stakeholders and theories of change (Winterbotham, 2020; Weine et al. 2018; Lauland et al. 2019).
- No youth specific violent extremist risk assessment tool currently exists. A review by the Department of Homeland Security (2017) of risk assessment tools identified the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY), as potentially applicable to youth,⁵ but this is targeted at general youth violence rather than ideologically motivated violence.
- Youth CVE should adhere to principles that (1) avoid simplistic equations of youth vulnerabilities as a predictor of violent extremism and take a holistic evidence-based approach when assessing risk and resilience factors (Wallner, 2018); (2) avoid adopting a highly securitized view of youth; (3) engage youth as partners and utilize

³ Seven of these best practices related to youth: Athena-syntax Where Art and Education Meet, Intercultural education through the subject 'Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region' (CSHR), Managing Controversy, Exit work located within the social space, Open Youth Work as a Methodology preventing and countering Extremism, Advice Centre Hesse, and Swedish method of working with formers in Exit work. See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/collection-inspiring-practices/expert-review_en

⁴ <http://www.impact.itti.com.pl/index#/home>

⁵ See Borum, R., Lodewijks, H. P., Bartel, P. A., & Forth, A. E. (2020). The structured assessment of violence risk in youth (SAVRY). In Randy Borum, Henny P.B. Lodewijks, Patrick A. Bartel, Adelle E. Forth (ed) *Handbook of violence risk assessment* (pp. 438-461). Routledge.

empowerment strategies (Mathiason and Hollister, 2020); and (4) develop interventions that are locally integrated, led by community partners and based on individual needs (Wallner 2020, 2021; Mathiason & Hollister, 2020).

- Strengthening good governance through training, oversight mechanisms, and human rights education for all partners is identified as critical to youth CVE. One issue identified is that workplace pressures and organisational priorities (e.g., within prisons) can undermine adherence to human rights principles when working with youth. It is identified that staff training that includes the language of human rights and support for staff can have a bearing on rehabilitation and reintegration efforts (Mathiason & Hollister, 2020).
- Educational initiatives should take a student-centred learning approach (Wallner 2020; Nash et al., 2017, 2018) and can facilitate youth empowerment and inclusion through discussing controversial and difficult issues (Nash et al., 2018). Educational initiatives need to occur across different settings (Nash et al., 2017, 2018) and with local practitioners (Mathiason and Hollister, 2020). This includes working with families and community leaders and adopting a gender sensitive approach (Mathiason and Hollister, 2020). Education can develop youth awareness of their rights and responsibilities and provide youth with access to democratic means to redress inequality and unfairness (Fedotov, 2019).
- While mentoring is often identified as a key type of intervention in youth CVE work, the overall level of evidence in support of mentoring as effective is weak (Winterbotham, 2020). In an assessment of mentorship interventions Winterbotham (2020) concludes that, (1) multi-agency cooperation is often lacking; (2) mentoring is often limited to young Muslims and should be broadened across different types of violent extremist ideologies; and (3) that mentorship schemes should be part of wider investments in positive youth development and enhancing their life skills.
- Youth CVE initiatives need to comprise multi-disciplinary teams including professionals from mental health, public health, religious, education, and law enforcement (Weine et al., 2015).

- A handbook by the UNODC advocates sport as playing an important role in CVE programs. Sport is recognized as creating opportunities to build resilience, promote social inclusion, and present opportunities to educate and empower individuals. However, evidence in support of the effectiveness of sport in reducing violent extremism is identified as lacking (UNODC, 2020).
- CVE strategies targeting youth should not simply comprise activities focused on formal learning i.e., they involve structured, deliberate, and formalised learning processes such as training, education, and psychological assistance. They should also include activities focused on non-formal, unstructured learning, where there is less of an emphasis on addressing risks, vulnerabilities and deficits, and more on relationship building and enjoyment, which can help youth process the problems that led to their radicalisation (Prinzjakowitsch, 2018).
- A RAN working paper (2017) identifies the principles and practice of youth work as particularly relevant to addressing youth radicalisation. The promise of youthwork is identified as originating in its ability to address radicalisation risk at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. This comprises equipping young people with general life skills (primary), tackling emerging extremist attitudes (secondary) and changing behaviours of youth already involved in violent extremist groups (tertiary) (RAN, 2017).

Subject Matter Expert Interviews

In this section the results from the SMEs are presented. As noted, six SME interviews were conducted. The interviews range from 30-45 minutes revolving around five questions. There is not the space in this paper to provide in-depth verbatim quotes, instead a summarised condensed description of key consistent points raised by interviewees is provided in response to the interview questions (see above for these interview questions). To help navigate these various points we first provide a summary of the main broad themes raised in each subsection.

Should youth rehabilitation and CVE interventions be different?

While overwhelmingly SMEs reflected that youth CVE is not significantly different compared to dealing with adults, there were some unique considerations raised to ensure interventions were tailored to youth needs and vulnerabilities and family members. Key points made include the following:

- The consensus was that youth CVE interventions will be different in some ways to adult programs, but the guiding frameworks do not vary with strategies that are aiming to replace “*one coping mechanism with another coping mechanism*” (SME 2).
- Engaging youth in CVE will draw on traditional youth work approaches, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), systemic family therapy (SFT) and typical case management support.
- Some radicalised youth will have a long history of interactions with youth services and other government agencies (e.g., child protection, education departments, and human services) due to their complex vulnerabilities. It is important to understand how these agencies operate and not to “*use language that will alarm different partners*” (SME 6) e.g., teachers, youth/social worker, or case managers. CVE can be seen as an unwarranted addition, and it needs to be communicated that CVE has something additional to contribute to the myriad of support already provided.
- Compared to adults an important factor is to ensure that youth CVE schemes take account of developmental considerations and that programs are developmentally appropriate. Such considerations include accommodating variations in youth executive functioning, emotional developmental, and possible neurodevelopmental issues (impact of autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).
- Interventions need to be trauma informed and recognise that the experiences and meaning of trauma can vary for youth from different socio-economic backgrounds (see also below training results).
- Youth who have radicalised are at a developmental stage where there is greater scope to shape decisions and behaviours. However, there are challenges if they are socialised into extremism early in their life by immediate and extended family members and

friends. This means there can be less opportunity and scope to work with them to limit their exposure to such social environments. This can be compounded by the fact there may be a limited number of options relating to alternative social ties, or an established history of work and educational achievement.

- Interventions need to also focus on informal engagements, and engaging youth through activities they find appealing and enjoyable.
- Interventions should aim to develop emotional insights through motivational interviewing.
- Assistance should involve helping youth to organise daily routines and manage their daily living, which will have a bearing on their capacity to engage in an intervention.
- Interventions must provide youth with resources to cope with setbacks and stressors occurring in their lives e.g., parents divorcing or deteriorations in relationships with significant others such as partners or friends.
- Youth are at an important stage in their lives where they are trying to assert control over their identity. Assistance needs to give youth a sense of mastery over their identity formation and a sense of purpose in life, and not dictate the process or direction.
- Family involvement is critical to the success of youth CVE interventions. This includes family members acting as an important information source in helping to collate information on their child's background and how developmental experiences have shaped their child. Family members are also essential to monitoring client progress and as a source for client motivation.
- Programs need to provide support to family members so they can assist their son or daughter in achieving intervention goals.
- Family counselling should be an essential part of youth CVE.
- It needs to be recognised that having a child charged for a terrorism offence and seeing them progress through the court system can be traumatic for family members.
- In some cases, family support needs to be provided when a youth incarcerated for a terrorist offence transitions from youth justice into the adult correctional system.

Parents need to be made aware of expectations in relation to levels of engagement, support and security procedures that will differ between these systems.

What issues should be considered in program design?

A range of logistical issues were raised by SMEs when it came to designing youth CVE interventions and revolved around the themes of planning, setting parameters for intervening, intake processes and engaging external partners. This included the following:

- Youth CVE programs need to have clearly defined aims.
- Engaging youth in CVE can raise legal issues around consent, age of responsibility and intervention providers need to be aware of whether they can legally approach or engage children or adolescents.
- Programs need to have clearly defined target groups relating to age.
- There needs to be clearly defined procedures for referral and intake.
- Intake procedures for interventions must identify the degree of radicalisation to assess the appropriateness of referral, but to also understand the drivers of radicalisation and if intervention is required.
- Risk assessments tools e.g., VERA 2R should be used to inform the development of intervention plans and case reviews. They should be used alongside a variety of assessment tools designed for youth.
- There should be procedures for case review that involve independent scrutiny of client management and progress.
- Some ideological factors may influence the level to which a radicalised youth engages and reacts to staff (e.g., staff who are female or of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds).
- Interventions need to incorporate pluralistic elements that will have a variety of components addressing lifestyle, mental health, problem solving, emotional regulation, and education achievement. This requires a network of service providers.
- Youth CVE needs to focus on how to compliment services and add value, given youth who are vulnerable to radicalisation may already be receiving assistance e.g., from

child services, so the aim should not be to duplicate, but enhance support. This means that the training of other service providers about violent extremism and its links to youth behaviours is an essential part of youth CVE.

- When an intervention involves support for a youth and their family members, it is important to have separate counselling processes that strategically align with each other. While these services have the same goal, there should not be any conflict of interest in relation to information provision or confidentiality.
- Program planning needs to include protocols for data access to inform case assessment and review, given data can be spread across number of systems and agencies that is not always made accessible to intervention staff.

What issues should be considered in program implementation?

A range of implementation challenges were raised by the SMEs which mainly related to taking account of factors that influence the degree of youth engagement with intervention staff and demonstrations of behavioural change. These issues incorporated the following:

- When directly engaging with radicalised youth, consideration needs to be given to how environmental factors, such as family functioning and school participation, might be influencing client change and progress.
- It needs to be acknowledged that parents may be a source of a child's radicalisation and can be resistant to their child's participation in a CVE program. The benefits of participation need to be explained and there should be a focus on motivating parents to also engage openly. In some cases, parental consent may be provided but later withdrawn due to suspicions about the program and its relationship to security/policing agencies.
- When engaging youth, practitioners need to consider their history of contact with authorities e.g., police, how this might shape levels of engagement with a governmental CVE program.
- Programs need to operate in a transparent manner and staff need to clarify their roles and responsibilities. For example, responsibilities if a youth is presenting a significant

risk of self-harm or reports the commission of a criminal offence. If this does not occur and an incident is reported to relevant authorities, then this can impact on the level of trust between a client and staff member and influence the disclosure of sensitive information.

- Youth CVE interventions need to be independent from police and security agencies.
- The development of relationships of trust with youth and building rapport is essential to engaging youth in an intervention. This means the focus of engagements should not be on the offence that led to their referral, but asking about broader domains in a youth's life and their aspirations.
- Staff need to be creative - also applicable to development of client trust – in how they engage youth. This requires acknowledge about a youth's personal interests (music, sport, leisure) and drawing on activities that align with those interests.
- Supports cannot simply focus on psychological assistance or vocational/educational goals. It may also be relevant to include ant-racist messages and geopolitical education.
- While instructive, violent extremist risk assessment tools have limitations in being informative for case planning and decisions relating to the selection of individual supports. They can be useful in assessing client eligibility and if a client presents too high a risk to be managed by intervention staff.
- Program implementation needs to include helping existing service providers to better understand the nature of the extremist thinking, how it might shape attitudes and behaviour, and how case planning can contribute to decreasing ideological beliefs.

What issues should be considered in program evaluation?

All SMEs highlighted the challenges in evaluating youth CVE interventions, with the consensus being that evaluation needed to capture a range of measures. When evaluating youth CVE interventions, the reported experience was that:

- For some types of activities and supports program outcomes can be more intangible, e.g., informal support provided by a youth worker being a non-judgmental listener and engaging a young client in dialogue about personal struggles and problems.
- Direct reductions in levels of violent extremism can be impossible to measure. Evaluations should not define outcomes in the context of compliance to legal orders, terrorism convictions, recidivism, or national security concerns.
- Evaluation will not necessarily be able to capture changes in ideological beliefs, but rather assess improvements around child and adolescent vulnerabilities and developmental challenges – focusing of whether these areas have improved which will then help to generate changes in extremist beliefs that were previously on display.
- Indicators of change and metrics need to look at a mix of outcomes which may be highly individualised. For example, individualised progress might encompass such behaviours as a at-risk youth who has been assessed as having low self-esteem, building his/her confidence to look for a job or volunteering to do public speaking at their school or a community centre.
- Metrics need to include changes in behaviours related to schooling and indicators of improvements in social integration such school attendance, engaging with other peers, participating in sporting activities, and decreases in violent tendencies.
- Evaluation should include measures of the number of supports that are in place that were not previously available to a client, and how well that a person is engaging with those supports.

What skills and knowledge are important?

It was emphasised that when engaging radicalised youth, staff and partners need a range of skills and knowledge (some unique to youth) that were identified as essential in encouraging behavioural change and connecting with youth clients. This included the following suggestions:

- Social media literacy is important when it comes to understanding youth radicalisation. This includes knowledge and training on the types of materials youth

are engaging with online and how it is packaged to be appealing, and nature of the platforms that youth are accessing.

- Knowledge of the influence of trauma is relevant to youth pathways into and away from violent extremism. This includes the types of trauma youth can experience and how this can be different from traditional definitions of trauma and can vary for youth. For example, failing to achieve at school or get a job, fighting with their parents, falling out with peers, these experiences can all be traumatic for youth and shape behaviour. Clients might experience trauma because they have failed to do something well or achieve a goal in the context of an intervention. Informing agency partners about how trauma varies and breaking down assumptions about trauma and what it constitutes, is an important part of training and capacity building.
- Staff need to be able to manage client resistance and various ruptures / setbacks that youth may experience and that are a part of adolescence.
- Staff need to be skilled in relationship building, which is important in sustaining client participation. This includes building rapport with family members. For example, parents may suddenly withdraw support for their son or daughter being involved in an intervention. However, this could be the result of undisclosed issues or problems in the family home, which will only be revealed if a trusting relationship has been developed with a case manager.
- It is important not to overrate the significance of theological counselling - e.g., for Muslim youth - with some youth uninterested in engaging in theological debates or with religious texts.

Conclusion

This research set out to identify strategies and approaches that are effective in assisting and rehabilitating youth who have been imprisoned for terrorist offences or identified as at risk of radicalisation due to their behaviours and associations. To do this, we reviewed a wide evidence-base. Like much research on CVE (e.g., see McBride et al., 2022; Morrison et al., 2021), we found that the evidence around youth CVE is limited in scope in relation to

identifying what works. Few studies have set out to evaluate specific interventions and those that have are of varying methodological quality (see McBride et al., 2022). We identified several key documents within the grey literature that make recommendations on engaging youth in CVE, but explicit evidence in support of the effectiveness of various approaches is lacking. In conjunction with our evidence review of the literature, the SME results point to several key approaches and considerations derived from practitioner experience. It must be acknowledged though there are limitations in the evidence-base that was drawn on (relating to quality and scientific rigor) and, in the methodology adopted, including the small number of interviews conducted with subject matter experts, which raises limitations relating to the generalisability of findings. One gap is that despite the recognition that the internet and engagement of social media is an important source of influence on radicalised youth (Hassan et al., 2018, Turner, et al., 2022) there was a lack of evidence on youth specific interventions. While our concern here was on interventions involving the direct engagement of youth compared to those occurring in on-line environments, there is an overall need to invest more on the evaluation of youth specific interventions. Hence while we need to be cautious to conclude our study has identified what works, the results provide some general guidelines and directions for youth CVE, that help improve the chance of program success and the task of implementation and evaluation.

Despite the diversity of evidence investigated and the varying quality of that evidence, several consistent and overlapping findings and themes are evident. For example, within both the CVE academic and grey literature, importance is placed on family involvement and participation in an intervention, with this also emphasised by the SMEs. It is valid to conclude that family participation is linked to program effectiveness. Therapies such as CBT, assistance with developing empathy, and cognitive development are consistently raised as viable in generating behaviour change across our data sources. Rapport building with youth and youth work approaches were also consistently identified as essential, as well as interventions being trauma informed. Professional training in intervention design and delivery, and on behavioural drivers were identified as essential to effective program delivery. Across the data sources there is also a focus on ensuring programs are developmentally appropriate and that expectations about client change need to take account of developmental capacities. Informal

forms of engagement involving non-clinical and non-vocational/educational activities are identified as essential to program impacts. When it comes to program design there was the consistent finding relating to the need for interventions to be transparent in how they operate. The utilisation of multi-agency responses was a consistent finding. In relation to the task of program evaluation, the challenges of demonstrating cause and effect in relation to the direct impact of an intervention on youth behaviours is evident. The need to draw on a variety of outcome measures was highlighted, with metrics needing to focus on measuring a variety of cognitive and behaviour outcomes. Some of these outcomes may not necessarily be directly related to reductions in specific offending behaviours. They will also be concerned with change relating to psychopathology deficits and risks that have a compounding impact on criminal offending and problematic behaviour.

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Appendix A

Youth P/CVE academic literature key work search terms:

(youth* OR young* OR adolesc* OR child* OR teen* OR juven* OR minor*) AND (“violent extremi*” OR radicali* OR extremi* OR terror* OR terrori* indoctrinat*)

Table 2 - Grey Literature sites and sources:

Type		Country	Website Search results yield *youth *radicalisation OR radicalization	Policy focussed	Empirical (if no: reports, blogs, conferences, roundtables, testimonials, memorandum, subcommittees)	Publications indexed	Peer reviewed	Evaluation metrics	Best practice / integrity guidelines
Government	National Criminal Justice Reference Service ⁶	US	109	No	No	Yes	--	--	--
Government	Public Safety Canada ⁷	Canada	4	Yes	--	--	--	--	--
Independent	Hedayah ⁸	UAE	63	No	No	--	--	--	--
Government	Department of Homeland Security ⁹	US	48	Yes	Yes (3)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Independent	Institute for Strategic Dialogue ¹⁰	Transnational	43	Yes	No	--	--	--	--
Government	Youth Justice Board	UK	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Research	Radicalisation Research ¹¹	UK	62	No	Yes	Yes	--	--	--
Independent	Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) ¹²	UK	51	Yes	Yes (3)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Research	National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) ¹³	US	82	Yes	Yes (1)	No	No	--	Yes
EU	Impact Europe ¹⁴	EU	n/a	--	Yes (1)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Independent	RAND ¹⁵	Transnational	58	Yes	Yes (3)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Government	Australian Federal Government	AU	n/a	Yes	No	--	--	--	--
EU	Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) ¹⁶	EU	n/a	Yes	Yes (3)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
EU	Council of Europe ¹⁷	EU	102	No	No	--	--	--	--
Transnational	UNESCO digital library ¹⁸	Transnational	386	Yes	Yes (3)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Transnational	UNODC	Transnational	449	Yes	Yes (2)	--	--	--	--
Transnational	Global Centre on Cooperative Security ¹⁹	Transnational	41	Yes	No	--	--	--	--
Transnational	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ²⁰	Transnational	334	Yes	No	--	--	--	--
Transnational	Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF)	Transnational	52	Yes	No	--	--	--	--
19			1884		20				

⁶ <https://www.ojp.gov/>

⁷ <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/>

⁸ <https://hedayah.com/>

⁹ <https://www.dhs.gov/>

¹⁰ <https://www.isdglobal.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.radicalisationresearch.org/>

¹² <https://rusi.org/>

¹³ <https://www.start.umd.edu/>

¹⁴ <http://www.impact.itti.com.pl/index#/home>

¹⁵ <https://www.rand.org/>

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran_en

¹⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal>

¹⁸ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/home>

¹⁹ <https://www.globalcenter.org/>

²⁰ <https://www.osce.org/>

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