

Community-Led Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) through SRAM Model in the UK: Evaluating Policy Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

This research paper analyses the effectiveness of community-led counter-extremism models and the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model, which was developed in the United Kingdom. Based on detailed mixed-methods research, the study compares community-led and government-led Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs. It delves into the practical application of the SRAM approach in Pakistan. The qualitative phase involved document review of the UK-based CVE initiatives, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions of the UK-based CVE initiatives, and the quantitative phase involved a survey of around 500 Pakistani university students, which aimed to measure awareness and attitudes towards extremism. Key findings include that the participation, completion, and level of trust in community-led programs are significantly higher than the participation and completion of government-led programs. The SRAM approach yielded significant positive results, such as increased educational engagement, improved employability, decreased reoffender rates, and improved critical thinking skills. Overall, Pakistani students had a high awareness of the causes of extremism, but a low conceptual understanding, making it crucial to provide a structured education on CVE in higher education institutions. This research concludes that effective CVE strategies need to include education, mentoring, and community involvement, as well as consider cultural, religious, and socioeconomic issues. The suggestions are to set up compulsory CVE modules in universities, create elaborate mentoring programs, and improve the relationship between educational institutions and community organizations and also to change the SRAM model for the socio-political context in Pakistan. The article adds to the worldwide debate concerning counter-extremism, delivering evidence-based lessons learned about interventions delivered in the community and their potential for lasting effect.

Keywords: Counter-violent extremism, Community-led CVE models, SRAM approach, Radicalization, De-radicalization, Mentoring.

Introduction

Extremism is one of the most recurring and ever-increasing problems in this century. The radical ideas remain alive and are evolving to fit the new socio-political and religious situations, and innovative and sustainable ideas need to be developed to

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counteract their influence on societies around the world. Violent extremism poses a constant risk that requires holistic solutions to tackle the underlying ideological, social, and economic drivers of violent extremism as well as the immediate threat to security (United Nations, 2016). One of the basic problems in responding to extremism is that there is no clear consensus on terms related to extremism. Sometimes, the terms radicalization, extremism, and violent extremism are used interchangeably, though they are different phenomena with different implications for counter-terrorism (UNODC, n.d.). Radicalization can be defined as the development of distorted ideology that can be a result of grievance or identity crisis, but not necessarily violence (Borum, 2011; FBI LEB, 2011). It is very important to understand this difference to counteract radicalization, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism. Extremism is defined as the advocacy or practice of extreme political, religious, or cultural views with intolerance, fanaticism, and a lack of compromise (UK Government, 2024; Pressman, 2009). Extremists may go about their business. Extremism can create the conditions for violence when combined with (perceived) injustice, victimization, and other factors, through non-violent means: political agitation or social protest (Schmidt, 2013).

Violent extremism is defined as violence or threats of violence for political or ideological purposes, and the deliberate targeting of civilians or infrastructure to intimidate, coerce, or instill fear (USAID, as cited in GSDRC, n.d.; OSCE, n.d.). It is sometimes described as more expansive than terrorism and includes ideologically driven violence (UNODC, n.d.; OHCHR, n.d.). These are not only two separate concepts, but they also have significant policy and practice implications. The terms “radicalization” and “extremism” can be of concern but does not always necessarily trigger violence. But, violent extremism is a threat to public safety and security, and must be tackled immediately, in tandem with proactively addressing the pipeline from grievance to radicalization to extremism to violent action (King&Taylor, 2011; Step Together, 2025; UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 2016). The level of violent extremism in Pakistan has been on the rise, and in 2024, there were 2,546 deaths, 2,267 injuries, and many terrorist attacks, most of which were in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Whereas the situation of law and order escalates as mentioned above, strategies such as Zarb-e-Azb are required. At the same time, however, the ideological perversions need to be addressed by community-led CVE programs to be effectively responded to. This is evident across many countries, for example, in the UK, where the model of community engagement is PREVENT.

Research Objectives

- i. To compare the effectiveness of community-led counter-extremism programs to government-led programs, particularly in terms of participation, completion, levels of trust and long-term outcomes.
- ii. To assess the viability of the SRAM towards Pakistan’s socio-cultural context and determine required adaptations to reflect the religious

sensitivity, tribalism, and dual education systems, as well as resource constraints.

Research Hypothesis

The community-led countering violent extremism (CVE) through the SRAM model in the UK shall have fruitful policy implications for Pakistan.

Review of the Literature

The academic literature on extremism highlights the need for clarity of concepts to develop an effective policy response. According to Hassan (2018), radicalization is not violent extremism; it is the process of accepting extremist beliefs and ideology. This is important as it helps to recognize intervention areas before a person moves into violent behaviour. McCauley and Moskaleiko (2015) go on to explain that radicalization is a process of change in beliefs and values, moving away from the mainstream, which is driven by various factors such as social isolation, grievances, and exposure to extremist ideologies through online or offline networks. Extremism is a more serious or in-group commitment than just radicalization. Extremism is identified by intolerance of other opinions, unwavering belief in the rightness of the cause and the desire to take extreme action to attain goals. But, as Khalil (2017) notes, extremism does not always mean violence, and many extremist groups use political pressure, social activism and propaganda as a means of communication without resorting to the use of violence. It is when violent extremism is manifested in the actual use or advocacy of violence in pursuit of an ideological objective that it is at its most dangerous. The development from disaffection to

The process of becoming radicalized to extremism to violent action is not linear and predictable; identifying the stages helps interventions be targeted at each stage. Most radicalized people do not become violent extremists, as Borum (2014) points out, so there must be something more than ideology that turns a radicalized person into a violent extremist.

Identifying the Root Cause of the Radicalization Problem

Several interrelated factors have been identified in the literature that drive individuals towards radicalization, at the individual, community, and societal levels. Radicalization is a consequence of complex dynamics involving push factors (grievances and vulnerabilities), pull factors (attraction to extremist ideologies and groups), and enabling factors (opportunities and contexts that enable radicalization at various levels). The following factors are all important for radicalization, and are presented in alphabetical order:

Unemployment and economic marginalisation are central themes in the study of radicalization. Those who are economically disenfranchised might have a sense of grievance towards states and society, which can increase their susceptibility to

messages of empowerment, purpose, and economic opportunity from extremist groups. But studies reveal that not everyone without a job turns to radicalism, and some extremists are middle class, implying that economic conditions are but one of several factors.

Table 1: Key Factors Contributing to Radicalization

Factor Category	Specific Factors	Mechanism	Evidence Level
Economic	Unemployment, poverty, and economic marginalisation	Creates grievances and a sense of injustice	Strong
Educational	Low attainment, lack of critical thinking skills	Limit's ability to counter extremist narratives	Strong
Social	Isolation, discrimination, identity crisis	Increases susceptibility to extremist belonging	Strong
Political	Disenfranchisement, perceived injustice, foreign policy	Provides ideological justification	Moderate
Religious	Misuse of religious texts, distorted interpretations	Legitimizes extremist action	Variable
Psychological	Trauma, humiliation, need for significance	Creates vulnerability to recruitment	Moderate

Educational factors have a two-fold function. Low education levels stifle their critical thinking skills and can make them more vulnerable to the simple-minded propaganda of extremists. However, some studies suggest the relationship between education and extremism is complex; extremist leaders have higher levels of education, in other words. Attainment is not the only factor that may be significant in the content and quality of education. A culture of critical thinking, understanding, and cohesion in education can act as a protective factor against extremism.

Approaches to Counter Violent Extremism

There is a spectrum of strategies that are generally regarded as 'hard' or 'soft' counter-extremism measures. Hard approaches focus on security measures such as intelligence, law enforcement, military action, and judicial prosecution. These strategies are directed at breaking up active terrorist cells and thwarting near-term attacks. Hard approaches are essential for situations of imminent danger, but they do not tackle the root causes of extremism. Soft approaches focus on the prevention, de-radicalization, and rehabilitation of individuals: Education, community engagement,

economic opportunities, and social integration. Neumann (2010) believes that successful counterterrorism must involve both hard and soft strategies,

Table 2: Detailed Comparison of the CVE Approaches

Aspect	Soft Approach	Hard Approach	
Primary Focus	Prevention, de-radicalization, rehabilitation	Detection, disruption, prosecution	
Methods	Education, mentoring, community engagement, dialogue	Intelligence operations, military force, law enforcement	
Target Population	At-risk individuals, vulnerable communities, General Public	Active terrorists, extremist organizations, terror cells	
Timeline	Long-term sustainable change (years to decades)	Immediate threat neutralization (hours to months)	
Resource Requirements	Moderate; leverages community resources and volunteers	High; requires specialized personnel, equipment, and infrastructure	
Effectiveness Measure	Reduced radicalization rates, changed attitudes, and improved community resilience.	Disrupted plots, arrested terrorists, degraded capabilities.	
Community Relations	Builds trust, cooperation, and social cohesion	Variable: may create tension or enhance security	
Sustainability	High creates lasting institutional capacity	Limited; requires continuous resource commitment	
Examples	SRAM model, Channel program, mentoring initiatives	Counter-terrorism operations, intelligence surveillance, and prosecutions	
	Extremist Belonging		
Political	Disenfranchisement, perceived injustice, foreign policy	Provides ideological justification	Moderate
Religious	Misuse of religious texts, distorted interpretations	Legitimizes extremist action	Variable
Psychological	Trauma, humiliation, need for significance	Creates vulnerability to recruitment	Moderate

The use of hard strategies to eliminate the present threats and soft to eradicate the causes of future radicalization.

Community-Led vs Government-Led CVE

It has become increasingly recognised in the literature that top-down government-led CVE initiatives have their limitations, and that community-led approaches have benefits. Community organizations have several inherent strengths argued by Briggs and Silverman (2014): They are familiar with the local context; they have established trust relationships; they are culturally and linguistically familiar; and they can provide sustained support. Despite the resources they have, government programs are often limited in terms of access to at-risk populations and perceived legitimacy and cultural insensitivity.

Research Design and Methodology

The study was conducted using mixed methods, exploratory sequential design with the pragmatic research paradigm. The decision on the use of mixed methods was made because the research questions were both qualitative and quantitative, and needed to be explored in depth, as well as be assessed on a large scale of Pakistani youth's awareness and attitudes regarding CVE programs. The sequential design was utilized in this research to get qualitative results of the UK and develop a quantitative instrument for the Pakistani context. The pragmatic paradigm was chosen as the most philosophically suitable for the applied research dealing with the practical aspects and policy implications. Pragmatism is not a philosophy, but rather a research method that emphasizes the need to use research methods appropriate to the research questions being asked. This flexibility allowed the incorporation of interpretive frameworks used in understanding community-led models with positivist frameworks used in measuring attitudes and outcomes.

Qualitative Phase: UK Community-Led Model

The qualitative phase aimed to learn from a range of community-led CVE programs in the UK, specifically focusing on Stockwell Green Community Services and partner organizations' Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring approach (SRAM). This phase used several data collection techniques to be able to gain a full picture. The analysis of program reports, evaluation documents, funding proposals, policy documents, and academic publications on community-led CVE in the UK. This added historical background, program logic, program goals, and documented outcomes. A structured checklist with program design, implementation fidelity, participant characteristics, outcomes achieved, and lessons learned was used for analysis of the documents.

Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders including: (a) leaders of civil society groups implementing CVE

programs (n=8); (b) officials from government sectors responsible for CVE policy and funding (n=5); (c) program beneficiaries who have benefited from SRAM interventions (n=7); (d) religious scholars engaged in program design or delivery (n=3); and (e) academic researchers studying the effectiveness of CVE program (n=2). Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, were audio taped with their permission, and followed a semi-structured format that gave flexibility to explore any themes that arose, while allowing for consistency to be maintained across subjects. Three focus groups were held with three different groups of participants: current SRAM program participants (n=8), program alumni (n=6) and community leaders and stakeholders (n=7). Interviews were augmented by focus groups for their group dynamics, shared experiences, and community views that could not be captured in individual interviews. Structured protocols were used to facilitate discussion, and the time to discuss was about 90-120 minutes.

Quantitative Phase: Pakistani Student Survey

The quantitative phase was carried out using a large-scale survey to gauge awareness, understanding, and attitudes of university students in Pakistan towards extremism. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed to incorporate the qualitative results and literature, was reviewed by experts and tested with 50 students. In order to make the study representative in terms of diversity of educational institutions and across Punjab Province (the most populous province in Pakistan), a multistage random sampling technique was used. First stage: 8 public universities were randomly chosen across geographies of Punjab (Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan and Rawalpindi). Second stage: Faculties/Departments in each university were randomly selected to represent a wide range of disciplines (sciences, social sciences, humanities, professional studies). In third stage, students were randomly picked from the class lists after stratification based on gender and year level. A sample size of 500 students (about 60-65 students per university) was determined using a power analysis that was used to detect medium effect sizes in comparative analyses.

The questionnaire was divided into six dimensions:

- i. Awareness of the causes and manifestations of extremism
- ii. Conceptual understanding of the processes of radicalization
- iii. Attitudes towards community- versus government-led interventions
- iv. Engagement, interest and willingness to participate in CVE programs
- v. Trust in different institutional actors
- vi. Perceptions of the university's role in CVE items, which were structured as 5-point Likert scales for most questions, with some being factual or demographic.

The instrument was carefully validated; it was reviewed by expert CVE researchers/practitioners and participated in pilot testing for. Clarity and cultural

appropriateness, as well as reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .78 to .89 across subscales).

Data Analysis

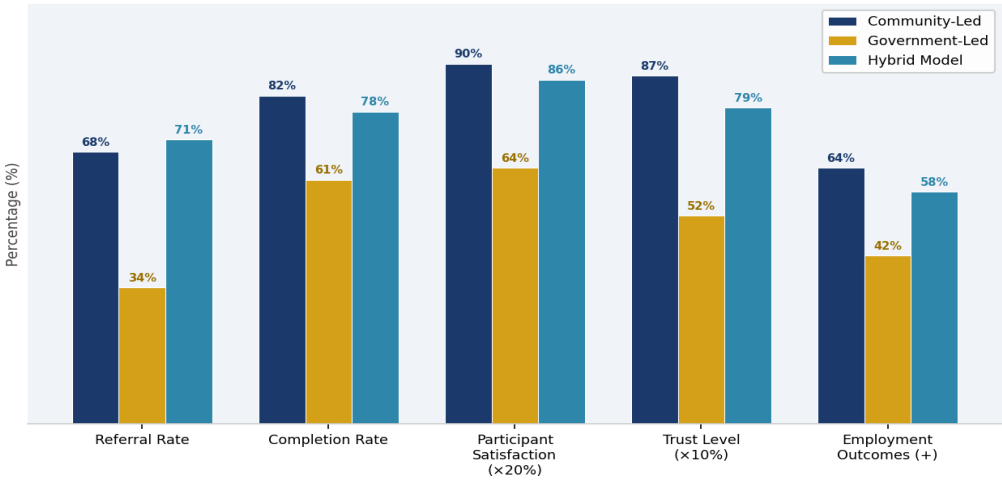
Thematic analysis (with support from NVivo software) was used for the qualitative analysis of interview, focus group, and document data. The analysis was done systematically in the following way: (1) Familiarization: repeated reading of the data and identification of meaningful units and patterns, (2) Initial coding: identification of meaningful units and patterns, (3) Theme development: clustering of codes to develop themes, (4) Theme refinement: refinement of themes for internal coherence and external distinctiveness, (5) Definition and naming of final themes, and (6) Integration and interpretation in relation to research questions and pre-existing literature. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS software, and descriptive statistics were used with an emphasis on the exploratory nature of the research. Data analysis included: frequency distributions and percentages for categorical variables, means and standard deviations for continuous variables, comparison of means across the groups (gender, university and discipline) through t-test and ANOVA, and correlation analysis to check the relationship between the variables. A p-value < .05 was considered significant.

Findings

Effectiveness of Community-led CVE programs

The effectiveness of CVE Programs in the Community was discussed. The effectiveness of Community-led CVE Programs was discussed. There were significant variations between community-led and government-led counter-extremist programs in terms of their effectiveness in the UK, both in terms of the scope of their activities and in terms of their outcomes and results. Findings across all studies showed that community-based programs achieved better results in terms of participation, completion, satisfaction, and sustained participation. The significantly increased referral rate in the community-led programs (68%) Trust and accessibility are key differences between these 34% (versus 32% for government-led). The common thread across all the interviews conducted was that the community organizations are seen as being allies and advocates, not enforcement. We are not an agency that immediately involves authorities and that is why we are able to attract families to us with the knowledge that we understand their problems. We're here to help, not to criminalize! There were also differences in completion rates, with 82 per cent of those in community-led programs completing the programs, compared to 61 per cent in government-led programs. Sustained engagement in CLT programs was identified from a series of factors that emerged in focus group discussions: culturally appropriate delivery, flexible schedules (participants' constraints), personalized support (individual needs), and non-stigma associated with participation. As seen in Figure 1, CVE program models can be compared for their effectiveness.

Figure 1: Comparative Effectiveness of CVE program models/ Impact of the SRAM Approach



The Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) program produced a significant positive effect in various outcome areas. Longitudinal tracking of the program. Significant improvements were revealed in educational participation, employability, criminal reoffending, and social integration by the participants. The outcomes of the program and its impacts are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: SRAM Program Outcomes and Impact

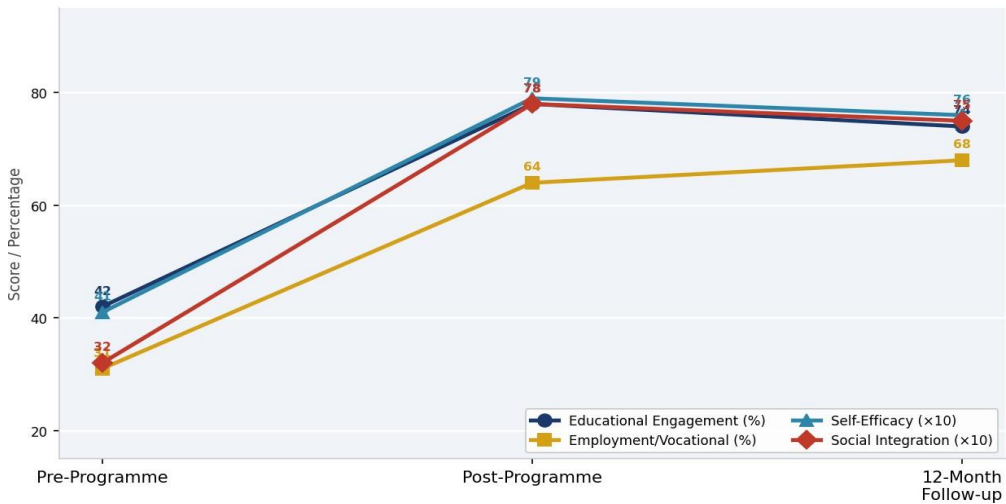
Outcome Domain	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change	Follow-up (12 months)
Educational Engagement (%)	42%	78%	36%	74%
Employment/Vocational (%)	31%	64%	33%	68%
Reoffending Rate (%)	47%	12%	-35%	15%
Social Integration (1-10)	3.2	7.8	4.6	7.5
Critical Thinking Skills	Low	High	Significant	High
Religious Understanding	Distorted	Balanced	Positive	Balanced
Self-Efficacy (1-10)	4.1	7.9	3.8	7.6
Community Connections	Isolated	Integrated	Strong	Integrated

The educational element of SRAM was especially fruitful. There was a strong desire to learn, and 78% of participants who had withdrawn from education sought to undertake educational or vocational qualifications because of participating in the program, compared with 42% who did so before participation. This change was attributed to several features of the program, including the mentoring relationships which re-built confidence and motivation, practical support in dealing with educational systems, the learning barriers in an ad hoc way, and a link to education

opportunities. Employment outcomes also made substantial improvements, with 31% to 64% getting employment or actively seeking it. The program highlighted skills development, confidence, and employer linkages, which facilitated economic integration. One program alumna said: ‘SRAM didn’t just teach me skills, it taught me that I was valuable to contribute. It changed my life and my vision of myself and my future.

Of note for brevity in the counter-extremism sphere, there was a 74% reduction in the rate of reoffending, falling from 47% to 12%. This significant effect is attributable to the multi-faceted approach of SRAM, which goes beyond the ideological and extends to the social, economic, and psychological factors that support recidivism. The SRAM Program outcomes for all phases are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: SRAM Program outcomes across all phases: Pakistani Student Awareness and Attitudes



A survey conducted among 500 university students in Pakistan indicated that while there was a high level of awareness, there was not much conceptual understanding, engagement, or interest. This profile highlights opportunities and challenges for CVE interventions based in universities. The study reveals that none of the Pakistani university students are aware of extremism.

Table 4: Extremism Awareness among Pakistani University Students.

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Level	% High/Very High
Awareness of Causes	4.2	0.7	High	78%
Conceptual Understanding	2.8	0.9	Poor	31%
Engagement Interest	3.4	0.8	Average	54%

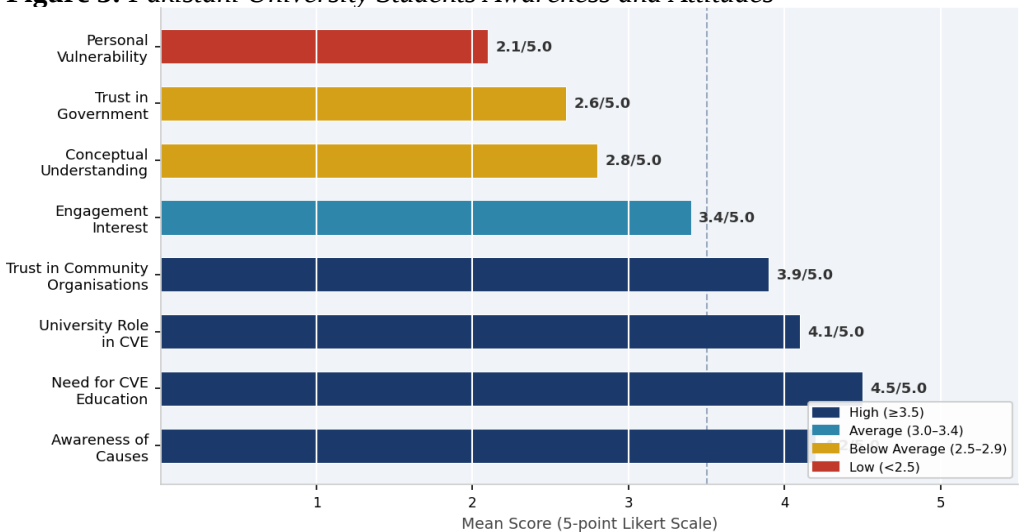
Need for CVE Education	4.5	0.5	Very High	87%
Trust Community Orgs	3.9	0.8	High	71%
Trust Government	2.6	1	Low	28%
University Role	4.1	0.7	High	75%
Personal Vulnerability	2.1	0.9	Low	15%

Students' awareness of extremism is high ($M=4.2$, $SD=0.68$) which means the students of Pakistan are not naive regarding the issue. They exhibited an understanding of economic, political, social and religious issues that can lead to radicalization. This overall awareness was not reflected in conceptual understanding items, however, where the mean score was poor ($M=2.8$, $SD=0.91$).

The confusion between awareness and understanding is significant. Students identify extremism as an issue but don't have methods of understanding the process of radicalization, how to recognize signs of radicalization and effective ways of intervening. Here are three conclusions: First, educational interventions should not be restricted to raising awareness but should strive to build complex analytical capacity; second, the information is independent of the problem domain; and third, the information is well-structured and consists of a set of variables that are mathematically related.

The Patterns of trust were especially obvious. Students' trust in community organizations was high ($M=3.9$, $SD=0.82$) while their trust in government institutions was low ($M=2.6$, $SD=1.03$). For addressing extremism. This discovery is at a similar level as the UK and indicates that community-led initiatives may have a better uptake than government-led initiatives in Pakistani universities.

Figure 3: Pakistani University Students Awareness and Attitudes

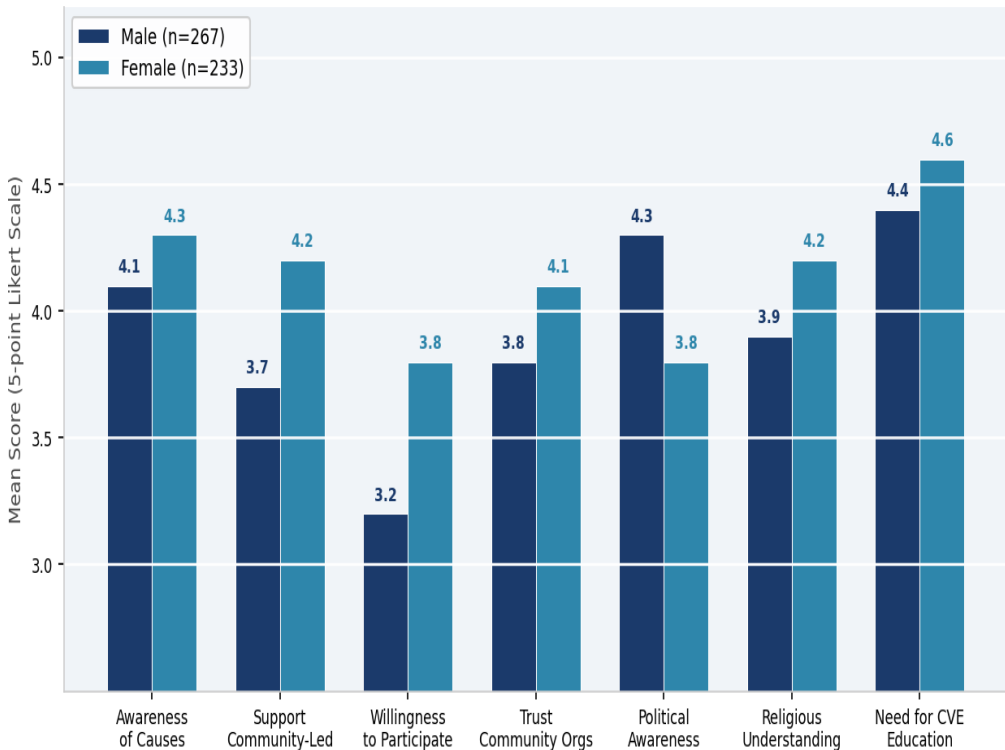


Gender Differences in Knowledge and Skills

Analysis revealed statistically significant differences among genders for multiple dimensions, indicating the need for gender responsive CVE approaches. Women students were significantly more likely to agree with the community-led CVE initiatives ($M=4.2$; $p<.001$) and more likely to agree to take part in mentoring programs ($M=3.8$; $p<.001$) than males. The concerns of the female respondents were expressed during focus group discussions with female students, who felt that community-based strategies were safer and more culturally appropriate because these strategies were in line with the norms that limit women's access to government.

The "Political awareness of extremism contexts" scale was significantly higher for male students ($M=4.3$, $p<.001$) which may be due to their higher level of exposure to political discourse and news consumption patterns. Female students had higher scores in religious understanding, however ($M=4.2$ vs 3.9 , $p<.01$), there are potential benefits in engaging female mentors and educators in dealing with the religious aspects of radicalization. This is a map of the attitudes and perceptions related to gender in extremism. This is a map of attitudes and perceptions around gender and extremism.

Figure 4: Gender Perception in Extremism Perception and Attitude



Discussion

Results of this research are compelling evidence of the effectiveness of community-led counter-extremism models, and the relevant issues are highlighted for application in the Pakistani context. A review of the salient themes that have surfaced from the data is presented with implications for policy and practice. But the stark results of community-led programs on all indicators measured reflect a key advantage – trust. A key mediator that was found to explain greater referral rates, completion rates, participant satisfaction and sustained impacts of community-led initiatives was the level of trust. This trust is expressed and manifested at different levels: institutional trust (trust of community organizations) and distrust of government agencies; interpersonal trust (relational trust), that is, trust built on interpersonal relationships that have already existed in the community; cultural trust (identity trust). Strength of values, competency based on demonstrated understanding of community needs.

Minority communities' historical experiences of policing and surveillance and counter-terrorism programs within the UK context have led to a certain degree of skepticism towards government-led programs. The situation is more complex in the Pakistani context in the sense that the government institutions are even more lacking in trust around them due to the perception of corruption, political instability, inequitable application of law, and the previous history of military involvement in civilian affairs. The issues of trust cannot be addressed through marketing and communication, but must be addressed at a fundamental level of how CVE is conceptualized and executed. The survey results show that Pakistani universities are very vulnerable and also a very important opportunity for countering extremism in the country. Students' awareness of the problem is high, but their conceptual understanding is not, thus providing a fertile ground for educational interventions. Pupils are aware of extremism as a concern, but are lacking in frameworks to understand and tackle it. The Universities serve a key role in meeting this need by developing curriculum, mentoring programs, research and policy engagements, community partnerships, and the provision of a safe space for difficult dialogues.

Conclusion

Pakistan faces a constant and acute menace from violent extremism, and a new paradigm is needed in the way the menace is dealt with. This will require military action to respond to an imminent threat, but sustainable security will also require a holistic approach, which should cover aspects of ideology, social, economic and psychological radicalization. What this research has shown is that there are frameworks that can bring that long-term impact, and that these frameworks can be community-led, especially the SRAM approach that was developed in this research. The particular socio-cultural, religious, tribal, global war on terror, and educational environment in Pakistan demands careful adaptation and not replication of foreign

models. But the core tenets of a CVE that works on all levels are applicable at all times: build on community trust and social capital, respond to multiple dimensions of vulnerability simultaneously, engage communities as partners, don't subject communities but invest in youth development and education, engage authentic religious scholarship, and priorities prevention over security responses.

One key lever of this new approach is the universities themselves. Pakistani higher education institutions can develop a sustainable mechanism to nurture resilience against extremist ideologies among youth by converting their potential recruitment area into a prevention hub, in which all these three pillars are addressed – mandatory, CVE education, comprehensive mentoring, and community partnerships. The strong appetite of students to be involved in a university and the trust of students in community organizations provide good conditions for implementation.

Recommendations

- Create a National CVE Framework that makes explicit the community-led approaches and security measures and provides dedicated funding mechanisms for community organizations.
- Establish University CVE Centers within key public universities as hubs that facilitate research, training, curriculum development and partnerships with the community.
- Establish a National Mentoring Program based on the SRAM model, before the national scale-up, in selected Universities.

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