

Research Methodology and Planning

Introduction

The previous chapter achieved the first objective of this research project, through the analysis of existing literature towards the radicalisation of those with neurodiverse characteristics into far-right extremism. Within this, prominent researchers such as Dr Zainab Al-Attar provides insight into how the features of both areas interact, and the attraction this can create towards far-right extremist content for those with neurodiverse characteristics (Al-Attar, 2020). Despite this, a conclusion was drawn that research is within an early growth phase, and theorists do not believe sufficient evidence exists to understand whether those with neurodiverse characteristics are vulnerable to radicalisation (Altier *et al.* 2017). Specifically, input from those who criminally investigate far-right extremism creates a gap within current research. This chapter therefore details the research methodology used to explore this opportunity, and to achieve objective two of the dissertation, which for reference is: To investigate and compare the understanding of neurodiversity within far-right extremism amongst response policing and counter-terrorism policing teams.

Research Strategy

Research, importantly, is viewed to be more than the simple collection and presentation of information, where purpose, direction, and the ability to interpret findings are salient (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). With the purpose of this research developed within the literature review, this paragraph focusses on the direction of the study. Firstly, where research is typically split into two different approaches, to include the collection of new information or the further development

of existing data, the research gap highlighted within the literature review means primary research (the collection of new information) is required to meet the dissertation objective (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Next, it is important to understand the type of information most beneficial towards the research goal. This again draws thought towards two paths, in the form of quantitative and qualitative methods, where quantitative approaches focus towards numeric, statistical outcomes, and qualitative approaches seek more word based, descriptive insight (Meyer and Avery, 2008). Within this dissertation, elements of both are utilised, where the research gap is closed by a mostly quantitative survey, however, also includes a small number of open questions to encourage qualitative views. In addition, interviews have been included from a solely qualitative approach. Consequently, this research approach aims to balance the qualities of quantitative and qualitative methods, for the outcomes to complement each other and to gain a fuller, more meaningful understanding. Whilst it is acknowledged that some researchers avoid this merge with concerns the approaches may compete against each other, confidence in this strategy is built from studies which conclude that combined methods can produce comprehensive findings (Gelo, Braakmann and Benetka, 2008).

Data Collection

With the overall strategy better understood, this paragraph explores the data collection practices utilised to best support the dissertation objective. Firstly, the timeframe for the collection of information needs to be appropriately balanced against the timeline of the research project overall, where data collection across a short period is referred to as cross-sectional, and collection across a more sustained duration is referred to as longitudinal (Rindfleisch *et al.* 2008). Whilst both hold

strengths and weaknesses, the relatively short timeframe of this research project means a cross-sectional strategy has been selected, which will allow information to be gained efficiently, at an achievable cost, and for interpretation to be timely gained (Setia, 2016). Here, surveys have been completed electronically across police officers within response and counter terrorism teams, to allow for expert insight consistent with the dissertation objective, and a large volume of participants to support informative and credible quantitative analysis. Interviews within the qualitative approach have then been completed on a smaller volume, however have allowed information to be gained within the time restraints of the research project. These interviews continue to involve response and counter terrorism policing professionals, to balance quality with quantity, and to gain expert insight from different perspectives. Finally, the questions presented within both the survey and interview approaches are designed in response to the learning and opportunity highlighted within the literature review, to ensure the feedback is strategic, and directed, in consideration with current research within the area.

Data Analysis

After the data collection element of the research, the appropriate forms of data analysis drew thought back towards quantitative and qualitative approaches. Accordingly, Microsoft Excel has predominantly been used to collate and display statistical findings from the quantitative elements of the research, where learning has been presented in the form of percentages and averages. Consistent with expectation however, qualitative results from the open styled survey questions and interviews presented word-based insight which largely included feelings, opinions and descriptive experiences (Greetham, 2019). The successful development of this

information therefore led to the utilisation of thematic analysis, an aged and widely respected method to help recognise key and recurring patterns within qualitative information (Patton, 2015). As a result, this highlighted common themes which were able to be considered alongside quantitative survey findings to draw fuller conclusions.

Limitations and Potential Problems

Consistent with theorist views however, no research approach is perfect, and researchers need to consider the strengths, weaknesses, and potential risks of their chosen paths (Choy, 2014). Firstly, from an ethical perspective, all stages of the dissertation have received approval through an early review. Additionally, prior to any participation in surveys or interviews, all participants were briefed on the nature of the dissertation, informed that their participation was voluntary, with their entitlement to withdraw at any point, and advised their participation would remain anonymous throughout. Consequently however, due to the sensitive nature of counter terrorism investigations, requests were made for interviews to be recorded through manual notes as opposed to audio recordings. To maintain accuracy and security, notes of the completed interviews were therefore created electronically during this time and held on password protected systems. Secondly, this study utilised access to policing professions which not all researchers possess. Whilst this means the findings are difficult to reinforce with other studies, the expert position of the sampled audience, combined with questions being designed strategically after a detailed literature review, adds a level of validity to the research (Drost, 2011). Finally, a limitation is present within the relatively short size limit of the dissertation, where focus was required to ensure the study remained focussed.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter has explored the methodology and planning considered within this research project. Within this, the strengths, weaknesses, and potential risks of each element have been detailed, and the utilised methods have been chosen because they provide a strong balance to achieve the second objective of this dissertation.

The next chapter of the dissertation will now move into the research findings these methods have produced.

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