
Systematic Review on the Outcomes of Tertiary Prevention Programs in the Field of Violent Radicalization

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Abstract

In the last decade, growing concerns about radicalized violence have led governments to make important efforts and invest significant sums of money in developing programs to prevent violent extremism (PVE). Despite these efforts, current knowledge regarding best practices in prevention remains disparate, and the effectiveness of practices used at present has not yet been clearly established. This is especially true for tertiary prevention programs, i.e., those that aim to “deradicalize” and/or disengage individuals from extremist groups and reintegrate them into society. To address this knowledge gap, we conducted a systematic review of the literature published up to 2019 to identify “what works” in tertiary PVE programming. Of the 11,836 studies generated from the searches in this review, 17 were eligible, as they included a sufficiently robust empirical evaluation of a tertiary prevention initiative using primary data. Narrative synthesis of the reviewed studies suggested that deradicalization interventions were harder to implement and less effective on average than disengagement/social reintegration interventions. This was echoed in the intervention modules that were most often described as successful: education, vocational training, and socialization components were preferred to religious education modules or online interventions purposed to challenge violent radical ideologies. The delivery of programs was facilitated by following the risk, needs, and responsivity principles of effective correctional intervention, as well as adequate training of practitioners, cooperation between the staff, good therapeutic alliance, complementary psychological counseling, and involving prosocial family members in the intervention. However, these conclusions rely on studies with substantial methodological limitations that hinder one’s confidence in their results. A screening of studies published between 2020 and 2024 was conducted and largely replicated the conclusions reported herein.

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Introduction

In the last two decades, growing concerns about extremist violence have led governments to make important efforts and invest significant sums of money in developing programs aimed at

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preventing and countering violent radicalization and extremism.² This has been supported by a variety of actors and organizations outside the traditional national security sphere, including mental health, education, and community sectors. The inclusion of new approaches, strategies, and stakeholders has led to an unprecedented shift in prevention—a field which, until then, was dominated primarily by traditional security approaches and often led by intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Despite the efforts and investments, current knowledge regarding best practices in PVE remains disparate (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). In recent years, literature reviews of the available evidence have noted that, while results are promising, they are based on studies of inconsistent methodological quality that generally fail to identify which program components or interventions have the most positive impact (Baruch et al., 2018; Bellasio et al., 2018; Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; Christmann, 2012; Feddes & Gallucci, 2015; Gielen, 2019; Hassan et al., 2023; Hirschi & Widmer, 2012; Romaniuk, 2015; Silke et al., 2021).

The above-mentioned is especially true in the case of tertiary prevention programs, i.e., those that aim to deradicalize individuals, disengage them from extremist groups, and reintegrate them into society. Implementing these programs has been an important goal of security-related public policies in most Western countries. In 2010, Horgan and Braddock concluded that a) no systematic effort had been made to analyze such programs or initiatives; b) there were no explicit criteria for what was considered a successful outcome; and c) despite the widely publicized success of these programs by certain governments, little data existed that could independently corroborate this success. In a 2016 literature review, Mastroe and Szmania identified 17 studies that empirically evaluated the effects of disengagement or deradicalization programs and reached conclusions that were not far from those of Horgan and Braddock (2010), particularly in relation to the trustworthiness of the reported data and the lack of consensus regarding the effectiveness of the programs. Indeed, many studies claim

² The distinction between preventing violent extremism (PVE) and countering violent extremism (CVE) is not always obvious. Efforts to counter violent extremism could fall under the umbrella of prevention depending on the author and situation, and vice versa. Because of that, authors tend to use both terms interchangeably or combine them (PVE/CVE). We agree with the suggestion of colleagues that the literature might be better served by classifying efforts to fight violent radicalization and extremism in terms of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Koehler, 2020). Therefore, in the current report, the term PVE will be used to represent both preventing and countering violent extremism, as well as all levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary).

to be “evaluations” despite not meeting the basic standards expected of such types of studies (Koehler, 2017; Silke, 2001). This is a serious issue because the implementation of prevention programs, without adequate knowledge about their potential outcomes and impact, may ultimately be counterproductive, stigmatizing, and lead to greater harms than benefits (Koehler, 2017; Romaniuk, 2015). However, since then, the body of literature on the impacts of tertiary PVE programs has become clearer, as systematic reviews have started to compile and synthesize data, offering a more structured and comprehensive perspective on the issue.

Existing Systematic Reviews of Tertiary PVE Programs

Even though literature reviews on PVE programs have multiplied in recent years (e.g., Davies, 2018; Holmer et al., 2018; Kudlacek et al., 2017; Radicalisation Awareness Network [RAN], 2019; Samuel, 2018; Stephens et al., 2021), many of them are simply summaries of publications and/or descriptions of research around a common theme, have used ad hoc methods, tend to be selective by necessity, and, thus, can be considered subjective and susceptible to bias (Jackson, 1980). To reduce potential biases, several systematic reviews on PVE programs have been published since 2010 (e.g., Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; Carthy et al., 2020; Christmann, 2012; Lewis et al., 2024; Madriaza et al., 2021; Madriaza & Ponsot, 2015; Taylor & Soni, 2017). Despite such a significant number of reviews, only three have specifically attempted to explore tertiary prevention programs: McBride et al. (2022), Silke et al. (2021), and Zeuthen (2021). The remainder focused mostly on primary or secondary prevention programs (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; Carthy et al., 2020; Christmann, 2012; Jugl et al., 2021; Madriaza et al., 2021; Sydes et al., 2023; Taylor & Soni, 2017) or did not allow the reader to determine the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs (Madriaza & Ponsot, 2015).

Zeuthen’s (2021) systematic review found 15 studies that met the (undisclosed) predetermined inclusion criteria, placing a special emphasis on gray literature. However, it had a limited number of keywords and used few databases, which could explain the surprisingly low number of records found in their search ($n = 1,448$). Furthermore, the method for appraising the quality of studies was not clearly described, apart from indicating that the evaluation was done “according to the robustness of research or evaluation

methodology” (Zeuthen, 2021, p. 46). A clear method for appraising the quality of studies is paramount for systematic reviews, as it enables a) the weighting of conclusions according to the quality of evidence on which they rely, b) the exclusion of studies of excessively unreliable quality, and c) to criticize the methodological advancement of the field in order to suggest avenues for future research. Therefore, even though Zeuthen’s (2021) study constitutes a novel and worthwhile effort in aggregating evidence on tertiary PVE programs, it also comprises several methodological limitations that could be improved upon.

Silke et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of manuscripts on disengagement and deradicalization published between 2017 and 2020. They then carried out a thematic analysis of the 29 retained articles in order to identify the major factors and pathways leading to disengagement. Their systematic review is thorough and methodologically sound, as each eligible article was screened for methodological rigor before being included. The result is an empirically informed model of disengagement based on various catalysts: family/friends, programs, prison time, help from former extremists, and disillusionment/stress/burnout from extremist movements. However, the authors only included recently published articles, potentially discarding earlier important findings in the field. Furthermore, their main goal being to extract a theoretical model, they did not specifically look at the reported effectiveness or negative side effects of interventions, limiting our ability to identify “what works” in tertiary PVE programming and how to avoid problematic or stigmatizing practices.

McBride et al. (2023) employed state-of-the-art Campbell Collaboration methods for their systematic review. However, their study focused on documenting evaluation methods rather than providing guidelines for practice. Although unquestionably valuable, this makes their review more fit for purpose for researchers than for practitioners.

Finally, even though it is not a systematic review specifically centered on the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs, Lewis et al.’s (2024) contribution has to be mentioned. This systematic review provides a thorough examination of case management tools and approaches used in programs designed to counter radicalization to violence. The findings highlight that while case management tools, such as risk and needs assessments, multi-agency collaboration, and client monitoring, are widely used in PVE efforts, their effectiveness remains largely untested due to a lack of rigorous outcome evaluations. Instead, the review

identifies factors that influence implementation, such as organizational structures, practitioner expertise, political pressures, and resource constraints. Additionally, it explores how case management processes, including assessment and intervention planning, vary across different stages of client engagement. However, despite its exhaustive scope, the review is more focused on case management processes—such as how interventions are structured, implemented, and evaluated—rather than on measuring their actual impact in preventing violent extremism. While it provides valuable insights into implementation challenges and best practices, it does not establish whether specific case management strategies lead to reduced radicalization or recidivism.

Objectives

In sum, currently available literature and systematic reviews of tertiary PVE programs have methodological limitations or remain restricted in scope, particularly when it comes to identifying best practice guidelines. To address this knowledge gap and proactively contribute to the knowledge base, we conducted a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of tertiary prevention programs in the field of violent radicalization. The goals of our systematic review were as follows: a) to describe the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs in terms of reducing the risk of violent radicalization; b) to identify specific program modalities associated with a higher chance of success or failure for the targeted populations; and c) to assess the quality of the literature in order to identify knowledge gaps and studies that should be given more (or less) weight in the interpretation of results.

The review aimed to provide a reliable, trusted, and valid knowledge base for the development of evidence-based guidelines that would speak to practitioners, researchers, and deciders from multiple sectors. As such, the review integrated evidence on the following: right-wing, extreme-left, religious-based, and “single-issue” (e.g., misogyny) violent radicalization and benefits/harms, costs, transferability, and community-related implementation issues when mentioned by the authors.

Methods

The systematic search strategy was guided by the Campbell Collaboration guidelines, particularly during the bibliographic search and manuscript selection phases of our systematic review. However, as the Campbell Collaboration guidelines are primarily designed for intervention reviews involving quantitative summaries (e.g., meta-analyses), certain aspects of the data extraction, analysis, and reporting processes were adapted to align with the state of PVE literature. These adjustments were necessary due to the qualitative nature of approximately half of the included studies and the substantial variability in outcome measures, which precluded meta-analysis. Accordingly, the following steps were undertaken.

Step 1: Develop the Logic Model and Formulate Key Questions

1.1: Develop the Logic Model

A logic model is a summary diagram that maps out a target population in conjunction with an intervention and its anticipated outcomes (Baxter et al., 2014). Logic models are considered best practices in program evaluation studies, as they uncover theories of change. That is, they inform the processes of how and why an intervention succeeds, fails, or leads to a given outcome (Weiss, 1998). They also document the links between short-, middle-, long-term, and final outcomes, both expected and unexpected (Pottie et al., 2011; Rogers, 2008). Logic models are also increasingly integrated into systematic review methodology, particularly reviews of program evaluation studies, as can be seen in Campbell Collaboration review methods. In this context, logic models have numerous advantages: a) they enable the identification of the target population; b) they help to operationalize key definitions; c) they help to posit links between concepts and variables; d) they enable the formulation of the main review questions; e) they structure the search strategy, codification of studies, and analysis of evidence; f) they frame the interpretation of evidence; g) they support guideline development based on evidence-based best practices; and h) they help to identify gaps in the literature and future research priorities (Anderson et al., 2011; Pottie et al., 2011). In summary, logic models have the potential to make systematic reviews and the recommendations they generate

more transparent to decision makers (Anderson et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2012). With the precision of analyses they offer, systematic reviews based on logic models of intervention help move conclusions beyond the often repeated “More evidence is needed” (Baxter et al., 2014).

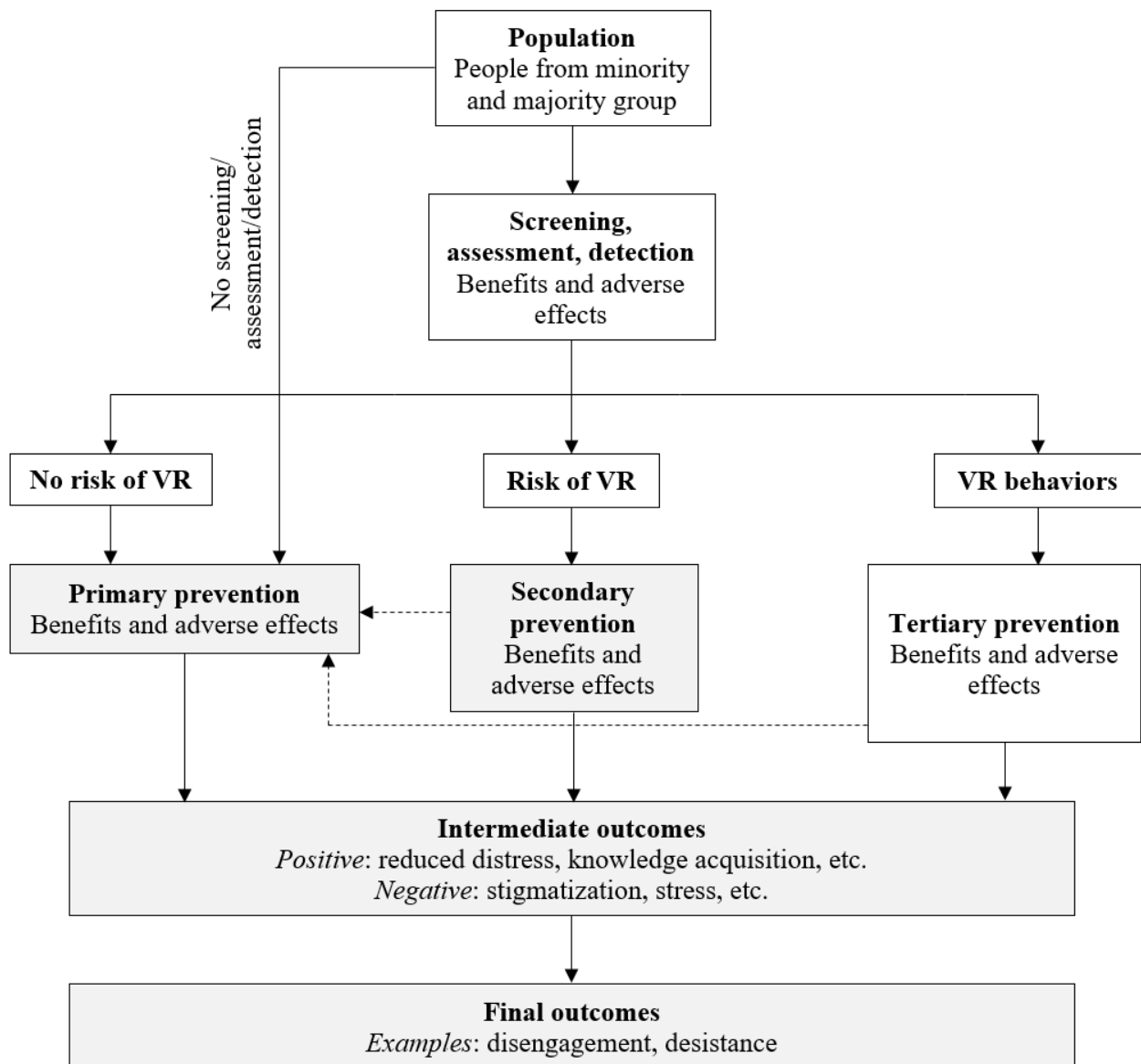
Our logic model (see Figure 1) classifies programs that aim to counter violent radicalization into tiers of prevention according to the public health model (Caplan, 1964) – a practice that has been recommended by many authors in the field (Bjørgero, 2013; Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Stares & Yacoubian, 2007; Schmid, 2013; Weine et al., 2017). Primary prevention programs are those designed for members of the general population not at risk or not identified as at risk of violent radicalization. Their goal is to prevent violent radicalization before it happens by targeting an entire population (Brantingham & Faust, 1976). In the context of PVE, primary prevention programs encompass initiatives ranging from “openness towards others” programs disseminated in schools and universities to counter-narratives displayed on radio or television (e.g., radio broadcasts sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development; Aldrich, 2014). Secondary prevention programs, in turn, are directed towards populations that are identified as vulnerable to violent radicalization and extremism. This assumption can be rooted in valid and reliable assessment procedures (although very few are empirically validated; Hassan et al., 2022; Scarcella et al., 2016) or in information suggesting that such populations are at risk (e.g., if they were exposed to extremist discourses; Liht & Savage, 2013). These programs mostly aim to prevent violent behavior or attachment to extremist ideologies among individuals identified as vulnerable but not yet violent. Finally, tertiary prevention programs, or intervention/disengagement/deradicalization programs, target individuals who already are on a path towards radicalization, have committed acts of political violence, or have joined a violent extremist group. They focus on reintegrating the individual into society and make them give up violence. They can also promote ideological changes.

Prevention programs, whether they are primary, secondary, or tertiary, can have both beneficial and adverse effects, and these can be intended or not by the program providers. These effects can lead to changes (positive and/or negative) in attitudes and behaviors

associated with violent radicalization (e.g., openness towards others). These, in turn, have an effect on the desired final outcome (e.g., disengagement from a path towards radicalization).

Figure 1

The PVE/PVR Logic Model



1.2: Formulate Key Questions

Based on the logic model, we formulated the main question to guide our systematic review strategy: “What are the main recommendations for prevention practice, program implementation, and program evaluation that can be generated from the literature regarding tertiary prevention in the field of violent radicalization?” The question implies multiple other, more specific questions and concepts: a) What is the content of tertiary PVE programs? b) Who are the populations included in tertiary PVE programs? c) What are the tertiary-level prevention programs that have been evaluated for outcomes? d) How were the outcomes of these programs defined and measured? e) What are the intermediate and final positive outcomes? f) What are the intermediate and final negative outcomes? g) What mechanisms did the authors use to explain these outcomes? and h) What are the implementation and cost issues, if reported?

Step 2: Set Admissible Evidence

2.1: Set Definitions

Violent Radicalization. One of the major recurring limitations within the empirical literature on violent radicalization is the lack of any consensus regarding definitions. Most such terminology issues stem from the fact that terms such as radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism have been used interchangeably: Terrorism and violent radicalization refer to an outcome or a method of political violence, while radicalization describes a process or a state of being (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). In addition, definitions tend to be shaped by the author’s field of practice and their understanding of comparable social problems. Most existing definitions also tend to focus on religious-based violent radicalization (e.g., Khosrokhavar, 2014; Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Recent definitions of violent radicalization (e.g., Hafez & Mullins, 2015) highlight a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon by integrating systemic, anthropological, psychosocial, and socio-political dimensions, which echoes Heitmeyer’s (2002) work on social disintegration, whereby violent radicalization is viewed as the product of individual experiences and social conditions that generate grievances (Hassan et al., 2018). Ecosystemic definitions (e.g., Schmid, 2013) describe violent

radicalization as an escalation of confrontational tactics where violence is considered as the only or most efficient means of defending one's (or the group's) cause. In an attempt to integrate these different definitions, we define violent radicalization as a “non-linear process by which individuals or groups undergo transformations (e.g., behavioral, psychological, identity-based, political, and/or ideological) that lead them to support or facilitate the use of violence towards an individual or group in order to further their cause and bring about individual or societal changes.”

In addition to the conceptual definition of violent radicalization adopted in this systematic review, we also rely on McCauley and Moskaleiko's (2017) operationalization of manifestations of violent radicalization (the two-pyramid model). Noting the relatively weak link between extreme attitudes and extreme behaviors, the authors emphasize the need to distinguish between violent radical opinions and violent radical actions. The first pyramid, opinions, comprises “individuals who do not care about a political cause (neutral); those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (sympathizers); those who justify violence in defense of the cause (justifiers); and those who feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the cause” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017, p. 211-212). The second pyramid, actions, comprises “individuals doing nothing for a political group or cause (inert); those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (activists); those engaged in illegal action for the cause (radicals); and those engaged in illegal action that targets civilians (terrorists)” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017, p. 212). Thus defined, violent radical outcomes include both attitudes and the perpetration of violence in the name of a cause.

Program Outcomes. In this systematic review, program outcomes were split into positive and negative outcomes. Positive outcomes comprise any outcome that enhances variables related to individual or social well-being and are reported in the literature as potential protective factors for violent radicalization (e.g., knowledge acquisition about topics related to discrimination). Positive outcomes also encompass the reduction of risk factors related to violent radicalization, such as reduced psychological distress. Negative outcomes, in contrast, are anticipated or unanticipated failures of programs, such as implementation problems, stigmatization of targeted communities, or increased polarization towards radical ideas. Negative effects also include other variables reported in the literature as risk factors

related to violent radicalization. Unanticipated negative side effects are often referred to as iatrogenic effects in the medical field.

Program outcomes can also be categorized as intermediate or final. Intermediate outcomes are characteristics that are a) directly or indirectly related to violent radicalization, b) targeted by programs in light of their theoretical link with violent radicalization, but c) are not direct measures of violent radicalization. Final outcomes, in turn, are direct measures of violent radicalization, either in terms of attitudes or behaviors. For example, a program aiming to improve self-esteem because of a purposed link with violent radicalization could include pre-/post-measures of self-esteem. Doing so, it would have assessed its intermediate outcomes, not its final outcomes. If the program added pre-/post-measures of violent radical attitudes, then it would have measured both intermediate and final outcomes. As evidenced by many systematic reviews in the field (e.g., Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022) program evaluators often fail to measure the impact of programs on final outcomes, which can obfuscate the true effectiveness of such programs, especially considering the tenuous links between risk and protective factors and violent radical attitudes and behaviors (Wolfowicz et al., 2020).

2.2: Set Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Because the field is characterized by heterogeneous studies, designs, and outcome measures, we adopted inclusion and exclusion criteria that maximize inclusiveness, thereby increasing the likelihood of locating studies that use different conceptual frameworks and/or methods. In addition to improving generalizability and consistency, this approach enables triangulation of evidence. The following criteria laid the rules for the evidence we considered admissible: a) had to be written in English or French (languages common to the members of the research team); b) had to include an evaluation, from primary data, of any kind of tertiary prevention initiative for violent radicalization (this means that studies discussing general tertiary PVE practices without examining a particular program were ineligible); and c) if these conditions were met, we did not impose any restrictions on study design, type, or method. Since assessing the quality of the available literature is one of the many goals of systematic reviews, we were purposely exhaustive in what we considered eligible, as it allowed us to critique the current state of the literature.

We included studies published up to June 2019, when the last bibliographic search was conducted. We acknowledge that this restriction may render our review outdated, and we address this limitation by providing a narrative discussion of more recent research on tertiary PVE programming and its implications for our conclusions.

Step 3: Search the Literature and Update Searches

In consultation with a library science expert, we developed a search strategy that aimed to target an array of bibliographic databases and gray literature resources. Wherever possible, we made use of controlled vocabulary terms from database thesauri and adapted the strategy by the database to make full use of its features. To reduce publication bias (Bernard et al., 2014), we conducted a thorough search for gray literature by searching the Web, using Google for studies, reports, electronic journals, conference proceedings, and other relevant documents. Our search included primary, secondary, and tertiary PVE programs, as they share multiple keywords, but our analyses were limited to tertiary PVE program evaluations. Primary and secondary PVE programs were analyzed by the same research team in another systematic review (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022).

In addition to the documents identified using the search strategy outlined above, we compared our results with the studies of seven literature/systematic reviews on PVE programs published at the time of our last bibliographic search: Andersson Malmros (2018), Bellasio et al. (2018), Davies (2018), Gielen (2019), Kudlacek et al. (2017), RAN (2019), and Samuel (2018). Each eligible English or French document that we had not identified was added to our database. We did the same for studies figuring in the Impact Europe PVE intervention database (<http://www.impact.itti.com.pl/index#/inspire/search>).

If a set of authors published multiple papers using the same sample, analyses, and objectives (e.g., a government report later published in a scientific journal), only the latest version was retained. The complete list of examined databases, as well as sample search statements from our database and Google searches, can be found in Appendix A.

Step 4: Select Admissible Evidence for Inclusion in the Review

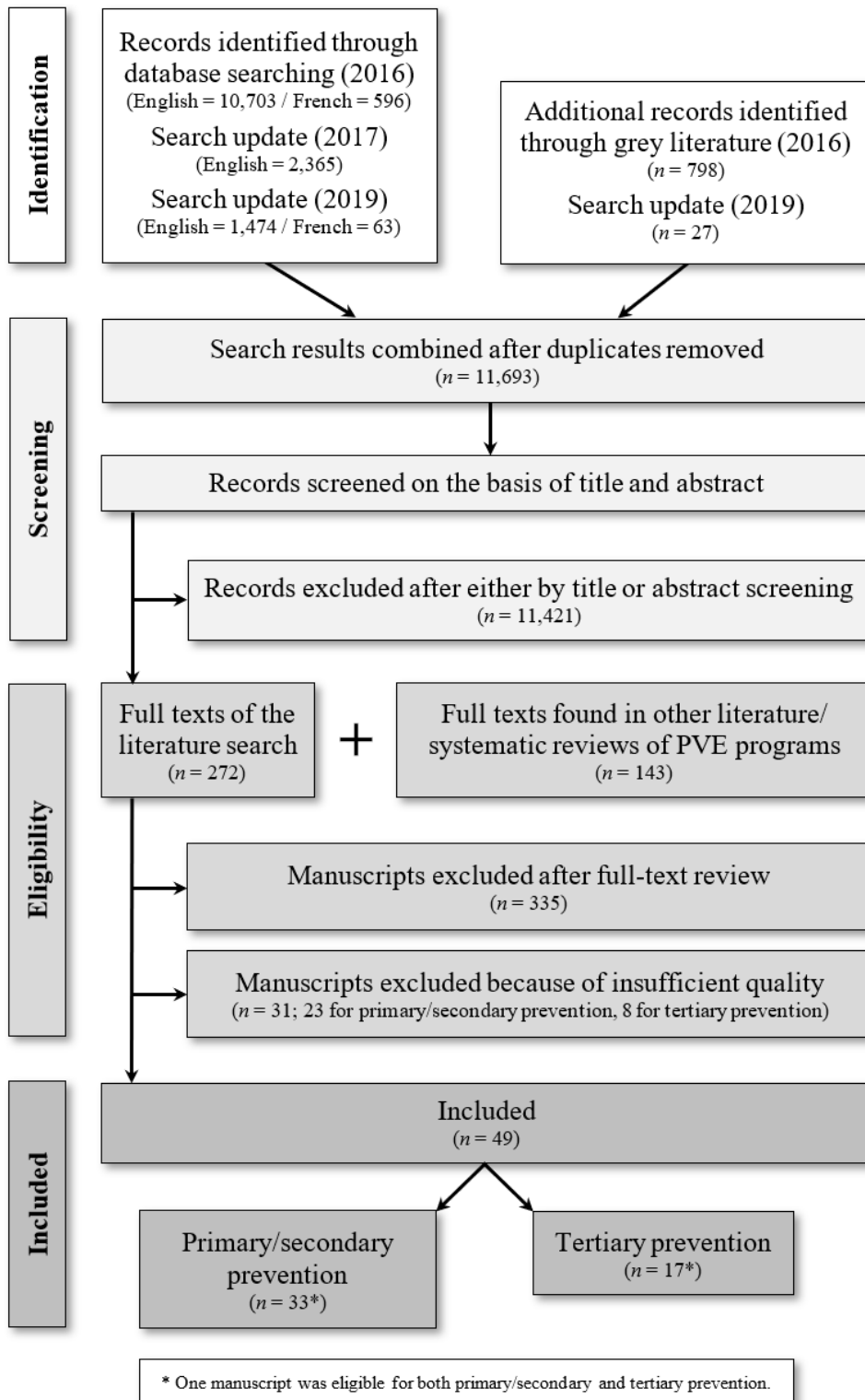
Selection of admissible evidence studies was carried out by five research assistants who screened the titles and abstracts of documents identified in the literature search. Each manuscript was rated as “no,” “maybe,” or “yes” by at least two research assistants, according to a screening tool based on our inclusion/exclusion criteria. To ensure that inter-rater agreement was adequate, Fleiss’ (1971) kappa was computed. The results showed the inter-rater agreement for selection of eligible tertiary prevention studies ($K = .65$) was moderate to substantial (Landis & Koch, 1977). Disagreements were dealt with in meetings with the lead researcher until consensus was reached. Next, the teams reviewed and cross-reviewed the full-text documents for final eligibility. The PRISMA (<http://www.prisma-statement.org>) template was used to record the results of the literature searches in a flowchart (see Figure 2).

Step 5: Assess the Quality of Studies

Leading systematic review organizations, such as the Campbell Collaboration and Cochrane, have highlighted the challenges of assessing the quality of studies in fields where research is diverse in terms of design, samples, tools, and outcomes. For this review, the quality of studies was assessed with a modified version of the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research & Evaluation II (AGREE II; Brouwers et al., 2010), which was adapted to fit the state of the literature in the field of PVE. The Quality of Study Assessment tool—found in Appendix B—comprised 10 items worth one point each. These items cover a) the clarity of concepts, variables, and research questions/hypotheses; b) the amount of methodological detail (e.g., sample description) and the validity of the strategy; c) the robustness of the collected evidence; d) disclosure of limitations and potential conflicts of interest; and e) whether the authors discussed the implications for practice or future research.

Figure 2

PRISMA Statement



Given the heterogeneity of studies in this field and the absence of clear guidelines for assessing methodological quality across diverse designs from both official and gray literature, we opted to assign equal weight to each item (one point per criterion). This approach enhanced the tool's flexibility and allowed for a broader inclusion of designs. However, studies scoring 3/10 or lower were excluded from the systematic review, as they provided excessively unreliable evidence and/or lacked sufficient methodological transparency to enable readers to assess their strengths and limitations. The inclusion or exclusion of studies based on risk of bias remains an ongoing debate in systematic review methodology (Harvey & Dijkers, 2019). In our case, however, since our tool was primarily designed to ensure that all key methodological components of a scientific study were present and sound, excessively low scores rendered studies uninterpretable and more suitable for exclusion than inclusion.

Step 6: Gather Information From Studies

We developed coding sheets to extract data from each selected study. Once completed, these sheets provided information on the following: a) conflicts of interest; b) program location and objectives; c) sample characteristics; d) methodological design; e) measures related to the program (e.g., user satisfaction); f) outcomes potentially influenced by the program (e.g., changes in radicalized behaviors/attitudes, self-esteem); g) results in terms of positive and negative outcomes; h) limitations; and i) recommendations for policy or future research. All data from studies were then integrated into summary of evidence tables, available in Supplementary Materials.

Step 7: Integrate Results and Interpret the Evidence

We initially tried to structure the aggregation of evidence by types of outcomes (e.g., changes in attitudes and behaviors, program satisfaction, etc.), but these were so heterogeneous that the task proved impossible to complete with parsimony. We thus conducted parallel aggregations of evidence according to program location/country, name, and whether outcomes were mostly positive, negative, or mixed. This ensured that each study would be listed only once.

For program outcomes to be considered “mostly positive,” the authors had to report exclusively positive effects, or substantially more positive than negative outcomes (and inversely for “mostly negative” outcomes). If a program led to both positive and negative outcomes, without a clear preponderance of either type, it was labeled as “mixed.” If a program had neither positive nor negative outcomes, it was sorted into “mostly negative,” because, on balance, such outcomes do not justify the associated cost/resource allocation.

Step 8: Write the Report and Formulate Preliminary Recommendations

We synthesized the accumulated evidence as follows: a) the key findings that emerged from the literature; b) the degree of trust in each finding (i.e., the robustness of studies, assessed qualitatively and through the Quality of Study Assessment tool); c) the generalizability and applicability of findings; and d) the limitations of existing knowledge and research gaps. Finally, we used a narrative synthesis method to integrate the results (Moher et al., 2009).

Results

The current study relates the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs. Of the 11,836 studies generated from the searches, 25 were eligible for this review, as they included an empirical evaluation of a tertiary prevention initiative using primary data. Of these, eight were of too low a methodological quality to be included (i.e., a score of 3/10 or less on the Quality of Study Assessment tool). This indicates multiple problems in the state of the literature, which will be discussed in the later sections. For those wishing to consult the list of eligible but excluded studies, see Appendix 3. These studies lacked basic methodological details, which made their results hard to interpret.

The 17 tertiary prevention studies assessed the outcomes of 15 different programs in 11 countries/continents:

- Australia [$k = 2$];
- France [$k = 1$];
- England [$k = 1$];
- Italy [$k = 1$];
- Nigeria [$k = 1$];
- North America [$k = 1$];
- Pakistan [$k = 2$];
- The Republic of Indonesia [$k = 1$];
- Sri Lanka [$k = 2$];
- The Netherlands [$k = 3$];
- Turkey [$k = 1$]; and
- UK [$k = 2$].

The total number of participants was 4,672, with sample sizes ranging from five (Madriaza et al., 2018; Manby, 2009) to 2,058 (Kruglanski et al., 2014). The mean number of participants was 271.06 ($SD = 527.98$). The studies were published between 2009 and 2019. Table 1 presents each of the 17 retained evaluations, listed by types of outcomes, geographic location, and program name. Many of these evaluation studies also figure in systematic reviews of tertiary PVE programs (e.g., McBride et al., 2022; Sydes et al., 2023; Zeuthen, 2021).

Table 1

Retained Evaluations of Tertiary Prevention Programs, Listed by Types of Outcomes, Geographic Location, and Program Name

Types of outcomes	Authors	Program	Country	n	Type of participants	Methodological design	Type of violent radicalization
Mostly positive	Cherney (2018)	Proactive Integrated Support Model	Australia	22	Inmates	Qualitative	Islamist, far-right
	Cherney & Belton (2019)	Proactive Integrated Support Model	Australia	14	Inmates	Quantitative	Islamist, far-right
	Madriaza et al. (2018)	CODE	France	5	Probationers	Quantitative	General
	Meringolo et al. (2019)	PROVA	Italy	37	Inmates	Mixed methods	General
	Barkindo & Bryans (2016)	Nigeria's CVE Program	Nigeria	45	Inmates	Mixed methods	Islamist
	Azam & Fatima (2017)	Mishal Deradicalization and Emancipation Program	Pakistan	20	Recently arrested persons	Mixed methods	Islamist
	Peracha et al. (2016)	Sabaoon Program	Pakistan	200	Youth work referees	Mixed methods	Islamist
	Kruglanski et al. (2014)	The Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program	Sri Lanka	2,058	Inmates	Quantitative	Nationalist
	Webber et al. (2018)	The Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program	Sri Lanka	934	Inmates	Quantitative	Nationalist
	Bastug & Evlek (2016)	The Disengagement and Deradicalization Pilot Program	Turkey	455	Members of extremist groups not under legal sanctions	Quantitative	Nationalist, left-wing, faith-based
Mixed	Davey et al. (2018)	Counter Conversations	England	569	Members of online extremist groups	Mixed methods	Islamist, far-right
	Demant et al. (2009)	Racism & Extremism Monitor, Deradicalisation in Practice	The Netherlands	22	Youth work referees	Qualitative	Far-right

	Schuurman & Bakker (2016)	Dutch Reintegration Program	The Netherlands	7	Probationers	Qualitative	Islamist
	van der Heide & Schuurman (2018)	Dutch Reintegration Program	The Netherlands	40	Probationers	Qualitative	Islamist
	Frenett & Dow (2015)	One to One Online Interventions	UK, North America	154	Members of online extremist groups	Quantitative	Islamist, far-right
	Manby (2009)	Prevent (Diversity Group)	UK	5	Youth work referees	Mixed methods	Islamist
Mostly negative	Anindya (2019)	Social Rehabilitation for Children Against Law and Protection House and Trauma Centre	Republic of Indonesia	21	Recently arrested persons	Qualitative	Islamist

The variety of tertiary PVE programs stood in contrast with primary and secondary prevention programs, which primarily focused on violent Islamist radicalization (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). Tertiary PVE programs targeted a wide range of violent radicalization types:

- 11 programs targeted Islamist radicalization;
- 5 targeted far-right extremism;
- 3 targeted nationalist extremism;
- 2 targeted general radicalization;
- 1 targeted left-wing radicalization; and
- 1 targeted faith-based radicalization.

In terms of participants, tertiary PVE programs were conducted with:

- a) Inmates (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Cherney, 2018; Cherney & Belton, 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Meringolo et al., 2019; Webber et al., 2018);
- b) Individuals under probation (Madriaza et al., 2018; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018);
- c) Recently arrested individuals (Anindya, 2019; Azam & Fatima, 2017);
- d) Members of extremist groups not necessarily under legal sanctions (Bastug & Evlek, 2016);
- e) Youth work referees (Demant et al., 2009; Manby, 2009; Peracha et al., 2016); and
- f) Members of online extremist groups (Davey et al., 2018; Frenett & Dow, 2015).

The overall outcomes of these evaluation studies seemed promising. Among the 17 studies, 10 declared mostly positive outcomes, six declared mixed outcomes, and one reported mostly negative outcomes.

The summary of evidence tables, available in Supplementary Materials, synthesized the current state of evidence regarding the benefits, harms, and costs of tertiary PVE programs. They contain the following information about each program: a) the name and country where the program was executed; b) objectives of the program; c) sample

characteristics; d) methodological details; e) positive outcomes; f) negative outcomes; g) the balance of outcomes (overall positive, negative, or mixed); h) limitations identified by the authors; i) limitations not mentioned by the authors but identified by our team; and j) the study quality score (/10). The general integration and synthesis of the results of the 17 studies are presented in the following sections.

Discussion

The current study comprises a systematic review on the effectiveness of tertiary prevention programs in the field of violent radicalization. Compared to similar literature or systematic reviews, the current study has some advantages. First, it includes program evaluation studies from around the globe, not only a specific region. Second, in addition to aggregating evidence, it critically appraises it and weighs key findings accordingly. Third, because one of its objectives was to lay the groundwork for the development of evidence-based best practice guidelines, it relays conclusions relevant for clinical practice in addition to those for future research and program evaluation. Fourth, even though synthesis of results is not based on meta-analysis, the current systematic review tries to distinguish effective interventions from iatrogenic ones in order to identify what works in tertiary PVE programming.

Key Findings

1) The Overall Effectiveness of Tertiary PVE Programs Is Promising but Hindered by the Lack of Quality Data

On average, tertiary PVE programs seemed effective in meeting the goals they set out for themselves, with numerous studies reporting mostly positive or mixed outcomes and very few reporting mostly negative outcomes. This indicates that, compared to primary and secondary PVE programs (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022), tertiary PVE program evaluations were more positively slanted – a finding echoed by Jugl et al. (2021), who compared the effect sizes of PVE programs operating in different prevention spaces. However, the relative lack of negative outcomes does not necessarily mean the absence of such outcomes; it may be

that evaluation protocols did not plan for the assessment of iatrogenic effects or that the authors failed to report them in the published studies. Encouragingly, some of the positive results came from studies with very solid methodological designs (i.e., longitudinal, pre-/post-evaluations) where negative outcomes were assessed. These studies found that programs elicited positive changes in intermediate and final outcomes related to violent radicalization in their participants (Cherney & Belton, 2019; Webber et al., 2018).

Multiple studies reported low recidivism rates for “treated” groups and individuals (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Peracha et al., 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). However, the follow-up period of these studies was usually limited to the time participants were enrolled in the program, severely constraining the time at risk during which recidivism or reengagement could have happened. For comparison purposes, desistance and redemption studies in the field of criminology indicate that for the risk of a convicted individual to reach that of the general population, four to eight years are necessary (with more serious crimes requiring more time; Blumstein & Nakamura, 2009). Similarly, the usual follow-up time for criminal recidivism studies seems to hover around two years (Bonta et al., 2003; Fazel & Wolf, 2015). None of the reviewed studies came close to that follow-up period. In addition, no comparison was provided between the recidivism rates of treated groups and those of control groups. Only van der Heide and Schuurman (2018) compared the recidivism rate of their participants (5.8%) with that of the Netherlands’s general offender population (45.3%). Coincidentally, among studies that reported reengagement/recidivism rates without comparing them with those of the general population, the reported rates were at times surprisingly low and under what would be expected of the general population. It may be that tertiary PVE programs are particularly effective, or it could be that data is obscured by the use of convenience control groups (or lack thereof), the absence of descriptive statistics concerning the average risk of samples, and the lack of clear definitions of what constitutes recidivism. Therefore, even though recidivism rates following tertiary PVE programs are encouraging, these are likely due to the limitations of studies. Thus, more methodologically robust studies will be required before we can attest to the success of such programs in decreasing the recidivism rates of convicted individuals on a violent radical trajectory.

As to disengagement from violent radical groups, the data is once again promising but hindered by the lack of methodologically solid designs. Barkindo and Bryans (2016), Bastug and Evlek (2016), and Demant et al. (2009) reported that during the time participants were involved in the assessed program, some showed disillusionment with their extremist group, some left their group, and some stopped wearing clothes or harboring symbols displaying their radical affiliations. However, in Demant et al. (2009), the violent extremist group went through an internal quarrel which significantly weakened group ties. In Webber et al. (2018), the group dissolved during the intervention. It was thus impossible to know if the intervention rather than the group dissolution was responsible for participants abandoning their group.

Finally, several studies reported programs having successfully deradicalized a percentage of their participants without specifying what that meant or without having an adequate definition of deradicalization. For example, in two studies, the authors considered deradicalized those participants who left the extremist group, which is more precisely a measure of disengagement and does not necessarily indicate cognitive or attitudinal deradicalization (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Demant et al., 2009). In another study, an intervention aimed to influence participants to acquire positive opinions towards the state and the military rather than reduce or change extremist beliefs – which was criticized by the author conducting the evaluation (Anindya, 2019).

2) Disentangling Deradicalization and Disengagement/Social Reintegration Efforts in Tertiary PVE Programs Is Complicated

Tertiary PVE programs can generally be classified as deradicalization or disengagement/social reintegration programs. Deradicalization programs mainly target the cognitive aspects of violent radicalization and aim to assist the individual in abandoning their radical beliefs (Hansen & Lid, 2020; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Koehler, 2017). These programs address aspects such as introspection, critical thinking, integrative complexity, religious understanding, accountability for one's actions, as well as changes in beliefs, attitudes, sense of self, and sense of significance. Deradicalization efforts can be conducted in the real world or online. Disengagement/reintegration programs, on the other hand, mainly focus on behavioral changes by assisting the individual in desisting from violence,

criminality, or their radical group, without necessarily addressing ideological components (Hansen & Lid, 2020; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Koehler, 2017). They address the obstacles convicted individuals face in reestablishing links with their family and reintegrating into their community and, more generally, society. Because these individuals have criminal records and are often identified as at high risk of reengaging in extremist violence, the obstacles they face in socially reintegrating are numerous (e.g., finding a job with a criminal record). Disengagement/reintegration programs thus assist the individual in surmounting these obstacles by focusing on improving a) living conditions (e.g., housing, access to food), b) vocational skills and employability, and c) social supports and engagement in recreational activities (e.g., sport, arts). They share many similarities with good practices in rehabilitative correctional interventions for non-radicalized offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Herzog-Evans & Benbouriche, 2019).

We observed that program designers (or authors) tended to confuse deradicalization, disengagement, and social reintegration. Some programs were advertised as deradicalization programs even though they were mostly aimed at disengagement/social reintegration, and vice versa (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Bastug & Evlek, 2016; Demant et al., 2009; Peracha et al., 2016). This confusion could be attributed to the persistent lack of conceptual, definitional, and theoretical clarity in the field (Feddes & Gallucci, 2015; Koehler, 2017), but it could also stem from the fact that regardless of program labels, most programs effectively combine deradicalization, disengagement, and social reintegration components. Though this may appear as a technicality, it is an important distinction because it leads to confusion concerning which program components are effective for which outcomes. It may also lead to inaccurate referrals (i.e., referring individuals to programs that may not fit their needs), which, in turn, influence program delivery, effectiveness, and adequate use of funding. Illustrating the importance of the aforementioned distinction are the different perceptions of practitioners and their clients about deradicalization compared to disengagement efforts.

3) Disengagement/Social Reintegration Efforts Seem on Average More Effective Than Deradicalization Efforts

Disengagement and social reintegration modules were commended by both practitioners and participants (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018) and are generally viewed more positively by scholars in the field than deradicalization and religious education efforts, which can be perceived as normative and discriminatory for certain communities (e.g., Muslims; Lindekilde, 2012). Studies of programs that implemented both deradicalization and social reinsertion modules found that practitioners and participants responded better to social reinsertion interventions, with practitioners often observing that they lacked the adequate training to conduct proper deradicalization interventions (Anindya, 2019; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). The conditions required for deradicalization efforts to be effective were numerous, including receptiveness from participants, adequate training for program providers, and involvement of figures credible to program participants like mentors, Imams, or former extremists (Anindya, 2019; Davey et al., 2018; Frenett & Dow, 2015). This being said, it is important to note that some deradicalization interventions were associated with positive outcomes (see below).

4) Different Tertiary PVE Program Components Lead to Different Outcomes

Not all tertiary PVE program components were equally effective in the context of their setting and participants. In the following section, we make an attempt to aggregate the positive and negative outcomes that have been reported in relation to each intervention component. Prudence is, however, advised, as most program evaluations did not employ methodological designs that would enable comparisons between the effect sizes of individual components. Therefore, the reported results should be considered as a narrative extraction and recollection of the reviewed data.

Religious Counseling/Education. Religious counseling efforts produced mixed findings. Positive outcomes reported were improved religious comprehension to counter the influence of radicalized individuals, more clarity and detailed knowledge of religious texts that helped participants identify inconsistencies and inaccuracies in their own beliefs, and discover a newfound respect for parents and elders (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Barkindo &

Bryans, 2016). However, negative outcomes of programs were frequently associated with the religious education component. It is not clear, however, whether these negative effects were due to the content of the religious education/counseling modules or to problems in the design, staff qualifications, or process of programs. For example, some religious education modules were permeated with conflicts of interest, such as the military hiring its own clerics to provide religious education to participants (Azam & Fatima, 2017). In such programs, the religious teaching modules were not adapted to the participants' characteristics or their situation. Specifically, complicated lectures were given to illiterate participants (Azam & Fatima, 2017), severely limiting the positive impact of the program while failing to follow the specific responsivity principle of effective correctional programming, which, among other things, states that interventions should be tailored to the learning style and ability of participants (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Finally, the training of program providers for religious modules was often inadequate, leading participants to view program providers with suspicion (Azam & Fatima, 2017) and program providers to feel inadequate in providing such interventions (van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018).

All religious counseling or education components of the evaluated tertiary prevention programs focused on violent radicalization inspired by Islam. As in primary and secondary prevention programs, the lack of religious counseling or education tackling other forms of religious radicalization constitutes a bias in the field that should be addressed (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). This may, however, be partly explained by the fact that other extremist movements, such as the extreme right, do not place religion at the center of their cause or propaganda and do not refer to their religious ideologies and roots to recruit and mobilize individuals as overtly as groups such as ISIS.

Online Interventions. Studies looking at online intervention programs for individuals on a violent radical trajectory or those that were members of online extremist groups reported lukewarm conclusions (Davey et al., 2018; Frenett & Dow, 2015). Most reach-out attempts made by practitioners on social media were either met with defensiveness or simply ignored, and among individuals that were reached out to, many did not agree to participate in the intervention. Among those who did, few could be considered to have significantly disengaged from online groups at the end of the intervention. However, some participants bonded with

former extremists and thought deeply for the first time about their radical beliefs, suggesting that some positive outcomes ensued from online interventions. It remains to be seen if these outcomes hold up beyond the intervention, however, as outcome measures were restricted to involvement during the conversations. The benefits were thus quite limited, in contrast to the substantial hurdles faced by program providers (Davey et al., 2018; Frenett & Dow, 2015). Indeed, practitioners declared that participants sometimes reacted very aggressively to reach-out attempts, making them feel unsafe. This was especially true for former-extremist practitioners. They also declared that the workload was often overwhelming, with many choosing to leave the project before its end (Davey et al., 2018; Frenett & Dow, 2015).

Counternarrative campaigns displaying ads in front of Google searches for violent radical materials (Helmus & Klein, 2019) seemed to result in less defensive responses from concerned individuals than direct messaging attempts on social media by unknown practitioners. Notably, direct messaging without prior consent does present ethical concerns and poses significant threats to the therapeutic alliance and the safety of those involved. Therefore, online interventions that fell under the umbrella of primary and secondary PVE were described more positively by program evaluators than tertiary PVE online interventions (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022).

Education and Vocational Training. Studies that evaluated program components related to education and vocational training reported that participants gained improved reading, writing, problem-solving, and leaning skills (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Peracha et al., 2016). These programs also improved empathy, integrative complexity, and enabled reflections on one's identity (Peracha et al., 2016). Very few negative outcomes were reported in relation to this type of intervention, and many evaluators noted its effectiveness in fostering the disengagement of individuals involved in violent radical groups or activities (Azam & Fatima, 2017; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). With the effectiveness of education and vocational training programs being noted in rigorous primary and secondary PVE program evaluations (e.g., Mercy Corps, 2016), and with unemployment being one of the main risk factors for violent radical acting out (Wolfowicz et al., 2020), it is not surprising to see vocational training modules perform well in tertiary prevention programs.

Interpersonal Relations. Even though they were not unified into a single module, many interventions targeted different aspects of interpersonal relationships: conflict resolution skills, social abilities, openness towards others, involvement in prosocial activities, making prosocial friends, and building trust between participants and program staff. These interventions led to mostly positive outcomes: improved definition of the self and ability to interact positively with peers and professionals, improved socializing skills related to working in a group, improved prosocial supports and activities, and improved skills to interact with others and respect family members (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Cherney, 2018; Meringolo et al., 2019). Iatrogenic outcomes were, however, observed in two programs that tackled racism and discrimination: in Manby (2009), some participants were found to have lower prosocial attitudes at the end of the program compared to its beginning, and in Demant et al. (2009), some participants stayed and even moved up in rank in their extremist group over the course of the program. Even though these outcomes could be due to the specific contexts of these programs and were based on very few participants, they do remind the complexity of targeting the cognitive aspects of radicalization (i.e., deradicalization).

Fostering cooperation with PVE staff led to very positive outcomes in multiple studies (Anindya, 2019; Barkindo & Bryans, 2016). In Kruglanski et al. (2014), participants whose attitude towards the personnel improved reduced their support for the violent struggle against the Sinhalese to a greater extent than those who went through the program but had lower disposition towards the staff. The effectiveness of fostering collaboration with the staff is consistent with data from the wider field of criminology (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Hare, 2003; Mann et al., 2010) and echoes numerous findings related to the importance of therapeutic alliance for treatment success (Flückiger et al., 2018).

Finally, even though programs were at times successful in improving the social network of individuals by fostering new positive relationships, many practitioners mentioned that it was harder to create distance from peers who were still part of militant groups and who could reignite a violent radicalization process (van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018; Peracha et al., 2016). When success was found in creating distance from antisocial peers, it was often because of confounding factors such as group dissolution (Demant et al., 2009). Considering the significant influence of peers on involvement in crime, as well as the general

susceptibility of humans to social pressure (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), it may be prudent for programs to focus not only on fostering new positive relationships but also on creating distance from extremist peers.

5) Numerous Facilitators and Challenges Affect Tertiary PVE Program Implementation and Delivery

In addition to the relative effectiveness of program components, tertiary PVE studies mentioned numerous facilitators and challenges that arose during program implementation and delivery. Most evaluation studies did not include an implementation and cost evaluation, probably because several assessment protocols were not in place at the onset of programs, or because of the complexity of cost/efficiency measures. Studies that included a process evaluation reported more challenges than facilitators. Among facilitators, cooperation between partner agencies and proper training for practitioners were frequently mentioned (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018), highlighting the relevance of professional networks that aim to foster collaboration, knowledge mobilization, and expertise sharing between PVE practitioners.

Studies comprising evidence on challenges to implementation emphasized the lack or inefficient nature of training for practitioners, leading to feelings of inadequacy in tackling extremist ideologies and, thus, in conducting deradicalization and religious education interventions (Anindya, 2019; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). In other programs, implementation was hampered by the lack of personnel, which had to be compensated by overreliance on external experts, thus significantly exceeding initial budget estimates (Anindya, 2019; Azam & Fatima, 2017; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). In addition, conflicts and disagreements between implementers on the goals of programs lowered the efficiency and impact of these initiatives (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Program implementation was also challenged by the lack of funding and financial resources, as well as technological restrictions on data collection and analysis, which limited the intervention capacity, sustainability, and outreach of programs (Anindya, 2019; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Additionally, program implementation was sometimes hindered by difficult relationships with the city and

competition between organizations with similar mandates (van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018).

Some factors facilitated the delivery of programs. Without surprise, one of the most frequently mentioned facilitators was a bond of trust with clients and a good working relationship within the team (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Complementing the main group intervention with individual psychological counseling was also commended by numerous studies (e.g., van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Duration of programs may also play an important role in fostering or maintaining disengagement, as data on program duration indicated that short duration was an obstacle to success (Anindya, 2019; Frenett & Dow, 2015). This means that some programs may have had a limited chance for success not because of programming issues but rather due to intervention time constraints. The literature, however, does not inform on what would be an optimal time frame for a tertiary PVE program, and studies did not assess for the association between time of delivery and outcome. According to practitioners, another facilitator for program delivery and success involved tailoring interventions to the specific needs of clients (Cherney, 2018; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016), thus following the needs and responsivity principles of effective correctional intervention (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Finally, the involvement of parents and other family members in the intervention was seen positively by practitioners and participants (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Bastug & Evlek, 2016), suggesting that PVE programs should integrate notions from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and multisystemic therapy, and thus involve the microsystem in preventive or rehabilitative efforts.

Aspects of programs negatively affecting delivery can be divided into external and internal challenges. External challenges included overworked staff and poor relationships between program providers, supervisors, and stakeholders. Internal challenges included applying a single disengagement approach to different types of extremist ideologies, using coercive tactics in interventions, administering a program without the knowledge and consent of participants, and safety concerns leading practitioners to leave the project. Group dynamics sometimes resulted in iatrogenic effects, with less mature participants causing disruptiveness or more radicalized participants trying to indoctrinate others.

Finally, Cherney and Belton (2019) mentioned that custody-based interventions seemed more effective for radicalized participants than those only considered at-risk of radicalization. While this result would have to be replicated before being put into PVE practice, it echoes the risk principle of effective correctional programming, which states that intervention intensity should match the level of risk (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Indeed, high-intensity interventions with low-risk offenders are known to lead to iatrogenic effects, as opposed to less intensive interventions mostly focused on social reinsertion. Conversely, low-intensity interventions for high-risk offenders are usually ineffective—the latter significantly benefiting from high-intensity treatments and interventions (Andrews & Friesen, 1987; Andrews & Kiessling, 1980). Therefore, it may be the case that for individuals at the start of their violent radical trajectory, low-intensity interventions, such as helping with housing, education, employment, or reducing isolation, may be more fit for purpose than exhaustive deradicalization interventions.

Limitations of Studies

Several studies were methodologically robust and included control groups, pre-/post-measures, and longitudinal follow-ups (Cherney & Belton, 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Manby, 2009; Webber et al., 2018), which speaks to the progress made in the field of PVE program evaluation. On average, the methodological quality of tertiary PVE program evaluations was higher than that noted in a similar systematic review of primary and secondary PVE programs (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). Although this may be due to the inherent difficulty in assessing primary and secondary prevention compared to tertiary prevention efforts, another argument could be made that tertiary PVE evaluation studies were more recent than primary and secondary PVE evaluation. Thus, evaluators and authors may have taken note of early criticisms and improved evaluation designs since. That being said, tertiary PVE evaluation studies often suffered from limitations relevant to data access, study design/sampling, outcome measurement, and biases, conflict of interests, and ethical concerns. These limitations are in addition to those previously discussed concerning the measurement of the effectiveness of tertiary PVE programs.

First, limited access to the data of participants—due to lack of necessary authorizations, desire to avoid disrupting disengagement processes, or incomplete files—hampered the scope and precision of analyses in multiple studies (Anindya, 2019; Azam & Fatima, 2017; Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Authors faced technological difficulties in accessing sensitive data such as recidivism or were not given the authorization to do so by government agencies (Demant et al., 2009; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). Data access problems were often related to flaws in study design, for example, lack of adequate planning for data collection, collecting data at too early a stage in the program, or ending data collection before termination of the program (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Peracha et al., 2016; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016).

Second, limitations relevant to sampling were observed and included lack of details on the size and characteristics of samples, as well as samples that were small, unrepresentative, or unbalanced—all of which limit the overall generalizability of results. In terms of study design, the issue of unstructured allocation of participants to groups, the absence of a control group, or the impossibility to randomly assign participants to either a control or rehabilitation group were commonly observed in the field—though these may be difficult to address due to ethical concerns.

Third, outcome measures often lacked clarity. As previously discussed, the lack of distinction between outcomes related to deradicalization and those related to disengagement/social reintegration led to confusion regarding which type of intervention is associated with which outcomes. There was also an important variation and lack of clarity in how researchers defined and assessed recidivism: several studies reported having collected recidivism rates, but it remained unknown what recidivism meant, what type of recidivism was measured (i.e., criminal vs. going back to extremist groups), and in what time frame (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Peracha et al., 2016; van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). This may explain why some studies reported a surprisingly low recidivism rate (1%), although it bears to mention that recidivism rates documented in violent extremist samples are notoriously low (around 3%; Hodwitz, 2021; Silke & Morrison, 2020).

Fourth, the current state of the literature cannot account for the links between program components, intermediate outcomes, and final outcomes. In most cases, studies mentioned the

characteristics targeted by programs (e.g., integrative complexity, vocational training) and general program outcomes (e.g., lack of recidivism) but failed to measure which characteristic was responsible for which outcome. According to our review, only two studies (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Webber et al., 2018) linked individual program components to specific outcomes. Considering that programs usually target multiple characteristics or have multiple components, having only access to general outcomes limits our ability to clearly identify the ingredients for the success of programs or, in other words, the risk and protective factors that one should target during the intervention in order to reduce the risk of violent acting out. Furthermore, studies often failed to measure final outcomes, collecting data on user satisfaction and intermediate outcomes only. This provides limited insight on what truly works in tertiary PVE programming because links between intermediate and final outcomes cannot be assumed to be linear and direct, as evidenced by recent meta-analyses in the field (e.g., Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Ideally, program evaluators would assess both intermediate and final outcomes and test empirical links between the two.

Fifth, a lot of studies reported no negative outcomes, which is doubtful and suggests that these were potentially not assessed. This can make some programs appear better because they were not evaluated as thoroughly, which can result in a disservice to programs that assessed for negative/iatrogenic outcomes. Even though evaluating negative outcomes may put programs, their stakeholders, and clinical staff under the spotlight of criticism, it is a courageous endeavor that must be encouraged, as it speaks to methodological and scientific rigor. It also means that policymakers, stakeholders, and funders must be supported to adequately understand the results of program evaluations before making a value judgment as to their effectiveness.

Finally, biases, conflicts of interest, and ethical concerns permeated studies. Several evaluations did not draw on participant data but relied on perceptions from program implementers, staff, or public data, which can introduce biases in the reporting of results, overestimate the effectiveness of programs, and be inattentive to the real impacts these programs had on the targeted populations (Anindya, 2019; Azam and Fatima, 2017; Bastug & Evlek, 2016; Meringolo et al., 2019; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016). Next, conflicts of interest were noted in the funding, recruitment, data collection, and analysis stages of many studies.

For example, in some cases, authors were the ones responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the program or were part of a technical assistance team for the program (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Bastug & Evlek, 2016; Frenett & Dow, 2015; Madriaza et al., 2018; Meringolo et al., 2019). In other cases, the program staff chose which clients the researchers could interview. Even though this was done to protect clients' well-being, it could also have introduced selection biases (e.g., only choosing successful cases). Even though the conflation of program implementer and assessor does not seem to have overly negative side effects in terms of data quality and can have positive effects on mobilizing the staff to properly conduct the program evaluation (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022), it still invites to caution in interpreting results when such results are exceedingly positive. Encouragingly, in the case of Davey et al. (2018), evaluators did a thorough job of documenting the negative outcomes of the program and in Madriaza et al. (2018), negative outcomes were thoroughly assessed and reported. A major ethical concern was found in a situation where participants took part in an online intervention and evaluation study without being informed that this was the case (Davey et al., 2018). This deprived them of their right to free and informed consent, and when candidates were informed that they were part of an intervention/study, only one out of seven maintained contact with the intervention provider.

Limitations of the Current Study

The current systematic review shares the same limitations as those of our systematic review on primary and secondary PVE programs, as the methodological framework was common for both studies (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). First, some potentially relevant studies may not have been included, as they were produced in languages other than English or French. We chose to only cover literature written in languages common to members of the research team so as to ensure that peer review could be conducted effectively during the selection and the coding process. However, this means that relevant studies from certain regions of the world may have been excluded from our review. Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark are among the countries with advanced tertiary PVE programming whose literature – if not published in English – may have been overlooked in our review.

Second, many government-led programs may have been evaluated internally through reports that are not publicly accessible to researchers. As a result, our understanding of the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs may be incomplete – particularly for those overseen by government entities, which may have limited incentive to disclose less favorable results or critical aspects of their initiatives. Classified data is a substantial issue in the field of PVE and has led to numerous controversies, such as that of the confidential Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG 22+; Lloyd & Dean, 2015) report, which has been used to structure the pre-crime assessment of individuals under UK’s PREVENT strategy (HM Government, 2011, 2012).

Third, another limitation may result from the variability introduced by each rater. We attempted to address this by measuring and monitoring inter-rater agreement rates, as well as by reaching consensus when raters had divergent ratings or made different selections. However, inter-rater reliability remained relatively low, suggesting that research assistants’ future training on inclusion and exclusion criteria should be improved.

Fourth, because our search strategy was designed to be broad in order to include a wide range of PVE programs, it may not have been tailored to some specific types of programs, such as counternarrative campaigns. Readers wishing to get a clearer picture of such programs’ outcomes should consult available systematic reviews (e.g., Carthy et al., 2020) or wait for them to be published by other research consortia.

Fifth, in this systematic review, we included studies with different types of methodological design (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed), which can lead to confusion in the interpretation of results. Extracting results from studies with qualitative designs often implies interpretation, which introduces subjectivity to this research – the same being true for pairing quantitative results with qualitative data. As previously mentioned, the conclusions of this study should be understood primarily as a narrative synthesis of the available data, rather than meta-analytic findings. To enable a robust comparison of the relative effectiveness of interventions, future research will require quantitative summaries using standardized effect size metrics.

Sixth, because our key findings are based on data of limited methodological quality, they may not reliably reflect the realities of the on-the-ground practice or the full breadth of positive and negative outcomes stemming from tertiary PVE programs. Once the field

disposes of enough high-quality studies to meaningfully integrate them, it may be worthwhile to conduct a systematic review or meta-analysis comprising exclusively methodologically solid studies.

Finally, because of data collection and analysis, publication delays, and the swiftness with which the PVE field is evolving, our June 2019 end date for data collection implies that the current systematic review may not be fully up to date. To address this limitation, we collaborated with the journal editor to conduct a brief literature search update on tertiary PVE programming published since 2019. This does not represent a full systematic search update; rather, it is a narrative overview of recent research that would have been eligible for inclusion had we conducted our search more recently. The main objective of this update was to determine whether recent findings align with our own or, if not, how they differ.

Recently Published Studies on the Outcomes of Tertiary PVE Programs

To identify new evaluations of tertiary PVE programs, we searched two types of sources: recently published systematic reviews on PVE programs (Jugl et al., 2021; McBride et al., 2022; Sydes et al., 2023) and a list of potential studies suggested by the journal editor. We applied our selection criteria to all studies published from 2019 onward and identified four new eligible papers evaluating the outcomes of tertiary PVE programs: Cherney and Belton (2023), Daugherty (2019), Keane et al. (2023), and San (2020). These studies assessed, respectively, case management programs for individuals at risk of radicalization in Australia (Cherney & Belton, 2023), Exit programs in Norway and Sweden addressing neo-Nazi extremism (Daugherty, 2019), the Healthy Identity Intervention for convicted individuals on violent extremist trajectories (Keane et al., 2023), and countering violent extremism (CVE) programs led by the Turkish National Police (San, 2020).

The conclusions of these studies closely aligned with those of our systematic review. The authors highlighted the conceptual confusion between deradicalization and disengagement and emphasized that ideological shifts were more difficult to achieve than social reintegration measures, which were generally found to be effective (Cherney & Belton, 2023; Daugherty, 2019; Keane et al., 2023; San, 2020). In cases where deradicalization was successful, it relied on credible messengers—former extremists acting as mentors (Daugherty,

2019). The studies also underscored the importance of individualized approaches and the role of social networks in fostering identity transformation. They recognized that violent radicalization is a multifactorial phenomenon and is best addressed through holistic interventions targeting the multiple systems in which individuals operate. Additionally, they stressed the need for adequate practitioner training and stable funding (Cherney & Belton, 2023; Keane et al., 2023). Finally, all four studies noted the persistent challenges of conducting methodologically rigorous program evaluations, particularly due to data privacy laws, small sample sizes, lack of control groups, and subjective success metrics (Cherney & Belton, 2023; Daugherty, 2019; Keane et al., 2023; San, 2020). In summary, we conclude that the findings from tertiary PVE program evaluations published since the end of our review do not alter the conclusions presented herein, based on studies published up to 2019.

Conclusion

Like in other highly dynamic and evolving fields of practice, the question of what works in PVE is fundamental to the development of prevention and intervention programs, as well as to the implementation of social and legal policies that aim to reduce violent radicalization. However, due to the lack of strong evidence, the conditions required for evidence-based best practice guidelines to emerge are currently absent. The numerous methodological limitations of evaluative studies of tertiary PVE programs have been discussed thoroughly by authorities in the field and are at this point a known quantity (Koehler, 2017; Mastroe & Szmania, 2016; Williams, 2021).

That being said, some amount of consensus emerged from the reviewed literature as to aspects of tertiary PVE programming that were associated with better or worse outcomes for the intended populations. Disengagement interventions were preferred to deradicalization interventions by both participants and practitioners and were seen as more effective. Education, vocational training, and socialization modules were associated with many positive outcomes and were mostly devoid of iatrogenic effects, in contrast with religious education modules and online interventions that involved participants without their consent. The risk, needs, and responsivity principles of effective correctional intervention (Andrews & Bonta,

2010) seemed to apply to tertiary PVE programs: interventions were seen as more effective when a) their intensity matched the risk level of participants (e.g., provide lower intensity social reintegration interventions to lower-risk clients), b) they were tailored to the specific needs of participants, and c) they were tailored to the learning style and cognitive ability of participants. Therapeutic alliance, cooperation between the staff and partner agencies, complementary psychological counseling, and involving prosocial family members were seen as key elements of successful interventions. Finally, when interventions were not long enough, lacked funding, or did not provide sufficient training for practitioners, their effectiveness suffered.

Even though these recommendations will need to be validated by experts and/or emerge from more robust scientific literature before they can be considered evidence-based best practice guidelines, we hope that they will figure in the mind's eye of program designers, practitioners, evaluators, and stakeholders when implementing tertiary PVE programs.

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* Studies included in this systematic review (tertiary PVE program evaluations).

Appendix A

Database Search

A broad array of databases was checked for relevant material across disciplines (Political Science, Sociology, Religion, Education, etc.), as well as multidisciplinary databases (Academic Search Complete, Web of Knowledge). Searches were originally conducted in the summer of 2016, and updates were performed at the end of 2017 and in June 2019. Databases searched were as follows: ABI/Inform Global (ProQuest), Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), ATLA Religion Database (EBSCO), CBCA Complete (ProQuest), Communication Abstracts (ProQuest), Canadian Public Policy Collection, Canadian Research Index (ProQuest), Education Source (EBSCO), ERIC (EBSCO), Érudit/Persée, Francis (EBSCO), International Political Science Abstracts (ProQuest), Medline, PAIS International (ProQuest), Political Science Complete (EBSCO), Dissertations & Theses Global (ProQuest), PsycINFO (EBSCO), Repère, Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), SocINDEX (EBSCO), and Web of Knowledge.

Database Search Example

The following example is the search run in the PsycINFO (EBSCO) database:

```
("Radical Islam*" OR "Islamic Extrem*" OR Radicali* OR "Homegrown Terror*" OR "Homegrown Threat*" OR "Violent Extrem*" OR Jihad* OR Indoctrinat* OR Terrori* OR "White Supremacis*" OR "Neo-Nazi" OR "Right-wing Extrem*" OR "Left-wing Extrem*" OR "Religious Extrem*" OR Fundamentalis* OR Anti-Semitis* OR Nativis* OR Islamophob* OR "Eco-terror*" OR "Al Qaida-inspired" OR "ISIS-inspired" OR "Anti-Capitalis*")  
AND  
(Prevent* OR interven* OR respon* OR screen* OR assess* OR procedur* OR instrument* OR program* OR reduc* OR treatment* OR counterterror* OR "counter-terror*" OR "de-radicali*" OR detect* OR "countering violent extrem*" OR CVE)  
AND  
(AB youth OR adult* OR adolescen* OR student* OR teenag* OR "young people" OR colleg* OR universit*)
```

All searches were conducted by a library science expert and made use of database-specific features and controlled vocabulary where appropriate. Several French-language databases were also checked after the search terms were translated into French by a translation expert. Search results were exported to an Endnote database for management and abstracts, then screened for relevance.

Additional searches were run using the Google search engine in order to seek out gray literature. Because the goal was to locate non-traditional publication types, the full Google search engine was used and not Google Scholar, which would have returned mainly standard journal articles. An exhaustive single search statement is not possible using Google, so a series of searches were run, varying the keywords employed. The first five pages of results were reviewed, and relevant materials were manually entered into the project's Endnote database. The OpenGrey.eu database was also checked for potentially relevant material.

Appendix B
Quality of Study Assessment Tool

Quality of Study Assessment Tool	
Prevention systematic review	Rating (0 = no, 1 = yes)
1) ARE THE KEY CONCEPTS AND VARIABLES CLEARLY DEFINED? <i>Examples of key concepts/variables : violent radicalization, self-esteem, program completion, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) ARE THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES CLEARLY STATED? <i>Example : Did completion of program X reduce radicalized behaviors and/or attitudes among sample Y?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) IS THE CHOICE OF METHODS IN LINE WITH OBJECTIVES? <i>Example : If the program provider wants to assess if program X had an effect on attitudes, are there pre/post measures, or at least a control group?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) IS THE SAMPLE ADEQUATELY DESCRIBED? <i>Examples : N , ethnicity, gender, age, civil status, employment, ...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) ARE THERE ENOUGH METHODOLOGICAL DETAILS? <i>Examples : quantitative/qualitative design, allocation to groups, description of variables/scales, statistical analyses, interview procedures, content/discourse analyses, ...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6) ARE THE DATA ANALYSIS METHODS APPROPRIATE? <i>Example : If variables are dichotomous, were statistical analyses adapted to such variables (e.g., using tetrachoric correlations, logistic rather than regular regression, etc.)?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7) IS THE EVIDENCE ROBUST? <i>Examples : Is it minimally representative? What is the strength of the research design? Were control variables/ alternative explanations considered?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8) WERE MAJOR LIMITATIONS INCLUDED IN THE PAPER? <i>Examples : biases in the chosen sample, suboptimal research design, weak quantitative/qualitative analyses, ...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9) WERE MAJOR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED IN THE PAPER? <i>Examples : interviews conducted by program staff, financial ties, authors of the paper not mentioning that they are also authors of the tool they assessed, ...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10) ARE FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS OR IMPLICATIONS MENTIONED? <i>Examples : how to improve the program, how to better reach the targeted populations, how to improve policies, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL (/10)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C

List of Eligible Tertiary Prevention Studies Excluded Because of Insufficient Methodological Quality

- Centre de Prévention contre les Dérives Sectaires liées à l’Islam. (2015). *Rapport d’activité annuel 2015 du C.P.D.S.I : Bilan d’actions et partage des retours d’expériences* [2015 annual activity report of the C.P.D.S.I: Review of actions and sharing of experience feedback].
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- Onyima, J. K. (2017). Sub-Saharan Africa: Societal reintegration of ex-militant youths. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 21, 76–100. <https://doi.org/10.24193/csqr.21.4>

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