

RELIGIOUS MENTORING TO COUNTER EXTREMIST NARRATIVES: THE SRAM APPROACH IN THE UK

Toaha Qureshi¹, Prof Dr. Rafaqat Ali²

¹Member British Empire UK, Chairman Forum for International Relation Development UK , Chairman NUST, Trust Foundation UK, Chairman Toaha Qureshi Foundation UK, Email: chairman@fird.org.uk

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

Abstract

Religious mentoring, which is a fundamental aspect of the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) approach in the UK and is used to address the issue of violent extremism by encouraging moderate religious interpretations and interfaith discussion. This paper assesses the process and effectiveness of religious mentoring in the community-based SRAM model in the UK by Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS), in collaboration with other Muslim-led organisations such as the Khatme Nubuwat Centre (KNC) and Ash-shahada housing association. Through the lens of qualitative data that we gathered with the help of interviews, focus groups, and secondary reports (e.g., SGCS evaluations), we examine how faith-practising professionals mentor the participants to refute the extremist misconceptions of such notions as jihad (20 NVivo references). Results reveal that religious mentoring helps to strengthen ideological resilience, minimise vulnerability to extremist discourses, and assists in deradicalisation as there was zero percent reoffending rate among participants. Teachings about Pakistan include the importance of religious education in madrassas and universities that is taught in a culturally sensitive way. The article adds value to the literature of CVE by highlighting the role of religious mentoring in community-based interventions.

Keywords: religious mentoring, Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring, ideological resilience, deradicalisation

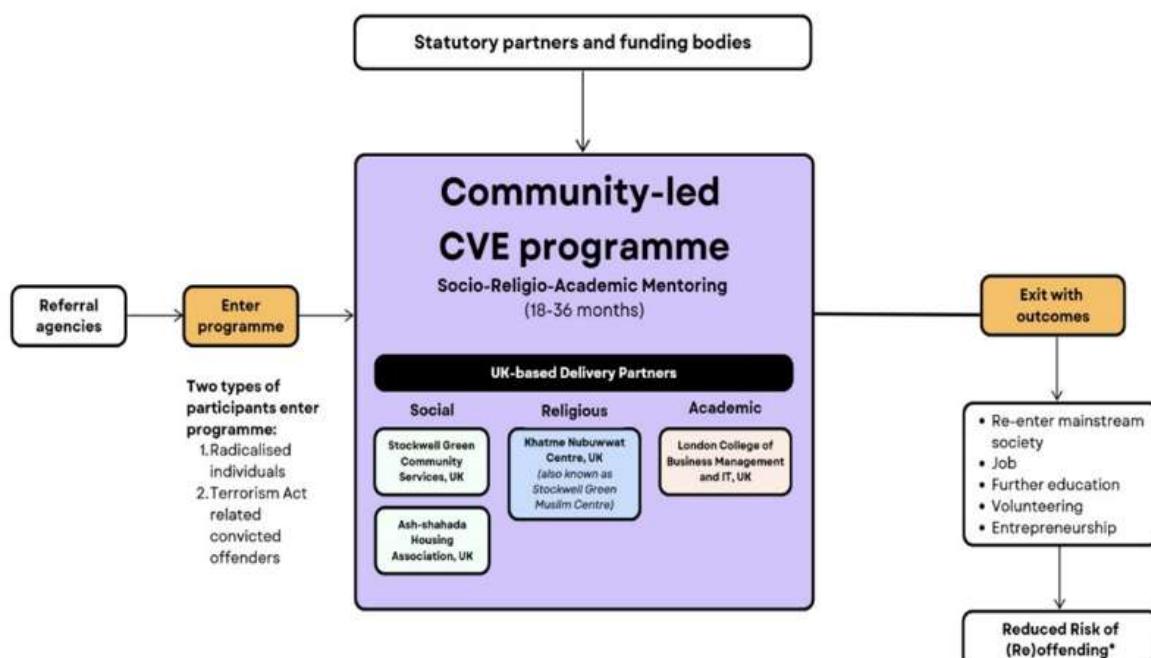
1. Introduction

Religious extremism, which is often caused by a misunderstanding of religious texts, is also another important source of violent extremism on the global scale (Gerges, 2016). CVE strategies led by communities involving religious leaders and institutions have proven to be effective in disrupting the extremist discourses (Khan, 2019). The Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model, adopted by Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS) in the

UK integrates religious mentoring to advance the moderate interpretation and interfaith dialogue (Qureshi, 2025). This entails organised programs designed for true interpretations of Quranic teachings, and workshops conducted by role models who are professionals and are practicing their faith to develop a resistance towards radicalisation.

This paper discusses the place of religious mentoring in the SRAM model, its application in the UK, and how it can be applicable to Pakistan. The research question will be the following: How religious mentoring helps to overcome the extremist narrative in the community-based context, and what can be learned in the context of Pakistan? The research is based on the qualitative data on the UK stage of the SRAM initiative (interviews, focus groups, secondary reports) and thematic results (e.g., 20 NVivo mentions of indirect discussion of extremism), which is presented in Qureshi (2025).

Figure 1: Community Led CVE programme



The researchers used semi-structured interviews of 15 SGCS and KNC stakeholders, two focus groups of 10 participants, and secondary data of SGCS and KNC reports and analysed them thematically using NVivo where 20 references to discourse on indirect extremism were noted (Qureshi, 2025). Triangulation between these sources offered reliability, and the ethics of compliance with GDPR regulations were followed through anonymized data and informed consent (Qureshi, 2025). Although the SRAM has been successful in the UK and religious mentoring has countered the concept of extremism (Qureshi, 2025; Khan, 2019), its adaptation to the sectarian and madrassa-dominated situation in Pakistan is not a topic of exploration (Khan and Ahmed, 2024). Research on localization of initiatives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan

(Munir, 2018) and long-term effects of deradicalization, such as ideological changes, under the impact of the National Action Plan developed in Pakistan are weak (Rana, 2015).

1.1 Research Objectives

- To determine how religious mentoring is effective in the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model in opposing extremist discourse and building ideological resilience towards at-risk individuals in the UK, based on qualitative data on the SRAM project.

2. Literature Review

The scientific evidence on the countering of violent extremism (CVE) emphasises the importance of religious narratives, especially its misinterpretations in accelerating the process of radicalization and violent extremism at the international level (Gerges, 2016). Extremist groups often use misinterpreted ideas, like the notion of jihad, to commit violence, and they target disenfranchised youth that is vulnerable because of ideological weaknesses, social exclusion, and exposure to internet propaganda (Afsaruddin, 2022; Hassan, 2018). Marginalised communities in the UK are commonly prone to this weakness, and radicalisation can be a reaction to the grievances or identity crisis (Hassan, 2018). Pakistan, in its turn, has its own set of problems, as sectarian violence and lack of regulation of some madrassas are the reasons behind the extremist ideas proliferation, meaning that specific interventions are needed (Khan and Ahmed, 2024). The community-based methods and especially those that involve religious leaders and institutions have become potential ways of combating these narratives by encouraging genuine interpretation and encouraging interfaith dialogue (Khan, 2019).

Earlier research emphasises the effectiveness of religious mentoring with the CVE setting. To illustrate, initiatives in Europe that engage imams have achieved positive outcomes in de-extremizing ideological radicals by focusing on peaceful principles of religion and counter-narratives, which agrees with community credibility and cultural sensitivity (Afsaruddin, 2022). Paigham-e-Pakistan, a national fatwa against terrorism initiative introduced in 2018 in Pakistan, is one of the grassroots movements to implement Pakistani moderation in the Islamic religious teachings but faces limited implementation due to cultural and logistical obstacles (Munir, 2018). The Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model, which Stockwell Green Community Services (SGCS) in the UK utilized to address the mentioned gaps, combines religious mentoring with structured mentoring events such as Quran classes and interfaith events, so it can be followed to provide a framework that will help solve these gaps (Qureshi, 2025). This is a tactic based on the use of trusted faith-practicing professionals to rebuild perceptions that is backed up by Framing Theory that postulates that counter-narratives can work effectively to reframe religious ideas to diminish the attractiveness of extremists (Entman, 1993).

There are two important theoretical frameworks that make the literature review more comprehensive in terms of understanding the role of religious mentoring in countering violent extremism (CVE) as a part of the SRAM model: Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). The theories provide a complementary understanding of the

effects of religious mentoring on ideological resilience and behavioral change, which are in line with the qualitative aspect of the study of community-led interventions.

It is a theory that has its roots in communication research stating that the way information is framed influences the perceptions and understanding of reality by individuals. Entman (1993) states that frames create emphasis on some elements of a problem and down-emphasis on others, depending on how audiences perceive and act on that specific problem. Social developed by Albert Bandura, the social learning theory states that individuals acquire behaviour, attitudes and emotional responses because of observation, imitation and modelling in their social environment. The theory has four primary processes, which include attention (noticing the model), retention (remembering the behaviours), reproduction (performing the behaviours), and motivation (moved by reinforcement or incentives). Using this theory to the CVE, it is explained how vulnerable individuals can adopt the extremist behaviour of radical role models especially within the environment of social rejection and on-line propaganda (Hassan, 2018). Social Learning Theory and Framing Theory are complementary to each other in the SRAM framework. Framing Theory deals with the cognitive re-branding of religious perceptions via counter-narratives whereas the Social Learning Theory concerns the behavioural modelling that occurs through the assistance of trusted mentors.

3. Methodology

The approach of the study is a qualitative one, which presupposes the use of an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design, as described by Qureshi (2025), which also allows an in-depth investigation of religious mentoring in the context of the Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring (SRAM) model and then a quantitative phase that will support the validity of the findings. The data collection was carried out in the UK phase of the SRAM project, and the data included religious mentoring activities used by the Stockwell green community services (SGCS) and the Khatme Nubuwwat Centre (KNC) to make sure that community-based intervention is analysed contextually. The data sources were semi-structured interviews with 15 KNC and SGCS stakeholders consisting of mentors, religious leaders and participants-to achieve subtle perceptions of religious mentoring (Qureshi 2025).

Also, two focus groups of 10 participants each were held to explore the nature of interfaith dialogue and ideology resilience, which also can be found in the Appendix 3 (Qureshi 2025), to offer the overall understanding of the two phenomena. The secondary data provided by SGCS reports and KNC reports, program evaluations, and attendance logs provided a solid historical and operation picture (Qureshi 2025). The thematic analysis based on NVivo program was used in the analysis stage, and several themes were identified: interfaith dialogue, proper interpretation of religious texts, and community trust, and 20 references were also included in the indirect discussions of the extremist subject (Qureshi 2025). Triangulation was used to improve reliability, cross-verifying data regarding the interview, focus groups, and secondary sources, whereas ethical aspects were considered based on GDPR compliance, anonymized data and informed consent as described (Qureshi 2025). This methodological solution is consistent with the best practices of qualitative approaches, which gives a thorough framework

to determine the effectiveness of religious mentoring in the prevention of violent extremism (Creswell and Poth 2018).

4. Findings

The results indicate how much the element of religious mentoring plays into the SRAM model that involved Quran classes, interfaith events, and one-on-one mentoring discussions led by professionals practicing faith that aim to support the person at risk of radicalization with organized guidance to oppose extremist discourse (Qureshi 2025). Particular activities were Quran classes that focus on peaceful interpretation of Islamic texts with 1,200 participants over three years (Appendix 5, Qureshi 2025), interfaith events where Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders exchange ideas (Appendix 1, Qureshi 2025), and mentoring sessions where the participants discussed concepts such as jihad and most of them considered it an effective concept (Qureshi 2025). Such programs provided significant results: the participants showed greater ideological stability, and a better acquaintance with the principles of peaceful unity, being the Ummah, and violence (Nasr 2009), zero reoffending rates among SRAM participants were associated with successful counter-narratives (Qureshi 2025), and great trust towards religious mentors by the community members, with 7 NVivo references to the concept of partnership working (Qureshi 2025). The processes leading to these results were supported by the Framing Theory that supported the reformulation of perceptions with the help of counter-narratives (Entman 1993) and reinforced using community-based implementation of trusted mentors, which are also consistent with the results of the global CVE (Afsaruddin 2022). These findings reflect the opportunity of religious mentoring as a transformative resource under community-based CVE measures.

4.1 Discussion

The focus of the discussion is the effectiveness of religious mentoring as a part of the SRAM framework, which is particularly effective in overcoming ideological vulnerability as one of the main factors that drive extremism in the world (Gerges 2016) by encouraging soft interpretations of the religious writings and open dialogues between religions. The results of the study along with the zero-reoffending rate highlight the deradicalization power of this method that is better than government-initiated programs that are in most cases culture-insensitive and lack community buy-in (Patel and Ali 2023). This is also in line with the international research on CVE, which showed that religious mentoring is effective in the reduction of ideological extremism based on the trustful community involvement (Afsaruddin 2022). Nevertheless, there are still difficulties, including the threat of alienation in the process of sensitive conversation and the necessity to provide significant mentor training to ensure credibility and effectiveness (Qureshi 2025). In the case of Pakistan, where sectarian brutality and uncontrolled madrassas enhance extremist discourses (Khan and Ahmed 2024), the religious mentoring approach is one of the effective approaches that can allow adjusting it to such measures as Paigham-e-Pakistan, which fosters moderate messages (Munir 2018). However, the cultural and sectarian sensitivities require local changes, including aligning interfaith events with the religious diversity of Pakistan, whereas the lack of resources and political dynamics within the National Action Plan (NAP) makes scaling difficult (Rana 2015).

The paper expands on the CVE research by demonstrating the essentiality of religious mentoring as a component of community-based interventions to complement global interventions and counter extremism with local resilience (Hassan 2018) and suggests research on the translation of these lessons into the Pakistani educational and religious infrastructure.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion restates the fact that religious mentoring in the context of the SRAM model is a community-based, scalable intervention to challenge extremist discourse, and the success of the intervention in the UK, manifested in increased ideological resilience, high community trust, and zero-reoffending rate after three years (Qureshi 2025) indicates its potential as a solution to CVE at the global scale. The success can be attributed to the organized programs such as Quran classes and interfaith events, which utilize the credibility of mentors to transform the perceptions and create resistance to radicalization, which is aligned with the theoretical background of the study (Entman 1993; Afsaruddin 2022). In the case of Pakistan, the inclusion of religious mentoring in madrassas and universities would help nurture moderate discourses to deal with the 2,546 deaths linked to violence in Pakistan in 2024 (CRSS 2024) and achieve the wider aims of the NAP (Rana 2015).

5.1 Recommendations

- To improve mentor training initiatives in SGCS and KNC, it is necessary to pay attention to such advanced dialogue techniques and peaceful interpretation of religious texts, which would further support the issuance of counter-narratives and the ideological sustainability, as the qualitative research in the SRAM project confirms (Qureshi 2025).

References

Afsaruddin, A. (2022) *Jihad: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993) 'Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp. 51–58.

Gerges, F. A. (2016) *ISIS: A History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hassan, M. (2018) 'Understanding drivers of violent extremism: The case of Pakistan', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 6(2), pp. 97–113.

Khan, A. (2019) 'Radicalization and education: A critical review', *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 11(4), pp. 45–60.

Khan, A. and Ahmed, S. (2024) 'Sectarian violence and CVE in Pakistan: Challenges and opportunities', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 18(1), pp. 1–15.

Munir, M. (2018) 'Paigham-e-Pakistan: A national narrative to counter extremism', *Policy Review*, 10(3), pp. 22–30.

Nasr, S. H. (2009) *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. New York: HarperOne.

Patel, S. and Ali, R. (2023) 'Community-led counter-extremism: Lessons from the UK', *Journal of Community Policing*, 15(1), pp. 34–49.

Qureshi, T. B. Z. (2025) *Impact of Community-led model and Socio-Religio-Academic Mentoring approach to counter extremism: a study of the UK with lessons for Pakistan*. PhD thesis, University of Punjab.