

Protective Factors in Risk Assessment: Practitioner Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

This Executive Summary comes from the Supplemental Report associated with the Evidence Gap Map and Protective Factors For Violent Extremism And Terrorism Report which reviewed the academic literature on protective factors with two new sources of data:

- A review of available information about risk assessment guidelines.
- Interviews with a range of practitioners.

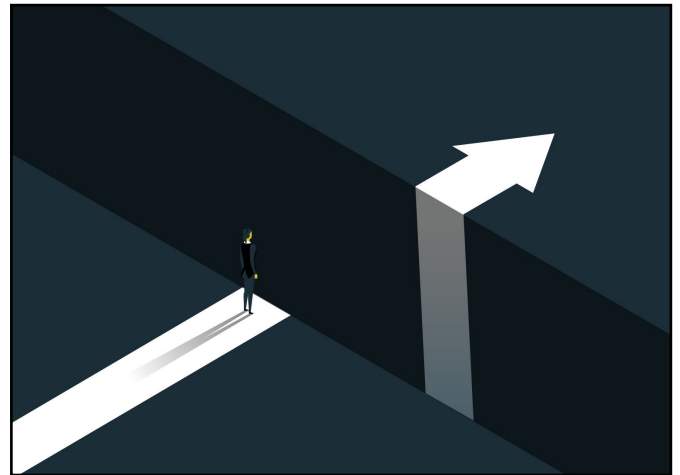
RISK ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

In order to better assess the risk assessment frameworks on offer we reviewed six frameworks about which there was some publicly available information. We did not have access to the full tools except in one instance.

Most of the guidance we reviewed adopted a structure professional judgment approach (SPJ). SPJ is designed to provide practitioners with guidance but allow them discretion in determining the relative importance of different factors and reach judgements in individual cases.

Of the risk assessment frameworks covered in this review, only the VERA-2R explicitly includes protective factors.

Other tools, such as ERG 22+, stress the importance of practitioners considering protective factors in



their assessments, but do not specify independent protective indicators.

Overall, all the risk guidance tools strongly emphasised risk factors which was consistent with the overall balance of academic evidence identified in our earlier report.

The available information overlapped with the previously produced evidence map in some cases (e.g., family support for non-violence) but other factors were either less clearly represented or not represented at all.

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

In addition to reviewing publicly available information on existing forms of risk guidance we interviewed ten practitioners with varied roles in risk assessment and analysed them thematically. We identified three key findings:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN RISK ASSESSMENT:

- Practitioner conceptualisation of protective factors was nuanced. Practitioners stressed the variance they found in protective factors, how idiosyncratic they could be, and the need to consider protective factors alongside and in interaction with risk factors.
- Practitioners described a range of guidance they used in decision-making, but these were all seen as fitting within the SPJ model. Above all, practitioners emphasised that every case was different and that protection needed to be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Practitioners identified a range of potential barriers to considering protective factors in their decision-making. They concurred with earlier research which found a relatively limited evidence base for protective factors. They also noted existing social and political biases which resulted in greater emphasis being placed on risk over protection.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our analysis suggests the following:

- There is a lack of empirical evidence underpinning protective factors in the case of terrorism and a limited understanding of how they work.
- The available research and risk guidance strongly emphasise the consideration of risk factors in assessments.
- Despite this, the SPJ approach as well as practitioner understanding means that consideration of protective factors do play an integral part in how risk assessments are made.
- To move forward, rather than augmenting existing risk-oriented perspectives to incorporate protective factors, there are potential gains from drawing on strength-based approaches as an alternative paradigm to the dominance of risk.
- Taking this broad approach as its starting point, the next phase of our research is to test a strength-based approach to protective factors to understand, empirically, its potential to support work in this area.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Executive Summary comes from a report produced from the Constraining Violence project. The project looks at how individual, social, and subcultural factors constrain the potential for extremist violence. You can find the report this summary is derived from (including references) as well as all the other outputs from this project at: crestresearch.ac.uk/project/constraining-violence

The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) is funded by the UK's Home Office and security and intelligence agencies to identify and produce social science that enhances their understanding of security threats and capacity to counter them. Its funding is administered by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Award ES/V002775/1).