

The Role of Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: A Scoping Literature Review

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Project Overview & Executive Summary

In 2023, Community Justice Initiatives (Kitchener, Ontario), Community Justice Connect (St. John's, Newfoundland), and Restorative Justice Victoria (Victoria, British Columbia) began a partnership project, funded by Public Safety Canada, to explore the appropriateness and applicability of restorative justice and restorative practice in preventing and responding to situations of hate and radicalization to violence, and to consider how restorative process might complement existing de-radicalization/violence prevention and response programs. This project involved several components:

- The development of a project team, with representation from each organization,
- An environmental scan of the actors and organizations operating in the preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) space,
- The development of a Community of Practice of representatives from organizations in the P/CVE space, to facilitate conversations with those working in the space about how restorative justice and restorative processes might assist in their work, as well as to understand their concerns with its potential application to the P/CVE space, and
- A scoping literature review.

This document contains the results of the scoping literature review, which included a full-text review of 191 articles, including both academic and grey literature, to better understand the possibilities of restorative justice and restorative practice in the P/CVE space.

This literature review was informed by the following research questions, jointly developed with the project team:

- 1) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to *prevent* hate and radicalization to violence in at-risk spaces and communities, as well as more broadly?
- 2) How can restorative justice based practices and processes be used to *respond* to instances of hate and radicalization to violence?
- 3) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to meet the needs of victims of radicalization to violence and their broader communities?

The main findings of each research question are summarized below:

- 1) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to *prevent* hate and radicalization to violence in at-risk spaces and communities, as well as more broadly?

Literature that surfaced focusing on the prevention of hate and radicalization to violence was largely focused on youth. Articles specifically written on the intersection between the use of restorative justice

and restorative practices and the prevention of radicalization to violence are available; work is emerging from Australia and Northern Ireland examining how restorative processes in school may be used to prevent radicalization to violence, although the link between these programs and their impact on violent extremism requires further study. Available literature also notes practical considerations regarding the use of restorative practice in schools, including the need for institutional and community buy-in to support the process and the risk of harm (particularly on racialized students). In order to avoid causing harm, schools should implement restorative practices universally, and not task teachers and administrators with identifying students “at risk” of radicalization to violence. There was a notable lack of prevention literature addressing adults at risk of radicalization to violence, with only one study emerging considering how the principles of restorative justice - namely reintegrative shaming - could be useful in dialogue in spaces deemed at-risk of fostering violent extremist beliefs.

2) How can restorative justice based practices and processes be used to *respond* to instances of hate and radicalization to violence?

The majority of the literature that surfaced as part of this scoping review concerned how restorative justice can be used to respond to hate crime and violent extremism. There is already significant work being done in this space, largely emerging out of Europe. Restorative justice-based organizations and other social service organizations working at the intersection of the formal criminal justice system and community have established programs that use restorative justice processes in the aftermath of hate crime. International examples of how restorative encounters may be useful in the aftermath of terrorism and violent extremism also surfaced in this review. Existing Canadian programs (Circles of Support and Accountability, Restorative Opportunities) that work in instances of significant harm may also provide opportunities for learning. Further research however is needed to better understand the link between participation in restorative justice programs and continued involvement in violent extremism or acts of hate. Practical considerations for implementation that surfaced in response to this research question included how restorative justice programs might work with insincere or reluctant offenders, as well as the risk of individualizing responsibility for widespread political conflicts with roots in state oppression.

3) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to meet the needs of victims of radicalization to violence and their broader communities?

This research question produced the least amount of literature, however when thinking about the needs of victims, there is considerable overlap with research on how restorative justice can be used to respond to acts of hate and/or violent extremism. There are examples of programs, as well as practical, implementation-focused writings available in emerging literature, as well as some evidence of impact and outcomes for victims who participate in a restorative process. Considerations for the needs of victims

include concerns of gatekeeping of restorative processes by justice system actors, the potential for standards of practice across restorative justice practitioners and organizations, and concerns about how the concept of “forgiveness” might impact a victim’s healing process.

There are limitations to consider regarding the possible implementation of restorative practice and restorative justice processes either as prevention or response mechanisms to hate, radicalization to violence and violent extremism, past the considerations noted above. First, sustainable funding is needed to support these initiatives. This concern was noted in the emerging literature, but is also born out of experience of having worked in the restorative justice field. All too often, programs are awarded seed funding to begin new work, but achieving long-term support to continue the work, as well as to evaluate its impact, is far more challenging. Second, while this literature review did surface examples of programs that exist at the intersection of radicalization to violence and restorative justice, the good work of many community organizations goes unrepresented in this paper. The work of non-profit organizations often goes unpublished, as resources to conduct formal evaluations on programs are nearly impossible to secure. Finally, while restorative justice certainly appears to have promise to work alongside existing interventions in the P/CVE field, we must be reasonable about what is possible to achieve through its use. Restorative justice intervention alone, while useful for community and individual healing, as well as building resilience to violent extremism, cannot address the many systemic factors that contribute to why an individual may radicalize to violence.

Author Statement of Positionality

I gained my familiarity with restorative justice and restorative processes through my time employed at Community Justice Initiatives in Kitchener, Ontario. I worked in a variety of roles during my time at the organization, including reintegration support for youth in custody and federally-sentenced women, administration, and organizational leadership. My time at CJI provided me with a deep understanding of restorative justice, its possible applications, and its limitations. I have a Master’s degree in Criminal Justice & Criminal Justice Policy from the University of Guelph, and am currently A.B.D. in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. My dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Whitson, focuses on the regulation of online space, a content knowledge area with some overlap with that of P/CVE more broadly. I also come to this work with some previous knowledge of radicalization to violence, having worked as a research assistant on a scoping literature review with Dr. James Popam (Wilfrid Laurier University) on inceldom and loneliness. My embodied knowledge of restorative justice as well as my research skill set provided me with the opportunity, alongside the broader project team, to learn more about how restorative justice practitioners and those working within the P/CVE space might come together to tackle the pervasive problems of social polarization, hate, radicalization to violence, and violent extremism.

Because I anticipate a wide readership of this work - restorative justice practitioners, public servants, academics, and those working on the front-lines of P/CVE - I have attempted to provide enough context for a variety of readers who may not be familiar with the fields of restorative justice or P/CVE, so that they can apply the learnings of this work to their own contexts.

Introduction

In violent extremism, the harm is not only personal but it has an impact on society. It creates a rupture in the value of solidarity on which the society is based.... Extremism tries to polarise society while solidarity aims at bringing people together, instead of separating them, even when they differ greatly among them. The aim is to restore justice (or undo injustice) by transforming both identities (of victims and perpetrators) and by focusing the sense of responsibility towards another human being..., not towards the law or the state. This can only happen through a process of truth, finding out what really happened through dialogue... Victims have the courage to live with such a truth, even when it is not nice to hear. The outcome must be a real experience of justice (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020)

Communities across Canada are increasingly grappling with the impacts of social polarization and hate. In their most recent Global Risk Report, the *World Economic Forum* identified social/political polarization as one of the top three threats most likely to present a crisis on a global scale (World Economic Forum, 2024), and many countries are struggling to recover from the polarizing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a surge of violence against communities of color, including Asian and Black communities in the United States and in Canada. Between 2020 - 2021, Statistics Canada reported a 27% increase in hate crimes reported to police (Statistics Canada, 2023), while hate crimes in the United States reached their highest levels in 12 years during the pandemic (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022). Both violent and nonviolent hate crimes increased in Canada in 2020, by 32% and 41% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2023). Hate crimes that target race or ethnicity have long been the most frequently police-reported hate crime in Canada, generally accounting for approximately 50% of reports, but between 2019 and 2020, there was an 80% increase in police-reported hate crimes motivated by race or ethnicity. Relatedly, the reported number of hate crimes targeting Indigenous populations across Canada has substantially increased since the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2023). Hate crimes motivated by gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation are also on the rise; in 2015, there were 141 police-reported hate crimes across Canada. By 2022, this number had risen to over 490 (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2023). These trends continue today, as polarization, hate, and radicalization to violence are experienced around the world, including recent acts of violence in Germany and France, but also occurring in communities across Canada, such as a recent violent attack of a gender studies class at the University of Waterloo (Shetty, 2023). While the journey from social polarization, to hate crime and/or violent extremism is not a linear path, increasing levels of social polarization and incidents of hate motivated by prejudice foster violent ideologies and can lead to radicalization to violence and acts of violent extremism (Romanowski & Low, 2024).

Important work is being done in the preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) space to counteract these concerning trends. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition from governments that they must also embrace community-based solutions to violent extremism, particularly “soft” initiatives, which are “aimed at building resilience and prevention capacity in communities” (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018: xii).

It is thought that this broadening out from traditional enforcement strategies to also include community-based initiatives will help foster collective social resilience to extremist ideologies (Huq, 2020; Spalek & Weeks, 2020). Across the United States, the United Kingdom, and beyond, initiatives in the P/CVE field have broadened to incorporate schools, universities, youth justice agencies, as well as families of violent offenders (Spalek & Weeks, 2017). The underlying justification for these emerging approaches is in part the recognition that a more holistic approach to security is required, particularly for preventative efforts (Guittard, 2019).

With the growing recognition of the role that community and community-based organizations can play in the P/CVE space, this scoping literature review seeks to contribute to this discourse through an understanding of the role that restorative justice and restorative practice more broadly can play in the prevention of and response to hate and radicalization to violence. There is a growing understanding in the field of crime prevention that our traditional justice system's punitive and carceral responses to crime do not reduce the likelihood of further crime (Latessa *et al.*, 2021) and that victims of acts of violence often benefit from a menu of options to help foster and create better conditions for healing from the impacts of this violence (Wemmers *et al.*, 2022). Restorative justice practices offer promise in reducing violence in a variety of conditions (Katic *et al.*, 2020; Mills *et al.*, 2019; Mutanda & Hendricks, 2022), as well as for increasing victim satisfaction in the aftermath of harm (Tolla & Bashige Murhula, 2021). However, given the interplay of power dynamics and risk of causing additional harm, many restorative justice practitioners are reluctant to enter the P/CVE field, and those working on the front lines P/CVE with current/former violent extremists are similarly hesitant to engage with restorative processes in their work. This scoping literature review seeks to deepen the understanding of the appropriateness and applicability of restorative responses to hate incidents and radicalization to violence. Sharing this knowledge with community organizations, academics and others working in the P/CVE field will provide those considering these approaches with an evidence-based understanding of existing practices, with the ultimate goal of reducing hate and radicalization to violence in our communities.

Why Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is cited in multiple sources and across diverse disciplines as an emerging best practice for preventing and countering violent extremism. It is suggested as a response mechanism for violence in schools by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), as a prevention mechanism for violent extremism by the United Nations (UN, n.d.) and more specifically, white supremacy (Mulligan *et al.*, 2021), as a possible means of repairing harm experienced by victims (Mehra & Coleman, 2022), and as a recommendation for reducing hate crime and increasing community cohesion (Morrow *et al.*, 2016). In addition, the international community is recognizing the role that restorative justice may play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (Dandurand, 2015). International collaborations have also emerged to consider the value of restorative justice in this space; in 2019, the *Radicalisation Awareness Network* and the *European Forum*

for Restorative Justice held an event to consider how Restorative Justice might contribute to the P/CVE space. The event gathered about 40 participants with experience in violent extremism and/or restorative justice “to increase understanding of the role of restorative justice in relation to cases of violent extremism, terrorism, and political armed conflicts. The group included victims of terrorism, former members of extremist groups, mediators, social workers, exit workers, and psychologists” (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020). The awareness of the potential for restorative practice to contribute to P/CVE is clearly growing. Restorative justice is pointed to as providing an opportunity to help polarised parties dialogue across differences, where so often black and white and “us versus them” thinking prevails. Restorative justice - through dialogue and other means of constructive communication - provides an opportunity to build trust and perspective between polarized parties (Soltveit *et al.*, 2021).

However, as with any situation where significant harm has been caused, the use of restorative justice and restorative practice needs to be carefully considered in the P/CVE space. Often, the suggestions that restorative justice is a promising best practice in this field do not come with a consideration of the risks, the resources required to do this work, nor any practical suggestions for successful implementation. Moreover, some are critical of the use of restorative responses to violent extremism, noting that they lack empirical evidence, or consideration for the political realities and experiences of both the perpetrators and victims of violent extremism (Zernova, 2019). Done without consideration for power imbalances and the needs of victims, the possibility of manipulation, and many other significant considerations, a restorative process could indeed cause further harm. As noted by members of the European Forum for Restorative Justice in their policy paper on the use of restorative justice in instances of violent extremism and hate crime, “Potential pitfalls, however, may erode good intentions. Dialogue does not necessarily defuse polarised thinking patterns or increase understanding. Preparation is crucial when addressing conflict within polarised communities” (Soltveit *et al.*, 2021). As such, this scoping literature review also presents cautions and considerations in the practical applications of restorative justice in the P/CVE space.

Definitions & Context

The following definitions are being used to inform this literature review:

Restorative Justice & Restorative Practice

It is difficult to articulate a definition of restorative justice or restorative practice that is universally accepted. Scholars and practitioners alike struggle to clearly define these sometimes nebulous concepts that often overlap with other forms of justice, such as transitional justice, rehabilitative justice, and/or transformative justice. Some definitions highlight specific programs or approaches, while others place greater emphasis on process or outcomes (Dandurand, 2015).

Our project team crafted the following definition of restorative justice and restorative processes, through a compilation of embodied knowledge and experiences, to guide our examination of this topic:

“Restorative justice is a way of thinking about and responding to harm as a violation of people and relationships. It is a way of engaging people involved in a situation of harm that works toward building understanding, exploring accountability, and dialoguing together about ways to address needs and questions. It can provide a space for people to be heard and to empower people to address harm.

Restorative processes are grounded in the following values, which can be flexibly applied to a variety of situations:

- Understanding and seeking to address unmet needs, which may be individual and/or collective,
- Upholding empowerment and recognition as both approaches and outcomes,
- Fostering accountability through relational approaches to harm,
- Inviting introspection around identity that informs behaviours (i.e. trauma-informed),
- Supporting capacity for enabling the exchange of communication of needs, questions and impacts,
- Positing transformation as long-term, infinite, and prioritizing cumulative shifts as opposed to instant or sudden change.”

For the purposes of this research, **restorative justice** can include practices such as victim-offender dialogues, mediations, conferencing and circles, among others. Generally speaking, the goal of these restorative processes is to bring together impacted parties (victims, their community, those who have caused harm) together for dialogue (Soltveit, *et al.*, 2021). **Restorative practice** more broadly refers to a proactive approach, when the practice is extended beyond a response to a specific harm or crime. It is “... a growing social movement to institutionalise non-punitive, relationship-centred approaches for avoiding and addressing harm, responding to violations of legal and human rights, and collaboratively solving problems” (Stahl *et al.*, 2023). This distinction is important to include in order to incorporate a discussion of both preventative and responsive restorative approaches in this paper.

The roots of restorative justice are long, and forms of its practice have existed since the concept of communities emerged in human civilization. “Many ancient civilizations required offenders and their families to make amends to victims and their families not only to ensure restitution, but also to restore community peace” (Community Justice Initiatives, n.d.). Indigenous groups around the world have also long fostered accountability in the aftermath of harm through community dialogue (Allen, 2022). Today, restorative processes are often provided by non-profit community organizations, operating alongside or in partnership with formal institutions, such as prisons, the court system, and schools.

The overall benefits of restorative justice are well documented:

- **Restorative processes can improve opportunities for healing** - “Restorative processes improve closure and healing for victims. Studies consistently state that restorative processes achieve at least 85% satisfaction among victims and reduce the fear of further harm to the victim. Meeting with the offender has been shown to reduce post-traumatic stress symptoms in victims” (European Forum for Restorative Justice, 2021). Even just the offer of a restorative process has been found to have positive impacts on a victim’s well-being, regardless of whether or not the victim decides to proceed (WhyMe, 2019).
- **Restorative processes are more cost effective than traditional criminal justice system approaches** - A 2002 cost-benefit study of 94 offenders who were diverted through restorative justice programs estimated that the restorative approach, rather than the traditional criminal justice system approach, saved governments between \$6,212,732 and \$15,902,885 (Umbreit et al. 2002). Investing in restorative processes saves governments money; a 2011 study conducted by the UK Government estimated that for every £1 spent on a restorative justice process, £9 were saved (Restorative Justice Council, 2011). In addition, a recent economic evaluation which analysed the impacts for Restorative Justice interventions for adults and young people in England and Wales found an overall cost-social benefit ratio of £14 per £1 invested, and a direct return on investment for the criminal justice system of £4 per £1 invested (Grimsey Jones & Harris, 2022).
- **Restorative justice can impact recidivism** - There have been a multitude of studies conducted to measure the impact of restorative processes on recidivism. Latimer et al. (2005), for example, “... applied control group experimental design, using a meta-analysis method, in a study that involved victim-offender programmes, to evaluate the effectiveness of restorative justice, by comparing it to non-restorative approaches. According to their results, there was victim satisfaction, offender satisfaction, and restitution compliance; and they argue: ‘restorative justice programs, on average, yielded reductions in recidivism, compared to non-restorative approaches to criminal behaviour’” (Latimer et al. 2005). Other studies, including a Ministry of Justice study from New Zealand, found that 23% fewer offences were committed over a 12 month follow-up period, following a restorative justice conference (WhyMe, 2019).
- **Restorative justice encourages accountability** - In an attempt to avoid a guilty verdict, the adversarial approach to justice discourages those who have caused harm from accepting accountability for their actions. In a restorative process, responsibility for one’s actions is paramount; those who committed harm must be willing to take responsibility (Kiyala, 2019).

Theoretically, it is understandable that the P/CVE space might look to restorative justice as a means of impacting change at both the individual and community level. Restorative justice centres the importance

of accountability and works to personify the demonized other, and therefore may encourage behavioural change in a perpetrator of harm. Moreover, restorative justice processes may facilitate a re-engagement with the broader community, as its application often emphasizes the importance of social connections. It is thought that dialogue, strengthened pro-social connections and the opportunity for redemption could be useful in a disengagement process for those who have committed acts of hate or who have been radicalized to violence (Bosley, 2020). Moreover, communities have been utilizing restorative justice-akin practices in dealing with the aftermath of incidents of hate, of their own volition, by embracing those who have caused harm, and offering forgiveness to those who accept responsibility for their actions (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to defining restorative justice and restorative practice, it is important for the purposes of this literature review to consider the various definitions that exist within the P/CVE space that would be relevant for this research. These concepts include:

Social polarization

“... refers to a process where groups in society become adversaries when there is a sharp psychological division between ‘us and them’. Alienation and hostilities are growing, resulting in a political climate where prejudices, hate speech and even hate crime flourish” (European Forum for Urban Security, n.d.).

Identity-based harm

“Identity-based harm refers to actions or behaviors that negatively impact individuals based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other aspects of their identity” (Harvey *et al.*, 2024).

Hate Incident

“A hate incident is any non criminal act that affects the sense of safety of a person or identifiable group of persons and that, due to the context, is seen to be an act targeting a specific person or group due to their race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or physical or mental disability” (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, n.d.).

Hate Crime

“A hate crime is a criminal act motivated by prejudice or hatred towards an individual or group based on factors such as race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or mental or physical disability” (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, n.d.).

Radicalization

“... is a phased process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology that can lead to an

increased willingness to condone or use violence for political goals. Radicalism challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies. It does not, in itself, lead to violence” (European Forum of Restorative Justice, n.d.).

Radicalization to violence

“... is a process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation. Violent radicalization entails:

- The adoption of an ideology that becomes a way of life and a framework for meaningful action for the individual;
- Belief in the use of violent means to promote a cause;
- The merging of ideology and violent action” (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, n.d.).

As previously noted, the path of radicalization to violence is non-linear, and involves a constellation of factors that contribute to whether or not an individual progresses to acts of violence. According to Laitsch & McCall (2022), this path typically includes five, overlapping types of experiences:

- 1) life experiences (i.e. discrimination or alienation),
- 2) activating/triggering situations (more recent events driving an extreme response in an individual),
- 3) predisposing vulnerabilities and propensities (i.e. psychological issues, such as the need for belonging),
- 4) social and group dynamics (i.e. engagement with a radical group), and
- 5) ideology or narrative (i.e. adoption of an extremist group’s ideas, beliefs, and values).

According to the *Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence* (n.d.), both the social context surrounding an individual, as well as their living environment, may influence a journey along this pathway. Moreover, vulnerability (risk) and protective factors may contribute to whether or not a person radicalizes to violence. The *Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence* (n.d.) groups these factors into five categories:

- **Relational**
 - *Risk*: family disaffiliation; network of contacts in radical circles
 - *Protective*: belonging to a non-violent social network; strong family connection
- **Personal**
 - *Risk*: difficult transition to adulthood; difficult life events (i.e. death of a loved one, job loss)

- *Protective*: support and guidance during difficult life events; positive educational and career prospects
- **Social Identity**
 - *Risk*: social isolation; sense of being stigmatized or discriminated against due to one's beliefs or origins
 - *Protective*: stable identity; strong social bonds
- **Psychological**
 - *Risk*: psychological rigidity; episodes of psychological distress
 - *Protective*: critical thinking and cognitive moderation; emotional and mental resilience; empathy and openness to others
- **External**
 - *Risk*: polarized societal debates; highly sensationalized media discourse; access to extremist discourse and propaganda
 - *Protective*: societal debates advocating tolerance, respect; reinforcement of the principles of shared community

The risk and protective factors that foster radicalization to violence have significant overlap with other social problems, such as gang membership, general criminal involvement, and other forms of violent behaviour (Laitsch & McCall, 2022). However, a deep understanding of the risk and protective factors unique to radicalization to violence is important to best inform where, along the pathway to violence, restorative processes may be best suited to intervene.

Violent extremism

“... is a term describing the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve extreme ideological, religious or political goals” (Public Safety Canada, 2018).

Exclusions

It is important to note that this scoping literature review is not including a discussion of the following concepts, as they are outside the scope of the project research questions.

Transformative justice

The transformative justice movement was largely initiated by communities of Black women, women of colour, queer communities, among others, and grew out of the anti-violence movement of the late 1990s (Rasmussen & Shah, 2022). It is generally an abolitionist framework which seeks remedies outside of state structures, recognizes the intersectional experiences of harm, and seeks to transform the conditions and oppressive dynamics of systems and communities. Transformative justice might ask questions such as, “What kinds of community infrastructure can we create to support more safety, care and connection

(e.g. a network of community safe houses that those in danger can use, or an abundance of community members who are skilled at leading interventions to violence)?” (Mingus, 2019). It seeks ways to respond to harm between people that do not involve relying on the state (Rasmussen & Shah, 2022).

Transformative justice seeks just that - *transformation* - particularly of existing systems and structures. Transformative justice and restorative justice are often pitted against one another in academic writing (Rasmussen & Shah, 2022), which is not the intention of this work. For purposes of scope, transformative justice literature was not explicitly sought in the project’s search terms. However, some of the literature which surfaced, particularly that concerning restorative practice in schools, suggests transformative changes to existing structures which would dismantle hierarchies and traditional, punitive, processes. Ultimately, this scoping literature review is not seeking to transform the P/CVE landscape, nor suggest that it should be dismantled. Instead, we are considering how restorative justice and restorative practice might be “another tool in the toolbox” to heal, foster accountability and understanding, and prevent future harm. However, some literature that surfaced in this scoping review also considered how state and formal structures may contribute to reinforcing patterns of inequality, contributing to the radicalization to violence pathway, a problem which transformative justice may seek to address through the dismantling of such structures.

Transitional justice

Transitional justice is a process of addressing human rights violations through judicial redress and can utilize restorative justice processes, like circles. Transitional justice typically occurs in post-conflict societies that are using restorative processes to rebuild trust and community, such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda (Zernova, 2019).

Significant literature on both transitional justice and transformative justice emerged in the search results for this literature review, given their use of restorative justice processes and their historical application in post-conflict societies. While there are important learnings to be gained from these historical events, the purpose of this literature review is to understand how restorative justice may be useful in the current landscape of radicalization to violence in a Canadian context. In conflict settings such as these, extremist groups function as the social fabric of a community (Steadman, 2020), which is not our current, Canadian landscape.

Methodology

This project seeks to explore the appropriateness and applicability of restorative justice and restorative processes in preventing and responding to situations of hate and radicalization to violence by asking the following research questions:

- 1) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to *prevent* hate and radicalization to violence in at-risk spaces and communities, as well as more broadly?

In other words, how can restorative justice, for example, be used to enhance protective factors against radicalization to violence, or be used as a means of countering the radicalization to violence process for those displaying vulnerability or initial markers of radicalization?

- 2) How can restorative justice based practices and processes be used to *respond* to instances of hate and radicalization to violence?

In other words, at what points along the process of radicalization to violence might restorative justice-based interventions be appropriate? How can restorative justice be used in the aftermath of harm caused by radicalization to violence, or in deradicalization and/or disengagement efforts?

- 3) How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to meet the needs of victims of radicalization to violence and their broader communities?

Are there unique considerations for victims of radicalization to violence that should be considered when implementing a restorative justice-based response? How might a restorative process benefit a victim of an act of hate or violent extremism?

To answer these questions, I adopted a scoping literature review methodology. Scoping literature reviews are useful when presenting and synthesizing a large body of literature on a broad topic (Pham *et al.*, 2014), and for examining a range of existing research activity and identifying research gaps (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Literature was sourced using Google Scholar, which in a recent assessment by Martín-Martín *et al.* (2021), was noted as the best choice for sourcing substantive coverage in searches of contemporary subjects. This scoping review uses the framework suggested by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), which includes the following five steps:

1. Identifying the research question
2. Identifying relevant studies
3. Study selection
4. Charting the data
5. Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 22).

The below search terms were used to collect relevant literature for each research question. These search terms were developed collectively with the broader project team, which included five restorative justice

practitioners from across Canada. Search terms included:

1. radicalization AND violence AND restorative justice AND prevention OR response (n=5,640)
2. radicalization AND violence AND restorative justice AND victims (n=4,260)

In total, the search terms produced 9,900 results. This included both academic and grey literature. However, there was a *significant* amount of duplication in these results. After removing duplicates, as well as an initial round of abstract screening for access, availability in English, and relevance to this project's research questions, 335 sources remained. This significant reduction in sources was a result of the overlapping results produced by the search terms, as well as the often cursory mention of restorative justice in many of the articles. Screening was an iterative process to continue to remove non-pertinent sources according to relevance to research questions. Sources were coded to a corresponding research question, and sources that did not correspond to a research question but provided relevant contextual understanding of the radicalization to violence process were also included as background literature. After screening, 191 articles remained for inclusion within this scoping literature review. The articles were categorized as follows:

1. Research question 1 (prevention) (n=54)
2. Research question 2 (response) (n=88)
3. Research question 3 (victims) (n=19)
4. Background/contextual literature (n=30)

These categories are not completely distinct; some articles that were coded as “prevention” also included a discussion of response strategies, and some sources deemed “response” literature included a consideration of the needs of victims, etc. The articles were coded based on the primary purpose of the article according to this author.

It is important to note that the lack of a clear definition of restorative justice and restorative practice created a challenge in sourcing data on its application in situations of hate, radicalization to violence, or violent extremism. In literature, restorative justice, for those who are not immersed in its use, is often conflated with rehabilitative programming that seeks to provide a person who has caused harm with skills, such as those which might contribute to employability, with the goal that it may keep them from re-offending. As an example specific to this research, former white supremacists engaging in public speaking efforts to demystify participation in violent extremism is not inherently restorative, though it may be rehabilitative for the former (Gansewig & Walsh, 2022). Similarly, prison education programs aimed at deradicalization may serve the purposes of rehabilitation and reintegration, but are not inherently restorative (Soltveit *et al.*, 2021). Without knowing the specific inner workings of a program being labelled

as “restorative” in the literature, it was often hard to discern if it contained the critical components of what would make a program restorative and therefore, this review focuses on literature where the interventions discussed clearly met this project’s definition of restorative.

Findings

While there is literature available on how restorative justice practices are being used to prevent or respond to incidents of hate and/or violent extremism in a Canadian context, the majority of the available literature focused on *responding* to hate or violent extremism. While there were over 50 articles found that were coded as “prevention” focused, some of these were not prevention in the upstream prevention sense, but instead the prevention of re-radicalization in deradicalized communities, such as Northern Ireland. As is often the case with criminological literature, there was a general lack of focus on examining the impact of restorative processes on victims or their needs in the aftermath of hate or violent extremism. The analysis of the 191 articles included in this scoping review form the remainder of this paper, organized by research question.

How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to prevent hate and radicalization to violence in at-risk spaces and communities, as well as more broadly?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, literature examining the prevention of radicalization to violence is generally focused on youth, and how we might intervene in a young person’s journey from polarization, towards acts of hate and violence. Multiple economic crises, disappointment with their respective political systems, and the increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants without sufficient structures to support their integration (Gavrielides, 2018) are cited as factors contributing to a growing sense of disillusionment amongst youth globally. There is no one characteristic, event, or condition that can be pointed to to blame for why youth radicalize to violence, but instead there exists a constellation of factors that may contribute to a youth’s radicalization pathway. Literature notes the importance of experiences of social marginality, whereby a youth no longer identifies with the broader values of their community (Gavrielides, 2018) as particularly impactful. Socio-political factors, such as experiences of foreign political policies or social policies, can also contribute to a sense of malaise and cause a young person to question their sense of belonging to their community (Centre for Prevention of Radicalization to Violence, n.d.). Such experiences, combined with processes of social identity confusion, whereby a young person’s exploration and development of their own identity results in a period of personal crisis, can cause a young person to seek remedies to their feelings of disillusionment, particularly if a person feels threatened or marginalized within their own cultural group (Amit & Abdulla, 2022). Similarly to why a youth might join criminal gangs, the search for identity often surfaces in literature as a key reason why youth join a violent extremist group,

as these groups provide the individuals with the sense of self-actualization, fulfillment, status, and direction that they are seeking, as well as feelings of belonging, and a network of social contacts (Dandurand, 2015). Moreover, if certain risk factors exist within that young person's life - experiences of trauma, the presence of radicalized social contacts, experiences of stigma and discrimination, among others - they may adopt radical viewpoints that legitimize violence as a means of managing emerging feelings of disillusionment (Centre for Prevention of Radicalization to Violence, n.d; Dandurand, 2015; Gavrielides, 2018). Experiences of trauma are noted as particularly impactful in increasing the risk that a youth will radicalize to violence. Unresolved experiences of trauma lead to feelings of hopelessness, despair, isolation, and self-loathing, that are then directed outward at groups - racialized populations, women, or others - as a means of displacing these feelings (Ahmed et al, 2023).

If we are to consider the points at which restorative practice may be able to intervene along the pathway to radicalization to violence, it is also important to understand what *keeps* youth from radicalizing to violence, so we can consider how restorative practice and restorative justice processes may be useful not only to address risk factors, but also to enhance protective factors. What then explains why some youth radicalize to violence, while others do not? Similarly to risk factors, a variety of experiences contribute to resilience to violent extremism among youth. Positive, pro-social support is suggested as a key protective factor, particularly from families. Not only is the presence of positive social support important for positive mental health in youth more broadly, but it is also negatively associated with support for violent radicalization (Miconi *et al.*, 2024). A recent meta-analysis by Jahnke et al. (2023) showed that perceived social support from family was associated with lower support for violent radicalization. In addition, supporting the development of resilience to violent extremism via the fostering of “some talent, aptitude, or quality” is noted as particularly important to prevent radicalization to violence (Amit & Abdulla, 2022; Grossman *et al.*, 2022), and often education is noted as being a key process through which to develop this resilience. “... Education plays an essential role in the promotion of ... a defense against the rise of violence, racism, extremism and more. In other words, young people need relevant learning opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that can instigate their resilience against extremist propaganda” (Gavrielides, 2022;127). Education is noted as improving cognitive resources, such as critical skills and analytical thinking that will assist a young person in resisting extremist messages and propaganda (Davies, 2009), and available literature suggests broad efforts fostering media literacy, democratic attitudes, and opportunities to engage with other religions/cultures as a means of rectifying false beliefs that can contribute to polarization and the development of extremist belief systems (Ben-Porath, 2023). Moreover, education may buffer against rising youth unemployment rates, which are regularly cited as a push factor for youth into violent extremism and as a “social and political ticking bomb” (Amit & Abdulla, 2022). Positive school experiences and fewer experiences of discrimination are also noted as factors which reduce the likelihood of youth engaging with violent extremism (Miconi *et al.*, 2024).

Schools

Generally speaking, restorative justice, restorative practice, education, and P/CVE are connected in the literature via the role of curriculum and pedagogy in assisting with the development of capacities, skills, or characteristics that may prevent youth from being drawn toward violent extremist ideologies. The literature links the use of restorative practice in schools with the development of skills such as effective communication, and to increasing student's capacity to build reciprocal relationships with staff, other students and the community more broadly (Laitsch & McCall, 2022). Schools are suggested as a logical institution through which to engage youth in restorative practice, providing a venue for youth to participate in meaningful dialogues about identity. Schools are suggested not necessarily as a means through which to thwart recruitment efforts, "... but to create the conditions that build the defences, within learners, against violent extremism and strengthen their commitment to non-violence and peace" (Laitsch & McCall, 2022). As sites of social connections and community, schools present an opportunity to support youth's interests in socio-political issues, allowing for discourse without silencing, which is identified as an important component of preventing radicalization to violence (Gereluk, 2023), while simultaneously fostering an emphasis on social justice, inclusion, and equity (Miconi, 2023). Importantly, schools are asking for support in reducing student vulnerabilities to violent extremism. In research conducted by the Canadian Centre for Safer Communities (formerly the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention, 2023), interviews and surveys of school professionals revealed a desire for in-depth training and resources related to preventing, identifying, and responding to social polarization, radicalization, and extremism, as well as guidelines on how to respond to students who are displaying problematic behaviour indicative of social polarization, radicalization, or extremism.

Broadly, restorative practice in schools can entail a reorientation of relationships, moving away from traditional, hierarchical relationships and punitive responses to harm. Institutionalizing non-punitive, relationship centered approaches is a cornerstone of embedding restorative processes in schools both in instances of harm, and more generally in school culture. When rules and norms are broken, providing students with the opportunity to participate in resolution processes in situations of harm reduces feelings of alienation and isolation from their school community. Restorative justice in the aftermath of harm, such as bullying for example, might include the use of circles or dialogue to repair damaged relationships, or restorative conferences may be used if there is a pattern of harmful behaviour. Restorative approaches in schools overlap with the concept of democratic classrooms, whereby pedagogies focus on relationship and trust building between students, teachers, and the broader institution, and focus on teaching skills and behaviours to manage conflict, giving students actual experiences of democracy and justice (Laitsch & McCall, 2022).

There is a significant body of evidence to support positive outcomes associated with the use of restorative processes in schools, for both students and teachers. Strengthened relationships (Rainbolt *et al.*, 2019),

closer bonds (Augustine *et al.*, 2019), bolstered feelings of mutual respect and trust (Wang & Lee, 2019), increased feelings of belonging, and a sense of justice and school safety (Gregory *et al.*, 2018) have all been demonstrated through empirical evaluation to be outcomes of restorative processes in schools. Moreover, research has shown that the use of restorative practices can also lower suspension and expulsion rates in schools (Acosta *et al.*, 2019).

There is an abundance of literature on restorative justice and practices in schools, and also significant literature on the role of schools in P/CVE. However, there is substantially less literature on the intersection between these three topics. Of the 191 articles in this scoping review, 12 articles focused specifically on the intersection between restorative justice, schools, and P/CVE, and one-third of those were focused on programs being implemented in Australia. While additional research is required to confirm the effect of school-based programming specifically on violent extremism among youth (Velez, 2020), schools are clearly a promising location for upstream, prevention-based interventions utilizing restorative processes.

Example: Australia

Australia has been embedding restorative processes into their public school system since the 1990s (Restorative Schools Australia, n.d.), however in recent years, the federal government has been intentionally expanding the use of restorative justice into pilot schools around the country, specifically selected for the funded intervention due to being identified as having significant levels of disengagement (e.g., absenteeism, anti-social behaviours, etc), as well as low test scores when compared to national averages (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023). The funding for this project uses available federal P/CVE funding, and provides training for four schools and their communities in restorative practices. Despite this connection to P/CVE funding, the policy actors involved in the restorative justice pilot project avoid language associated with violent extremism and frame the project more broadly (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023).

Salter Springs High School is one pilot site where restorative processes were implemented within the school, "... with the aim of creating a consistent approach to supporting young people experiencing conflict" (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023). Each staff member at Salter Springs High School received training in how to utilise restorative processes in response to conflict within the school community, and these practices were used for both high level incidents (i.e. acts of violence), as well as low level incidents (i.e. interpersonal conflict) – whether between staff and students, or among the students. As part of this process, the staff invested in "norming" the use of circle format – "... an approach used to develop connections through sharing of experiences and concerns - along with teaching social competence skills, respect and responsibility" (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023). The point of normalizing the use of circle was so that participants were invited to consider restorative processes not only as something used when conflicts arise, but as an essential life skill more broadly (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023). A unique feature of Salter Springs High School is its remote location, creating close relationships with surrounding, feeder schools. Such contexts can create opportunities for effectively embedding restorative processes, as opposed to when working with schools

in large urban centres, as Salter Springs High School worked closely with local feeder schools to lay foundations for using restorative practices among younger students, before they were enrolled at the high school (Stahl, *et al.*, 2023).

The work of Stahl *et al.* (2023) concludes that school leadership reports significant, positive changes to the school environment, as well as broader community culture, as a result of an embedded restorative approach, a finding which echoes other large-scale studies on restorative processes within school communities. However, the authors note that their evaluation is limited as it does not include the voices of the students, and also note that these processes do not necessarily address the systemic roots of a youth's radicalization to violence pathway.

Example: Northern Ireland

Similarly to Australia, the application of restorative practices in schools has experienced growth in Northern Ireland in recent years, but its use remains intermittent depending on resourcing and availability. Northern Ireland is often internationally recognized as a pioneer in embedding restorative processes in their justice system, particularly their youth justice sector, which evolved as a direct consequence of Northern Ireland's transition from conflict to peace, following The Troubles (Payne *et al.*, 2022). Specific to the prevention of violent extremism, restorative justice and practices in schools in Northern Ireland are concerned with preventing the re-radicalization of communities with historical conflicts between Catholic and Protestant populations. In the integrated schools that exist in Northern Ireland, where Catholic and Protestant youth (as well as youth of other faiths, or secular youth) learn side-by-side, restorative practices are utilized to facilitate learning between the students of their respective traditions, histories, and religious differences, and to overcome negative stereotypes. These jurisdictions often continue to experience high levels of division, and the hope is that by embedding restorative justice in the integrated school system, the youth "... will feel less threatened by the cultures and traditions of the other community, and be more likely to respect them, as well as form enduring cross-community relations" (Payne *et al.*, 2022).

Evidence supports the continued growth of restorative practice in schools in Northern Ireland. A study by Lucas, Sturgeon & Jarman (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders and young people in low-income communities considered at risk of involvement in paramilitarism, in order to understand the barriers to participation in education and employment for young people aged 16-24 who are at risk of involvement in local extremist organizations. Of significance to this literature review, the study recommended the expanded use of restorative approaches to conflict in schools as a means of managing conflict and instilling coping strategies among the youth. The work of the North Belfast Alternatives programming in the Belfast Boys Model Secondary School was noted as a key

example in enhancing student relationships with one another, as well as considerably reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions (Lucas, Sturgeon & Jarman, 2019).

Social Settings

There was a lack of literature focused on preventing radicalization to violence for at-risk adults; only one article emerged on the use of restorative practice in at-risk social settings. Kerst (2022) details how reintegrative shaming ¹ - a concept pioneered by Braithwaite (1989) which has been particularly influential in the world of restorative justice - can be useful in dialoguing with individuals in spaces at risk of radicalization to violence, whereas stigmatic shaming ² has the opposite of its intended effect, pushing those at risk of radicalization further into dangerous ideologies. While Kerst applies this technique to a physical space - namely, German marksmen's clubs (*Schützenverein*) - it is worth considering how lessons from his work might be applied to prevention in physical spaces, or in other environments such as online space, where stigmatic shaming and polarizing dialogue prevails.

Example: Germany

Kerst (2022) conducted ethnographic observation, as well as interviews with individuals from within a variety of German marksmen's clubs. This setting in particular was chosen because of their generally conservative values, focusing on history and tradition, and their predominantly Christian, white, and middle-class make-up. Marksmen's clubs also rely on military-style structures and traditions. Kerst does not suggest that all members of these clubs are radicalized to violence, but instead that the clubs possess characteristics attractive to the extreme right.

Kerst's findings suggest that members of the clubs expressed a general fear of being labelled a "Nazi" or "extremist", simply for holding right-wing beliefs. Some respondents noted having experienced this first-hand, and expressed a sincere embarrassment for being associated with violent ideologies like Nazism, for their beliefs on topics such as immigration. As a result, members noted a sense of being politically silenced, a phenomenon not exclusive to marksmen's clubs, which has been shown to increase dissatisfaction with democracy and overall receptivity to radical right-wing ideologies (Grimm and Pilkington 2015). Extreme right-wing actors will also capitalize on this sense of silencing, and exploit these feelings of dissatisfaction, to present themselves as "representatives of silenced people" (Kerst, 2022). A reintegrative shaming approach, on the other hand, which allows for the possibility of redemption and dialogue, creates the opportunity for members of potentially at-risk communities like

¹ Reintegrative shaming focuses on shaming the behaviour, rather than an individual's characteristics; offenders are not assumed to be deviant per se, allowing for the possibility of redemption and reconciliation (Braithwaite, 1989).

² Stigmatic shaming is associated with the traditional justice system; It casts an offender as deviant, and labels them 'criminal'. There is evidence to suggest this can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading to higher crime rates or continued attraction to deviant subcultures (Braithwaite, 1989).

markmens' clubs to hold their political views on a variety of topics like immigration and to raise their concerns, without rejecting their political beliefs or resorting to labels like "Nazi". Kerst goes on to suggest that because of their strong sense of community, markmens' clubs and other such social settings, could be useful in combating right-wing radicalism, as their norms and values could be useful in contradicting extremist ideologies (Kerst, 2022). This study however does not provide practical suggestions for how reintegrative shaming approaches might be used in the prevention of extremist violence, nor any empirical outcomes, past the individual interviewee's experiences of feeling ostracized for their political beliefs, and the risks this presents for contributing to a radicalization to violence pathway.

Cautions and Considerations

Despite the promise of restorative practices in preventing radicalization to violence, some literature cautioned against its uncritical use, particularly with youth. Considerations include:

The need for upstream, universal implementation - The United States' Department of Homeland Security's Violence Prevention Strategy is provided as an example of how targeted approaches in schools to preventing violent extremism are misguided. Despite their insistence that "prevention is not prediction", the strategy relies heavily on threat assessments, and tasks actors within schools with identifying suspicious behaviour and the potential for violence. In California, for example, the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative obtained funding via the federal Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention program to train staff at over 50 high schools in the Bay Area in how to identify students "displaying unspecified behaviors or factors that indicate they are radicalizing or moving toward committing violence". Worse still, guidance from the federal funder suggests that "robust interventions" be employed on "students assessed as posing any level of risk to themselves or others". This recommendation has the potential to lead to overreporting of innocuous behaviour by students (Panduranga, 2021). To avoid this concern, restorative practices should be embedded across the school, instead of being applied when students display behaviours that are deemed risk factors for radicalization to violence, and asking school staff to identify individual students who are "at risk" of violent extremism should be avoided.

The potential impact on racialized students - Particularly when efforts to prevent radicalization to violence are applied to specific groups of students, there is the potential that the burden will be felt disproportionately by certain students. It is well established that students of colour, especially Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students, as well as those with disabilities, are punished more often and more severely than white students, throughout their school career (Panduranga, 2021). Restorative practices, when applied uncritically and without care, can replicate this harm, and locate risk of violence within the bodies of marginalized youth (Schulz *et al.*, 2021).

Some school-based practices deemed “restorative” can cause harm - The use of former extremists in dialogue opportunities, for example, has been cited in literature as potentially problematic. Former extremists may play a role in community-based activities which seek to prevent radicalization among youth via public speaking opportunities and other dialogue-based interactions aimed at demystifying participation in violent extremism³. Work by Walsh & Gansewig (2019) however, which evaluated a school-based initiative whereby a former extremist was tasked with dialoguing with students, found that "contrary to previous assumptions, there were no clearly documented positive effects of the evaluated school-based PVE seminar of a former right-wing extremist on the students when compared to a control group". Not only was the program found not to have its desired impacts, but additional research by Gansewig & Walsh (2022) noted that the former's focus on their past instead glamourized their history of violence, and that those participating in the speaking engagements often lacked the training necessary to work in schools, and/or that they had not yet reached a sufficient stage of self-reflection and learning to properly engage with students on this content (Papatheodorou, 2023).

The need for buy-in - Lastly, without buy-in from the community - not only the students in the school, but also the staff, the administration, the parents, and beyond - restorative processes aimed at preventing radicalization to violence will be difficult to implement. “Researchers studying school-based restorative practice programs consistently note that for them to be effective requires a fundamental paradigm shift that addresses not just discipline but the entire school climate and community as well” (Stahl et al, 2021). Some professionals working in education hold deeply ingrained beliefs about the value of hierarchical relationships and punitive processes that will impede the development of a restorative school culture.

Within the available literature which suggests restorative practice and restorative justice processes as a prevention mechanism for radicalization to violence, there is a lack of an explicit discussion of how to prepare educators and school professionals to do this work. School professionals have indicated that while they feel they can play an important role in prevention, they lack the resources on how to engage in this work, and lack of clarity around what their role is (Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention, 2023). To remove this burden from school professionals, while still also working to prevent radicalization to violence, restorative processes should be embedded in school systems and applied universally to all students. When applied in an upstream way, restorative processes provide promise in the prevention of radicalization to violence. In addition, a coordinated approach to the funding of restorative processes in schools is required in order for this approach to be successful. Restorative justice organizations across Canada currently working in schools often rely on their community and school board to fund this work where possible, and therefore only certain communities have access to these important services.

³ A former extremist participating in a public speaking opportunity at a school would not meet the definition of restorative justice/restorative practice identified by this author as guiding this project. However, such programs were identified in the surfacing literature as on the spectrum of restorative justice practices, and as such their use is being included in this literature review.

Overall, current applications of restorative practice in schools address several of the risk and protective factors noted as part of an individual's pathway to radicalize to violence as outlined by the *Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence*. School-based restorative practices can provide more positive educational experiences by promoting critical thinking, fostering empathy across differences, allowing for respectful dialogue, and reducing social isolation. The use of restorative justice-based programming in schools should be further explored for its potential impact on these important areas of protection and vulnerability, in order to strengthen youths' resilience to violent extremism and polarizing worldviews. More consideration is needed in how restorative practice or restorative justice processes, such as dialogues, might be deployed in space where adults are considered at-risk of radicalization to violence.

How can restorative justice based practices and processes be used to respond to instances of hate and radicalization to violence?

The literature that surfaced in this scoping review concerning how restorative justice might *respond* to hate and radicalization to violence was more varied than the prevention literature, and included applications in a variety of contexts. Themes from the literature on restorative justice's possible role in the P/CVE space included considerations for the processes of disengagement and deradicalization and in the aftermath of harm - either interpersonal or on a large scale. Generally speaking, there is evidence to suggest that restorative justice can be useful in responding to hate and acts of violent extremism, as well as for intervention with those who have been radicalized to violence or are at-risk of radicalization, although similarly to the prevention literature, evaluation of the long-term impacts of its use are unavailable.

Disengagement and Deradicalization

Before discussing the possible role of restorative justice in disengagement and/or deradicalization, it is important to differentiate between these two processes. *Disengagement* is often a long-term, continuous process whereby an individual distances themselves from extremism, including reducing or ceasing participation in violent or extremist activities (Davolio & Villiger, 2019). Disengagement does not require that an individual renounces their belief system, whereas *deradicalization* refers to the moderation of radical viewpoints, including an individual becoming more open to alternative thoughts and worldviews (Davolio & Villiger, 2019).

Similarly to the variety of factors that contribute to why a person may be drawn to a violent ideology or group, there are a number of push and pull factors that can contribute to why an individual will disengage and/or deradicalize from a violent group or ideology. Push factors can include becoming disillusioned with the group when everyday realities of participation do not meet idealized expectations, the fear of legal

repercussions such as imprisonment, or experiences of violence. Pull factors may include obtaining legal or legitimate employment, or the establishment of positive relationships outside of the group, including starting a family (Windisch *et al.*, 2022). Importantly, these processes which lead to an individual de-identifying as an “extremist”, benefit from a holistic range of support. Programs such as the Organization for the Prevention of Violence’s Evolve Program, which works to help individuals disengage from violent extremism, note a variety of complex needs for individuals in these processes, such as assistance finding housing, facilitating tattoo removals, clinical counselling, addiction support, religious/spiritual counselling, among others (Organization for the Prevention of Violence, 2021). Moreover, research demonstrates that rebuilding relationships with family is often a key component of disengagement, a daunting process that may inspire fear of rejection or abandonment while the individual works to rebuild trust with their former network (Windisch *et al.*, 2022).

The role for restorative justice in both disengagement and deradicalization processes is only discussed as a promising possibility in the research that surfaced as part of this scoping review (Biffi, 2021). There does not appear to be any programmatic or evaluative literature available on how a restorative process might, for example, assist in the rebuilding of familial relationships or assist in psychological distancing from violent ideologies (Jaffe *et al.*, 2022). It is suggested however that lessons could be learned from the application of restorative justice interventions with other types of victims, including survivors of domestic violence, given the similarities in traumatic impact (De Backer *et al.*, 2019). The potential usefulness of restorative practices is also noted as a valuable skill for exit/deradicalization workers who are assisting individuals in this process (Biffi, 2021). However, there is research that demonstrates the difficulties of reconciling key components of a restorative process - namely, accepting accountability for harm caused - with processes of disengagement and deradicalization. Accepting accountability can be particularly challenging for some former extremists, even for those committed to no further acts of violence or who are working through a process of disengagement, as documented by Verwoerd & Little (2018) in their work with formers in Ireland, South Africa, Israel, Palestine, and the United States. They note that, particularly for politically motivated formers, accountability through apology or asking for forgiveness may feel like a betrayal to their political cause, or to those who died in conflict. Moreover, they note that a key challenge in working with formers is balancing the need to inspire empathy for those they have harmed through their participation in extremist violence, without demonizing their participation or inflicting further pain (Verwoerd & Little, 2018). These tensions would need to be recognized in any restorative process being used for the purposes of disengagement or deradicalization, given that accountability for harm caused is a key component of restorative processes.

Instances of Harm

As noted, there is significant literature available on how restorative justice processes have been used in the aftermath of large scale atrocities and war crimes, including in former Yugoslavia, post-apartheid

South Africa, among others (Alonso & Bada, 2016), however, these examples of transitional justice are outside the scope of this review. The available literature that is of more relevance to a Canadian context includes that specific to the use of restorative justice in the aftermath of a hate incident or hate crime, or after an act of violent extremism or terrorism.

Hate crime

The relationship between hate crime, radicalization to violence, and violent extremism is still being examined, however the two have been referred to as “close cousins”, due to shared characteristics. For example, in both hate crime and violent extremism, the intention is often to cause fear among a greater number of people than the specific target of the act, and the victim is often chosen because of their group identity, not their individual behaviour (RCMP, 2024). In addition, there can be a relationship between the timing of hate crime and extremist violence; some research notes hate crime as a precursor to violent extremism, while other research notes the inverse relationship, where membership in a violent extremist group precedes acts of hate (RCMP, 2024). While not all those who commit a hate crime are or will become radicalized to violence, the commission of an act of hate provides an opportunity for intervention along this path.

There is also a growing recognition that enforcement alone is insufficient to tackle the constellation of factors that contribute to hate, and radicalization to violence. While the criminalization of hate is important - it communicates to broader society a denouncement of certain behaviours - the application of enforcement strategies often do little to support victims, or change the worldviews of perpetrators (Walters, 2015). Moreover, it is generally understood that experiences of hate are often under-reported to police or other formal justice structures, particularly by Black, Indigenous, and Asian victims. Generally speaking, these populations express a general lack of trust in police, as well as discomfort reporting hate to police for a variety of reasons, including feelings of hopelessness associated with the normalization of hate in our communities, a lack of awareness on how to access reporting structures, fear of discrimination or not being taken seriously by the police, as well as various accessibility challenges, such as language barriers (Navarro, n.d.; St-Amant *et al.*, n.d.).

Restorative justice is suggested as an effective response to hate crime, perhaps more so than traditional, punitive justice system responses, because of the emphasis on developing empathy between parties (Walters & Brown, 2016). Restorative processes in the aftermath of an incident of hate or hate crime can have benefits for both victims and perpetrators of harm, as the process humanizes both the harmed, as well as the harmer. A study by Walters (2014) of a U.K. based community mediation program specifically utilized in instances of hate found that the majority of victims reported an improvement in their emotional well-being following the restorative process, as well as reduced levels of anger, anxiety, and fear. Those harmed also reported feeling empowered by the process, and expressed feelings of comfort as a result of

the perpetrators commitment to abstain from further hate crime (Walters, 2014). However, most of the evaluative efforts of such programs involve very small sample sizes, and as such, the impacts of these programs require more rigorous and long-term study (Stanford Law School Law and Policy Lab, 2021).

Examples of community-led, restorative justice based programming being used in the aftermath of incidents of hate and hate crimes surfaced in this literature review. Community Works West, for example, a California-based non-profit organization, partners with justice system partners to divert youth arrested for various offences, including acts of hate, to a restorative process. An available example case study from Community Works West involved several youths who had vandalized a mosque and stolen the shoes of those praying inside. The affected parties engaged in a restorative conference, and the youth agreed to help build a new mosque, attend services at the mosque, and write letters of apology to be read aloud during a service (Stanford Law School Law and Policy Lab, 2021). Similarly, Common Justice, a nonprofit organization in New York, diverts cases involving acts of hate to restorative processes. An example case provided involved an anti-Semitic hate crime on the subway where a young woman suffered physical injuries after a violent attack. After much preparation, the perpetrator agreed to a range of commitments, part of which included apology and reflection to be shared with the victim (Stanford Law School Law and Policy Lab, 2021). Why Me?, an organization in the U.K., has done significant work at the intersection of hate crime and restorative justice, and their website library hosts a variety of literature that includes how to work with local police to establish referrals to a restorative justice program for hate crime, as well as considerations for specific populations, such as the LGBTQ2+ community (Why Me?, *n.d.*). Their good practice guide for working with LGBTQ2+ hate crimes and incidents provides examples of how their organization has utilized restorative justice processes in a variety of contexts in the aftermath of hate, including the below case study.

Unfortunately, most of the good work being done by and in communities at the intersection of hate crime and restorative justice is unlikely to emerge in a scoping literature review of academic work. Without embodied knowledge of the field of restorative justice, it is difficult to know what innovative work is happening in the space. Moreover, nonprofits rarely possess the funding necessary to engage in evaluation efforts much past participant satisfaction assessments, meaning that the long-term impact of this important work often goes unmeasured and unpublished.

Example: United Kingdom

The following is an excerpt from WhyMe's "Safe To Be" Handbook (Millington & Robinson, 2024):

The harmed person, Bradley, received messages via Snapchat that were transphobic and homophobic in nature and caused distress. The person responsible received a conditional caution and a referral was made to the Restorative Justice service. Bradley indicated he would like to take part in a face-to-face

meeting with the harmer. They had known each other for some time and Bradley had considered him a friend. He wanted to challenge the harmer on what he said and then move on from what happened with no further contact.

The case was complex, not only because of the nature of the offence, but also because both parties were experiencing mental health issues. In addition, Bradley was experiencing difficulties with the transition process in terms of his acceptance by others including his family, and the harmer was neurodiverse. This meant there was a need for careful and lengthy preparation for the face-to-face meeting. However, Bradley reported that this gave him time to recover and he was grateful to the facilitators for taking the time to work with them both.

The harmer said that the restorative intervention helped him to understand what it meant to be trans and what it was like to be born in the wrong body... In this case, the harmer knew Bradley before he transitioned and only knew him by his deadname and former pronouns. The harmer asked the facilitators to correct him when he used the wrong terms... During the meeting, the harmer self-corrected himself when he made a mistake and did it less frequently than during the preparation meetings. At the face-to-face meeting, the harmer apologised for his comments and said he would never use a person's gender identity as a weapon against them in the future.

After the formal part of the meeting, the pair stayed for over 45 minutes talking and catching up. Bradley gave feedback that after the meeting, he felt more confident in challenging people who dead named or used the incorrect pronouns. He also said that he felt safe during the process as he could see and easily access the exit. Afterwards, Bradley said that he was 'very grateful' that the facilitators took the time to 'sort it out' and would 'one hundred percent recommend' Restorative Justice to others.

Violent extremism & Acts of Terrorism

Examples of restorative justice interventions being used in the aftermath of acts of violent extremism and terrorism also surfaced in this literature review, largely emerging from Europe, albeit under a variety of circumstances and through the use of varying restorative approaches. Biffi (2021) cites three geographic regions where restorative encounters have taken place following violent extremism: Spain, Italy, and Northern Ireland. Specific details are available for each, but details are provided here on Basque Country, Spain, and the restorative encounters following the terrorist attacks of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), a violent, paramilitary group that conducted a series of bombings, assassinations and kidnappings throughout the country.

Example: Spain

ETA was an active terrorist organization operating in Spain for almost 50 years, and the majority of their violence occurred in Basque Country, an autonomous community in Northern Spain. By the end of their activity, the group had been linked to approximately 800 deaths (Varona, 2013). In 2008, leading ETA members were arrested, leading to the dismantling of its most active cell at the time. ETA declared a ceasefire in 2011, and disbanded entirely by 2018. Over the years, various ETA participants had been jailed for their roles in the violence. In 2011, in the Basque prison of Nanclares de Oca, a group of about 20 prisoners who were serving sentences for a variety of violent crimes associated with their ETA involvement, but who had since disengaged from the organization, petitioned the Basque government's Directorate for the Attention to Victims of Terrorism, for the opportunity to meet their victims. With the support of various branches of government, professional mediators were employed to facilitate restorative encounters between those who were imprisoned and their victims, which were often surviving relatives of terrorist attack victims. The inmates received no institutional benefit for their participation in the encounters, which took various formats (face-to-face meetings, letter exchanges), depending on what was appropriate for and desired by the victim (Pali, 2018). "By the end of 2011, 11 victims had met with ex-terrorists. In five of those cases, victims met with an ex-terrorist condemned for their victimisation or belonging to the same terrorist cell responsible for the killing. In only one case was the encounter carried out by letter. The rest involved letters and face-to-face encounters, either inside or outside prison, with the help of experienced facilitators" (Varona, 2013). While there is no formal evaluation available of the process, both victims and perpetrators who engaged in these processes have spoken publicly to the media about how they have benefitted from participation. The process however was not without criticism. One woman, who was the sister of a politician who had been killed by ETA, noted that unless the former extremists agreed to collaborate with the justice system to imprison remaining, at-large members of the organization, then asking for forgiveness was "useless" (Varona, 2013).

There may be opportunities to learn from existing Canadian programming that is available to facilitate restorative encounters in the aftermath of serious harm. The process detailed above is similar to Restorative Opportunities (RO), offered by Correctional Services Canada. RO offers opportunities for dialogue between victims and offenders who are institutionalized in a federal prison. Victims of harm can initiate this process directly, or the process can be initiated by the offender through the institution. In a 2018/2019 report on the RO program, institutional referrals outweighed victim-initiated referrals by about 25% (Government of Canada, 2024). There is no institutional benefit to the offender for participation, and no impact on their sentencing. In 2018/2019, the most common offence for which a RO was sought was murder, manslaughter, or attempted murder, representing about 50% of referrals to the program. The RO program has undergone several evaluations, and consistently shows that participants feel great satisfaction after engaging with RO, noting the strong support of the mediators. Many offenders who engage with RO also express increased levels of empathy toward the victim and appreciation for the

compassion shown to them throughout the process. A 2013 study notes that the program may demonstrate promise in reducing recidivism among offenders, as after one year of release, offenders involved in a face-to-face RO “...had fewer returns to custody despite lower reintegration potential and motivation ratings” (Government of Canada, 2024). While these offenders were not necessarily charged with a terrorism-related offence, the RO program does offer restorative processes even in situations where the offender has committed acts of violence. Similarly, there is evaluative literature available on the benefits of RO for victims who have participated in restorative processes; the Restorative Opportunities digital storybook, which details the program’s use over 20 years, features the voices and stories of victims who report healing, connection, and transformation following engaging in the program (Correctional Service Canada, 2024). Learnings from RO could be applied to situations of harm resulting from violent extremism and/or terrorism.

At-Risk Settings

Prisons

In the literature that surfaced in this scoping review, prisons were noted as a potential site for the use of restorative justice in both responding to *and* preventing violent extremism, given their reputation as “breeding grounds” for radicalization to violence. Given the risk factors associated with vulnerability to violent extremism often present for those who are in prison - social marginalisation, poverty, resentment against the “system” - as well as the potential for close contact with those who have been radicalized to violence, prison environments can enhance vulnerability to a radicalization process (Ruiz Yamuza & Ravagnani, 2018). “Deprived of their existing social networks and given the conditions of their confinement, prisoners with no previous involvement in politically motivated violence are vulnerable to being radicalised and recruited into terrorism” (International Corrections & Prisons Association, *n.d.*). Restorative justice is noted as a possible means through which to combat this increased vulnerability, by promoting conflict resolution skills, tolerance and inclusiveness, and respect for diversity (Ruiz Yamuza & Ravagnani, 2018).

Example: Northern Ireland

An example is provided by Chapman (2018), in his work with politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland. The ALTERNATIVE research program began in 2010 when government officials contacted university faculty for advice on how to engage politically-motivated prisoners in rehabilitative programming. This process had been notoriously difficult for prison staff in the past due to a variety of factors, including that the prisoners felt that their violence was justifiable, and that they saw their actions and harm caused as a collective action - part of a worthy cause - rather than an individual responsibility. Chapman sought to understand if restorative justice processes might help these politically-motivated

prisoners to engage with empathy and better understand their impact on victims, as well as their broader community.

The prisoners were engaged in a learning process, premised on restorative justice principles, and given the option of obtaining a certificate in restorative practices from the participating university. The program focused on encouraging disengagement from violence through critical thinking, relationship building, and presenting alternative narratives, rather than dismantling any existing political ideologies held by the participants. General knowledge on the principles and practices of restorative justice was also included, alongside role playing of problem solving and conflict resolution practices. The program lasted three years, during which time four participants obtained their certification in restorative practices, five participants completed one module, two left the program, two transferred to different locations, and four were released. Of the program, Chapman (2018) notes: “We based this course on the belief that the key characteristics of violent extremism is a closed mind, a lack of empathy for others and a belief that there is no alternative to their current commitment to violent action... We found that given the right approach these prisoners were open to critical and personal reflection on their ideology and practices. They expressed a wish to redeem themselves with their families and their community” (Chapman, 2018). While Chapman’s approach shows promise in working with former extremists, the small sample size makes it difficult to predict the impact that this program could have if implemented more broadly. Chapman notes that the program was “reasonably effective”, but also acknowledges the difficulties with replicating the conditions that made the program successful; prisoners with different ideologies or in different stages of deradicalization journey may not be similarly impacted by the program (Chapman, 2018).

Community Reintegration

In addition to supporting the rehabilitation of those currently incarcerated, restorative justice was noted in the literature as a possible avenue through which to support community re-entry after a period of incarceration. Not only could reintegration programming provide ongoing support to a former who is attempting to navigate the challenges of community re-entry, but it may also be helpful in quelling the fears of the public. A study by Altier (2023) noted that while the public is generally less supportive of rehabilitative programming for convicted terrorists, restorative justice-based programming had some positive effect on survey respondents’ willingness to support community reintegration. Bosley (2019) notes that a suite of supports are often needed for former violent extremists who are reintegrating after a period of incarceration, including the opportunity for dialogue and reconciliation with their former community, via restorative justice practices. Biffi (2021) notes the promise of a Canadian model of reintegration support - Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) - that is currently utilized with high-risk sex offenders who are returning to community after a period of incarceration, as a potential model that could be applied to the reintegration of former extremists. COSA pairs trained community volunteers with community professionals (probation/parole officers, police, social workers, etc.) to support

an offender's transition from prison to community through both practical and emotional support. Sex offenders, similarly to former violent extremists, face a high degree of community scrutiny and stigma during their reintegration journey (Clubb *et al.*, 2024; Grossi, 2017), a challenge that COSA has been shown to buffer against (Sandbukt, 2023). There is no evidence however that such a model has yet been used to support the community reintegration of former extremists.

Cautions and Considerations

While restorative justice has demonstrated value in responding to incidents of hate and violent extremism, several important cautions and considerations emerged in the literature regarding its implementation.

These include:

Specific training needs for facilitators - Preparation to engage in dialogue is key, in order to properly support the parties in sharing their stories and experiences. While this is true across any restorative process, there may be particular considerations for facilitating restorative encounters when polarized thinking patterns are present (Soltveit *et al.*, 2021). Facilitators also require their own support, care, supervision, and training (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020). WhyMe?, the U.K. organization doing significant work at the intersection of hate crime and restorative justice, notes the importance of content- and population-specific knowledge for the facilitators of a restorative process. They suggest, for example, that restorative justice organizations and LGBTQ2+ organizations provide reciprocal arrangements for the delivery of training to their facilitators (Millington, 2020).

The question of resistant or insincere participants - Research demonstrates that the public's reluctance to support rehabilitation programming or support for former violent extremists is in part linked to the belief that their ideological motivations are less amenable to change than other forms of crime (Altier, 2023). This concern is understandable, given that an ongoing commitment to a radical ideology and continued ties to violent extremism are strong predictors of re-engagement in violent extremist behaviour (Altier, 2023). How then would restorative justice, which requires a level of accountability on the part of the offender, work with a resistant or insincere participant? Restorative justice practitioners face this dilemma in other applications of their work, and it is not uncommon for those who have caused harm to engage in a restorative process without full accountability. However, accountability can present on a spectrum, and a restorative process may move a person who has caused harm towards a deeper understanding of what accountability for their actions might mean. Walters (2015) details how a lack of full accountability can present in a hate crime mediation. He notes: "... the author has made a number of observations of restorative justice meetings whereby an offender has admitted to an offence or incident but has denied s/he is prejudiced. In each of these cases, practitioners were still able to facilitate discussion on the issue of hate and its impacts. Typically, offenders go on to promise that they will not engage in any 'further' racist, anti-religious, homophobic, and/or disablist behaviours ... Such promises

hint at the acceptance of responsibility, even where there is no outright acknowledgement by offenders that they had initially acted in a biased way” (pp.251). In other words, depending on the circumstances, full accountability on the part of the offender is not necessarily required to create a successful restorative process, depending on how “success” is defined. This is also not a challenge unique to restorative justice, but is also faced by other organizations working with former or disengaging violent extremists. For example, the previously discussed Evolve program, which supports participants through a disengagement and/or deradicalization process, receives referral from law enforcement agencies, meaning that individuals are mandated to participate in the process. Similarly in a restorative justice process, mandated participation can diminish motivation, and may mean that a participant is not showing up fully accountable for their actions. Evolve, much like in a restorative process, uses relationship-building techniques to establish rapport with reluctant participants, and move them towards trusting relationships with program staff, where meaningful change can be realized (Organization for the Prevention of Violence, 2021). And, even with relationship-building techniques and as much preparation as possible, it is inevitable that not all people who commit acts of hate or violent extremism will be appropriate candidates for a restorative process. Certain individuals with deep ideologies of prejudice or who minimize or deny the impact of the harm caused may simply never be suitable for engaging in a dialogue with someone they have harmed (Szontagh, 2021).

The role of formers - The potential role of “formers” in preventing and countering radicalization to violence and violent extremism was frequently considered in the literature emerging for this review; considerations of how “formers” might engage with at-risk populations (Clubb, 2015), their role in countering radicalization in the aftermath of large scale conflict (Alonso & Bada, 2015; Tapley & Clubb, 2019), and their potential motivations (Schewe & Koehler, 2021) emerged as considerations for the P/CVE field. Specific to applications of restorative justice, tensions around the needs of victims emerged when considering what role a former could play in a restorative process. Argomaniz & Lynch (2018), for example, note that the participation of formers in restorative justice programs can be problematic for victims and their families, given the potential for the former to control the narrative around their participation in violence. Past those directly impacted, Tapley & Clubb (2019) note that the “vicarious victims” (i.e. the broader public), who are also often significantly impacted by acts of violent extremism, may not achieve the same level of private understanding as the direct victim who is able to participate in a restorative encounter with a person who caused harm, and therefore may not support formers’ involvement in P/CVE programming. Therefore, while restorative processes can provide both rehabilitative value to the offender and healing opportunities to direct victims, it may be difficult to translate these impacts to the broader public that has also been victimized by the violence.

The risk of individualizing responsibility for political conflicts - Zernova (2018) provides an important critique of the previously noted restorative processes that took place in Basque. Her article expresses

concern that the application of restorative processes neutralizes the realities of political violence that contributed to ETA's formation, and that this continuing discourse may be cementing political narratives and power dynamics that led to the political violence. Zernova notes that the process, as recounted by the prevailing discourse, tells a story of illegal terrorist violence perpetrated by ETA, but does not account for the state repression of the political left, and recognizes only the victims of ETA violence as the true victims. This, she states, "... reduces causes and consequences of conflicts with deep historical roots to individual incidents". She suggests community-wide restorative approaches, where honest dialogue about the roots of the political conflict can take place - as opposed to individualizing responsibility to those who have been imprisoned due to their role in the violence. She notes: "In Errenteria and Azpeitia – Basque towns where many lives were lost on both sides of the conflict – initiatives were created which united those subscribing to opposing political views and generated discussions and debates. The participants shared their experiences of the conflict and explored possibilities of future coexistence.... By inviting public dialogue, initiatives of this kind enable 'untangling' thoughts, emotions and motivations and help the participants understand better the source of the conflict" (Zernova, 2018).

Overall, a review of the available literature demonstrates that restorative justice processes are being used to combat radicalization to violence in at-risk settings, as well as in instances of real harm. Existing approaches target many of the risk factors that contribute to the radicalization to violence pathway identified by the *Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence*, such as reducing the influence of networks of contacts in radical circles through prison-based programming, and also are being used to enhance identified protective factors, such as through the fostering of empathy for others via dialogues in the aftermath of harm. There are, however, potential areas for further exploration, such as the role that restorative justice might play for a person in their deradicalization process; could the fostering of empathy and opportunity for dialoguing across difference assist in this process? What might be some ethical and practical implications for this work? In addition, further evaluative efforts should be made to understand the impacts of this work, such as for example, the longer-term impacts of a restorative process on the ideologies and behaviours of someone who has previously committed acts of hate.

How can restorative justice practices and processes be used to meet the needs of victims of radicalization to violence and their broader communities?

The final research question for this scoping review produced the fewest number of articles; only 18 articles out of 191 articles were coded as focusing on the needs of victims in a restorative process in the aftermath of an incident of hate or violent extremism. This trend, however, is not unique to the field of P/CVE and restorative justice. The interests and needs of victims of crime more broadly have long been side-lined by academic research and writing, and the study of victimology only began to emerge in the 1970s (Schmid, 2012). The decentering of victims is mirrored in traditional criminal justice approaches, where the state takes primacy as the wronged-party, and the victim is seen as peripheral to the process of

the administration of justice. As such, this scoping review made intentional efforts to seek out the research that does exist on the needs of victims in the aftermath of hate or violent extremism, in order to consider how restorative justice might play a role in meeting these needs.

An act of hate or violent extremism is unique when compared to other acts of violent crime due to the intentional, public display of violence, used as a means of inspiring fear in the broader community. The general public may experience such an attack as an attack on themselves (Pemberton, 2014). As such, there may be multiple types of victims whose needs should be considered in the aftermath of a hate incident or act of violent extremism, depending on the circumstances. **Primary victims** are those who have been impacted physically by the attack, either as the target or as a bystander. **Secondary victims** are the immediate network of the primary victims; their friends and families. **Tertiary victims** are those vicariously impacted by the attack (i.e. the general public) (Schmid, 2012; Walgrave, 2015). Walgrave (2015) suggests an additional, often undiscussed, fourth category: the relatives of the offenders and their community, who are also impacted by the stigma of association with the person who caused the harm. The needs of victims in the aftermath of an act of hate or violent extremism - past the immediate emergency needs such as medical care - can vary, but generally fall into 5 categories: recognition and respect, support (such as information, practical and legal assistance, psychological care), protection (if the threat to their safety is ongoing), access to justice, and compensation/restoration (EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, 2021). Restorative justice is specifically included by the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism (2021) as a component of a victim's restoration process.

Restorative justice processes may be particularly useful for victims in the aftermath of an act of hate or violent extremism, as existing literature notes that the formal justice system may leave them feeling dissatisfied for a variety of reasons. A study by Alonso (2023) of victims of the previously discussed ETA terrorist organization in Basque found that victims expressed feelings of disappointment in the institutions of justice following their experiences of victimization, noting the difficulties in navigating red tape and bureaucratic complexities to access support in their healing process. Moreover, the victims expressed feelings of distrust in the formal justice system, indicating that it had failed to both adequately punish those responsible for the harm, and moreover, when a perpetrator was punished, that those who agreed to collaborate with police and courts were granted privileges such as early or temporary release (Alonso, 2023). Such experiences create feelings of disillusionment, but are not exclusive to victims of acts of hate or violent extremism; too frequently, victims of all types of crime are left feeling voiceless, misunderstood, or revictimized by formal systems of justice. A Canada-wide, multi-site survey of victims of crime found a range of criticisms of Canadian justice processes, including a perception on the part of victims that the system favoured the accused, the need to be treated with more respect in the justice process, and the need for more accurate and timely information about their case (Government of Canada, 2006).

One of the core tenets of restorative justice is the centering of the needs of the victim throughout the process, unlike in traditional approaches, where the state is considered the wronged-party (Community Justice Initiatives, *n.d.*). Restorative justice programs may better support victims by allowing them to articulate their experience, receive an acknowledgment of the impact of the harm caused, and ask, if desired, for some form of repair (Stanford Law School Law & Policy Lab, 2021). Moreover, unlike traditional approaches in the aftermath of a crime, restorative justice allows for the participation of the broader community (Bosley, 2019), creating opportunity for secondary or tertiary victims to participate in a restorative process. The experiences of these vicarious victims are not addressed by courts or police.

Several types of restorative justice processes could be used to assist in a victim's healing process, or the healing journey of secondary and tertiary victims. Similarly to processes already discussed, dialogues between parties can take place via letter-writing or face-to-face meetings when appropriate and desired. Walgrave (2015) provides an example of a restorative process between the parents of a child killed in a school shooting in Antwerp and the parents of the shooter as an example of how these processes can be extended past use merely with the primary victim and the person who caused harm.

There are, of course, practical considerations for any restorative process involving victims of an act of hate or violent extremism. Listing the facilitation practices and skills required to do this work is outside the scope of this literature review, however the work included in this review by Soltveit *et al.* (2021) provides practical advice and guidance on how to facilitate restorative dialogues and encounters in cases of violent extremism and hate crime. Generally speaking however, it is suggested that the process, where possible, de-politicize the event, and focus instead on the harm caused and its impact. Moreover, because restorative justice processes arise from the needs of the individual, it is important to understand that each process and subsequent outcome will be unique. While there are common needs often expressed by those who have been harmed (such as visibility, empowerment, and a desire for answers), it is important to prepare all parties for unforeseen or undesired outcomes (European Forum for Restorative Justice, *n.d.*). Preparation for the restorative encounter is key, especially for assessing the appropriateness of the process for the person who caused the harm, so as not to re-victimize the person who was harmed. "It is important to determine whether or not the returnee or violent extremist still has a radicalized view and does not take responsibility for their actions. Returnees and violent extremists may also see their actions as just and thus claim that their ideological, political, religious or other beliefs justified their acts of violent extremism or hate crime in favor of their cause. If this is the situation, the case is not suitable for a restorative justice encounter with the victim" (Soltveit *et al.*, 2021). As noted previously, not all situations will be appropriate for and result in a restorative process, and it is a key responsibility of the facilitators to understand the motivations of the offender if they are to be involved in the dialogue (Biffi, 2021; Soltveit *et al.*, 2021), a process which can require extensive preparation (and therefore also, significant time and resourcing).

There have been efforts to evaluate the impact of restorative processes on victims who have made use of them. Research on restorative processes more generally has consistently found high rates of satisfaction among victims who have participated (Biffi, 2021). There is clear evidence that demonstrates that participating in a restorative process can help victims understand and alleviate negative emotions associated with the harm caused (Dandurand, 2015). However, a lack of access to restorative processes continues to be a barrier for those who have experienced harm. Often, gatekeepers - courts, crown attorneys, police - act as referral mechanisms to restorative justice-based programming, and as such, these institutions hold the power to decide which cases are appropriate for referrals. Moreover, restorative justice based programming is not consistently available across the country, and so access is inconsistent. A study by Gavrielides (2022) of victims involved with the U.K. criminal justice system found that 77% of those who had experienced harm had not been offered access to a restorative process. Of the 23% who were offered the opportunity, 79% of them took part in the restorative process. When asked what needs a restorative process could have served for them, those surveyed noted themes of healing, getting “closure”, the possibility of feeling empowered, and a better understanding of the harmful event (Gavrielides, 2022).

Example: Israel and Palestine

The Parents-Circle Families Program has brought together more than 600 families from Israel and Palestine who have lost a close family member during the ongoing violence in the region. These families share their experiences of suffering and grief with one another through dialogue to build understanding. In addition, the organization brings Israeli and Palestinian speakers into high school classrooms to share their personal stories of bereavement, and demonstrate their commitment to dialogue, instead of ongoing violence (The Parents Circle, *n.d.*). There do not appear to be any evaluations of impact of this program, past the personal stories shared on the program’s website.

Cautions and Considerations

Although restorative justice has demonstrated benefits for victims who have experienced harm, there are considerations for its application in instances of hate and violent extremism. These include:

The problem of “forgiveness” - Forgiveness is often associated with restorative justice. Unfortunately, this pervasive belief and fundamental misconception about restorative processes creates a social pressure on victims to perform forgiveness for the sake of reforming the person who caused them harm (Ghumkhor, 2021). This tension may be particularly pronounced in instances of hate and/or violent extremism, where the act may be motivated by racism or other prejudices. Critics of restorative processes in these situations note that victims are being asked to perform forgiveness in situations of, for example, violent white supremacy, in the name of social unity (Ghumkhor, 2021). However, restorative justice

practitioners would assert that forgiveness is not a required component of a restorative process. A restorative process should not place a burden upon a victim to perform forgiveness for the sake of resolution; forgiveness may be an outcome of a restorative process, but should not be a requirement of a participant.

The need for broad access to restorative approaches - The belief that restorative justice is “soft on crime” continues to pervade the discourse on its use, and in situations of hate or violent extremism, the victims may be members of communities that are already frequently the targets of discrimination and violence, whose experiences of violence have traditionally been discounted or diminished by systems of enforcement, such as police. Some view an invitation to a restorative process as asking these victims to “give their attackers the benefit of a restorative process”, which sends a message that these crimes are less serious than others. To combat this misperception, restorative justice processes should be embedded in justice systems more broadly and made available to all victims. By normalizing the use of restorative processes, whether in addition to or as substitution for traditional processes of justice, the misconception that they are only offered in situations of low-level harm can be challenged (Stanford Law School Law and Policy Lab, 2021).

The potential to create standards of practice - Because of the possibility of harm in situations where a restorative process is implemented without the required care, some literature suggests that the field would benefit from standards of practice, particularly for use in situations of hate and/or radicalization to violence. Research points to the importance of trained, skilled facilitators, access to restorative opportunities throughout the justice process, screening protocols for participants, secure funding, and research on impact as key components of ensuring restorative processes are implemented with the care required to not cause further harm to victims or communities (Biffi, 2021; Varona, 2013). The suggestion however that restorative justice must “professionalize” in order to meet the needs of victims of harm also faces criticism from practitioners themselves, who assert that this emphasis can result in a loss of community focus, limit access to restorative processes via gatekeeping by the state, and place an overemphasis on technical skills, rather than the importance relationship building in a restorative process (Braithwaite, 2004; Takagi & Shank, 2004). This tension is not new to the field of restorative justice, and will continue to present a challenge for practitioners and policy-makers alike, particularly when considering applications of restorative processes in novel settings.

Overall, restorative justice processes have clear benefits for meeting the needs of victims of acts of hate or violent extremism. When implemented with proper preparation and care, restorative dialogues can be another means of assisting victims in healing in the aftermath of harm.

Discussion & Limitations

Given the evidence presented, there appears to be promise for restorative practice and restorative justice to play a role in the P/CVE space, from upstream implementation in schools to strengthen youth's resilience to factors which put them at risk for radicalization to violence, to restorative dialogues between parties who have caused and experienced harm. Further exploration is warranted for what role restorative justice might play in other spaces of prevention (such as family conflict), deradicalization and disengagement efforts, as well as for supporting the community reintegration of those returning from custody. There is however a lack of literature available within the Canadian context, despite the existence of restorative justice organizations across the country.

While caution about the role of restorative justice in the P/CVE space is warranted, this is not the first time that restorative justice practitioners have waded into unfamiliar waters. For many years, the field faced criticism and concern from law enforcement and other justice system actors for adapting programming to meet the needs of survivors of sexual, domestic, and other forms of gender-based violence. While these programs do require intensive levels of screening and preparation, they have been shown to be less victimizing than formal court processes (Daly, 2006), increase victims' feelings of validation and participation (Daly & Wade, 2017), as well as feelings of empowerment for the victim (Gavrielides, 2015). It is possible that the P/CVE field could apply learnings from these applications of restorative justice, given the overlapping concerns of power dynamics and the risk of re-victimization.

Despite the emerging evidence to support its use, there are some noteworthy limitations of this work:

Missed opportunities for application and study

It is important to note that the search terms utilized in this scoping literature review may have constrained the results. There is a fairly significant body of work that exists specific to the use of restorative justice in the aftermath of a hate crime. A Google Scholar search for "hate crime AND restorative justice" literature authored between 2018-2025 produces approximately 12,900 results. Given this paper's broader focus on radicalization to violence, hate crime was not included as a specific search term for this paper, and it is relevant to note that there is more literature available specific to this application of restorative justice that is worth exploring. Similarly, specifically including literature on transformative justice, as well as the role of restorative justice in education, could yield additional useful learnings. Lastly, given that literature included in this review had to be authored in English, there is likely knowledge produced in other languages that would be relevant to this field of study.

As noted previously, a scoping literature review is unlikely to produce knowledge on the good work happening in the community that has not yet been the focus of evaluation and writing. Sulah, for example,

the program operated by Community Justice Initiatives in Kitchener, Ontario, works at the intersection of restorative practice and instances of hate, providing dialogue services to community members who have experienced and/or caused identity-based harm. Trained facilitators work alongside participants in instances of, for example, derogatory graffiti and acts of violence, to hold space for dialogue (Community Justice Initiatives, *n.d.*). Without embodied knowledge of the restorative justice field, which operates largely within the Canadian non-profit sector, we cannot have a full understanding of what is already happening at the community level to address issues of radicalization to violence and social polarization. Similarly, CJI provides support to families experiencing conflict through their conflict coaching programming, which helps families build healthier relationships and improve communication (Community Justice Initiatives, *n.d.*). Given we know that positive, quality relationships with family can act as a protective factor against radicalization to violence (Zynch & Nasaescu, 2022), programming like CJI's Family & Youth Conflict Coaching and Dialogue services may serve as an important buffer against forces of social polarization and radicalization to violence.

One glaring contributor to the radicalization to violence process that restorative practices do not currently address is the impact of online spaces. Conspiracy theories and polarizing language that drives the proliferation of ideologically-motivated violence extremism can thrive in online spaces (RCMP, 2024). A recent systematic review by Madriaza *et al.* (2024) suggests that exposure to hate content in online spaces can increase negative attitudes and stereotypes about groups and individuals, reduce trust between targeted groups and the general population and fuel hateful comments in online spaces. The review concludes that exposure to hate in online space has a "significant impact on individuals and groups" (Madriaza *et al.*, 2024). In light of the recent loosening content moderation practices on major social media platforms (Biddle, 2025), these findings raise significant concerns about how online space contributes to the process of radicalization to violence. However, given the anonymity provided by online space, restorative justice is difficult to deploy in online environments, and there is a lack of literature on the intersection of online space, radicalization to violence, and the application of restorative processes; this presents an opportunity for further exploration and study.

The need for sustainable funding

Organizations that offer restorative justice-based services often struggle to find ongoing, sustainable funding to support their work (Gavrielides, 2022). Even evidence-informed best practices which have undertaken the hard work of program evaluation, such as the previously suggested Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) constantly run the risk of losing funding, and often rely on short-term grants to sustain their work (Duffy, 2024). Organizations may be reluctant to enter into new spaces of practice - like P/CVE - because they fear that any good work they begin will end as quickly as it starts due to a lack of financial support. The need for sustainable funding was also noted as a constraint for the P/CVE field more broadly by Bressan *et al.* (2024). Their work found that the P/CVE field lacks sufficient and robust

evaluation efforts because of the funding constraints so consistently faced by projects looking to address and prevent violent extremism.

The need for empirical evaluations of program outcomes

While this literature review presented some small-scale empirical evaluations of restorative justice-based programming and its impact on preventing or responding to radicalization to violence, the lack of evaluative literature presents an ongoing challenge for this field. Community organizations providing front-line restorative justice-based programming often lack the resources required to conduct long-term impact evaluations of their work. The need for more evaluation, however, applies equally to the P/CVE field more broadly, as formal evaluation efforts have only more recently begun to take shape (Bressan *et al.*, 2024).

What is reasonable for restorative justice to achieve?

Finally, similarly to the challenge presented by online space, it is important to acknowledge the practical limitations of using restorative justice and restorative practice to prevent and respond to violent extremism. Simply put, some of the factors that have been found to contribute to ideologically-motivated violent extremism may be outside the reach of a restorative process, as there are systemic contributors to hate and radicalization that restorative justice alone cannot solve. The role of shame associated with social and economic disadvantage, for example, can produce feelings of anger that drive hatred towards groups, such as minorities or immigrants (Walters, 2015). While a restorative process could be useful in increasing empathy between parties, it cannot address the systemic issues that can be drivers along a radicalization to violence pathway.

Conclusion

This literature review presents the available evidence for consideration in how restorative justice and restorative practice might assist in preventing and responding to the threat of radicalization to violence, as well as in meeting the needs of victims who have experienced acts of hate and violent extremism. Restorative practice offers promise in the prevention of radicalization to violence, particularly if implemented universally throughout school systems to strengthen youth's resilience to pull factors associated with the radicalization to violence process, as well as to encourage the development of important skills such as critical thinking, media literacy, and empathy. Restorative justice also has demonstrated clear benefits for those who have experienced harm - whether this is an act of hate, or an act of violent extremism. However, as discussed, there are significant considerations for how these processes should be implemented, from practical considerations for practitioners in preparation to facilitate a restorative process, to providing adequate funding to support the development of these

programs. The intersection of restorative justice and P/CVE provides ample opportunity for future study, and the promise of the ability to inspire significant change, both at the individual and community level.

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