

UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM

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OR

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DRAFT RESEARCH TITLE QUESTION: An investigation into the prominence of neurodiversity within right-wing extremism: Are people with neurodiverse characteristics more vulnerable to radicalisation? INTRODUCTION: The impact of terrorism can lead to national fear, alter public behaviour, and influence economies, in a powerful reaction which can pass through generations (Van Der Does <i>et al.</i> 2021). In illustration, despite the perception of many, there were no fatalities within the United Kingdom (UK) as a result of terrorism during 2022 (Counter Terrorism Policing, 2023). A consideration therefore forms towards how history, stereotypes and fear compare with reality, and how well the risks are truly understood. Despite the 2022 statistic, deeper analysis of recent terrorist movement within the UK identifies the growth of far-right extremist activity, where referrals in this area to the UK's counter-terrorism program grew by 36% in 2018 alone, and activity has been particularly prominent within post-industrial communities (Knight, 2019). Studies within the area of far-right extremism however are disproportionately low, where between the timeframe of 2001 and 2018, of the top three terrorism journals, only 6 terrorism articles out of 1846 used primary data to support their research of far-right	

extremism (Ahmed and Lynch, 2021). Consequently, as the impact of far-right extremism grows in media attention, study and understanding of the contributing factors, particularly of those radicalised by far-right extremist groups, is lacking and forms the landscape this research project intends to explore.

This research project specifically proposes to investigate the composition of far-right extremist groups within the UK, where initial conversations with experts within counter terrorism policing have highlighted the prominence of neurodiversity within this area to be a common and concerning factor. This project therefore intends to investigate whether people with neurodiverse characteristics are vulnerable to radicalisation by far-right extremists, and the potential contributing factors. Accordingly, this project intends to compare these findings with the perception of terrorist threats amongst those within the police service, to observe the practical implications this has towards the investigation of far-right extremism and consider future safeguarding options.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The aim of this project is to investigate whether people with neurodiverse characteristics are vulnerable to radicalisation by far-right extremists. Additionally, the project aims to understand the policing awareness of this factor and provide recommendations to safeguard those at risk of radicalisation.

These aims will be achieved by focussing on the following objectives:

1. To analyse the existing literature surrounding the radicalisation of those with neurodiverse characteristics into far-right extremism, to include any additional contributing factors.
2. To investigate and compare the understanding of neurodiversity within far-right extremism amongst response policing and counter-terrorism policing teams.
3. To assess the practical implications these findings present towards the investigation of far-right extremism, and the safeguarding of those at risk.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Whilst a research gap exists within far-right extremism, in comparison with other forms of terrorist activity, this research project intends to explore the existing literature in close

detail, and potentially branch into areas such as age demographic, technology impact, incel culture and schooling to analyse the existence of neurodiversity within those who are radicalised, should the avenues be appropriate upon further research.

Since 2001, studies show that approximately 80% of terrorism related studies have focussed on Jihadi movement, where events such as 9/11 have influenced societal perception across decades (Silke, 2006). Despite this, deeper exploration has found that studies specifically focussed towards far-right forms of extremism began from approximately 2013 onwards which will form the starting point of the research within this project (Schuurman, 2020). Nonetheless, it is understood this research will require extensive reading, with far-right extremism noted to be complex, challenged by individual based perpetrators and reduced societal exposure through bias and stereotypes (Ahmed and Lynch, 2021). Examples of prominent individual based attacks worldwide exist however, such as the 2019 attacks in El Paso, Texas and Christchurch, New Zealand which demonstrate the opportunity to research recent self-radicalised far-right attacks (Gruenewald, Chermak and Freilich, 2013). Additionally, despite diversity links appearing sparse on first impression, the UK's 2023 counter terrorism strategy specifically notes neurodiversity and the enabler of the internet which opens a starting point for neurodiverse specific research (Glover, 2023).

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH – SURVEY METHOD:

According to the introduction and literature review sections within this proposal, there is a research gap surrounding the presence of neurodiversity characteristics within far-right extremist groups across the UK. This research project therefore proposes to investigate this area through literature reviews, and primary source qualitative interviews and questionnaires.

Whilst it is understood that primary quantitative results would provide measurable and specific statistics, the nature of terrorist activity means ethical concerns may arise from interaction with offenders, victims or witnesses. This approach is therefore not proposed within this research project.

This project instead proposes to complete a detailed analysis of existing literature to analyse the existence of neurodiversity links. Furthermore, this project proposes to complete interviews with experts within a local counter-terrorism policing unit, and to survey police officers within response policing units to gain insight on the area from the different viewpoints.

The questions within both the interviews and questionnaires will be written based on the findings of the literature review, however it is intended that the questions will focus on policing impressions of current terrorist risks, the understanding of far-right extremism, and the contributing factors towards radicalisation in this area. Consequently, it is predicted that comparisons will be possible between the differing departments, and further discussion will be available regarding the finding implications.

SUMMARY OF SAMPLING FRAMEWORK:

This research project intends to ask police officers within the departments of local counter-terrorism and response policing teams to participate in the research. This is because the counter-terrorism team is anticipated to provide current and insightful views, where it is predicted that views across response policing will vary due to the more distanced position.

ETHICAL ISSUES

The researcher has considered the ethical implications of the proposed research however there are no anticipated concerns at present. Notably, this project intends to complete a detailed analysis of current literature from trusted sources, and to survey police professionals which means there will be no direct interaction of public suspects, victims or witnesses.

TIME SCALE:

This research has a clear and defined timeline, where the project is scheduled to be completed in full by the 8th of April 2024. During this time, the research project is separated into six modules and submission deadlines to support the researcher, and the quality of the work competed. Due to the relatively short time scale, thought has been drawn toward the interview and survey aspects of the project however this is dependant on the findings from the literature review which is due to be completed by the 6th of November 2023.

REFERENCE LIST:

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