REHABILITATION STRATEGIES IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: LESSONS FROM THE UK'S SOCIO-RELIGIO-ACADEMIC MENTORING APPROACH

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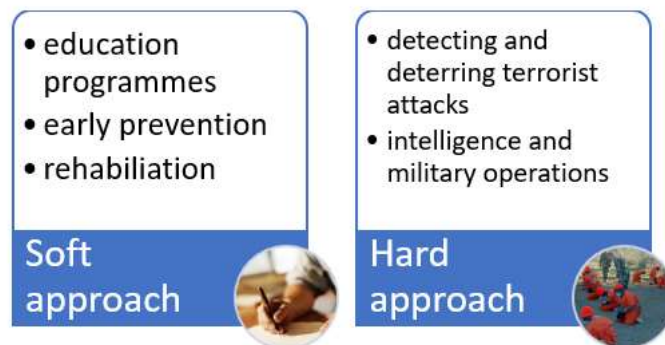[2]Dean Social Sciences Lahore, LEADS University DHA Phase -5 Lahore

Abstract

Rehabilitation is a critical strategy in countering violent extremism (CVE), focusing on the reintegration instead of punishment. In this article, the author evaluates the effectiveness of a community-led model through Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) approach, based in the UK in deradicalising and rehabilitating a person who fell into the pit of violent extremism. It compares the elements of SRAM, its results and how that may be adapted in Pakistan, where hard approach prevail. The study will also combine the qualitative interview and the quantitative survey using a mixed-method approach to assess the effects of SRAM. The qualitative study sample was a set of stakeholders of the CVE project in the UK, which included mentors, community leaders, and representatives of organisations such as Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS), Khatme Nubuwwat Centre (KNC), and Ash-Shahada Housing Association (ASHA) based on interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and report of secondary data. The population of 500 students of 8 universities in Punjab Province, Pakistan, was the focus of the quantitative study, chosen through multistage random sampling as a survey on awareness and attitudes to extremism, which was supplemented by other interviews and FGD with Pakistani stakeholders. The instrumentations adopted in the study included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, 35 items CVE awareness questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88) and secondary data analysis where NVivo was utilized as qualitative thematic coding and SPSS was utilized as quantitative descriptive statistics (Qureshi, 2025).

Findings indicate zero recidivism and better life opportunities, which reflect community trust as important. Possible recommendations are incorporating SRAM in Pakistani universities and civil society collaborations with constraints observed on scalability and adaptation to the culture.

1. Introduction

Violent extremism (CVE) needs creative approaches as opposed to the traditional methods of hard power rather rehabilitation of individuals in need by adopting a soft approach, the distortion of ideologies, and social exclusion to integrate individuals back into the society (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). A holistic framework is provided by the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) approach which has been developed by organisations in the UK, such as Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS), School of Economics and Law (SOEL), Khatme Nubuwwat Centre (KNC), and Ash Shahada Housing Association (ASHA). SRAM, which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Home Office, targets people at-risk and Terrorism Act-related offenders over the ages of 18-36 months, yielding transformative results (Qureshi, 2024). Researcher addresses the rehabilitation mechanisms, the methodology, findings, and applicability of SRAM to Pakistan, where the yearly count of fatalities due to violent extremism is 2,546 as of 2024 (CRSS, 2024). By examining the effectiveness of SRAM in the UK setting, as well as the flexibility of the implementation of this intervention in Pakistan, the study will inform scaled and culturally sensitive strategies of CVE. By filling this research gap, it aims at augmenting rehabilitation initiatives in risky situations.

Figure 1: Soft and Hard approaches to Counter Extremism

Soft

Although community-based interventions such as the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model has proven successful in the UK, as it has recorded zero recidivism and better life opportunities due to comprehensive rehabilitation, there is still a large knowledge gap on how these types of models can be successfully implemented in contexts such as the one in Pakistan where militarised practices are prevalent and where community involvement is not robust (Aly et al., 2014; Rana, 2015). Literature has emphasised the need to focus on root causes like unemployment, limited education, and social isolation as a way of countering violent extremism (CVE), but research has not been done on how to incorporate community-based, culturally competent rehabilitation models into the educational systems and civil society networks in Pakistan. This is especially an issue because in Pakistan itself, the percentage of violent extremism-related deaths is extremely high, and the Western models can hardly be scaled or adjusted to the local culture in developing countries (CRSS, 2024; Khan, 2023).

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To test the efficiency of the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model in deradicalising and rehabilitating people, who were engaged in violent extremism in the UK, using qualitative interview and focus group discussions and the secondary data analysis of community-led organisations.
2. To evaluate the possible flexibility of the SRAM strategy in Pakistan through evaluating the awareness and attitudes towards extremism in university students in the Punjab Province, a mixed-method design, combining a 35-item CVE awareness questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion with stakeholders was to be used.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is experiencing rising violence extremism and terrorism, and in late 2023, violence-related deaths reached 2546 cases, mostly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan (Khan and Ahmed, 2024; CRSS, 2024). Although the regulation of madrassas and hatred speech is within the scope of the National Action Plan (NAP) of 2014, its militarised hard version ignores the ideological background and does not offer solid community engagement or social inclusion (Jones, 2021; Rana, 2015). This disconnects leads to radicalisation of young people due to the disenfranchisement, low CVE education, and segregated secular-religious curricula, unlike the UK where the community-based model of radicalisation has achieved success, such as SRAM (Qureshi, 2025).

1.3 Research Significance

The study fills in a vacuum in the CVE literature by confirming the efficacy of community-driven initiatives such as SRAM as an alternative to militarised approaches with a higher level of trust (Mean=4.09) and zero reoffending observed in the UK with prospective chances of the universities in Pakistan acting as a prevention centre (Briggs and Silverman, 2014; Qureshi, 2025). It advises policy on topics of faculty training, tolerance modules compulsory, and civil society partnerships, which strengthen vulnerable populations and are part of international deradicalisation efforts due to the increased extremism (Patel and Ali, 2023).

1. Literature Review

In the literature on CVE, the radicalisation, extremism, and violent extremism will be differentiated. Radicalisation is a process of taking extreme perceptions because of disenfranchisement or grievances, which do not always result in violence (McCauley, 2015). Intolerant advocacy characterises extremism, and the use of violence to attain ideological objectives is a hallmark of violent extremism (Hassan, 2018). In accordance with desistance theory, which states that social bonds and skill-building inhibit recidivism, rehabilitation comes in at an initial stage to check its growth, rehabilitation intervenes at a very early stage (Maruna, 2001).
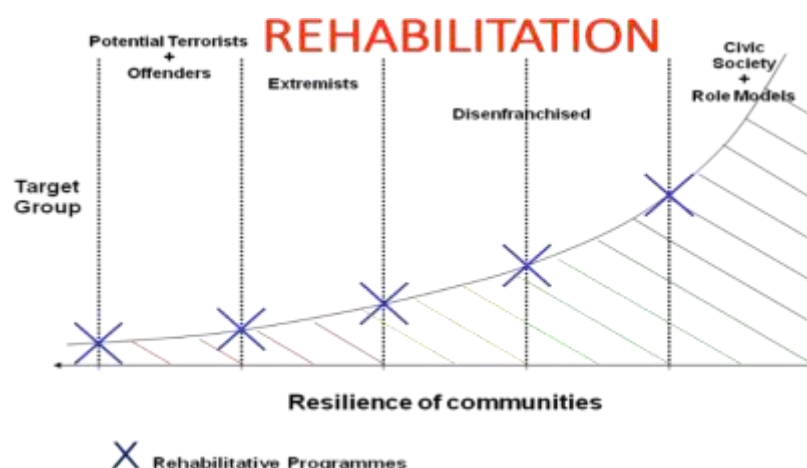
Figure 2: Rehabilitation Progression Framework

(Qureshi, 2024)

The above figure depicts the rehabilitation process where the bold title of rehabilitation shows its theme. The blue X markers are used to show individuals or important steps, which proceed through a difficult situation (bottom left) to the various phases of mentoring and intervention marked by coloured lines: red, which shows the initial phase of radicalisation or risk, yellow, which denotes the transitional phase of mentoring and intervention (reflecting the SRAM aspects of social, religious and academic component), and green, which indicates successful reintegration into the community, which fits the study results of zero recidivism and better life prospects.

Models led by communities such as SRAM use trust and cultural sensitivity, which perform better than state-led ones (Briggs and Silverman, 2014). Social learning theory proposes change in behaviour via credible role models (Bandura, 1977) and the self-determination theory focuses on autonomy and competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) is the explanation of the prosocial group identities promoted by SRAM to prevent extremist affiliations, which strengthens community integration. The Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) explains why the mentoring at SRAM helps to solve conflicting beliefs that facilitate deradicalization and reintegration.

 The PREVENT component of British Counter Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST) requires schools in the UK to recognize persons at-risk (Home Office, 2023). On the other hand, Pakistan has a National Action Plan (NAP) that concerns the hard measures such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb with minimal community involvement (Rana, 2015). The major risk factors include unemployment, low level of education, housing instability, and poor family support trigger radicalisation (Khan, 2023). These are addressed with the help of social, religious, and academic mentoring by SRAM to ensure resilience and social cohesion (Davies, 2016). Religious mentoring opposes extremist discourses as witnessed in the case of Paigham-e-Pakistan fatwa in Pakistan (Munir, 2018). Academic mentoring boosts the employability, minimizing economic disenfranchisement (Khan, 2019). Nonetheless, there are still loopholes in the incorporation of community-based models in education, especially in the developing countries (Aly et al., 2014).

After the target groups or individuals have undergone the Counter Violent extremism (CVE) programmes to rehabilitate them, they are given very clear exit strategy. The worst outcome the participants might achieve is that they will become an efficient member of the mainstream society. Moreover, they were able to finish their education and training by which they could find a job, establish a business and even become the role models.

Figure 3: Exit Strategy for rehabilitation

(Qureshi, 2024)

2. Methodology

The researchers used a pragmatic, mixed-methods exploratory sequential research design to measure the effectiveness of SRAM (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Qualitative phase was carried out in the UK and followed ex post facto approach, with the secondary data (reports, attendance records, syllabi) and primary data being gathered through semi-structured interviews with SGCS and KNC as well as ASHA stakeholders. They used NVivo software to perform the thematic analysis which revealed such themes as community trust and socioeconomic challenges (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The research instruments were developed based on a pragmatic mixed-method exploratory sequential design, with a focus on reliability and validity via triangulation and pilot testing (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interview questions were developed among the university stakeholders in Pakistan, addressing the subject of curriculum design, mentoring styles, and community involvement, based on the themes of the SRAM model and pilot tested to make them clear and relevant to local culture (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015; Qureshi, 2025). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were created to investigate the ideas of counter CVE, and open-ended questions were based on the literature (e.g., Hassan, 2018) and modified according to the piloting phase to fit the dynamics of the group and the sensitivity of the topic. The content analysis of the SGCS reports and syllabi was conducted to examine the patterns of secondary data in accordance with GDPR-compliant summarisation, and triangulation was used to guarantee validity (Bengtsson, 2016; Vidino and Brandon, 2012). In the case of the quantitative phase a 35-item CVE awareness questionnaire will be created to measure awareness, attitudes, and engagement among 500 Pakistani university students, who will be selected through multistage random sampling, and where the items will be based on the literature pertaining to the root causes of extremism (e.g., Khan, 2019). The questionnaire was very reliable (Cronbachs Alpha = 0.88), and pilot tested on cultural suitability, with the analyse of data done in SPSS to give the descriptive statistics

(Tavakol and Dennick, 2011; Qureshi, 2025). The instruments were developed progressive with professional guidance of the supervisor, and in line with the purpose of the study, the instruments were made contextually applicable both in the UK and Pakistani context.

The survey that was a part of the quantitative phase was conducted among 500 Pakistani university students in Punjab, with multistage random sampling to determine the level of awareness and attitudes towards extremism (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The perceptions were measured in a 35-item questionnaire pilot-tested with reliability (Cronbachs Alpha = 0.88) (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The survey was complemented by focus group discussions (FGDs) among Pakistani stakeholders, which guarantees methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). The ethical issues involved informed consent, confidentiality, and GDPR (Wiles, 2013).

3. Results

The community led model of SRAM works better than the top-down initiatives since government-led programs tend to lack trust (Patel and Ali, 2023). The author focuses on collaboration with the local authorities and civil societies in partnership working (9 NVivo references) in the thesis, and this approach can be used to strengthen the credibility of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) of Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there is a limitation of scalability because of resource limitation in Pakistan, and the study of the thesis is used to focus on Punjab only, which does not allow generalisation to other regions with different characteristics, such as Baluchistan (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Religious mentoring combined with programs such as Hadith Studies and Quranic Exegesis might help overcome ideological weaknesses in madrassas, yet secular interventions could be opposed (Khan and Ahmed, 2024). The results are also in line with Cognitive Dissonance Theory since mentoring in SRAM eliminates conflicting beliefs, which facilitate deradicalization (Festinger, 1957). It is suggested that further study should be done on digital response to curb online radicalisation as more and more social media is used to recruit extremists (Neumann, 2013).

The qualitative results supported the usefulness of SRAM, where community-led programs scored high in terms of trust (Mean = 4.09, SD = 1.44096) and effectiveness (Mean = 4.02, SD = 1.48409) as opposed to government-led programs. Interviews suggested the effectiveness of SRAM in deradicalisation with zero re-offending of parolees. Social mentoring was used to create inclusion with 81 percent family network referrals. The religious mentoring made it clear such concepts as jihad and lowered the ideological vulnerability (20 NVivo references). It gave nearly 1,500 scholarships through academic mentoring and increased employability and education outcomes (Qureshi, 2025).
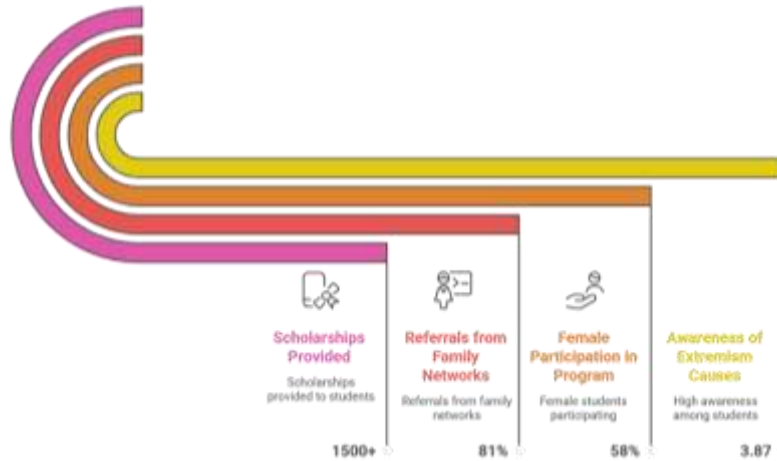
Figure 4: SRAM impact on Pakistani Students

Quantitative findings demonstrated that Pakistani students were very much aware of the causes of extremism (Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.80625) but not much interested in engagement, which means that rehabilitative education is required. There were minor differences in the perceptions among genders (t-value = 2.10, p = 0.036), making 58% of the participants female. FGDs also focused on culturally sensitive curricula with the inclusion of mentoring (Qureshi, 2025).

4.1 Discussion

The success of SRAM is based on its community-driven approach that creates a sense of trust and interventions that are adapted to local situations (Patel and Ali, 2023). Social mentoring is in line with the social capital theory as it uses informal networks to help in alleviating alienation (Putnam, 2000). The religious mentoring would be a counter to the extremist narratives, as observed in the way it correlates with the Paigham-e-Pakistan (Munir, 2018). Academic mentoring is a response to economic drivers, and this is in line with the empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995).

The effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation in CVE, demonstrated by zero recidivism and improved life opportunities, highlights the effectiveness of the SRAM approach in the UK, which is consistent with the findings of desistance theory and its focus on social bonds and identity transformation (Maruna, 2001). The strong trust level (Mean = 4.09) indicates that SRAM depends on the community organizations such as SGCS, KNC, and ASHA, which use social capital to enhance inclusion and overcome alienation (Putnam, 2000). In line with the Social Learning Theory, social mentoring through programs such as SPARC sports programs and personal development seminars corrects the situation of disenfranchisement by encouraging civic responsibility and alleviating social isolation (Bandura, 1977). The 81% family referral rate emphasises the strength of informal networks, which in turn strengthens the Ecological Systems Theory that emphasises the effects of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Religious mentoring is an effective factor to counter extremist narratives by reframing such notions as jihad and Ummah, which fits into the Framing Theory and global CVE practices and are focused on counter-narratives (Entman, 1993; Afsaruddin, 2022). The 1,500 scholarships provided under the academic mentoring correspond to the Empowerment Theory,

which contributes to the increased autonomy and competence to diminish the economic factors causing radicalization (Zimmerman, 1995; Khan, 2019).

SRAM may complement National Action Plan (NAP) in Pakistan by introducing community-based rehabilitation to universities, which are the universities are some of the main sources of extremists (Prezelj and Zalokar, 2024). Nevertheless, there are such problems as cultural adjustment and non-militarisation. The zero-recidivism rate indicates the potential of SRAM, but training the faculty and collaborating with civil societies is necessary to be scaled (Siddique, 2018). Gender issues point to inclusive programs can be implemented, but cultural raising should be discussed.

4. Conclusion

The example of the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) strategy adopted by the United Kingdom-based organizations such as Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS), Khatme Nubuwwat Centre (KNC), and Ash-Shahada Housing Association (ASHA) introduces a new paradigm of combating violent extremism (CVE) and promoting rehabilitation as the focus. The mixed-method results of this study including the qualitative interview, focus group discussion (FGDs), and quantitative surveys (Cronbachs Alpha = 0.88) show that SRAM is effective in deradicalizing and reintegrating individuals as indicated by the zero-reoffending rate of participants in the parolees of Terrorism Act-related offenses and the award of more than 1,500 scholarships to increase employability (Qureshi, 2025). Adoption of social capital, informal networks (81% family referrals), and culturally sensitive interventions are the strengths of this approach, as the high trust in community-led programs (Mean = 4.09, SD = 1.44096) indicates the strengths of addressing the causative factors of the extremism, namely, disenfranchisement, distortions in ideology, and social exclusion (Putnam, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The combination of social, religious, and academic mentoring makes SRAM build resilience, enhance social cohesion, and change the life opportunities, which is consistent with the desistance theory that identifies social ties and identity change (Maruna, 2001).

SRAM has thrived in the UK because its structure is community-led, unlike top-down, government-led efforts such as the PREVENT strand of the CONTEST strategy that has been taken to task due to its alienating nature to communities (Patel and Ali, 2023). The qualitative results emphasise the alienation reduction brought about by social mentoring, including SPARC sports programs and personal development seminars, and religious mentoring, which results in the re-definition of such concepts as jihad and Ummah with the help of Quran classes and interfaith discussions (Afsaruddin, 2022; Nasr, 2009). Economic drivers are handled through academic mentoring, through vocational training (e.g., PROSEED initiative), resulting in greater autonomy and competence as in Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995). The fact that zero-recidivism rate and the high level of participation (1,200-1,500 participants aged 18-36 months) indicate that SRAM will provide sustainable reintegration pathways with the help of trusted mentors and collaboration with local authorities (Appendix 5, Qureshi, 2025). These findings confirmed community-based models as more successful and reliable (Mean =

4.02, SD = 1.48409) as compared to militarized solutions and provide a blueprint that should be scaled to undertake CVE in the world (Briggs and Silverman, 2014).

Finally, SRAM is a good illustration of the transformative power of rehabilitation in CVE as it is a holistic, community-based model that focuses on dealing with ideological, social, and economic motives of extremism. Its experience in the UK with zero recidivism and better life opportunities is a strong argument to be adopted in Pakistan where militarised strategies have failed to deal with underlying issues. Through the establishment of trust, encouraging moderate discourse, and increasing employability, SRAM deradicalises individuals in addition to increasing community resiliency leading to sustainable peace. Although the issues such as scalability and cultural adaptation persist, the focus of the model on partnership and inclusivity provides the blueprint on global CVE approaches, calling upon policymakers, educators, and communities to focus on rehabilitation as the foundation of countering violent extremism.

5.1 Recommendations

- Increase SRAM and strengthen interfaith dialogue efforts, and strengthen collaboration with local authorities and civil society, which will guarantee long-lasting zero recidivism and high community trust by culturally sensitive and community-driven interventions (Patel and Ali, 2023; Qureshi, 2025).
- Introduce SRAM-inspired compulsory CVE courses into Pakistani university education, which includes religious mentoring and vocational training and is piloted in Punjab with the civil society to improve the engagement (Mean = 3.87) and anti-radicalisation (Munir, 2018; Qureshi, 2025).

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