

Findings and Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the primary research findings, where themes were highlighted, and comparisons were drawn towards the literature review. This chapter builds upon these foundations, where broader conclusions will be presented to address the overall dissertation question. Additionally, this chapter will critically reflect upon the research project overall, to include observed limitations and a consideration towards where the findings sit within the broader research picture. First however, the following subchapter will begin the discussion, with a return to the dissertation objectives, to understand the project's delivery against the specific goals.

Dissertation objectives

To support a strategic investigation, the dissertation set three specific objectives, which for clarity were:

1. To analyse the existing literature surrounding the radicalisation of those with neurodiverse characteristics into right-wing extremism, to include any additional contributing factors.
2. To investigate and compare the understanding of neurodiversity within criminal investigations and right-wing extremism amongst numerous policing units in South Wales.
3. To assess any implications these findings present towards the investigation of those with neurodiverse characteristics, and the safeguarding of those at risk.

These areas have been addressed in order, where the first objective was achieved within the literature review and has formed a frequent reference point throughout. Next, objective two was completed within the analysis of results chapter, where research findings were presented to include three prominent observed themes. Finally, the research findings also raised potential implications, which will be further explored within this chapter to meet and close the third objective.

Main findings

In addition to the research objectives, this subchapter addresses the dissertation question, which for reference is to investigate the prominence of neurodiversity within right-wing extremism, and to understand whether people with neurodiverse characteristics are more vulnerable to radicalisation. To begin this discussion, the primary research confirmed and strengthened the literature review, which presented theoretical relationships between neurodiverse characteristics and factors of criminal behaviour. Here, the survey and interview feedback consistently raised observed links to include social interaction, theoretical stimulation, and visual appeal which shows the connections have been observed within policing, in compliment of wider literature however from a different viewpoint (Ahmed and Lynch, 2021; Al-Attar, 2020; Baron-Cohen, 2002; Samson *et al.* 2012). In combination of the literature review and primary research, it is therefore argued that a variety of right-wing extremist factors can create an appeal for those with neurodiverse characteristics, to include rule and order, politics, history, and a form of social belonging for example.

In contrast however, an argument has formed that although neurodiverse draws exist, these are not exclusive to right-wing ideology, and links occur towards criminal involvement more generally. Notably, survey responses showed that participants perceived neurodiverse vulnerability to be present across criminal involvement more broadly, on a comparable if not marginally increased level than towards the development of a right-wing extremist mindset. This led to specific feedback detailed within the previous chapter of organised crime leaders targeting those with neurodiverse characteristics within their recruitment. Additionally, earlier consideration of why some people are attracted deeper into right-wing extremist content whilst others withdraw could be argued to a wider audience than neurodiversity alone, and forms a larger opportunity for study. Furthermore, the literature review presented that senses of injustice and frustration are emotions actively sought by terrorist recruiters (Collins, 2023). Whilst these feelings create an attraction towards the idolisation of retaliation, revenge, and the hate messages associated with right-wing extremism, the emotions are not unique to those with neurodiverse conditions. Instead, it is argued that society more broadly has the potential to develop these feelings, particularly during times of hardship. These points considered in combination therefore strengthen the previously highlighted argument of others, where although neurodiverse characteristics and right-wing factors relate to some extent, it does not mean all neurodiverse people are vulnerable to right-wing extremist radicalisation (Al-Attar, 2020; Altier *et al.* 2017).

Finally and most unexpectedly, the research highlighted a severe support and training gap regarding neurodiversity, both to safeguarding those with neurodiverse characteristics from criminal involvement, and from an investigative perspective

should criminal engagement occur. Within the primary research, low levels of neurodiversity training and awareness created a strong theme across the numerous and varied police departments. Despite this however, the research continually provided insight regarding neurodiverse characteristics which was consistent with wider research. When combined with research feedback of participants feeling poorly equipped despite having a high level of experience investigating those with neurodiverse characteristics, the findings highlight that police training gaps focus towards how to support neurodiverse people as opposed to how to recognise the indications. This conclusion links with additional research findings which promote that a solely policing approach is inadequate to protect those with neurodiverse characteristics from criminal engagement. Whilst this argument is biased through the contribution of policing professionals only, views were presented that punitive police action leads to a frequently visible reoffending picture, which directly compliments the literature review findings (Rutten *et al.* 2022). To add strength to this argument, further contribution was also provided that wider multi-agency strategies are beneficial, to include education, healthcare, and social family services for example. These conclusions are not without opportunity for further study however, where the next subchapter will provide a reflection on the research project overall to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the findings.

Research reflection

The ability to reflect and present limitations within academic study has been described to be a responsibility for researchers, where honesty and openness is respected and supports future learning (Ross and Zaidi, 2019; Smithies, 2016). Within this research project, input from policing professionals was chosen to address

the literature review highlighted research gap, which has been successful to an extent, however has raised a number of additional opportunities. These opportunities will be further explored in the following recommendations chapter however a limitation of the research has been present within the relatively short timescale and overall size of the project. Specifically, direct input from counter terrorism policing units was not possible due to additional vetting and timescale requirements. Whilst this has been beyond the scope of this study, it is viewed that specialist input from would provide valuable insight, specifically from those with higher experience of investigating right-wing extremism.

Conclusion

Despite the further opportunities highlighted, this dissertation has contributed towards closing the research gap, where the overall dissertation question has been addressed, and the implications raised have been explored to close and complete the third and final dissertation objective. Having discussed the overall conclusions from the research project, the next and final chapter will provide recommendations of how the additional opportunities can be approached to support future academic studies.

Word Count – 1098 (1100 limit)

Bibliography

Ahmed, Y. and Lynch, O. (2021) 'Terrorism Studies and the Far Right - The State of Play', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 36(12), pp. 1-21.

Al-Attar, Z. (2020) 'Autism spectrum disorders and terrorism: how different features of autism can contextualise vulnerability and resilience', *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 31(6), pp. 926-949.

Altier, M.B. *et al.* (2017). 'Why They Leave: An Analysis of Terrorist Disengagement Events from Eighty-seven Autobiographical Accounts', *Security Studies*, 26(2). pp. 305-332.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2002) 'The extreme male brain theory of autism', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 6(6), pp. 248-254.

Collins, J. (2023) 'Mobilising Extremism in Times of Change: Analysing the UK's Far-Right Online Content During the Pandemic', *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 29(3), pp. 355-377.

Ross, P.T. and Zaidi, N.L. (2019) 'Limited by our limitations', *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(4), pp. 261-264.

Rutten, A.X. *et al.* (2022) 'Offence type and neurodiversity: A comparison of 12-17-year-old boys charged with a criminal offence by diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or both', *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 32(6), pp. 404-413.

Samson, F. *et al.* (2012) 'Enhanced visual functioning in autism: An ALE meta-analysis', *Human Brain Mapping*, 33(7), pp. 1553-1581.

Smithies, D. (2016) 'Reflection On: On Reflection', *Analysis Reviews*, 76(1), pp. 55-69.