

Supporting Early Career Researchers in Countering Violent Extremism

The *International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security* (IAPSS) consortium is committed to supporting early career researchers (ECRs) in their journey to become future leaders in Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP). As part of these efforts, we provided travel bursaries to a group of ECRs from Canada, the USA, and the UK, enabling them to attend the 2024 Conference on Countering Radicalization to Violence (also known as 'Megaweek'), hosted by the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, which is housed within Public Safety Canada.

With the theme 'Local Responses to Global Pressures,' Megaweek convened over 400 participants, including academics, government experts, tech leaders, and frontline practitioners from 20 countries, creating an excellent networking opportunity for ECRs.

EXPANDING HORIZONS AND BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Megaweek proved to be an invaluable experience for the ECRs, offering them the opportunity to engage with leading experts and peers in the field of CVE. During the conference, the ECRs attended over 50 sessions, deepening their understanding of emerging threats, multidisciplinary prevention methods, and the critical role of academia in shaping policy and practice.

One researcher, in the last year of their PhD, reported a renewed confidence in the relevance of their work, driven by the rich discussions and feedback received from senior academics and practitioners:

“Listening to speakers and discussing my research has renewed my confidence in the relevance and value of my current research.”

Another ECR found Megaweek to be a pivotal moment for professional growth; engaging with international professionals and initiating collaborative projects:

“Megaweek inspired ideas for new collaborative projects and greatly contributed to my professional and academic development” and “The trip was highly enriching, providing valuable insights into the efforts being made in Canada to prevent extremism... The experience contributed significantly to my professional development by offering opportunities for knowledge exchange and networking.”

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The diversity of sessions attended by the researchers spanned topics from the impact of gender in violent extremism to the latest AI and digital tools for prevention. One of the researchers was particularly inspired by discussions on positive masculinity models as a means to counter violent extremism, stating:



“This conference reaffirmed my pre-existing belief that understanding the role of gender and masculinity in violent extremism is paramount in disrupting extremist movements.”

This concept has become a central focus in their ongoing research, highlighting the conference's role in shaping future scholarly directions. Moreover, the exchange of ideas extended beyond attending research sessions. The ECRs made over 60 new and existing networking connections, engaging in meaningful dialogues with both academics and practitioners. These interactions not only expanded their professional networks but also provided practical insights into real-world applications of CVE strategies.

INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIONS

The impact of Megaweek on the ECRs is evident in their post-conference actions. Some researchers have begun working on collaborative papers, initiated follow-up research on newly discovered topics, and are exploring potential career opportunities inspired by the event. One researcher shared:

“I have also started a collaborative paper with a contact made at Megaweek, and after meeting

several senior academics in my specific research field, one has since agreed to be the external examiner for my final viva.”

We are thrilled to see the ECRs returning from Megaweek with fresh perspectives, enhanced networks, and a clear sense of direction for their future work. Their participation in this event not only benefited their own professional development but also contributed to the broader field of CVE.

“At IAPSS, we are committed to supporting the development of ECRs and advancing the field of science and security. The benefits experienced by this group at Megaweek underscores the importance of such initiatives in enabling early career researchers to access critical opportunities for learning, networking, and career advancement.”

Prof Stacey Conchie
Director of CREST and IAPSS co-lead

As they continue their research and career journeys, we look forward to seeing the positive impact of their contributions to creating safer, more resilient communities.