



# **Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism**

**A Systematic Review of the Research  
Evidence**

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# About the author

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# Executive summary

The purpose of this systematic review is to examine the scholarly literature on the process(es) of radicalisation, particularly among young people, and the availability of interventions to prevent extremism. The review was undertaken to inform the national evaluation of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales' (YJB) preventing violent extremism programmes within the youth justice system, and as such, represents one of the research outputs from that study. The full evaluation report, *Process Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism Programmes for Young People*, is to be published by the YJB alongside this review.

The review found that the evidence base for effective preventing violent extremism interventions is very limited. Despite a prolific output of research, few studies contained empirical data or systematic data analysis. Furthermore, although a growing body of literature investigating the radicalisation process is emerging, the weight of that literature is focused upon terrorism rather than radicalisation. As such, the evidence is concerned with that smaller cohort of individuals who, once radicalised, go on to commit acts of violence in the pursuit of political or religious aims and objectives. This introduces a systematic bias in the literature, away from the radicalisation process that precedes terrorism, including radicalisation that does not lead to violence.

Despite these limitations, the systematic review found that Islamic radicalisation and terrorism emanate from a very heterogeneous population that varies markedly in terms of education, family background, socio-economic status and income. Several studies have identified potential risk factors for radicalisation, and, among these, political grievances (notably reaction to Western foreign policy) have a prominent role.

The review found only two evaluated UK programmes that explicitly aimed to address Islamic radicalisation in the UK. These were outreach and engagement projects running in London: the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) and the 'Street' Project. In addition, the review drew heavily upon the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) rapid evidence assessment, *Preventing Support for Violent Extremism through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence* (Pratchett et al, 2010). This advocated the adoption of capacity building and empowering young people, and interventions that "challenge ideology that focus on theology and use education/training". The Netherlands-based Slotervaart Project was identified as an exemplar of the outreach/community-based approach recommended by the DCLG review. The review also considered a number of de-radicalisation programmes operating in several Islamic countries and programmes tackling right-wing radicalisation. These programmes provide some potential learning points for future UK programmes, chiefly around the need for those engaging with radicalised individuals to carry authority and legitimacy, and to be equipped with profound ideological knowledge.

# 1. Background to the review

## Introduction

The suicide attacks on London in July 2005 and Madrid in March 2004 have brought recognition from many government, academic and security sources that Europe now confronts a qualitatively different kind of 'terrorism'. What has been described as the 'new terrorism' appears to function across a global dimension, while being more fluid, dispersed and unpredictable than previous terrorist threats. 'New terrorism' is conducted by largely autonomous groups which operate in the absence of institutional training and recruitment, but share an ideological affinity with the original Al Qa'ida network, and are defined ethnically and racially. It has been argued that the emergence of these networked 'self-starter cells' represents a distinct and novel phenomenon and a dramatic departure from previous activity.

The London attacks, in which 52 people were killed, also signalled another tendency, that the perpetrators were all citizens who had spent the majority, and sometimes all, of their lives in the UK. These were not then hardened veterans of some former conflict, but rather disenfranchised members of a community who would have been moulded in a broadly liberal-democratic and tolerant multi-cultural context. Yet, as many commentators have noted, such assumptions hardly seem credible when considering the values that the militant ideologues espoused in martyrdom videos and the obvious indifference to mass civilian casualties. Of course there is nothing new about religious violence, political violence, or its more familiar label of 'terrorism'. Neither have governments been slow to brand violent opponents with this title, nor to produce ever more proscriptive legal definitions of terrorism, most of which encompass behaviour that would constitute offences under ordinary criminal law (Townsend, 2002: 3).

The radicalisation of European Muslims is now a focal point of research and political debate on contemporary Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorism in Europe. Considerable research efforts have been made to understand this new emerging paradigm in radicalised violence, and this review examines and synthesises this research literature.

## Aim of the review

The purpose of this systematic review is to examine the scholarly literature on the process(es) of radicalisation, particularly among young people, and the availability of interventions to prevent extremism.<sup>1</sup> The review was undertaken to inform the national evaluation of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales' (YJB) preventing violent extremism programmes within the youth

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<sup>1</sup> The views presented in this report are those of the author and are not representative of YJB or Home Office policy unless explicitly stated.

justice system, and as such, represents one of the research outputs from that study. The full evaluation report is to be published by the YJB alongside this review (*Process Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism Programmes for Young People*, 2012).

Throughout this review, the explicit focus is upon Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (sometimes referred to as 'Islamic militancy' or 'Islamic extremism' by some commentators) taking place in the West. We have not examined other forms of 'extremism' such as that of the far-right, except where there was direct relevance to the radicalisation process or where there was some valuable crossover in programmes and interventions concerning prevention, or other applicable joint learning. This narrows down the field of study to a focus on the (mostly) Muslim population in the West who are subject to radicalisation that leads to violence and Jihadist terrorism.

Part of this task requires breaking down the original research questions into a number of sub-questions and examining the literature for viable explanations. Therefore, we are interested in knowing:

- Why and how do some apparently well-integrated youths that live in affluent Western liberal democracies become attracted to Islamist radicalisation?
- What explains the move from discussion of political/religious violence to violent action?
- Why are some individuals moved to this form of violence, whereas the vast majority of others exposed to the same influences and generating conditions are not?
- Is religious fundamentalism by itself the root cause of radicalisation and Islamic terrorism?
- Are the causes more social than religious, with radicalised ideology merely an organising principle?

These questions can also be summarised as follows: which contextual features interact with which individual factors through which mechanisms – or what, as Atran neatly asks, is “the original spark that ignites people’s passions and minds” (Atran, 2007: 110)?

Other questions focus on the social organisation of Islamic radicalisation:

- Is there a difference between the individuals planning a violent act and the ones actually performing one?
- Are social networks and group processes in themselves sufficient to radicalise?
- Are there feedback loops to radicalisation from authorities’ responses and media coverage?

The other aim of this review is to move beyond the theoretical discussion contained within the literature and to consider policy approaches to preventing radicalisation. Therefore, the review also sets out to examine:

- what has been done to measure radicalisation
- what has been tried in tackling radicalisation and whether there are any reliable measures of success
- whether there are any lessons from other initiatives and associated interventions that could be used to engage with 'extreme' prejudices and actions among young people
- once radicalised, what can be done to 'de-radicalise' or to disengage young people from this process.

## **A note on systematic reviews**

The systematic review has traditionally been used in the medical sciences to aid evidence-based decision making. Typically, this has involved examining clinical trials to answer questions about a health care intervention, often imposing a strict inclusion criteria based on methodology to ensure that only the evidence from the most rigorous studies is assessed and interpreted (i.e. randomised controlled trials). There are several well-known advantages to conducting systematic reviews, for instance, they can compensate for low statistical power for interventions across numerous trials by combining studies, and in addition they can also allow more justifiable generalisations to other populations if effectiveness can be demonstrated across a range of studies.

More recently, systematic reviews are being employed in the social sciences, usually when examining the efficacy of some given intervention in tackling a social problem (for instance, cognitive behavioural therapy, or 'alternative opportunities provision' for preventing youth gang involvement). However, this form of meta-analysis is most productive when addressing a clearly focused question. Where the research question is broad-ranging or where the key terms are vague or ill-defined, the ability of a systematic review to produce a convincing answer is reduced. The earlier discussion on definitions should indicate that the 'process of radicalisation' remains ill-defined. This made the task of generating a factual knowledge base for collation and summary that much more difficult.

A full description of the methodology used in this systematic review can be found in Appendix 1.

## **A note on the quality of the research evidence**

Before we discuss the main results of this systematic review, we make some remarks on the quality of the research in the field of Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation, and in the field of terrorism research more generally (we are not referring here to the quality rating exercise conducted for this review).

As this systematic review demonstrates, there is now a sizeable body of literature analysing the causes of terrorism, and a smaller literature on Al Qa'ida (or Jihadist) terrorism and radicalisation. Jackson reports that scholarly

papers in the terrorism discipline are believed to have increased by 300% (Jackson, cited in Shepherd, 2007) since 11 September 2001.

However, there remain serious limitations to research in this area. As the terrorism researcher Andrew Silke has noted, despite this prolific output, a number of critical issues remain concerning the quality of the evidence being used to justify the many claims by researchers (Ranstorp, 2006; Chen et al, 2008, in Silke, 2008). Much of the research looking at Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation has been limited, often relying on anecdotes and a small number of case studies. Furthermore, the general quality of scholarship is often poor, and has been described as "impressionistic, superficial and often pretentious, venting far reaching generalisations on the basis of episodic evidence" (Schmid and Jongman, 1988: 177).

These rather dismal remarks reflect some rather stark facts. For instance, it is estimated that only 20% of published articles on terrorism provide any substantially new knowledge about the subject (Silke, 2008: 101). More revealing still is Silke's (2008: 101) contention that systematic interviews have been used in only 1% of research reports, and to date, no such interview-based study has been carried out with Jihadists. These findings are reinforced by Getos' more recent review of terrorism literature, which found that less than 5% of all published articles on terrorism were based on any sort of empirical data (Getos, 2009).

These difficulties have meant that many studies examining radicalisation are mainly conducted using qualitative methods in analysing data, and as few make systematic data analysis a feature of their studies, sampling error and attributed bias cannot be discounted. Our review also found a preponderance of studies that were entirely theoretically driven, using political-sociological or historical analysis of terrorist acts (Hudson, 1999). Indeed, much of the literature in this review fits this last category, with empirically driven research being the exception rather than the norm.

Even some of the higher quality studies, such as Sageman (2004, 2008) and Bakker (2006) are based almost entirely on secondary analysis of data sets which combine archival records, court reports/legal documents and media reports. While Sageman and Bakker's studies represent a significant step forward in social science research on Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorism, providing a more systematic analysis of the backgrounds, characteristics and circumstances of Jihadists, the data sources are not always reliable due to the apparent bias of different journalistic and other publications, or are simply incomplete as data sources. Another weakness of these studies is that neither author provides any comparison with individuals who are not members of extremist groups, thereby lacking any counterfactual. Furthermore, these better quality studies focus upon known terrorist subjects, and as such represent a retrospective analysis of the end point of the radicalisation process: the militant who is actively engaged in the preparation or performance at the operational phase in conducting an attack. While the authors conduct a valuable analysis of the preceding events and itemise influencing factors, they necessarily report upon a skewed sample if one's concern is the process of radicalisation as a whole.

The reasons why empirical studies have been so lacking in researching Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation and terrorism are unsurprising. Even the most intrepid researcher finds difficulty, not to mention danger, in identifying and accessing members of radical groups and environments, all of which results in a scarcity of new data. Even when access is possible, radicalised members may be unwilling to speak frankly and disclose critical information for security reasons (Getos, 2009). Furthermore, those who become operationally active (i.e. as successful suicide bombers) and whose mindset and circumstances are of most interest to researchers, kill themselves in the process of the attack, thus ruling themselves out of future interviews. This only leaves those who are apprehended as part of investigations (including unsuccessful bombers), which presents other access and security concerns, and makes them difficult research subjects. Furthermore, as Getos notes, those who are prepared to talk may know the least.

Silke (2001) highlights another difficulty, which lies in the differing terminology and definitions employed by researchers across the discipline, with definitions being frequently unclear, misleading or inappropriate.

## 2. Radicalisation as a process

### Introduction

As its definitions indicate, radicalisation is best viewed as a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another. Recent scholars argue that becoming radicalised is, for most people, a gradual process and one that requires a progression through distinct stages and happens neither quickly nor easily (Horgan, 2005; Sibley and Bhatt, 2007). So a person does not become radical overnight, although the influence of an incident which may act as a 'catalyst event' (such as an experienced act of discrimination, perceived attack on Islam such as the 2003 war on Iraq, or a 'moral crisis' with the death of a loved one) may accelerate the process. For instance, Al-Lami (2009: 2) notes that the majority of female suicide bombers in Iraq are thought to have had family members killed by either multi-national or state forces in the country, triggering their own recourse to terrorism, from what we assume is an act of vengeance.

### Models of the radicalisation process

A number of studies in the literature identified that the process of radicalisation is composed of distinct and identifiable phases, charting the transition from early involvement to becoming operationally active. We examine these here.

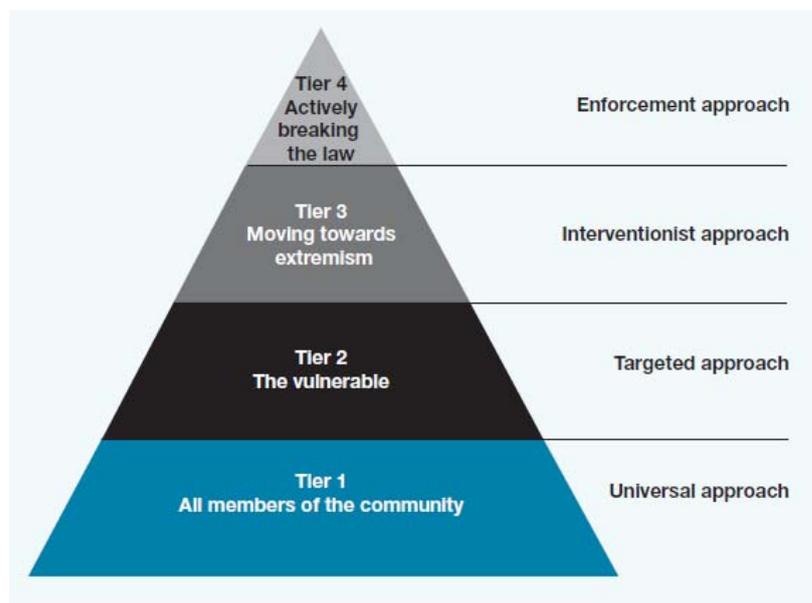
#### The Prevent pyramid

One way of conceiving radicalisation is as a progressive movement up a pyramidal-type model, where higher levels in the pyramid are associated with increased levels of radicalisation but decreased numbers of those involved (see Figure 2.1 below).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This model was developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in response to the previous Labour government's Prevent Strategy, which was launched in 2007. This strategy aimed to stop radicalisation, reduce support for terrorism and violent extremism, and discourage people from becoming terrorists. Since 2007, there have been a number of revisions to the strategy, culminating in its comprehensive review by the coalition government published in June 2011. Further information is provided in the accompanying report, *Process Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism Programmes for Young People* (YJB, 2012).

Figure 2.1: The ACPO tiered model of intervention to address Prevent<sup>3</sup>



At the apex of the pyramid are active terrorists (Tier 4 – those actively breaking the law) who remain relatively few in number when considered in relation to all those who may sympathise with their beliefs and feelings. This larger group occupy the next level down (Tier 3 – moving towards extremism). While not committing any violent acts themselves, they may provide tacit support to those sitting at the top of the pyramid and act to inspire others from below (at Tier 2). At this lower level, there sits a far larger grouping which constitutes all those that are considered ‘vulnerable’ to being influenced by these messages. One such group is young people within the criminal justice system. At the very bottom of the pyramid is the ‘wider community’, although it is unclear from the model how broad this grouping actually is (i.e. whether ‘community’ functions as an anodyne synonym for ‘society’ or a more meaningful grouping stratified by some category of faith, such as the ‘Muslim community’ etc.).

From this pyramid perspective, radicalisation is the gradient distinguishing the active terrorist from the broader base of sympathisers. The model leaves open the question of how a person moves from the base to the extremes of the apex (McCauley and Moskalkenko 2008:417). What is assumed is an implicit and linear relationship between the process of radicalisation and ultimately, for some, participation in terrorism. This assumption acts as a cornerstone of the previous Labour government’s 2007 Prevent policy. However, the assumption has been the subject of recent criticism, for instance by Demos (Bartlett and Birdwell, 2010: 8-10) who draw on Sageman’s work to argue that radicalisation is more ‘unpredictable and complicated’ than the linear process assumed by Prevent. The authors also cite McCauley and Moskalkenko’s (2008) work (discussed below, see Table 2.2), which identifies some 12

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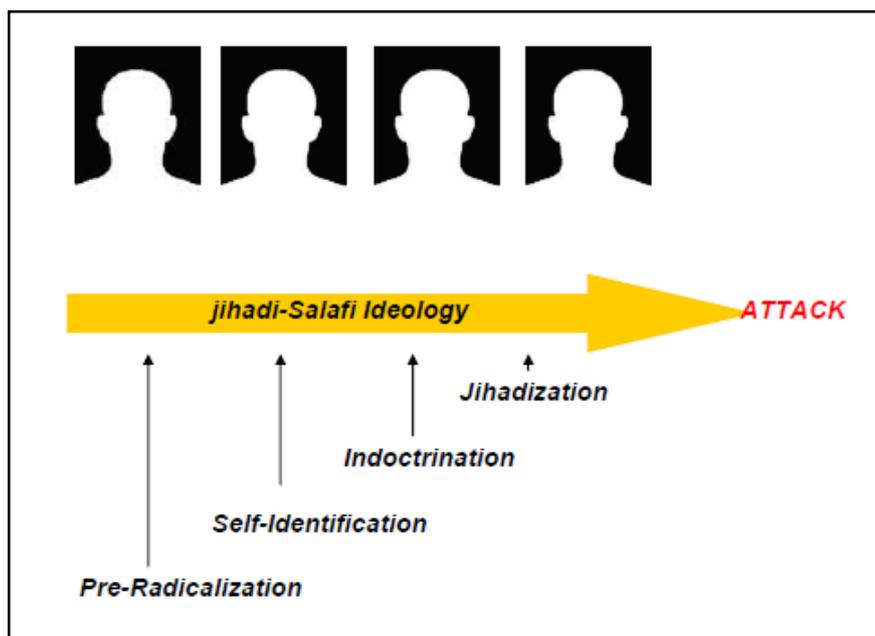
<sup>3</sup> Audit Commission (2008) *Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Development Exercise. Report to the Home Office and Communities and Local Government*, p.12.

different social/psychological processes operating across three different levels (the individual, group and mass levels) that can lead to radicalisation.

### The New York Police Department's four-stage radicalisation process

The New York Police Department (NYPD) report which systematically examined 11 in-depth case studies of Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation and terrorism conducted in the West identified four phases: pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadisation (NYPD 2007: 4). We provide a brief outline of these stages below.

Figure 2.2: The NYPD's proposed four-stage radicalisation process<sup>4</sup>



1. **Pre-radicalisation:** this initial stage describes the person's life situation before radicalisation and prior to exposure and adoption of Jihadi-Salafi Islam ideology. Presumably, the authors are describing here an 'at risk' group displaying some vulnerability (as in the pyramidal Tier 2 discussed in the Prevent pyramid section above) although this is unclear.
2. **Self-identification:** this stage encompasses the person's early exploration of Salafi Islam, and a gradual gravitation away from their old identity, the beginning of association with like-minded individuals and adoption of this ideology as their own. A "cognitive opening" provides the catalyst for this, where religious seeking is a cognitive opening, or crisis, which shakes an individual's certitude in previously held beliefs and leaves them receptive to new world views. The authors include a wide range of triggers that can serve as catalysts, including: economic triggers (losing a job, blocked mobility), social triggers (alienation, discrimination, racism – real or perceived), political triggers (international conflicts involving Muslims) and personal triggers (death in the close family).

<sup>4</sup> *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (NYPD, 2007: 21).

3. **Indoctrination:** this third phase sees an individual progressively intensifying their beliefs, and finally wholly adopting the Jihadi-Salafi ideology. This leads to a conviction that the conditions and circumstances exist where action is required to support and further the cause of militant Jihad. We are told that this phase is typically facilitated and driven by a “spiritual sanctioner”. Important to this phase is the association with like-minded people in order to ‘deepen’ the indoctrination. This is similar to Tier 3 of the terrorist pyramid (“moving towards extremism”), but appears to encompass a hardened ideological position. The role of the group becomes increasingly formative in encouraging and reinforcing hardened views.
4. **Jihadisation:** this is the final operational phase in the radicalisation process, where members of the cluster accept an individual duty to participate in Jihad, “self-designating themselves as holy warriors or mujahadin”. Ultimately, this sees the group carrying out a terrorist attack, including planning, preparation and execution (i.e. leading to Tier 4 – actively breaking the law).

There is no inevitability to this process, however. Not all who begin the process progress through all the stages, and they may either stop or abandon the radicalisation process at different points (NYPD, 2008: 19). However, those studied who did progress were deemed ‘quite likely’ to be involved in the planning or implementation of a terrorist act.

### **Marc Sageman’s four-stage process**

Sageman’s more internationally orientated analysis (2004, 2007, 2008) argues that the process of Al Qa’ida-influenced radicalisation to violence consists of four factors or ‘prongs’, these are:

1. a sense of ‘moral outrage’ (i.e. a reaction to perceived “major moral violations” such as the killings of Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya, or the perceived humiliation of Muslims as in the abuse at Abu Grade prison in Iraq – which bridge the local and global in the world view of the recipient (2007: 3))
2. a specific interpretation of the world (for instance where moral violations are seen as representing a “war against Islam” (2007: 3))
3. resonance with personal experiences (the interpretation of a Western war against Islam that meshes with perceptions in everyday life where anti-Muslim social, political, economic and religious bias and discrimination are perceived. These feelings are exacerbated by a combination of unemployment and boredom, which also drive participation in clandestine activities (2007: 3)), and finally
4. mobilisation through networks (Muslim anger and frustration is vented, often through internet forums and chat rooms, and it is this **interactivity** that acts to radicalise young Muslims together, amplifying grievances (2007: 4).

Sageman tells us that these are four recurrent phases in this process, and are not necessarily sequential.

### **Taarnby's eight-stage recruitment process**

Drawing heavily on Sageman's work (2004, 2007), Taarnby (2005: 22) outlines the structure of a recruitment process which characterises the structure of the Hamburg cell occurring before 11 September 2001. As Taarnby notes, this was a self-generating process containing the following elements:

1. individual alienation and marginalisation
2. a spiritual quest
3. a process of radicalisation
4. meeting and associating with like-minded people
5. gradual seclusion and cell formation
6. acceptance of violence as legitimate political means
7. connection with a gatekeeper in the know, and finally
8. going operational.

Taarnby's structure of the movement from growing intent to action dissects the later stages in the radicalisation process, with some element of an operational phase being evident in the last four phases.

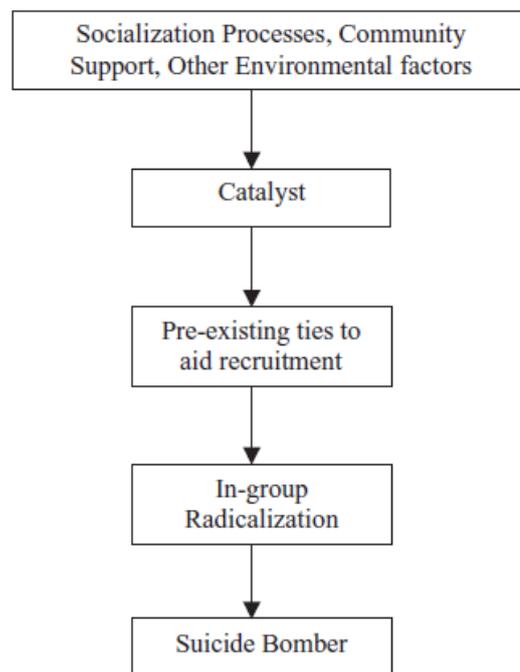
### **Gill's pathway model**

In a similar view, Gill (2007) offers a pathway model which charts the trajectory of individuals who become suicide bombers. The model proposes that individuals experience four key stages on their path to a suicide bombing:

1. a broad socialisation process and exposure to propaganda which tends to predispose the audience towards violence
2. the experience of a 'catalyst event' which can motivate joining a terrorist organisation
3. some pre-existing familial or friendship ties which facilitate the recruitment process, and finally
4. in-group radicalisation through internalisation and polarisation of the group's norms and values.

These four stages are considered prerequisites that all suicide bombers experience, although Gill argues that the order with which different suicide bombers experience these stages changes from bomber to bomber. Together, the stages mutually reinforce one another.

**Figure 2.3: Gill's four-stage pathway model<sup>5</sup>**



### **Wiktorowicz's al-Muhajiroun model**

Wiktorowicz (2004) puts greater stress on the role that social influence plays in leading a person to join a radicalised Islamic group. The author conducted extensive fieldwork observing al-Muhajiroun<sup>6</sup> and identifies four key processes that enhance the likelihood of an individual being drawn to a radical Islamic group and being persuaded to become actively involved (Wiktorowicz's study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). According to Wiktorowicz, these four processes are:

1. cognitive opening: where a person becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and world views
2. religious seeking: where a person seeks meaning through a religious framework
3. frame alignment: where the public representation proffered by the radical group 'makes sense' to the seeker and attracts their initial interest
4. socialisation: where a person experiences religious instruction that facilitates indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes.

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<sup>5</sup> Gill, P. (2008) 'Suicide Bomber Pathways Among Islamic Militants', *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 4 (2): 414.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Muhajiroun is a transnational Islamic movement based in the UK that supports the use of violence against western interests in Muslim countries and the establishment of an Islamic state through a military coup.

The first three processes are necessary prior conditions for the fourth (the socialisation stage), as joining a group requires that members are open to, and accepting of, the key tenets of the movement's message. We are told that this would often require an extensive process that included prolonged exposure to the movement's ideas, perhaps involving intensive debate and deliberation, and even experimentation with alternative groups. The value of Wiktorowicz's work in contrast to many of the other models discussed here, is that he provides an empirically-based study of radicalisation, rather than inversely working back from cause to effect in the study of *violent* radicalisation. This makes Wiktorowicz's study of particular significance, although the small sample size precludes wider generalisation.

### **'The staircase to terrorism'**

Moghaddam (2007) provides a more sophisticated 'multi-causal approach' to understanding suicide terrorism, one which forgoes the pathway metaphor in favour of the analogy of a narrowing "staircase to terrorism". This involves three levels at the individual (dispositional factors), organisational (situational factors) and environmental (socio-cultural, economic and political forces).

Moghaddam's metaphor is of a staircase housed in a building where everyone lives on the ground floor, but where an increasingly small number of people ascend up the higher floors, and a very few reach the top of the building, being the point at which one is led to carry out a terrorist act – there are obvious parallels with the Prevent pyramid model. We are told that the movement up each floor is characterised by a particular psychological process (discussed below in Table 2.1) and as one ascends the staircase, so it narrows, reflecting one's narrowing choices (as in a decision tree) thereby making it that much more difficult to disengage and (following the metaphor), descend.

**Table 2.1: A description of Moghaddam's staircase of terrorism**

<b>Floor</b>	<b>Description</b>
Ground floor: 'Psychological interpretation of material conditions'	<p>Acquiring a degree of predisposition towards terrorism via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• subjective perceptions of deprivation, injustice, blocked social mobility</li> <li>• perceived threats to their identity –antagonised by increasing globalisation and Westernisation.</li> </ul> <p>This is the most 'foundational' floor, presumably with the largest number of inhabitants due to widespread perceptions of relative deprivation and injustice.</p>

<p>First floor: 'Perceived options to fight unfair treatment'</p>	<p>Those on the first floor have a perception of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• blocked social mobility and exclusion from political decision making, which generates a sense of injustice at the illegitimacy of existing procedures and systems of rules</li> <li>• 'displaced aggression', whereby others are blamed for their perceived problems.</li> </ul>
<p>Second floor: 'Displacement of aggression'</p>	<p>This floor is characterised by displaced aggression, often verbalised rather than expressed through violent action.</p> <p>There is little by way of explanation for the transition to the third floor except the conscious seeking of ways to take physical action.</p>
<p>Third floor: 'Moral engagement'</p>	<p>The role of the terrorist organisation emerges on the third floor, where training and 'moral engagement' occur, with narrative to persuade the individual that its ends justify its means in achieving an 'ideal society'. Employing tactics of "isolation, affiliation, secrecy, and fear" acts to encourage and maintain this moral disengagement.</p>
<p>Fourth floor: 'Categorical thinking and the perceived legitimacy of the terrorist organisation'</p>	<p>Climbing to the fourth floor is to fully enter the terrorist organisation. Here recruits are socialised and assimilated into the secret life of the terrorist cell. The group promotes categorical us-versus-them dichotomous thinking, and the group's clandestine mission fosters increasing isolation from wider society. Moghaddam describes how pressures to conform and obey increase the likelihood of terrorist acts by members and narrow the options for leaving the group.</p>
<p>Fifth floor: 'The terrorist act and sidestepping inhibitory mechanisms'</p>	<p>The fifth floor is the last step or operational phase, with recruits receiving the cognitive resources necessary to overcome natural inhibitory mechanisms required to kill others by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• categorising the target as 'the enemy'</li> <li>• exaggerating in-group and out-group differences</li> <li>• preventing any inhibitory mechanisms (i.e. allowing victims of the attack to become aware of the danger and thereby behave in a way that could change the attacker's mind).</li> </ul>

Moghaddam agrees with the general consensus in the literature that many suicide bombers are motivated by a desire for revenge (for example, loss of a loved one or perceived social injustice). However, suicide bombing may also be motivated from a duty to follow one's own values, family, community or religion, with failure to act being perceived as betraying one's ideals or loved ones, God or country. Other situational circumstances are also influential, notably the social and organisational levels that both equip and influence the bomber. Finally, the environmental level provides the more general conditions that can give rise to political and religious violence including cultural, religious and political forces. This is not a determinative process however, and we are told that "the fundamentally important feature of the situation is [...] how people perceive the building and the doors they think are open to them" (2007: 70). While Moghaddam's explanation has as its focus suicide bombing, it is a metaphor that charts the first concrete steps of radicalisation of people who are searching for improved upward social mobility and trying out opportunities for advancement on the first floor, yet do not view themselves as radicals.

### **McCauley and Moskalenko's 12 mechanisms of political radicalisation**

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) have identified 12 'mechanisms'<sup>7</sup> of political radicalisation which operate across three levels: that of the individual, the group, and the mass level (we discuss each in greater depth in Table 2.2). This then is not specifically charting the different pathways towards Islamic radicalisation as such, or offering an underlying unitary theory of radicalisation or, as the authors make clear, an overarching conceptual framework integrating all the different influences. The findings are more modest, identifying and elaborating those social psychological processes which account for political radicalisation. Neither is this list exhaustive, in anticipating future research the authors are careful to note that other mechanisms may be identified later.

In keeping with much terrorism research, the authors argue that political radicalisation will likely involve more than one mechanism for an individual's trajectory to terrorism, endorsing the prevalent view that there are "multiple and diverse pathways leading individuals and groups to radicalisation and terrorism" (2008: 429).

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<sup>7</sup> By 'mechanism' the authors mean how something is accomplished.

**Table 2.2: McCauley and Moskalenko’s mechanisms of political radicalisation**

<b>Level of radicalisation</b>	<b>Mechanism</b>
Individual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal victimisation</li> <li>2. Political grievance</li> <li>3. Joining a radical group – the slippery slope</li> <li>4. Joining a radical group – the power of love</li> <li>5. Extremity shift in like-minded groups</li> </ol>
Group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat</li> <li>7. Competition for the same base of support</li> <li>8. Competition with state power</li> <li>9. Within group competition – fissioning</li> </ol>
Mass	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Jujitsu politics</li> <li>11. Hate</li> <li>12. Martyrdom</li> </ol>

Each mechanism is outlined in more detail below.

**1. Individual radicalisation by personal victimisation**

This first mechanism refers to the role that personal grievance plays in the radicalisation process (the authors cite a number of cases including Palestinian suicide bombings where revenge for loss of a loved one is the motive for self-sacrifice).

**2. Individual radicalisation by political grievance**

A political grievance from some political event or trend can also radicalise a person (although this can often prove difficult to disentangle from group grievances).

**3. Individual radicalisation by joining a radical group – the slippery slope**

Often joining a radical group is a slow and gradual process, starting with small tasks leading to greater responsibility and risk prior to becoming involved with important operations.

**4. Individual radicalisation by joining a radical group – the power of love**

This path to radicalisation is through personal connections where a person is recruited into a group through friends, family and lovers. Studies in small group psychology testify how commitment increases as group cohesion increases.

**5. Group radicalisation in like-minded groups**

This pathway refers to the phenomenon of “risky shift” or “group polarisation”, where there is increased agreement about an issue along with a more extreme position being adopted in their views.

**6. Group radicalisation under isolation and threat**

Small groups under threat tend to show certain features, including very high levels of cohesion, itself increasing pressure for behavioural compliance and internalised value consensus.

**7. Group radicalisation in competition for the same base of support**

This pathway describes competition for a wider base of support and can drive more radical action to gain that support. The authors cite a range of examples of this phenomenon from the IRA and other nationalist groups.

**8. Group radicalisation in competition with state power – condensation**

The “dynamic of condensation” refers to a cycle of reaction and counter reaction between a radical group and the counter posing state agencies which see an increased commitment to violence by some members in an effort to retaliate to state violence.

**9. Group radicalisation in within-group competition – fissioning**

This pathway to radicalisation involves intra-group conflict and the role of threats from within the group for agreement.

**10. Mass radicalisation in conflict with an out-group – Jujitsu politics**

Here *mass* radicalisation can occur where out-group threats lead reliably to greater group cohesion and respect for leaders and, in turn, to sanctions for those dissenters and deviators.

**11. Mass radicalisation in conflict with an out-group – hate**

This pathway refers to the dehumanisation of the ‘enemy’ by group members, typically where prolonged violence becomes more extreme, resulting in opponents being perceived as less than human.

**12. Mass radicalisation in conflict with an out-group – martyrdom**

The final mass radicalisation pathway is martyrdom, where radical groups keep salient the memory of their martyrs (or witnesses), although as the authors note, the impact of martyrs on mass audiences is under-theorised.

As the authors highlight, most of the 12 mechanisms are largely reactive in nature, depending upon a “dynamic of opposition” (2008: 430). By contrast, only two group radicalisation mechanisms are relatively autonomous. The first is individual radicalisation in joining a radical group – the slippery slope which involves adopting new beliefs and values in understanding past behaviours. The second is group radicalisation in like-minded groups, which captures how competition within the group over status, rewards and acceptance can drive radicalisation.

## Summary

All of the models examined had little specific information on how long the radicalisation process took from inception to operational action. The NYPD study indicates radicalisation takes place gradually over two to three years, similar to Silke’s (2008) contention that for most, radicalisation takes months or years. However, Reinares’ (2006) sociological profile of arrested Jihadist terrorists in Spain estimated a longer process of radicalisation, starting up to ten years before their arrest. The final stage of Jihadisation identified in the NYPD study (this being the final stage which defines an actual attack) can occur very quickly, with the authors citing as short a period as a couple of weeks if the members accept the group decision to undertake an attack (NYPD, 2007: 45). This rapid escalation in radicalisation was also found by Demos’ comprehensive study into the process of radicalisation in the West, *Edge of Violence*, although the authors failed to specify the number of radicals who had experienced this (Bartlett, Birdwell, and King, 2010).

Despite the identification of differing stages in the radicalisation process, all studies agree that there is a stage of individual change (for example, increase in religiosity, search for identity) that is enhanced through external aspects (for example, experienced discrimination or racism, or a perceived attack against Muslims such as the wars in Bosnia and Iraq), and a move to violent radicalisation, usually taking place when the individual socialises with like-minded people. These stages are not necessarily sequential, and they can also overlap, meaning that a person may skip a stage in reaching militant action or alternatively may become disillusioned at any given point and abandon the process altogether.

The exception to offering models of successive stages in radicalisation is McCauley and Moskalko’s model, which conceptualises 12 dimensions of radicalisation across three levels, as distinct from one inter-related model. As we would expect, there is an interplay of agency and structure in radicalisation, such that the central theoretical task is explaining the dynamics of this linkage. Integrating the levels of explanation has proved particularly difficult, and McCauley and Moskalko (2008: 429) are sceptical that a single theory can integrate all the different influences that bring a person to radicalised violence (although a conceptual scheme is not impossible). More common were studies that listed several possible factors, usually socio-psychological models, but failed to specify, in any detail, the interactions among them. While some attempts have been made to create or test theories and models of terrorism, or explain the processes of terrorism (for example, Crenshaw, 1981; Moghaddam, 2007) what a theory of Al Qa’ida-influenced

radicalisation to violence still lacks is a fully integrative perspective across all levels of explanation, one which enables an organisation to assess which correlates are causes, and which are mere markers or symptoms (Bouhana and Wikström, 2008: 37).

We consider these factors further and the key explanations put forth to account for the radicalisation process in Chapter 3. This material has been organised by the level of explanation through the major social science disciplines, and contributions of the earlier discussed models are also examined in light of this. The critical question remains as to why does one person become radicalised and another does not?

## 3. Theories of radicalisation

The following are summaries of the main theories attempting to explain radicalisation and violent extremism. Each section summarises the key messages from the literature (the full list of source documents can be found in Chapter 8).

### Biological theories

The overwhelming majority of people who become radicalised to violence in the West are young and male, generally aged between mid-teens and mid-20s (Bakker, 2006; Wadgy, 2007). This finding has strong parallels with much mainstream criminological research and suggests some comorbidity with work examining life course persistent offending, which suggest that higher levels of impulsivity, confidence, risk-taking and status needs play a partial role in the attraction that violent extremism holds for a few. In addition, holding more positive attitudes toward vengeance and a greater likelihood to exhibit and approve of vengeful behaviour may also be important (Silke, 2008). A smaller literature concerning Muslim radicalisation (which has not necessarily led to violence) finds similar age and sex parallels.

The role of women in Islamic radicalisation appears to be largely confined to supportive roles (such as propagandising Jihadist ideas through the internet) and there is some evidence from Holland indicating that women's roles are becoming more prominent (Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst (General Intelligence and Security Service) (AIVD), 2006) although there are few known cases of women's more direct involvement in actual acts of Islamic terrorism. However, the scarcity of research findings on the extent and nature of women's roles in group and community radicalisation may reflect the literature's focus on extrapolating findings from known terrorist cases, an approach which would largely fail to expose women's roles in the radicalisation process.

### Psychological theories

Much of the research literature has been concerned with providing individual-level explanations for terrorism rather than explanations for non-violent radicalisation among young people. These efforts have largely focused upon detecting some particular set of distinguishing characteristics that differentiate the terrorist from the wider population, aiming to discover what has variously been described as a 'terrorist personality'. The principal explanations have centred upon some form of pathology (mental illness or psychodynamic abnormality), repressed sexuality, or some other distinguishing personality trait. Nevertheless, these attempts have been largely unsuccessful. It seems that many Islamic terrorists (at least in the West) appear notable for their normality and ordinariness. While it may be premature to entirely rule out the

importance of individual characteristics or experiences in the development of a differential propensity to become radicalised to violence, the literature has yet to firmly establish what these characteristics might be.

## Muslim identity

For most Muslim young people, the search for their own personal identity involves defining their relationship to the world, exploring and experimenting with issues of faith, heritage and their peer group, without necessarily leading to radicalisation. However, some young Muslims choose to adopt a radical religious identity which can be the outcome of an earlier 'identity crisis' or 'identity confusion' in attempting to reconcile the potential conflicts of being at odds with what the first generation perceives as a 'Muslim identity' while feeling that they are not accepted or do not belong to wider British society. This can be intensified by perceptions or experiences of discrimination, a sense of blocked social mobility, and a lack of confidence in the political system. This can spur a search for a Muslim identity at a moment of crisis, leaving that person vulnerable to radicalising influences or embracing religious fundamentalism as an antidote to these unresolved inner conflicts, one which offers a highly structured ritual and practice. This sense of contradiction or conflict between a Muslim identity and a sense of Britishness, is not inherent for young Muslims. Thomas' (2008) study in West Yorkshire exploring young Muslims' attitudes to living in Britain found that many saw no inherent contradictions.

## Societal theories

Societal-level explanations were the commonest form of explanation for violent radicalisation in the reviewed literature, although these were expressed with varying degrees of commitment. Typically, these explanations took the form of arguments assigning some degree of causation to either poor or failed integration, the impact of discrimination, and the experience of deprivation or segregation. One central question is whether these influences play a direct cause in radicalisation and/or violent radicalisation, or whether they are at best only distal background factors (the causes of the causes)?

### Is deprivation and poor integration a direct cause of radicalisation?

A person can experience relative deprivation<sup>8</sup> personally or perceive it at the wider group level (in their surrounding community), or even at the international level (i.e. the relative fortunes of the Muslim world compared to the West). Relative deprivation operates through an awareness of what others have in relation to the perceiver (materially, culturally or in terms of social status) *and* when they perceive these differences to be meaningful and potentially unjust (Runciman, 1966). People can experience relative deprivation in several ways: after a period when rights and privileges have expanded only to be

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<sup>8</sup> 'Relative deprivation' refers to broad-ranging structural inequalities such as poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, and poor housing.

followed by stagnation, or more poignantly, when the fortunes of one's in-group seem to be declining while the fortunes of others improve (Gurr, 1970, in Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008b). Several studies (Demos, 2006: 45) view deprivation as providing a cause of grievance and "fertile terrain for radical mobilisation" (The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo), 2007).

Many authors cited statistical data which consistently shows that Muslims as a group suffer from higher levels of deprivation than other groups, arguing that this inequality was the basis for resentment and frustration. However, this data does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Pisiou's interrogation of UK socio-economic data demonstrates that the evidence levied as proof of Muslim deprivation results from comparisons of Muslims with non-Muslims at the national level. The findings change drastically when figures are analysed at smaller geographical levels that reveal that Muslims tend to be concentrated in areas where both Muslims and non-Muslims suffer from high unemployment. The consideration of additional factors such as age and generation<sup>9</sup> dilute the force of argument further. Integration data in Europe suffers more profound problems, with no reliable figures of deprivation and integration (Pisiou, 2007: 8).

The perceived failure to adequately integrate second and third generation Muslims into wider society, especially new Muslim immigrants to Europe, was another common explanation for radicalisation (NYPD, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Netherlands Ministry of Justice, 2004; Home Office, 2004). Biographical data from extremists (e.g. Alonso and Reinares, 2006; Dornhof, 2009; Sageman, 2004, 2008) does not entirely disprove the 'failed integration hypothesis', as it shows the occurrence of integration problems in the biographies of some Jihadists in the form of relative deprivation or identity crisis, although these elements do not occur in all cases. As Pisiou (2007:13) points out, such a correlation does not equate to a valid proof of cause.

It seems that at best, experiencing relative deprivation may play some facilitative role rather than a causative one. The experience of discrimination and hostility can also be formative; support for this comes from both a range of polling data and qualitative research, including one of the few ethnographic studies of radical Muslim groups conducted in Europe (Wiktorowicz, 2004). This does provide some evidence that the intensity of feeling experienced in cases of discrimination, hostility and blocked mobility can underlie a change in identity formation, prompting a 'cognitive opening' and change in previous belief systems which may lead the individual to alternative discourses, such as radical Islam, that provide ideological explanations and repertoires of action to overcome it. In turn, this may lead the individual to socialise with radicalised groups whose attachment and group loyalty provides an antidote to the sense of alienation from wider society. However, it should be stressed

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<sup>9</sup> As Pisiou notes (2007), the Muslim and total rate are quite similar due to the fact that "Muslims tend to be concentrated in areas with general high unemployment or where industries have waned. The low educational performance rates are skewed by the relative youth of the population and the relatively high number of older immigrants who arrived with little or no education; studies on the education levels and overall performance of British-born Muslims have actually showed better results than the national average." (2007:8).

that these findings cannot be generalised as the study is only a small scale, using a non-random sample.

While the role of relative deprivation theories and failed integration theories feature strongly in the literature and are difficult to settle, it is likely that their role is only, at best, a background or distal factor (the cause of the causes) in any process of radicalisation, and then not a necessary one.

### **The role of segregation and enclavisation**

Enclavisation results when different groups live apart from each other and become clustered into segregated groups whereupon they lead “parallel lives” (Cantle, 2001). While enclavisation is thought to “only play a limited role” as a pull factor to violent radicalisation (Vardy, 2008: 60), other studies suggest that residential segregation, often self-segregation, of some Muslim communities plays a more substantial role in the radicalisation process leading up to violent radicalisation (Macey, 2008; Mahood, 2006; iCoCo, 2007).

### **Political explanations**

Many explanations of radicalisation and Islamic terrorism found in the literature were rooted in socio-psychological accounts which emphasised the primacy of grievances and discontent, usually by implicit reference to frustration-aggression or humiliation-revenge mechanisms. In one rather obvious sense, all motivations for violent extremism can be thought of as constituting grievances, but the literature demonstrates that they can carry powerful effects. These feelings of psychological distress and grievance are seen as generated from a range of socio-economic, political and cultural strains and crises which prompt individuals to become radicalised.

There was a consensus in the literature about the role of political grievances as key explanatory factors driving radicalisation in Europe, especially concerning British (and Western) foreign policy, and the perceived humiliation of Muslims in conflict zones, or ‘humiliation by proxy’. This is supported by a range of survey and polling data which consistently suggested widespread opposition to British foreign policy, particularly the war in Iraq and the ongoing Palestinian situation, although numerous other conflicts play their role. This would appear an important finding, suggesting that understanding political action requires, at least in part, political explanations.

Important as political grievances seem to be, they appear insufficient in themselves to adequately explain why some individuals choose to join Islamic groups while others do not (Sageman, 2008: 21; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008: 5; Wiktorowicz, 2004: 4; Moghaddam, 2007; NYPD, 2007). These authors suggest that to progress from radicalisation to violent radicalisation requires more than a shared set of grievances and psychological stressors. Other mechanisms seem to be involved which explain differential patterns of joining among different Islamic movements, ranging from militant to non-violent organisations (Wiktorowicz, 2004: 4). These can include some catalyst or crisis event in the person’s life (although this can be experienced on behalf of another person) and crucially, having these grievances mobilised through a social network (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Gill, 2007, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2004).

Therefore, understanding Islamic extremism requires group level and individual level explanations.

### **The role of social bonds and networks**

One of the most consistent findings in the research is that involvement in violent radicalisation is a group phenomenon, with social relationships and networks playing a key role in pathways to participation. Radicalisation takes place both within small networks of friends and relatives who spontaneously self-organise into radical groups, and also as an outcome of organised top-down recruitment procedures exercised by radical Islamic groups through a number of outreach practices. A number of mechanisms such as group socialisation, group bonding, group polarisation and isolation, and peer pressure can transmit and intensify indoctrination and moral disengagement, possibly leading to entry into violent extremism.

Approaches such as social movement and network theory, resource mobilisation theory and framing theory show how radical movements actively seek to exploit political opportunities to explain and promote their cause when recruiters engage with potential recruits (Hamid, 2007; Wiktorowicz, 2004; Sageman, 2004, 2008). Framing theory shows how the normal activist can gravitate into violent extremism through a social and inter-subjective process which creates the required motivation (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008/2: 7). Wiktorowicz (2004) shows how “mobilising agents” reaching out to a “sentiment pool” who share a set of common grievances, skilfully “re-frame” these issues, recasting them as grievous injustices, and attributing responsibility and a moral justification for violence against the perceived wrong-doer (Dalgaard-Nielsen, op cit).

One question which is left unanswered by this focus on small-group dynamics is whether these group processes can turn anyone into a violent extremist. Weinberg and Davis (1989, cited in Bouhana and Wikström, 2008: 22), have argued that “[w]ould-be members of the underground are ‘pushed’ toward a particular group because of their pre-existing cognitive or affective attributes and are ‘pulled’ into the group (and re-socialised) by forces in play within the collective itself.” Certainly, the role of group dynamics as a ‘re-socialising agent’ is important in explaining recruitment and radicalisation, but as Bouhana and Wikström (2008: 22) have noted, questions remain about the “developmental process leading to the acquisition of these ‘pre-existing’ attributes, or to the selection process, by which some individuals come into contact with environments (settings) conducive to moral change and the acquisition of new moral habits.”

This group perspective also illustrates a number of benefits or ‘pull factors’ (inducements) on offer to members that can attract people into involvement, and appear to be consciously used to groom potential recruits. These include (but are not limited to) providing a sense of belonging, rewarding personal and social ties, increased status and self-esteem, the sense of risk, excitement and danger, being part of the wider Muslim Ummah, as well as fulfilling the desire for vengeance (Crenshaw, 2003; Silke, 2008: 117; Demos 2008a, 2008b). This is likely to have appeal to alienated young Muslim males in

particular, who are seeking a place to belong or exploring their own religious identity.

A recent study of radicalisation by Bartlett, Birdwell, and King (2010) identified five elements which the authors find provide the appeal in the journey to violent radicalisation:

1. the emotional pull to act in the face of injustice, including:
  - a. a relative lack of Islamic knowledge
  - b. the appealing and vitriolic narratives of Muslims being 'under attack' from 'evil, scheming Western interests'
  - c. the ubiquity of jihadi videos.
2. the 'thrill, adventure and coolness' of a dangerous counter-cultural organisation:
  - a. the authors stress the role of non-religious reasons in this process
  - b. particularly other radicals' stories of excitement and adventure.
3. status and internal codes of honour
4. peer pressure
5. the lack of alternative sources of information that could potentially act as diversions.

These elements highlight the importance of group-level influences and the often unintended effects in escalating attitudes and behaviour. Most of the interviewed radicals (who were non-violent) reported having considered but rejected the use of violence. The most significant reasons given for this rejection were the presence of good role models when growing up, family members with religious knowledge, access to lots of texts, contact with Sufi ideas, and hearing internationally renowned scholars speak at conferences (ibid, 33–34). One of the main findings of the research equated the acceptance of radical ideas as similar to other 'social epidemics', with peer group pressure playing a critical role: "Radicalisation depends on how far one's peers accept such ideas and the extent to which they are seen as worthy of imitation" (Demos, 2010b: 31).

This emphasis upon peer group influences has strong parallels to more mainstream criminological research examining co-offending and the central role of peers in understanding the aetiology of delinquency, notably the way that groups can create their own moral climate, defining what is acceptable behaviour within a self-contained social system (Warr, 2002).

### **The role of religion in the radicalisation process**

Violent radicalisation and Jihadist terrorism derives its authority from a particular interpretation of Islam. This begs the question as to the authenticity of this interpretation, the qualities of the ideology and its control over the behaviour of its adherents.

One inescapable and glaring commonality among those who have committed recent bombings in the UK is that their political radicalisation is linked to their increasing religiosity (Awan, 2007a). More widely, a strong commitment to religious belief was demonstrated as the principal motivating factor for involvement in Islamic terrorism among incarcerated terrorists (Bell, 2005a; Ibrahim, 1988; Sageman, 2005 in Wadgy, 2007). This fact appears to place the role of ideological and religious sympathies within the Islamic world at the heart of this form of violent radicalisation and implies a causal link between faith and attitudes, although it should be stressed that this was a point of much dispute in the literature.

Unfortunately, there have been few studies aimed at investigating this phenomenon, with the vast majority of contributions to this debate being theoretically driven. One exception to this is Ansari et al (2006, in Silke, 2008) who found that religious identity had a major impact on attitudes: respondents who felt their primary identity was Muslim held more positive views towards Jihad and martyrdom, terrorism, violence, suicide, Jihad and the 9/11 attacks, whereas respondents with a dominant British identity did not (Ansari et al, 2006, in Silke, 2008). While this highlights the key role that religious identity may play, the small sample size limits the study.<sup>10</sup> A number of international surveys have identified strong popular support for Islamic violent extremism in predominantly Muslim countries. Other pioneering studies have found that religious people tend to be prejudiced (Allport and Ross, 1967 in Altmeyer, 2003). More recently, Altmeyer (2003: 17) found that religious fundamentalism correlated quite highly with religious ethnocentrism, and also prejudice against various racial-ethnic minorities. Altmeyer concluded that religious fundamentalists tended to have a very small 'us' and quite a large 'them', such that religious ethnocentrism inclined toward in-group, out-group distinctions.

In response to those that argue for an Islamic theology lying at the heart of violent radicalisation, a number of authors point out the sheer weight of countervailing evidence:

- that the majority of Muslims are moderate in their faith and do not subscribe to radical Islam or Jihad, arguing that these doctrines misappropriate religious labels for violent ends (Abbas, 2007; Githens-Mazar, 2008)
- by stressing the plurality and diversity of beliefs contained within Islam (Demos, 2006)
- showing the actions of Islamic terrorists as almost entirely political and not at all theological (Abbas, 2007a).

While these are fair points, Islam as a religious culture resists separating the secular from spiritual jurisdictions (Townsend, 2002: 102). Furthermore, as Vertigans (2007: 452) notes, "across Muslim societies concepts like jihad and martyrdom are now embedded within social and political discourse and

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<sup>10</sup> N = 80, and none of the respondents were actual Jihadists, a point which, as Silke (2008) notes, further limits this study.

normative religious behaviour is less moderate, reducing the distance to be travelled to militancy and terrorism”.

The question of how religion impacts upon radicalisation is far from settled, in part because the theories we have discussed are too powerful for the methods, and there is little empirical work in the literature. However, this is not to deny a connection between radical Islam and political violence, one which can partially explain the predisposition to a sustained use of violence among some Muslims.

One of the key issues in the debate concerning the role of religion in the radicalisation process is the interpretation of Islamic texts and the meaning given to particular passages and verses (i.e. sword verses) and the significance of key concepts (such as Jihad). While this issue of scriptural authority cannot be settled here, the various Islamic texts provide the resources for a number of different and competing readings. In the absence of any sure means of establishing authorial intent, a plurality of interpretations, be they ‘moderate’ or ‘radical’ can be made and defended, indeed, this is one of the factors which accounts for the fractional and heterogeneous nature of the wider Muslim world. It follows then that Islamic doctrines can be used to justify either violence or non-violence, and in the hands of those whose faith requires obedience, also exercises ideological control over behaviour. This is not to propose that a majority of Muslims will be predisposed to use force, or that Muslims will use force in all situations, as Gould (2005) argues, religious commitment in Islam by itself is unable to account for violent radicalisation; other factors will also be required. This requires a closer consideration of both the idiosyncrasies of individual psychology and other group and social mechanisms of radicalisation.

## **Radicalisation incubators**

### *Prisons*

There is some evidence to suggest that radicalisation is taking place within prisons, both in the UK and more widely in parts of the USA, and some prison inmates do appear to be vulnerable to radicalisation. However, further research is needed to explore whether the radicalisation process(es) are the same as in the community, and also the scale of radicalisation within prisons.

### *The internet*

While much has been written and implied concerning the role of the internet in radicalising young people, there is little actual evidence that it plays a dominant role in radicalisation. More likely it has a facilitating and enabling role, such as in maintaining network contacts and reinforcing ideological messages that have already been internalised by their audiences. Face-to-face human contact appears to remain crucial to recruitment and the group dynamics that can drive radicalisation, at least radicalisation to violence.

## 4. Individual risk factors

Much of the research on Islamic extremists has shown the lack of any consistent profile that can help identify the potential terrorist – as is the case with earlier efforts in the broader terrorism literature. Moreover, recent studies show that the common characteristic among Islamic extremists is just how normal they are (Atran, 2003; Crenshaw, 2003a; Gill, 2007; Horgan, 2003b, 2005, 2008; Sageman, 2004; Sibling and Bhatt, 2007; Silke, 1998, 2003b, 2008). The 2005 London bombers and some of the terrorists involved in the Madrid attacks were seemingly well integrated into their communities and were radicalised while living in their respective countries. The House of Commons report (2006) into the events after the London bombings on 7 July 2005 asserted:

*What we know of previous extremists in the UK shows that there is not a consistent profile to help identify who may be vulnerable to radicalisation. Of the 4 individuals here, 3 were second generation British citizens whose parents were of Pakistani origin and one whose parents were of Jamaican origin; Kamel Bourgass, convicted of the Ricin plot, was an Algerian failed asylum seeker; Richard Reid, the failed shoe bomber, had an English mother and Jamaican father. Others of interest have been white converts. Some have been well-educated, some less so. Some genuinely poor, some less so. Some apparently well integrated in the UK, others not. Most single, but some family men with children. Some previously law-abiding, others with a history of petty crime. In a few cases there is evidence of abuse or other trauma in early life, but in others their upbringing has been stable and loving.*

(Home Office, 2005: 31)

*Understanding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the UK* (2008), a later study conducted by MI5's Behavioural Science Unit,<sup>11</sup> and based on several hundred in-depth case studies of individuals in Britain known to be involved in, or closely associated with, violent extremist activity, also concluded that it was not possible to draw up a typical profile of the 'British terrorist'. Most were seen as "demographically unremarkable" and simply reflecting the communities in which they lived (Guardian, 2008). Furthermore, all had taken strikingly different journeys to violent extremist activity. MI5 could not identify either a uniform pattern by which the radicalisation process occurred, nor a particular type of person that was susceptible to it.

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<sup>11</sup> This was a classified internal research document for MI5, the key findings of which were reported by the Guardian newspaper in August 2008: Travis, A. (2008) *MI5 Report Challenges Views on Terrorism in Britain*. London: Guardian.

These British findings are reinforced by the New York Police Department's (NYPD) (2007)<sup>12</sup> comparative study into Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation, which also concluded that there was no useful profile to predict who would follow a trajectory of radicalisation, and that those who became involved came from "unremarkable walks of life" (2007: 82). Indeed, they had average educations, average jobs, and little, if any, criminal history.

This bleak prognosis for the success of profiling efforts in identifying perpetrators of Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorism is shared by other reviews and studies of the evidence (Bux, 2007; Horgan, 2007; Merari, 1990; Bakker, 2008). After analysing the social, personal and situational characteristics of more than 200 individuals who were involved with 31 cases of Jihad terrorism in Europe, Bakker concludes that "there is no standard Jihad terrorist" (2008: 53). This lack of common traits was also the case at the group level, as Bakker notes: "Even the conclusion that many would-be terrorists join the Jihad as groups of friends or relatives does not provide clear signs that would make it easier for the intelligence community to spot jihadi networks at an early stage. There are uncountable groups of friends and family members and our sample also includes groups of persons that lack pre-existing social ties". Moreover, there are examples of people who seem to have operated almost entirely on their own, i.e. the 'lone wolf' (2008: 53).

This diversity in 'Jihadists' profiles is attributed by Devi (2005) to the many differing reasons for their joining the Jihad (in Al-Lami, 2009). One exception to this broad consensus on the feasibility of profiling is a study of suicide bombers in the Middle East (Lester et al, 2003). The authors argue that the dismissal of psychological profiles of suicide bombers is premature and probably incorrect, and suggest that suicide bombers may share personality traits (such as an "authoritarian personality"). While this finding cannot be easily discounted, the concept of an authoritarian personality is somewhat controversial and suffers serious methodological limitations. Furthermore, the studies' frameworks have been developed on the basis of local domains of empirical observations in the Middle East, which may have limited relevance to suicide bombers in Western Europe.

The lack of a recognisable set of characteristics suggests that the process of radicalisation will also be highly variable. So while some factors may prove pivotal for one person's involvement, they may only play a peripheral role or no role at all in the decision making of others (Horgan, 2008).

Despite the generally accepted heterogeneity and inconsistencies in the profiles of radical extremists, a number of studies and reviews report some similarities and internal and external factors that may play a role in the

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<sup>12</sup> This was a comparative case study of five prominent homegrown groups/plots which resulted in either terrorist attacks or thwarted plots. The cases included: Madrid's 2004 attack, Amsterdam's Hofstad Group, the London 2005 attack, Australia's Operation Pendennis, which thwarted an attack(s) in November 2005 and Canada's Toronto 18 Case, which thwarted an attack in June 2006. The NYPD dispatched detectives and analysts to meet with law enforcement, intelligence officials and academics at each of these locations to enhance understanding of these events as well as the phenomenon of homegrown terrorism cases.

radicalisation process (Al-Lami, 2009; Bakker, 2006; Hemmingsen and Anderson, 2007; Horgan, 2003b, 2005, 2008; Lester et al, 2003; NYPD, 2007; Silke 2003b, 2008). It has also been suggested that individuals had some “vulnerability in their background” that made them receptive to extremist ideology (Travis, 2008). Horgan (2008: 82–83) suggests six key risk factors that may predispose individual involvement in terrorism and suicide bombing. These are:

- having an “emotional vulnerability” (feelings of anger, alienation or disenfranchisement), often linked to feelings of being culturally uprooted or displaced and searching for spiritual guidance
- dissatisfaction or disillusionment with mainstream political or social protest as a method to produce political change
- identification with the suffering of Muslim victims globally or experience of personal victimisation
- the conviction that violence against the state and its symbols can be morally justified (and this conviction can be ‘fine tuned’ by a religious figure)
- gaining rewards from membership of the group/movement (such as status, respect, and authority over other members)
- close social ties, having contact with people experiencing the same set of issues or having some involvement with terrorism through family or other associates.

The MI5 report also discusses “key vulnerabilities” that made those studied receptive to extremist ideology, including the experience of migrating to Britain and facing marginalisation and racism; the failure of those with university qualifications to achieve anything but low-grade jobs; a serious criminal past; travel abroad for up to six months at a time and contact with extremist networks overseas; and finally, religious naivety (Travis, 2008). The perception of personal marginalisation combined with the perception of Western double standards in foreign policy appears to play a crucial role. Additionally, individuals often join radical groups for political or religious reasons and in a search for empowerment, but also in search of friendship and a sense of social belonging. Sageman’s (2004) study of Jihadists found that despite the many differences between the identifiable four groups, there were some common patterns just prior to joining the prospective Mujahadin, such that being “socially and spiritually alienated and probably in some form of distress”.

Reflecting on the earlier predisposing risk factors, Horgan (2008: 85) warns that it is a mistake to consider the risk factors in isolation because none is able to adequately explain the process of radicalisation to violence. Rather, we should consider them in combination as a useful framework (or “openness to socialisation into terrorism”) for understanding the process towards violent activity and the qualities specific to each individual's involvement. Furthermore, these factors are only believed to be potent during initial

involvement, with group influences taking over once a person moves towards belonging to a terrorist group (i.e. group dynamics, ideological control, leadership influences, etc). These caveats provide an indication of the complex and multifaceted nature of radicalisation to violence.

## 5. Psychometric scales and assessment tools

Our review also examined what action had been taken in order to identify the process of radicalisation and violent radicalisation. Two different psychometric tools were found that offered some relevance to measuring features of radicalisation as a psychological construct. The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale and the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment (VERA) are discussed in turn below.

### The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale

The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale aims to measure religious fundamentalism, being a shorter revised scale (from the original 20-item scale down to 12 items) while retaining greater internal consistency and construct validity than the original Religious Fundamentalism Scale. The overall scale is reported to provide a more inclusive measure of religious fundamentalism.<sup>13</sup>

The scale is intended to measure attitudes towards one's religious belief and not an adherence to any particular set of beliefs, therefore it is not a measure of Islamic fundamentalism per se, but rather it should capture fundamentalism in many faiths (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2004). While the author's particular concentration was upon religious fundamentalism in Protestant denominations, the original scale was tested on a range of faiths and this has included Muslims both in Canada and in Ghana, with convincing results. However, there is a weakness to the revised scale's methodology as it was only extensively piloted in the United States and only among undergraduate university students and their parents, and therefore, cannot be considered representative of the broader population. This would suggest that the original scale may be a more reliable measure of Islamic fundamentalism than the revised version, despite the authors arguing that the newer scale provides a more inclusive measure of fundamentalism. More testing of the scale is required in order to settle this matter.

### The Violent Extremist Risk Assessment

Pressman (2009) provides us with a specialised risk assessment tool that is designed to be used with (and limited to) people with either a history of extremist violence or convictions for terrorist-related offences. The instrument is designed to determine whether or not the individual under test has an

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<sup>13</sup> The scale was also validated with a sample of Muslims in Ghana (Hunsberger, Owusu and Duck, 1999), and the authors report that the fundamentalism measure posted an alpha of .87 and correlated .78 with hostility toward homosexuals; and rendered strong associations with right-wing authoritarianism (.62 to .82) (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2004: 49).

identified target; whether the violence has an ideological, religious or political motivation; and finally, if the person is acting as part of a group or alone (Pressman, 2009: 32). As such, the VERA appears applicable only to that small cohort that is in (or near) an operational phase and hence, breaking the law – the population within Tier 4 of the UK government’s terrorist pyramid. Pressman also informs us that the VERA is focused specifically on assessing the degree of risk of “violent political extremism” (Pressman, 2009: 21–26) and implies a far broader population deemed at risk of radicalisation (Tier 3) and of religious extremism. It remains unclear then as to the applicability of the tool for those individuals deemed merely ‘at risk’ of radicalisation and subject to interventions. Notwithstanding this confusion, Pressman also advises that the tool is in its early stages of development and should be considered a “conceptual tool” for research purposes, a point which would further limit its applicability.

Some degree of training is also required before a practitioner could administer the tool, as there are some judgements involved in conducting the assessment (the tool is not a formal test or scale that simply produces a “risk score” but rather a “structured professional judgment tool”). Experience in conducting professional assessments along with an understanding of the radicalisation process and violent extremism are the requirements. This is useful, as it makes the tool open to use by a wide range of sufficiently trained practitioners rather than the exclusive province of a chartered psychologist or specialist consultant.

The VERA is composed of 28 items covering five risk factors (attitude; context; historical; protective; and demographic) (itemised below) each scored high, medium or low, with each risk factor producing a subtotal and the scale producing a final VERA ‘judgement score’, although rather confusingly, this is *not* a numerical score.

Pressman provides a detailed description of each risk factor and its justification, along with a narrative for each of the 28 risk factor items (2009: 35–39). Items have been drawn from other risk factor domains of previous structured professional judgement tools which assess the risk of violence in adolescents and adults, namely the HCR-20 version 2 (Webster et al, 1997, in Pressman, 2009: 31) and the SAVRY (Borum et al, 2006, Pressman, 2009: 31), with the addition of those from known characteristics of individuals involved in offences related to violent extremism and terrorism. The 28 elements of the VERA are listed below (including the addition of a demographic item).

## Box 5.1: The 28 elements of the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment

### Attitude items

1. Attachment to ideology justifying violence
2. Perception of injustice and grievances
3. Identification of target of injustice
4. Dehumanisation of identified target
5. Internalised martyrdom to die for cause
6. Rejection of society and values/alienation
7. Hate, frustration, persecution
8. Need for group bonding and belonging
9. Identity problems
10. Empathy for those outside own group

### Contextual items

1. User of extremist websites
2. Community support for violent action
3. Direct contact with violent extremists
4. Anger at political decisions, actions of country

### Historical items

1. Early exposure to violence in home
2. Family/friends involvement in violent action
3. Prior criminal violence
4. State-sponsored military, paramilitary training
5. Travel for non-state sponsored training/fighting
6. Glorification of violent action

### Protective items

1. Shift in ideology
2. Rejection of violence to obtain goals
3. Change of vision of enemy
4. Constructive political involvement
5. Significant other/community support

### Demographic items

1. Sex
2. Married
3. Age

These factors are in accordance with many of the key findings from this review of the literature, notably the attitude items concerning the role of political grievances, attachment to a justifying (religious) ideology and the role of martyrdom, the importance of small group dynamics (here expressed as a 'need' for group bonding) and self-identity issues. Pressman also considers four contextual items examining the influence of friends, family and the environment, such as using extremist websites and the wider community's support for violent extremists, including direct contact with extremists. Factors concerning the individual's historical relationship with violence are also considered, and interestingly, travel to training. Rather curiously, travel to Pakistan did not figure prominently in the earlier reviewed literature despite being considered by some authoritative commentators as a risk factor for violent radicalisation (MI5 internal report cited in Travis, 2008). Paramilitary training on the other hand (be it state sponsored or otherwise) would appear to be a clear indication of intent. The historical items concerning criminal violence suggest that this category of offender may be present with a higher level of consistency in radicalised populations.

## 6. Programmes tackling radicalisation

Our review found only a very limited number of programmes from the literature that had the explicit aim of addressing radicalisation in the UK,<sup>14</sup> and few of these were thoroughly evaluated. The review found two programmes that aimed to address Islamic radicalisation in the UK; these were outreach and engagement projects running in London (the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), and the ‘Street’ Project). The review also identified a teaching resource pack *Things Do Change* developed in Calderdale. In addition, the review drew heavily upon the recent Department for Communities and Local Government’s (DCLG) rapid evidence assessment of community interventions to prevent support for violent extremism, *Preventing Support for Violent Extremism through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence* (Pratchett et al, 2010). This is an important study, as it is one of the very few to assess what interventions work best in relation to tackling extremism, particularly extremism in the name of religion. In the interest of possible application in the UK context, the UK-based initiatives were supplemented with consideration of programmes tackling right-wing radicalisation and a number of de-radicalisation programmes operating in several Islamic countries. While this is not to advocate applying these programmes unquestioningly in a UK context, analysing the experience of de-radicalisation among right-wing and Islamic radicals in other countries is a worthwhile exercise, and may provide some learning points for future pilot programme development.

The DCLG study (2010: 21) found that the two most successful interventions with young people were “capacity building or empowering young people” and interventions that “challenged ideology that focused on theology and used education or training”. Education and training in theology was also found to be successful in preventing religious violent extremism for Muslim women, although interventions which allowed women to debate and discuss theological issues were more successful.<sup>15</sup> The DCLG study highlighted one successful type of intervention in preventing support for religious violent

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<sup>14</sup> There is a myriad of local, regional and national programmes and interventions that make some claim to be impacting upon extremism (broadly conceived) in the UK, many of which have only tangential relevance (i.e. ‘community cohesion’ initiatives). Their inclusion would have required a very considerable intervention mapping exercise, one of dubious value. Therefore, programmes were only considered for inclusion if they had the aim of explicitly tackling radicalisation.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that for many of these interventions a strict segregation of the sexes is adhered to, with males and females often undertaking separate group-based interventions which prevent them from freely mixing and associating, justified on theological grounds. This is a practice which is at variance with mainstream youth work practice and values.

extremism within the wider community, which was interventions to capacity build/empower.<sup>16</sup>

The DCLG study highlighted a relationship between the use of outreach methods to recruit people onto interventions and successful outcomes across the different groups considered (young people, women and the wider community). This finding is supported by other studies (for example, Smith, 2008).

The use of outreach develops the high levels of trust required for interventions to be successful. The use of outreach methods for Muslim women also makes sense when considering the barriers (and self-imposed barriers) that some Muslim women tend to face (including their traditional role in Muslim society, adherence to religious practices which segregate the sexes, language difficulties, and low confidence), which can account for poor engagement with public institutions and wider society.

A programme which encapsulates much of the existing guidance on the importance of outreach, and the mechanisms through which it can be achieved is the Slotervaart Project. This was a community-based project aiming to build resilience to radicalisation in a Netherlands<sup>17</sup> borough with a significant immigrant population (cited by the DCLG 2010 authors<sup>18</sup> and Rand, 2010<sup>19</sup>). The project included organised gatherings (the Religious-Secular Circle) which were important for addressing Muslim identity issues. The success of these gatherings was defined by a two-stage approach, firstly, having “safe and accessible spaces” for community debates examining Islam and political issues, and secondly, extending this debate more widely to include non-Muslims in the Circles. The DCLG authors highlight the key success factors of the outreach approach adopted by the project as:

1. the “respectful, listening mode of interaction”
2. “the focus on the most theoretically relevant groups, agencies, and public bodies”
3. “engagement with the wider community and those who were crucial to sustaining the communities’ engagement with the project and providing longer-term governance” (2010: 25).

The Slotervaart project provides a number of tentative learning points for community-based programmes aiming to counter radicalisation. Clearly, caution needs to be exercised in transferring programme learning from the

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<sup>16</sup> The limited findings for interventions with the community appear to result from the inconsistent and different meanings and uses of the term ‘community’ across the reviewed literature, confusing any clear relationship between conditions (DCLG, 2010: 31).

<sup>17</sup> The DCLG authors state that while work took place with women, leaders and the community, this was very much secondary to the work that took place with young people.

<sup>18</sup> An English language copy of the report was obtained by the review team.

<sup>19</sup> Rabasa, A., Pettyjohn, S. L., Ghez, J.J., Boucek, C. (2010) *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*. National Security Research Division, RAND Corporation.

results of one project operating in a specific, local context, albeit with a high immigrant (and Muslim) population.

The DCLG study also emphasised that work delivered through outreach approaches was more successful than work taking place in formal institutions. The study highlighted the importance of education and training which is non-prescriptive, where young people were able to “develop independent thinking or research and leadership skills”, allowing them to question and challenge a range of knowledge sources, including peers, radical groups and internet sites (2010: 25).

The experiences with de-radicalisation programmes in other countries may provide some learning points that are applicable within the UK, although the transfer of practice lessons across very different contexts would need to be carefully considered and well thought out. That said, an important insight from analysis processes of de-radicalisation (Demant et al, 2008) is how radicals are sometimes more receptive when they are confronted with people whom they see as credible conversational partners, that is, where the conversational partner is perceived as “us” and not as the hostile “them”. In such cases, the conversational partner also needs to carry authority and legitimacy, and be equipped with profound ideological knowledge and argue in a way that appeals to the radical. This insight may be valuable for application in the UK, but presents difficulties in government expressing a preference for strands of religious ideology, as well as the practical task of selecting credible conversation partners (Demant et al 2008). Some elements of using discussion and dialogue in an attempt to transform radical thinking or correct scriptural interpretation already takes place in some mainstream youth service provision (and was evident in the MCU and Street approaches).

## 7. Conclusions

The reviewed literature found that few researchers had developed a general causal model or theory of the structural causes of Islamic terrorism and there was disagreement as to whether such a model was achievable. More prevalent were studies that listed several possible factors, usually social-psychological models, but failed to specify the interactions between the listed factors in any detail.

Evidence from the individual biographies of those involved in radical Islam (both Islamic terrorists and activists) emphasises the role that political grievances play, particularly those grievances concerning the plight of the Muslim community internationally and anger at perceived Western hegemony.

Situational explanations, the lists of precipitating factors and grievance-based explanations point to a large group of potential participants. In isolation these factors fail to explain why most individuals who are exposed to the same overall influences do not turn to terrorism. The notion of catalyst events, crises or triggers (be they political, religious or personal) in a person's life purport to answer this problem of causal specificity. They have been proposed as important in understanding the psychology of why people become extremists and radicalised. However, the research evidence highlights a further key component to becoming fully radicalised, that of exposure to a network or movement. Social network theory, resource mobilisation theory and framing theory offer another way of studying the radicalisation process, one that links structural factors, group processes and individual motivations within an integrated analytical framework.

This review found two psychometric scales of relevance to measuring radicalisation as a psychological construct: the Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale and the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment (VERA) tool.

The review found only two evaluated UK programmes that explicitly aimed to address Islamic radicalisation in the UK. These were outreach and engagement projects running in London (the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), and the 'Street' Project). A teaching resource pack, *Things Do Change*, developed in Calderdale, was also identified. In addition, the review drew heavily upon the recent Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) rapid evidence assessment of community interventions to prevent support for violent extremism, *Preventing Support for Violent Extremism through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence* (Pratchett et al, 2010). The DCLG review clearly advocated the adoption of capacity building and empowering young people, and interventions that "challenge ideology that focus on theology and use education/training". These interventions were most successful when delivered through outreach work that focused attention directly towards the relevant communities. The Netherlands-based Slotervaart Project was identified as an exemplar of the outreach/community-based

approach recommended by the DCLG review. The review also considered a number of de-radicalisation programmes operating in several Islamic countries and programmes tackling right-wing radicalisation. These programmes provide some potential learning points for future UK programmes, chiefly around the need for those engaging with radicalised individuals to carry authority and legitimacy, and to be equipped with profound ideological knowledge.

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# Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

## Criteria for considering studies for this review

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they had some direct bearing upon either the process of radicalisation or an intervention or programme aiming to prevent radicalisation and extremism. A search strategy was developed using the key research questions and sub-questions to supply the initial keywords. The keyword list was further added to as a result of articles identified from the initial search results and by using the subject headings (mapped terms).

As discussed earlier, this required a broad inclusion criteria which reflected the lack of conceptual clarity in ideas such as 'radicalisation' and 'violent extremism'. Like 'terrorism' these terms defy easy definition, (or are wrongly used as synonyms). This issue over definitions is complex and reflects longstanding debates within the literature over what the terms rightly mean and encompass, debates which are characterised by much disagreement (see Silke, 2001).

One central issue when designing and testing the search terms was whether radicalisation functioned as a euphemism for terrorism, and the parallels between the process of radicalisation and that of engaging in political and religious violence. Because terrorism is the violent outcome of a longer process of radicalisation, the literature required examining for initial inclusion. There has also been a great deal of research accumulated over some 40 years on the aetiology of terrorism and general academic studies on the (social) psychology of terrorists that are relevant to the study on Jihadi terrorists, particularly since the September 2001 attacks in the USA, which makes it an especially fruitful data source. However, this is a very considerable literature and a path needed to be steered between being inclusive while making the review manageable and relevant.

With this in mind, we included research upon all forms of terrorism (such as social revolutionary terrorism, and nationalist-separatist terrorism, although not state-sponsored terrorism). Where possible, we restricted this to identifying the proposed causes of terrorism with the aim of gleaning insights about Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorism and where appropriate, the wider radicalisation process. This has meant dealing with two interlinked sets of literature, the bulk of which relates to explanations of 'terrorism' and 'suicide terrorism', rather than an explicit focus upon Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation. This is because of the smaller literature on this form of terrorism and radicalisation, reflecting its more recent prominence as a research field and also the lack of conceptual clarity in how these terms are understood and used by researchers in the field. Not that the literatures are mutually exclusive, as religious terrorism and suicide terrorism figure in these literatures. It should be noted that this often meant focusing on the violent outcome of radicalisation, that most dramatic element in a longer process of change, and the one which is of highest concern to the public and government alike.

Imposing more stringent inclusion criteria would, of course, have meant a substantially reduced literature in the review (although systematic reviews can

often include fewer studies than comprehensive literature reviews precisely because of their selective inclusion criteria). This was not deemed appropriate due to the ill-defined nature of the central concept of the process of 'radicalisation'. Taking this wider terrorism literature into consideration also allowed consideration of a broader level of analysis and drew on a more mature body of literature than would otherwise have been available. Nevertheless, the central focus of the review remained Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation among young people in Western Europe.

### **Programmes and interventions addressing radicalisation**

The review examined the published literature for the availability of programmes operating in the UK and internationally that had as their central focus, or as a substantial core component of the programme, the prevention of Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation. The review also collated measures addressing radicalisation that emerged in the literature, but did not form part of an initiative or programme, but nevertheless, may have some usefulness in addressing radicalisation and promoting de-radicalisation. This did not include itemising core government strategies and initiatives such as the CONTEST strategy, which are well known to the commissioners.

A broad definition of intervention was taken for the purposes of the review in order to create the initial base of literature to examine. We, therefore, included evaluations and reports of any studies that involve the prevention, detection, management or treatment response to those individuals who are deemed to be at risk of, or who have already been radicalised. These relatively loose inclusion criteria are in response to the fact that very few interventions explicitly set out to address radicalisation or de-radicalisation.

In addition, the review also searched for psychological and psychometric scales that could prove useful in measuring features of radicalisation or Islamic terrorism. This literature search included contacting several clinical psychologists at the University of Huddersfield in order to identify any relevant scales.

### **Search methods for identification of studies**

A three-part search strategy was undertaken in order to maximise chances of capturing all relevant literature. These parts are detailed below.

#### **1. Electronic searches**

An initial search was undertaken with the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR) and The Campbell Collaboration<sup>20</sup> at the outset of this systematic review, to assess whether another systematic review of suitable quality had already been carried out or was in preparation for examining the process(es) of radicalisation and the availability of interventions to prevent extremism. A number of key search terms found no title or key word matches in either library to indicate the existence of another systematic review.

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<sup>20</sup> The Campbell Collaboration is an international research network and is a sister organisation to the Cochrane Collaboration. It produces [systematic reviews](#) of the effects of social interventions, specifically covering the fields of education, crime and justice, and social welfare.

### *Search strategy and justification*

Search terms were devised, refined, and tested for the number of abstracts and titles elicited through building a dictionary of key words used in the literature and by searching the following eight online databases:

- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) Abstracts
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- Sociological Abstracts
- Social Science Abstracts (SocialSciAbs)
- Psychology Information (PsychInfo)
- Intute; Social Sciences
- British Humanities Index

The grey literature (i.e. materials that cannot be found easily through conventional channels such as publishers) search included:

- System for Information on Grey Literature (SIGLE) database
- Index of conference proceedings
- Theses and dissertation searches
- Index to Thesis (UK and Ireland)
- Dissertation Abstracts International

See Appendix 2 for the search strategies that were used to search the databases listed above.

### **2. Other resources: Personal communications**

Appropriate academic societies, academic associations, and non-governmental organisations were contacted. Requests were sent to email lists (list-servs) for assistance in locating studies. Contacts were made with a small number of leading researchers and any article recommended by relevant colleagues was obtained for the review.

### **3. Other resources: Hand searching**

In addition to the electronic database searches, hand searches were also made of bibliographies from key authored papers and from previous ('non-systematic') literature reviews concerning radicalisation and violent extremism. The leading four peer reviewed journals in the field of terrorism studies were also examined for relevant articles (*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*; *Security Journal*; *Terrorism and Political Violence*; *Terrorism Studies*). Relevant websites, including those maintained by governments, other agencies, and academics were searched for literature.

## Results of the search

The search strategy generated 2,613 citations. The primary reviewer checked titles and abstracts for relevance (first sift). The identified documents were compiled within a reviewing log, which is in Excel spreadsheet format to enable tracking of the review process. All additional journal articles and items were assessed for their relevance to the key research question firstly by review of abstract. At the completion of this exercise, some 2,322 citations were excluded as not being sufficiently relevant to the research questions and key sub-questions.

The remaining 325 items which the primary reviewer felt might be relevant were retrieved in full text for initial inclusion and referenced in an Endnote library. A further eight items were identified in the later stages, and included in this study, bringing the total to 333 items for initial inclusion. The search strategies used for the databases can be found in the following sections.

## Initially included studies

Studies were included in the review if they were deemed relevant to the key research questions after examining the full text copies (second sift). Scoring low on the quality assessment scale was not sufficient in itself to exclude a study.

## Excluded studies

There were 23 studies excluded by the review team. This is a relatively low number, as items were only excluded if they were deemed to be clearly irrelevant to the research questions – a criteria which set a relatively low bar for inclusion. Scoring low on either of the quality measurement scales did not automatically exclude a study from the review.

There were no disagreements between reviewers regarding study inclusion or exclusion. However, study authors would have been contacted if further information could have resolved initial disagreements about inclusion and the Principal Investigator for this study would have been consulted if consensus had not been reached.

## Total included studies

This gave a total of 310 included studies in the review. Table A1.1 details the number of items by reference type. The majority of items were journal articles, overwhelmingly from peer reviewed journals. Book chapters along with reports from governments, non-governmental organisations and independent organisations also featured prominently in the literature. A smaller number of items were obtained from conference papers (or recent conference presentations) and thesis or unpublished papers. The literature is also very current, with over 74% of items being published in the last five years. No doubt this reflects the recent interest in religious extremism and political violence more generally since September 2001 and the London bombings.

**Table A1.1: Summary table of retrieved items by type for initial inclusion in systematic review**

<b>Reference type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Journal article	154
Book chapter	59
Reports and government documents	52
Magazine/newspaper article	11
Conference paper/presentation	12
Other (thesis, unpublished work, audiovisual, etc.)	15
Authored book	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>

### **Data extraction exercise**

Review authors independently conducted data extraction using a specially developed data extraction form. All items were assessed either as an outcome study or a qualitative study, and were rated accordingly across four separate criteria. This procedure produced an 'overall quality score' for each study item, ranging from 1 to 5 (5 indicating high quality, and 1 indicating low quality).

The methodological quality score procedure for qualitative studies was based upon the Magenta Book derived from the Government Social Research Unit's guidance on evaluating qualitative research. The methodological quality score for outcome studies was derived from a reconviction study rating scale developed as part of one of the research team's PhD thesis (Wilcox, 2005) to assess the methodological quality of studies in the review. In practice, however, items not scoring highly on the quality assessment exercise were not automatically excluded from the review. This was because many of the studies in the review were largely discursive and theory driven in nature, often drawing on the findings and recycling data of other researchers' work, with few studies generating any new empirical data. Secondly, the more quantitative-based studies often carried some significant methodological flaws (for example, lack of adequate comparison group, small sample size, lack of representativeness, inadequate outcome measure). With good quality studies being very much the exception in the literature rather than the norm, any approach which adopted a rigid application of the scales (generally rated as a 3 or above on the Maryland Scale) would have resulted in the overwhelming majority of items being discarded from this review. In light of this, the review team decided that this would be an overzealous approach, risking 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater', and losing a lot of potentially valuable insights. Therefore, the review team took an inclusive approach to study items, requiring only a low threshold for item inclusion (although some very poor quality studies were rejected).

## Risk of bias in included studies

A large number of studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria for the review. These came from a range of academic and practitioner sources, the majority of which were peer reviewed (72%) or in, the case of government reports and other organisation reports (16%), would likely have undergone some degree of quality assurance in addition to our own quality scoring procedures. The remaining cases (12%) were newspaper articles, unpublished papers and conference papers of more variable quality. We attempted to minimise the risk of publication bias by the inclusion of grey literature.<sup>21</sup>

The problem of multiple publications resulting from a single set of data was apparent in the literature and reflected the small number of empirical studies which are widely reported and discussed by multiple authors. However, this reflects the nature of much research in terrorism literature generally (see Note on the quality of the research evidence on page 3 of the report), although it also provided some re-interpretation of findings in the light of subsequent evidence. This was not the case for the literature examining programmes and interventions for radicalisation.

The review was restricted to English language items, introducing an English language bias. While studies from other European countries were available in English and were obtained, several German and Dutch items were excluded. This was not felt to be overly detrimental, as English language pan-European studies of radicalisation were included in the review. Language bias is likely to be more pronounced when considering the literature in Muslim countries, but the central focus of this review was radicalisation in the West. Furthermore, de-radicalisation programmes in several Muslim countries were available in English language.

## Effects of interventions

There were no impact or outcome studies which examined effectiveness of the interventions at the time of the review. However, an update of this review was able to include a number of additional studies, one of which featured a rapid evidence assessment of some 70 community interventions to prevent support for violent extremism.<sup>22</sup> A further two studies examining community-based programmes aimed at tackling Islamic radicalisation in London were in preparation at the time of this review. Both of these projects were the subject of doctoral degrees, and only one of the completed theses was available in late January 2010, although it was not an evaluation study.

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<sup>21</sup> Publication bias refers to the tendency for studies with positive results to be published compared to those with negative results.

<sup>22</sup> Pratchett, L., Thorp, L., Wingfield, M., Lowndes, V. and Jabbar, R. (2010) *Preventing Support for Violent Extremism through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence*. Department for Communities and Local Government. See: [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1513881.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1513881.pdf)

## Appendix 2: Systematic review search terms

To date, the following search terms have been used with filters for English language post-1990 articles:

Radicalisation

Radicalization

Radicalism

Radical\* + religio\*

Extremism

Fundamentalism

Suicide + muslim

Suicide + religio\*

Suicide + islam

Cause\* + terror\*

Violence + Muslim

Violence + political

Violence + Islam\*

Religious minorit\* + violence

Religious minorit\* + terror\*

Religious minorit\* + Muslim

Religious fundamentalis\*

Religious violen\*

Salafism

Jihad\*

Social integration

Counter-terrorism

Program + radical\*

Program + terror\*

Program + extrem\*

Prevent\* + radical\*

Prevent\* + terror\*

Prevent\* + extrem\*

Treat\* + radical\*

Treat\* + terror\*

Trest\* + extrem\*

Intervent\* + radical\*

Intervent\* + terror

Intervent\* + extrem\*

Where searches returned unwieldy hits (in excess of 400 abstracts), they were refined with filters.

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