Better Reporting To Prevent Radicalisation, Extremism, and Terrorism

By Neda Richards

New empirical research findings recommend changes to policy and practice, in relation to counterterrorism community engagement, to encourage and improve the reporting of radicalisation and extremism.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Policy Brief

Key Findings & Recommendations

1. Poor quality reports of radicalisation and extremism, including those lacking supportive evidence, persist despite policy changes intended to encourage reporting from professionals, and despite the training available to this group.
2. Most reports about radicalisation and extremism are made by professionals, notably education and mental health services, and very few relatives or close associates report concerns.
3. Community engagement has proved to be effective in encouraging reports from relatives and close associates.
4. To help with prevention, the Counterterrorism Community Engagement (CTCE) Logic Model provides a framework to encourage and improve reporting behaviour through community engagement, with a focus on relatives and close associates.
5. Those seeking to encourage reporting must be aware that (a) reporting needs to be made easy and feasible by reducing the cost of reporting and making the reporter knowledgeable – for example better training; (b) the psychological underpinnings of reporting behaviour needs to be addressed in order to encourage people to come forward.
6. It is recommended that the policy and practice related to counterterrorism community engagement - including radicalisation and extremism awareness trainings – to reflect the need of reporters.
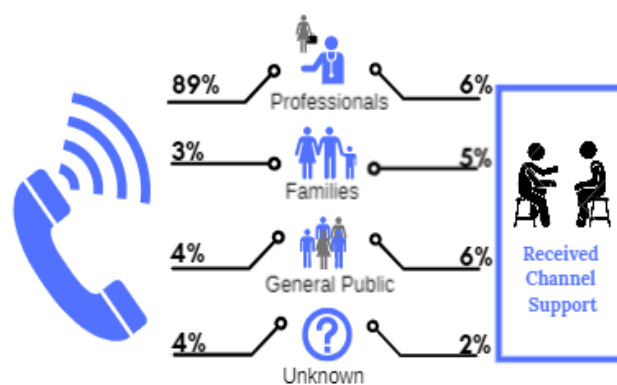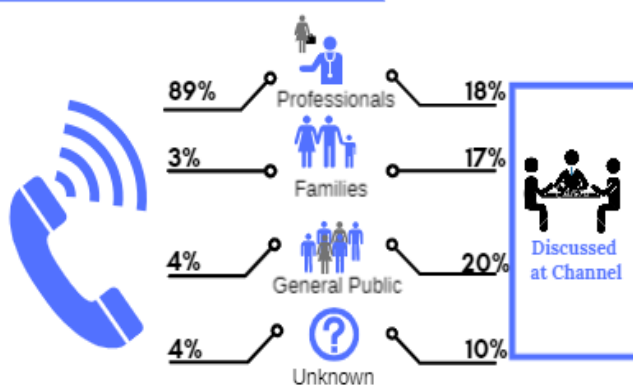
Context and Importance of the Problem

Prevention of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism relies upon good quality intelligence. One source of intelligence is through formal reporting of concerns. Research shows most reports come from professionals, and very few from the relatives and close associates. Moreover, only a small fraction of these reports make it to Channel or meet Channel thresholds. Practitioners argue that this is because the majority of referrals are "malicious, misguided or misinformed".
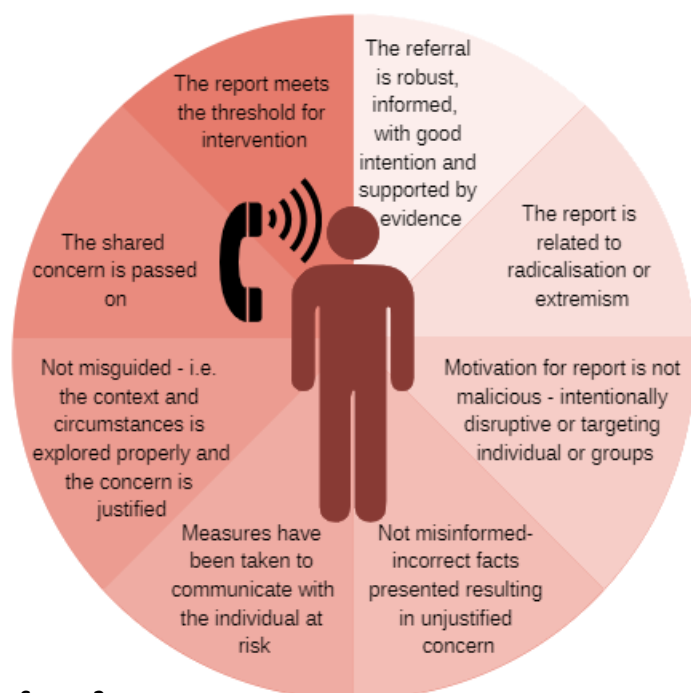
Currently, the problem is that professionals report too quickly, without having the appropriate supporting evidence, fearing repercussions, which leads to poor quality reports that do not meet the Channel threshold. While relatives and close associates are too slow to report. This poses a serious question for the prevention of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism: **how can authorities encourage people reporting their concerns, whilst ensuring good quality reports, in addition to increasing reports from relatives or close associates?** The latter group is more likely to first notice the signs in a vulnerable individual, and time is often vital to the prevention of an act of criminality.

Reports of Radicalisation & Extremism Based on the Home Office Data 2017/2018

Source 1

The Components of a Good Quality Report

The referral is robust, informed, with good intention and supported by evidence

The report is related to radicalisation or extremism

The report meets the threshold for intervention

Motivation for report is not malicious - intentionally disruptive or targeting individual or groups

The shared concern is passed on

Not misinformed- incorrect facts presented resulting in unjustified concern

Not misguided - i.e. the context and circumstances is explored properly and the concern is justified

Measures have been taken to communicate with the individual at risk

Source 2

Understanding reporting behaviours and the reasons for reporting are important for creating and strengthening appropriate processes, practices, and policies which encourage and improve reporting in the counterterrorism context.

The comparative study of East Jutland (Denmark) and West Yorkshire (UK) found that although other confounding factors may be involved, the Info-House - a multiagency prevention approach - in East Jutland has managed to increase reports of radicalisation and extremism through community engagement and working closely with relatives.

There is evidence that the application of psychological interventions in the delivery of community engagement may be helpful in addressing fears of reporting – a major factor in influencing the decision to report.

Encouraging Reporting

Contrary to some belief, those worried about radicalisation or extremism do want to be able to raise and discuss their concerns. However, there are various barriers that make it challenging for reporters - especially relatives and close associates - to come forward. These include:

1. *Lack of understanding of psychological factors involved when reporting radicalisation and extremism* – Psychological factors that influence this behaviour have mainly surrounded the notion of one's identity, as through this medium one manoeuvres in life. Identity influences responsibilities, attitudes, values, respect, perceived control and power, relationships, and how people perceive others (e.g. are they going to harm or help us?). In turn, these factors shape the cost-benefit of reporting in a given situation.

UK government in the early 1990s managed to increase legitimate reports of Irish related terrorism by 700% by releasing advertisement that addressed psychological underpinnings associated with identity.
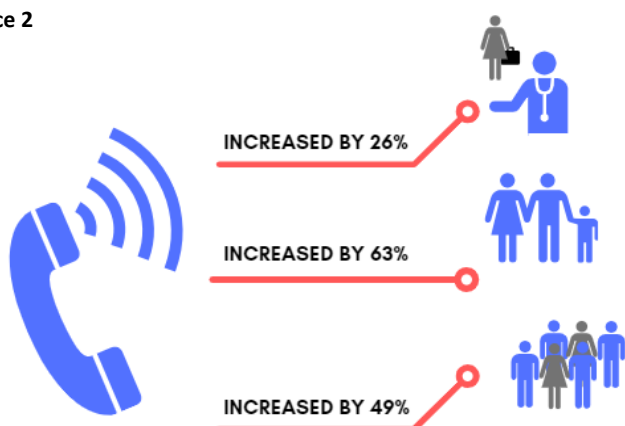
Psychological Factors Involved in Reporting Behaviour

Source 2
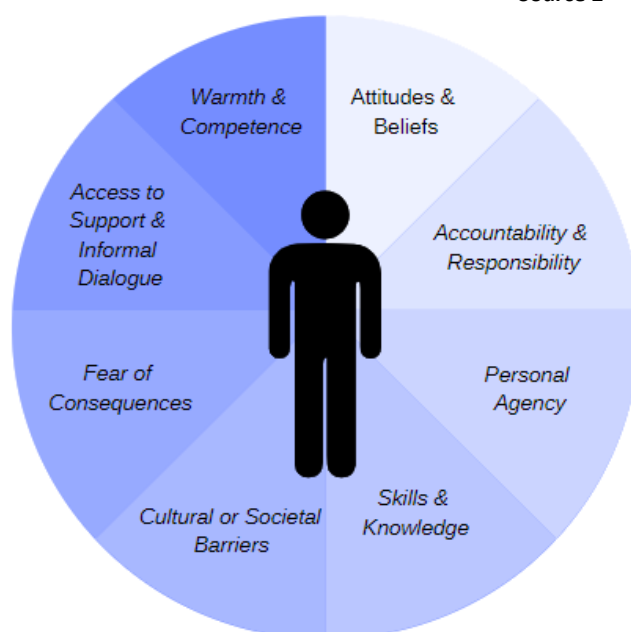
Average Annual Increase In Reports Between 2011-2017 After the Implementation of Community Engagement By the Info-House

Source 2

INCREASED BY 26%

INCREASED BY 63%

INCREASED BY 49%

Warmth & Competence

Attitudes & Beliefs

Access to Support & Informal Dialogue

Accountability & Responsibility

Fear of Consequences

Personal Agency

Cultural or Societal Barriers

Skills & Knowledge

The CTCE Logic Model is an evidence-based approach to community engagement with the intention to increase reporting and assist with prevention by addressing these psychological factors, as well as building a stronger public relationship with the authorities.

2.   *Inadequate policies* – There are both positive and negative implications that result from policies, despite their good intention. For example, although the Prevent Duty has increased reports from statutory authorities (e.g. education services), these reports are not necessarily good in terms of quality.

Professionals within the education services sometimes report for the fear of running foul of Ofsted compliance standards or facing punishment. As such, this hastiness results in the reporter failing to obtain evidence to support their concern - a crucial step that is covered in training. Policies that have helped with reporting are also S. 115 of the Danish Administrative Justice Act, as it allows sharing of information between partner agencies for prevention purposes but also inhibits the use of information obtained

for purpose of prevention in a criminal court for prosecution. This, in turn, has enabled concerned individuals, as well as at-risk individuals to talk openly about their situation.

3.   *Reporting processes & access to specialists* - there is a need for informal reporting processes that encourage open dialogue and access to a specialist who can provide guidance and support in relation to radicalisation and extremism. Fear of consequences has a major impact on reporting behaviour. Reporters do not want to make a mistake of reporting apparent 'ghosts' or not reporting.

Being able to spot the signs of radicalisation and extremism is very difficult - especially for a lay person. Therefore, access to such processes and individuals provide the reporter with confidence that they are free to raise their apprehension without having to fear that formal action will take place. Most reports show that concerns are not necessarily counterterrorism-related. Therefore, user-friendly reporting processes are vital. The Info-House in East Jutland is open to everyone who is in
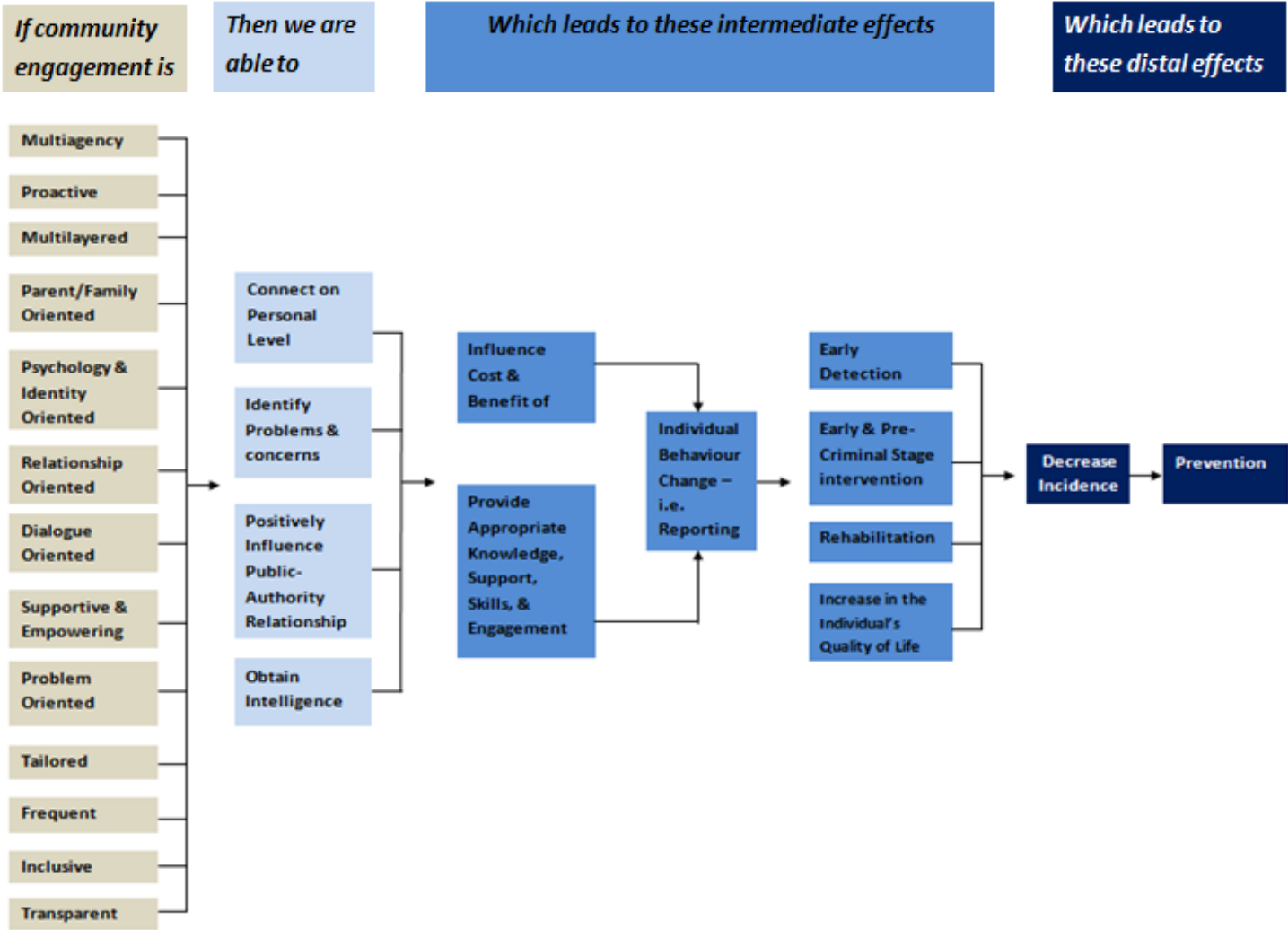

Figure 1: Counterterrorism Community Engagement (CTCE) Logic Model, source 2.

need of help and guidance. It is an information hub, as well as a place where reporters can access support and advice more informally.

4.   *Lack of public knowledge and awareness* – there is uncertainty around counterterrorism strategies and the practices. There is a lack of knowledge in what kind of support is available to those in need, and where it can be sought from. Access to user-friendly and appropriate information is vital to shaping a better understanding of the investigation and rehabilitation process in the pre-criminal stage. This induces transparency, as well, as assists with gaining trust and confidence in the system.

5.   *Lack of support and inclusion of relatives of the vulnerable* – Parents Network set up by Info-House and close working relationship with this group raised awareness about support available to them through word of mouth. This led to an increase in reporting from this cohort, where parents informed the agency directly of the return of their child from conflict zones. By treating relatives and close associates in this way, relevant authorities are able to identify their needs better and provide them with the support needed. Knowledge and access to such support decrease the fear and cost of reporting.

6.   *Resource* - Lack of resources has resulted in a reactive engagement, short exposure to raising awareness, and support for reporters. Without sufficient funding or inadequate staff the quality of service declines with negative implications for reporting. For example, some areas, which are not deemed priority to Prevent funding but are still required to raise awareness, fail to do so comprehensively.
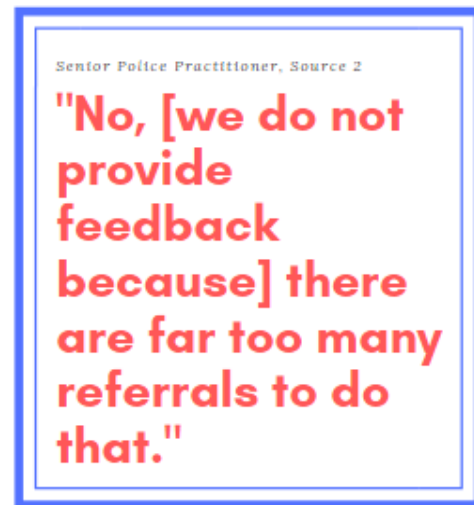
As a preventative strategy, Community engagement may help address these barriers to reporting. Currently, counterterrorism community engagement is reactive rather than proactive, inconsistent, and is not evidence-based.

Improving Reporting

Inhibitors to good quality reports include:

1.   *Some professional reporters do not follow the training provided* (for the reasons explained earlier). This leads to skipping crucial steps prior to reporting. Professionals (e.g. teachers, doctors, and mental health practitioners) are required to spot the signs, check them by gaining evidence to support their concern, and then report them. However, what happens is that checking for evidence is missed. This leads to reports not meeting threshold required to be recommended for early

intervention programmes such as Channel, as well as excessive reporting.

Senior Police Practitioner, Source 2

"No, [we do not provide feedback because] there are far too many referrals to do that."

2.   *Lack of feedback results in uncertainties for the reporter.* The study revealed there is a lack of feedback to reporters, which may be due to the volume of reporting and lack of resources. For example, this includes 'have they reported the right concerns?', 'what other information could have improved the report?', 'why the report did not meet the threshold?', and 'was their view valued?' Feedback provides guidance, support, and inclusion that is needed to encourage better quality reports. Such lack of inclusion can have a negative impact on reporters' morale and self-esteem, with implications for whether they might report in the future.

3.   *Lack of comprehensive and appropriate training for practitioners and statutory agency professionals.* Not all Prevent training is delivered by specialists (e.g. Prevent or Channel Officers) who deal with radicalisation and extremism, and its assessment on daily basis; this may be ineffective. The training process currently, allows for managers in organisations to be trained, and are then required sharing that knowledge with their staff within their organisation through training. This results in Chinese-whisper style of training with gaps in knowledge and skills. Training is not provided based on guidelines or for an appropriate length of time (e.g. a minimum of two hours). Local authorities deliver training as short as 20 minutes to cover counterterrorism awareness, which is not sufficient to address complex issues such as radicalisation and extremism and results in a ticking process. Additionally, these individuals do not have the expertise to answer any specialist queries, resulting in inadequate training. Finally, workshops and training that are evidence-based have been found to be more effective in Aarhus, Denmark.

4. *Stop incentive funding*. This is linked to the issue of resources and training, as well as policy issues. Due to the pressure to raise awareness and lack of funding, the research has found that some Local Authorities deliver short awareness training, like a ticking process. Therefore, the quality of training drops for the sake of receiving funding through the quantity of training delivered. As mentioned earlier, poor training can result in poor reports, and this is not a risk that can be afforded in the counterterrorism context.

What Needs To Be Done?

Short-Term Recommendations

- Create a multi-agency information hub, where it is possible for the members of the public, practitioners, and vulnerable individuals to seek guidance and support from counterterrorism professionals. In Aarhus, Denmark, this hub is on the police premises, operated by multi-agency staff. The hub imitates a living room within a home, which takes away the formality and promotes a relaxed atmosphere. It is recommended for the UK to adopt a similar approach, as it enables the individual to discuss issues openly in a comfortable environment, their needs are signposted and provided the support required by the appropriate agency. Also, from the onset, there is transparency in who is involved in the process.

- Conduct audits of training sessions for professionals tasked with identifying and preventing radicalisation to ensure the prioritisation of quality.

- Remove funding incentives that encourage increases in the quantity of training rather than quality.

- Apply the CTCE Logic Model to community engagement practices to engage with the psychological underpinnings of reporting, and build closer relationships with relatives/close associates.

- Increase active community engagement and dialogue. The UK needs to be less risk-averse when it comes to having "difficult conversations". More needs to be done in identifying opportunities to have dialogue. It is important to understand that dialogue is not about changing opinions but to listen in order to identify a common ground that parties can utilise to work together that ultimately will help with prevention.

- Working with relatives/close associates is vital to an all-round approach to prevention. For example, in Iceland inclusion of parents in the prevention of youth anti-social behaviour has been positive, as well as the works of Info-House with parents of vulnerable individuals.

Long-Term Recommendations

- Improve the quality of training and awareness workshops through an evidence-based approach, which aims to inform better practice and be more effective, as well as useful training.

- More investment in youth services is needed, as they can engage with young people and their families to raise awareness and safeguard. In Denmark youth services are very active in prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

- Funding for community engagement needs to increase but also needs to be more targeted. Review funding policies that negatively impact practice – these may be identified through an audit.

- Audit training sessions, delivery of workshops, and reporting processes for a better understanding of bottlenecks.

- Invest in advertisements that connect with individual's core social identity (e.g. being a parent) and sense of responsibility associated with that role, and focus on delivering facts about the services and the support available to them. Publicity can be used as a form of engagement and sharing of information.

The Author

This Policy Brief has been prepared by Neda Richards, a PhD researcher at the University of Leeds. She has a background in social science, and auditing organisational practices and processes. This Policy Brief includes findings from her comparative and behavioural insight research study of community engagement practices, and experiences of reporters in East Jutland (Denmark) and West Yorkshire (UK).

Email: N.Nobari1@leeds.ac.uk

Source 1: Home Office (2018) 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2016 to March 2017'

Source 2: Neda Richards, (forthcoming), *Preventative Counterterrorism Policing: The Impact of Community Engagement on Public Cooperation*, University of Leeds.