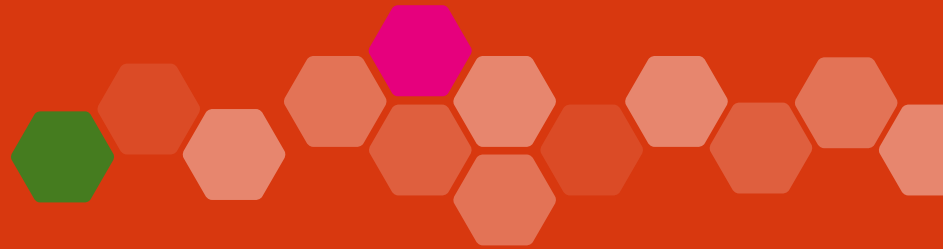


Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public sector practitioner perceptions and views



PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

This report was prepared for the Scottish Government by **Thinks Insight & Strategy**.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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Executive summary

Introduction

Prevent is the first of the 4 'P's of the UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, known as CONTEST (Home Office, 2018). The purpose of Prevent is to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism'. While counter-terrorism (and therefore Prevent) is a reserved matter and the responsibility of the UK Government, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) places a duty on sectors that are devolved from Westminster to the Scottish Government (including health and social care, prisons, the police, education and local authorities) to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This is known as the Prevent duty. The Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (Home Office, 2021a) outlines how the specified sectors are expected to comply with this duty.

The Scottish Government supports the specified sectors to fulfil their obligations under the Prevent duty, and ensures that mechanisms are in place for safeguarding and supporting individuals who may be susceptible to being drawn into terrorism as outlined in the Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP) Duty Guidance (Home Office, 2021d).

The Scottish Government commissioned Think Insight & Strategy to conduct research to explore public sector practitioner understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland. For the purposes of this research, public sector practitioners include professionals working in the sectors which have a statutory obligation to fulfil the Prevent duty (health and social care, prisons, the police, education and local authorities)¹.

While the focus of the research is on extremism, the Prevent duty is the link between the practitioners who participated in this research and extremism, and therefore is another key focus of the research.

This research is part of a wider programme of work to improve understanding of extremism in Scotland. Complementary research has been commissioned and conducted by the Scottish Government to explore the understandings and experiences of the Scottish public and stakeholders:

- [Understanding extremism in Scotland: Stakeholder perceptions and views](#) (Scottish Government, 2023a)
- [Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public perceptions and experiences](#) (Scottish Government, 2023b)

¹ This definition differs in other parts of the UK, where a 'professional' describes a frontline public sector worker and a 'Prevent practitioner' describes someone in a Prevent-related role.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this research, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. The qualitative research was undertaken first to give depth of insight into how public sector practitioners understood this topic. In-depth interviews and mini focus groups were carried out with practitioners with a designated Prevent aspect to their role (n=12) and practitioners without a designated Prevent aspect to their role (n=22). This was followed by the quantitative research, which involved an online survey distributed through an open link to public sector practitioners involved in delivering Prevent in Scotland. A total of 492 responses were received to the survey.

The research aimed to recruit public sector practitioners working across a range of professions and areas of Scotland. It also sought to ensure there was diversity of coverage across variables such as gender, rural or urban area and job role.

However there were several limitations to this research, including that it was relatively small scale, in terms of the overall number of participants, when compared to the size and breadth of the police, local authority, health and social care, prison and education sectors in Scotland. It is important to note that while a diverse range of opinions were included, this sample cannot be considered representative of the population of interest (i.e., all employees in each of these sectors who have an obligation to carry out the Prevent duty).

Further methodological detail can be found in section 2 of the report.

Key findings

The Prevent duty places an obligation on those in the local authority, health and social care, education, prisons and police sectors to pay due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. The report found that those working in different sectors, and those in different job roles within these sectors, had different levels of awareness, understanding, and views on extremism and Prevent in Scotland.

Understanding of extremism

Participants struggled to define extremism, and felt that terrorism was much easier to define. However, those who were familiar with Prevent were more likely to be able to define extremism, and were more confident in their ability to do so, than those who were not.

Support for violence was identified spontaneously by public sector practitioners as a key marker of extremist beliefs. Participants linked violence and extremism before being prompted with definitions of extremism. Alongside this, when prompted with definitions, practitioners favoured those that made explicit reference to violence over those that did not.

However, views on the link between violence and extremism tended to weaken when practitioners were asked to define terrorism. Participants believed that

terrorism always involves violence, whereas someone could hold extremist views but not be violent themselves.

Views on the link between extremism and hate crimes were mixed. Some public sector practitioners viewed perpetrators of hate crime as people who hold extremist views, while others were unsure if this is always the case.

Despite this, there was a clear perception that there are differing levels of severity in relation to extremism, terrorism and hate crime, with some using the analogy of a spectrum to describe the range involved. Simply holding extremist beliefs (but not acting upon them) was seen as the least serious of these issues – although still seen as cause for concern. Committing acts of terrorism was seen as the most serious of these issues. Meanwhile, hate crimes were seen as being less serious than terrorism but more serious than holding extremist beliefs that are not acted upon.

In addition to finding it difficult to define extremism, public sector practitioners were generally unsure of the specific behaviours that may indicate that an individual holds extremist views or may be being radicalised. Participants tended to believe that they would recognise if someone held extremist views or was being radicalised if they encountered this situation, but could not clearly articulate the specific behaviours or actions that they would look out for.

Conversely, public sector practitioners tended to find it easier to talk about the range of factors that might make an individual vulnerable to extremism. There was recognition that multiple factors could make someone more vulnerable to extremist ideologies and that these factors may interact and influence one another (for example, living in poverty and being socially excluded).

Views on extremism in Scotland

Extremism was seen by public sector practitioners to be a problem in Scotland. However, it was viewed as a much smaller problem in Scotland than in the rest of the UK and the rest of the world.

Public sector practitioners also had a clear perception that extremism is a growing problem in Scotland. Some practitioners in Prevent-related roles questioned whether this was due to increasing awareness and knowledge of Prevent amongst practitioners, or an actual rise in extremism.

Amongst public sector practitioners there was a relatively high level of uncertainty about the prevalence of extremism in their own local areas and in Scotland more widely compared with further afield. This was particularly the case for those who were less familiar with the Prevent aspect of their roles, suggesting that their perceptions were less likely to be drawn from their own experience. Instead, these practitioners often referred to large-scale terrorist events outside of their own experience.

Racism and sectarianism were seen as the most prevalent types of problematic beliefs within Scotland. However, public sector practitioners did not always consider

these attitudes and beliefs to be extremist. This was linked to perceptions among some respondents that these attitudes and beliefs are commonplace and therefore could not be considered 'extreme'. Other practitioners said that racism and sectarianism, although wrong, rarely lead to acts of terrorism, and were therefore not extremist.

Conversely, Islamist² extremism was seen as very uncommon in Scotland, and usually associated with violence and/or acts of terrorism. A small number of public sector practitioners expressed views that were prejudiced against Muslims during interviews.

Public sector practitioners who indicated that they were more familiar with Prevent were more likely than those who were less familiar with Prevent to cite right-wing extremism as a big problem in Scotland. Similarly, a handful of public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles who worked closely with Prevent referrals mentioned mixed, unstable and unclear concerns³ as being prevalent in Scotland.

In contrast, public sector practitioners were more likely to see Islamist extremism as a big problem in Scotland if they had not heard of Prevent or did not see it as part of their role.

Experiences of extremism in public sector practitioners' work

Only a minority (39%) of public sector practitioners who took part in the research reported having had an experience of extremism as part of their work.

Practitioners working in local authorities were most likely to report having had an experience of extremism at work, followed by those in the prison and police sectors. Unsurprisingly, practitioners whose job role involves managing Prevent concerns were more likely to report having experiences of extremism as part of their work, likely due to their responsibility to manage referrals.

Those who reported having had an experience of extremism in their job role tended to discuss the beliefs, attitudes and ideologies that they had either witnessed or heard about, rather than the behaviours that had led them to identifying that someone held extremist views.

The most common setting for an experience of extremism referenced in both the qualitative and quantitative research was in schools. This was noted both by education practitioners and by practitioners working in the police and local authority sectors.

² The term 'Islamist extremism' is UK Government terminology (Home Office, 2018) that is also adopted in Scotland.

³ This reflects instances an ideology includes a combination of elements from multiple ideologies (mixed), shifts between different ideologies (unstable), or where the individual does not present a coherent ideology yet may still pose a terrorism risk (unclear) (Police Scotland, 2023b).

Understanding of the Prevent duty in public sector practitioners' work

A significant minority (16%) of respondents reported never having heard of Prevent, with public sector practitioners in the health and social care sector (23%) and in Prevent non-managerial roles (20%) most likely to claim to be unaware of Prevent.

Although the majority were aware of Prevent, before seeing an explanation of the Prevent duty fulfilling this duty tended not to be seen as a key part of public sector practitioners' roles. In contrast, public sector practitioners were more likely to see safeguarding as a key part of their role. They tended to be more familiar with safeguarding duties, and saw them as more directly relevant to their work, particularly those working with vulnerable adults.

After being shown a description of the Prevent duty, a greater proportion of respondents saw Prevent as part of their role. After seeing this description, eight in ten (80%) respondents said that they thought Prevent was part of their role, compared with 54% before, bringing the proportion up to over the level of those who considered safeguarding to be part of their role (78%).

Delivering the Prevent duty

In the survey, over half (51%) of public sector practitioners who had heard of Prevent reported having had an experience with the Prevent duty, with most of these people citing training as their experience. In contrast, only 15% had made a Prevent referral.

The self-reported quantitative data suggests only a minority are highly confident in their ability to identify vulnerability to extremism and in knowing what to do in that situation. The qualitative data supported this, indicating that many public sector practitioners, including those in Prevent-related roles, struggled to articulate the signs of extremism they would look out for clearly, and instead often relied on 'gut instinct'.

There was more variation between practitioners in their ability to describe what to do in the event of someone being vulnerable to extremism. Practitioners in Prevent-related roles were much more likely to be able to describe the process they would follow than practitioners without Prevent-related roles. For the latter, the first port of call tended to be reaching out to more experienced or specialised colleagues.

Practitioners were more likely to feel confident in their ability to know what to do if they came across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism than in their ability to identify such a person. This suggests that these are important areas to address in terms of increasing practitioner confidence in implementing Prevent. Practitioners may benefit from support with identifying vulnerability and risk, including those who are broadly more confident and knowledgeable on this topic.

Unsurprisingly, public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles were more confident in their ability to deliver the specific aspects of the Prevent duty than those who were not in managerial roles. This suggests that increased training about the Prevent duty (which those in Prevent managerial roles are more likely to have

received) has a positive impact on practitioners' confidence in their ability to identify those at risk of being drawn into extremism and what to do in those situations.

Views on Prevent in Scotland

In the qualitative and quantitative findings, views tended to be uncertain or neutral about Prevent, particularly amongst those with less familiarity with Prevent as part of their roles.

In the survey a majority of respondents selected 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' for each statement about the reputation and performance of Prevent and its suitability for Scotland. Similarly, in qualitative discussions, when asked whether they feel favourably or unfavourably towards Prevent, practitioners without Prevent-related roles tended to feel they did not know enough to have a strong view.

Those who did express an opinion on Prevent were more likely to be positive about it than negative. For example, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, 'Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland' 41% said they agreed, compared with just 7% who said they disagreed (with 52% saying they neither agreed nor disagreed or did not know). This broad pattern was replicated for the statements 'Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland' and 'Prevent is delivered in the right way for Scotland'.

While public sector practitioners tended to have uncertain or neutral views about Prevent, there was broad consensus in qualitative discussions that tackling extremism in Scotland was important, and that Prevent was therefore necessary.

In both the qualitative and quantitative phases of research, public sector practitioners who said they were more familiar with Prevent tended to be more positive about it than those who were less familiar. Those with managerial roles in relation to Prevent also tended to be more positive about it than those without managerial roles.

Public sector practitioners broadly felt it was important to improve Prevent and promote it more widely. When prompted with a list of potential improvements to Prevent, those that were ranked as likely to be most effective were those aiming to increase practitioner understanding of extremism.

Implications and considerations

Understanding of extremism

The research found that public sector practitioners struggled to come to a clear definition of extremism, even when prompted with potential definitions.

There are two key implications of this finding. Firstly, public sector practitioners' ability to inform the development of a definition will be limited unless they are provided with further information and time to deliberate upon it. Secondly, if the Scottish Government does develop a definition, significant work will need to be

done to ensure that this definition and its implications for practitioners' work are clear.

Views on extremism in Scotland

The research found that behaviours which might in other contexts be seen as extremist – particularly those related to sectarianism – were not always considered to be manifestations of extremism in Scotland.

It also found a gap in awareness and understanding of the kinds of extremism that exist in Scotland, particularly amongst those who were less familiar with Prevent. This was particularly the case in relation to right-wing extremism and mixed, unstable and unclear concerns. Those who were less familiar with Prevent tended to focus most on Islamist extremism, and a small number of practitioners expressed prejudiced views about Muslims in the course of the interviews.

These findings suggest that providing up-to-date guidance on the extremist beliefs, ideologies and behaviours that public sector practitioners should be aware of in Scotland will improve the effective implementation of the Prevent duty. Secondly, this research suggests that work may need to be done to address prejudiced views amongst a small number of public sector practitioners to ensure they are fairly and consistently applying the Prevent duty.

Understanding of the Prevent duty in public sector practitioners' work

Safeguarding was initially seen as a part of the vast majority of public sector practitioners' roles, whereas Prevent was not. There was a sense that safeguarding duties felt more familiar, and appeared to have more direct relevance to roles than Prevent duties, especially if a practitioner's role involved frequently working with vulnerable audiences.

Nonetheless, the research found that there was appetite for increasing awareness and understanding about Prevent among public sector practitioners. The research also found that presenting public sector practitioners with a definition of Prevent raised awareness of the Prevent duty as part of their role.

Therefore, this research suggests that raising awareness of the Prevent duty being part of public sector practitioners' roles is necessary and may be impactful.

The findings also suggest that emphasising the safeguarding aspect of Prevent may increase the relevance of Prevent for public sector practitioners who see safeguarding as a relevant aspect of their role.

Delivery of the Prevent duty

While public sector practitioners were confident in identifying the factors that might make an individual more vulnerable to extremism, they often struggled to articulate specific behaviours they would look for that would indicate that an individual held extremist beliefs. Alongside this, understanding of the Prevent referral process was low amongst those practitioners without a Prevent-related role.

Therefore, this research suggests there would be value in raising awareness among public sector practitioners using training and guidance which provides practical advice on behaviours to look out for and what to do in the event that possible extremist behaviours have been identified.

In terms of potential improvements to the training provided, given the diversity of public sector practitioners' interaction with the public in relation to their job roles and sectors, guidance on behaviours to look out for should ideally be tailored to their roles and sectors. More broadly, tailoring the language on delivering the Prevent duty to different roles and sectors may help public sector practitioners engage with the Prevent duty guidance.

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government commissioned Thinks Insight & Strategy to conduct research to explore public sector practitioner understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland. The project took place between April 2022 and January 2023, with fieldwork carried out between 10 May and 30 September 2022. This research is part of a wider programme of work to improve understanding of extremism in Scotland. Complementary research has been commissioned and conducted by the Scottish Government to explore the understandings and experiences of the Scottish public and stakeholders:

- [Understanding extremism in Scotland: Stakeholder perceptions and views](#) (Scottish Government, 2023a)
- [Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public perceptions and experiences](#) (Scottish Government, 2023b)

This section provides an overview of the background to this research programme, and outlines the aims and research questions specific to the research exploring public sector practitioner understandings and experiences of extremism.

1.1. Background and context

Prevent policy

Prevent is a strand of the UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy CONTEST (Home Office, 2018). The purpose of Prevent is to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism'. While counter-terrorism (and therefore Prevent) is a reserved matter and the responsibility of the UK Government, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) places a duty on sectors that are devolved from Westminster to the Scottish Government (including local authorities, health and social care, education, prisons, and the police) to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This is known as the Prevent duty.

The Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (Home Office, 2021a) outlines how specified authorities are expected to comply with this duty. There is sector-specific guidance for further education institutions (Home Office, 2021b) and higher education institutions (Home Office, 2021c).

The Scottish Government supports the specified sectors to fulfil their obligations under the Prevent duty, and ensures that mechanisms are in place for safeguarding and supporting individuals who may be susceptible to being drawn into terrorism as outlined in the Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP) Duty Guidance (Home Office, 2021d).

In Scotland, the approach taken to Prevent is tailored to the distinct Scottish context and the specific challenges faced by Scottish communities. Emphasis is placed on early intervention, safeguarding, and preventing people from becoming alienated or isolated, with the aim of reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to extremist narratives.

While the focus of the research is on extremism, the Prevent duty is the link between the practitioners who participated in this research and extremism, and therefore is another key focus of the research.

Key definitions

The UK Government currently adopts the following definition of extremism:

‘Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.’
(Home Office, 2011: 107)

This definition was introduced in the 2011 Prevent strategy, and is used as a working definition rather than a legal definition. It was used in the UK Government’s Counter-Extremism Strategy (Home Office, 2015), which set out the UK Government’s approach to countering ‘both violent and non-violent’ extremism. However, counter-extremism is a devolved matter and the Counter-Extremism Strategy and the UK Government’s definition of extremism were not adopted in Scotland.

At present, therefore, the Scottish Government does not have an official definition of extremism. A review of evidence carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c) explored how extremism is defined in existing literature, and highlighted the challenges associated with defining the concept. For example:

- Various factors, such as the prevailing political culture, value systems and personal characteristics and experiences, influence how the term is understood, meaning it is an inherently relative and ambiguous term (Sotlar, 2004).
- Extremism is often conceptualised as a continuum of beliefs and behaviours, which makes it difficult to capture in a definition (Wilkinson and van Rij, 2019).
- Defining extremism too broadly can risk impeding rights to free speech and protest, while defining it too narrowly can lead to potentially extremist behaviours being overlooked (Redgrave et al., 2020).

These challenges have meant that while a range of definitions of extremism have been proposed, there is a general lack of consensus on how it should be defined.

Further to the debate around defining extremism, there are also conceptual debates around the related terms ‘terrorism’ and ‘hate crime’. In the UK, the Terrorism Act (2000) defines terrorism as the use or threat of any of the following actions, where the action is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is used for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause:

- Serious violence against a person
- Serious damage to property

- Endangering a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action
- Creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public
- Seriously interfering with or disrupting an electronic system

In addition to the above, the use or threat of action which involves the use of firearms or explosives is considered terrorism regardless of whether or not the action is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of the public.

However, terrorism is defined differently by governments elsewhere, as well as by global institutions and academics, meaning there is no universally agreed-upon understanding of the term. For example, NATO defines terrorism as 'the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence, instilling fear and terror, against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, or to gain control over a population, to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives' (NATO, 2016). Although there is no shared definition of the term in academia, in recent decades there has been increasing consensus in the literature that the core factor in terrorism is 'that it entails the intent to generate a wider psychological impact beyond the immediate victims' (Richards, 2015).

Reasons presented for this lack of agreed-upon definition include that it is difficult to encapsulate the wide range of behaviours, actions and beliefs associated with terrorism in one definition, and that the term is subjective. For example, the position that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter' (Ganzor, 2010). Due to a lack of a universal definition, terrorism is generally defined at a national level.

Hate crime is another term associated with extremism which poses challenges around its definition due to its subjective nature. For example, Garland (2012) discusses issues involved with deciding which identity groups are categorised as specific hate crime groups and which are not. The Scottish Government tends to use Lord Bracadale's definition developed as part of his independent review of hate crime legislation in Scotland, which refers to hate crime as 'the term used to describe behaviour which is both criminal and rooted in prejudice' (Lord Bracadale, 2018). Police Scotland (2023a) define hate crime as 'any crime which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated (wholly or partly) by malice or ill will towards a social group' with the five groups covered including disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender identity.

Understanding extremism in Scotland

The evidence review carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c) identified evidence gaps relating to the extent and nature of extremism in Scotland, which impede understanding of whether current approaches are appropriate and impactful in preventing the spread of extremist ideologies and reducing terrorism in the Scottish context. In particular, the review showed that while tentative conclusions can be drawn from data relating to terrorist activity, Prevent referrals and public

attitudes, there is a lack of research evidence on the prevalence and nature of extremism in Scotland specifically.

The Scottish Government is therefore developing a programme of research which aims to support understanding of extremism and Prevent delivery in Scotland. In the first instance, this research has sought to explore understandings, perceptions and experiences of extremism from the perspective of the Scottish public, stakeholders⁴ and public sector practitioners, in three distinct but related projects.

The aim of this research is to develop understanding of how these groups define and understand extremism; their views on the extent to which extremism is a problem in Scotland and the types of extremism they consider to be more and less prevalent; as well as on how well they perceive current approaches to countering extremism in Scotland to be working.

This report focuses on the findings from the research exploring public sector practitioner understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland. For the purposes of this research, public sector practitioners include professionals working in sectors which, under the Prevent duty, must pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', including local authorities, health and social care, education, prisons, and the police⁵.

1.2. Public sector practitioners and their role in Prevent

This research was carried out with a wide range of public sector practitioners with diverse job roles in the sectors with a statutory obligation to fulfil the Prevent duty (the local authority, health and social care, education, prisons and police sectors). A broad breakdown of types of job roles of public sector practitioners who participated in this research can be found in Appendix A. Public sector practitioners who are not obligated to deliver the Prevent duty, such as emergency service workers or those in the military, were not within the scope of this research.

In the Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (Home Office, 2021a)⁶, it is noted that how sectors comply with the duty, and the extent to which they do, will depend on many factors, such as how much interaction they have with vulnerable individuals. While there is variation by sector, therefore, the guidance states that all relevant public sector staff should be trained to recognise signs that someone has been or is

⁴ The research with stakeholders was carried out with predominantly senior-level representatives of organisations that have direct involvement in Prevent in Scotland, or significant interest in Prevent or extremism in Scotland more generally.

⁵ This definition differs in other parts of the UK, where a 'professional' describes a frontline public sector worker and a 'Prevent practitioner' describes someone in a Prevent-related role.

⁶ The Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (Home Office 2021b) uses a number of phrases interchangeably to refer to the susceptibility of an individual to being drawn into extremism or terrorism: 'vulnerability to' or being 'at risk of' 'being drawn into terrorism' or 'being drawn into any form of extremist ideology' or 'extremist messaging' or 'radicalisation'. This report therefore uses such language to some extent interchangeably, although the focus of this research has been on extremism in particular, and how that relates to the Prevent duty.

being drawn into terrorism and locate available support, including making a referral when necessary.

1.3. Research aim and questions

This research aimed to explore understandings and experiences of extremism from the perspective of public sector practitioners working to deliver Prevent in Scotland.

The research questions were:

Understanding extremism

- How do public sector practitioners working to deliver Prevent in Scotland define and understand extremism?
- How far do public sector practitioners' understandings of extremism in Scotland align with definitions and categorisations adopted in other contexts?
- What are public sector practitioners' views on the boundaries of extremism? For example, when does an act or behaviour cross the threshold into extremism?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they understand and perceive extremism?

Views on extremism in Scotland

- To what extent do public sector practitioners perceive extremism to be a threat or problem in Scotland? Do they feel that this has changed over time?
- How do public sector practitioners perceive extremism in Scotland to manifest as views, behaviours and actions, particularly in the communities they work in?
- What are public sector practitioners' views on the ideologies or types of extremism that are of most concern or growing concern currently, and why? What are views on the key drivers of these concerns?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they perceive current threats?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns had an impact on what public sector practitioners are seeing in terms of spread of ideologies?

Public sector practitioner experiences of extremism

- To what extent have public sector practitioners observed or experienced extremism in Scotland?

Understanding the Prevent duty

- To what extent are public sector practitioners aware of the Prevent duty, and how well do they feel they understand it?

Delivering the Prevent duty

- Do public sector practitioners consider Prevent as part of their day-to-day work? What processes are in place for this in their workplace?
- What aspects of extremism do public sector practitioners feel more and less confident in understanding?
- How well-equipped and supported do public sector practitioners feel in their ability to recognise and respond to extremism?

Views on Prevent in Scotland

- How favourable are public sector practitioners' opinions or impressions of Prevent?
- How effective do public sector practitioners consider the current approaches to reducing extremism in Scotland to be, and why?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they perceive the effectiveness of responses to extremism?

Two original research questions were found to be beyond the scope of this work and may be suitable for further research with public sector practitioners working closely with extremism and Prevent:

- What do public sector practitioners find to be most effective in preventing the spread of extremist ideologies?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns had an impact on public sector practitioners' abilities to monitor and respond to any changes in terms of spread of ideologies?

1.4. Report structure

Having introduced the background to the research and the research questions, the report sets out the methodology in detail, followed by presentation and analysis of the findings. The findings section first presents practitioners' understanding, views and experiences of extremism, then explores their understanding, experiences of delivering and views on Prevent and the Prevent duty. The report ends with a conclusion chapter that sets out the implications of this research.

2. Methodology

2.1. Overview

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this research, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. The qualitative research was undertaken first in order to generate depth of insight into how public sector practitioners understood the topic, and explore differences in this understanding between types of practitioner. The findings from this stage informed the design of the quantitative survey, ensuring that the questionnaire covered key topics identified by public sector practitioners themselves and used language that would be fully understood by all respondents.

Ethics

The Scottish Government carried out an ethics assessment prior to the research commencing, highlighting particular sensitivities that would need to be taken account of during the research. This assessment was further developed with Thinks Insight & Strategy during project inception.

To ensure the identity of participants was protected, the research was designed and conducted in full compliance with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

All fieldwork was carried out by members of the Thinks Insight & Strategy project team, who are trained to meet ethical standards and are experienced in conducting research on sensitive topics. Recognising that the sensitivity of the topic might create discomfort or distress for participants in the qualitative research in particular, steps were taken to minimise this, including offering relevant support following participation in the discussion. In view of the fact that safeguarding concerns might potentially arise as a result of the discussions, there was also a comprehensive safeguarding policy in place which informed all interviewers of their safeguarding responsibilities, including guidance on what steps to take in the event that any unreported Prevent concerns were raised.

A full breakdown of the ethical issues that were identified, and the measures put in place to mitigate them, can be found in Appendix B.

2.2. Qualitative research

Overall design

The qualitative research was conducted between 10 May and 23 June 2022. The initial design included in-depth interviews (a detailed, individual discussion designed to elicit depth on a topic of interest) with public sector practitioners with a Prevent-related role – in order to capture the detail of their roles and experience – along with mini focus groups (an organised discussion with a small number of participants) with public sector practitioners without a Prevent-related role. The project team felt that focus groups were more appropriate for practitioners without a Prevent-related role on the assumption that they might feel less confident in their

knowledge of the topic and that the interaction and sharing of experience arising within a peer group setting would facilitate discussion. However, due to issues aligning practitioner availability, some focus groups were replaced with in-depth and paired in-depth interviews (meaning that two participants were interviewed at the same time).

Therefore, the qualitative research was ultimately structured in the following way:

- 12 x 45 minute, 1-on-1 in-depth interviews were conducted with public sector practitioners with a designated Prevent aspect to their role.
- 4 x 1 hour mini focus groups (3-4 public sector practitioners), 6 x 45 minute in-depth interviews (1-on-1) and 1 x 45 minute paired in-depth interviews (2 public sector practitioners), were conducted with public sector practitioners without a designated Prevent aspect to their role but who have a statutory obligation to deliver the Prevent duty.
 - The 4 mini focus groups were conducted with public sector practitioners from the health and social care, schools, Further / Higher education and local authority sectors.
 - 4 of the in-depth interviews were conducted with public sector practitioners from the prison sector; while 2 in-depth interviews and the paired in-depth interview were conducted with practitioners from the police sector.

Sample

The research aimed to recruit public sector practitioners working across a range of professions and areas of Scotland. It also sought to ensure there was diversity of coverage across variables such as gender, rural or urban area and job role. A screening questionnaire was used at recruitment stage, and quotas were set for the in-depth interviews and mini focus groups across those variables to ensure this diversity was met.

To identify and recruit participants for the interviews, the Scottish Government contacted public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles and asked if they were interested in taking part. The contact details, alongside information about job role and area of work, of those who wished to, were shared with Thinks Insight & Strategy with their consent. These contacts were then screened by Thinks Insight & Strategy to ensure a spread of participants were recruited in terms of region and rurality.

To identify and recruit participants for the mini focus groups, existing contacts of the Scottish Government were provided and utilised (with their consent). This involved asking these contacts to advertise the opportunity to participate in the research to their colleagues. This was combined with a free-finding method, which involved recruiting individuals through a recruitment agency (Taylor McKenzie) using a screening questionnaire. This was designed to ensure the recruitment of participants would reach a broad and diverse set of practitioners with a range of views and experiences.

The final sample for the qualitative research component included 34 public sector practitioners, broken down in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. Breakdown of qualitative research participants, by sector

	Health and social care	Primary / secondary education	Further / Higher education	Local authorities and social work*	Police Scotland	Scottish Prisons Service
Total	6	5	4	7	6	6
Practitioners with Prevent-related role	2	2	1	3	2	2
Practitioners without Prevent-related role	4	3	3	4	4	4

*'Local authorities and social work' is often referred to as 'local authority' in the report for ease.

The spread of public sector practitioners participating in the qualitative research by region is as follows:

- 3 x Aberdeen and North East
- 1 x Highlands and Islands
- 2 x Tayside, Central and Fife
- 9 x Edinburgh and Lothians
- 15 x Glasgow and Strathclyde
- 4 x Scotland South

Topic guide development

Topic guides for the interviews and focus groups were developed in partnership with the Scottish Government. The wording of the questions varied depending on whether the participants were public sector practitioners with or without Prevent-related roles, in order to make the questions relevant. For example, public sector practitioners without a Prevent-related role were asked if they were aware of other roles within their organisation that might deal with Prevent referrals. Public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles were not asked this.

A broad outline of the topics covered in the guides can be found in Appendix B.

Analysis

A qualitative analysis framework was developed at the start of fieldwork to organise key points from the fieldwork into themes, and draw insight from the interviews by organising notes into a grid structure, filled with verbatim quotes from participants. This analysis framework was used throughout the fieldwork period to identify key

themes and insights early on, and to help shape the ongoing qualitative fieldwork and subsequent quantitative fieldwork.

Full analysis of the qualitative framework, alongside quantitative analysis of the survey, shaped the report findings. Quotes from participants in the qualitative research are used throughout the report to illustrate key points.

A key difference of relevance to the research in terms of practitioners' job roles was the extent to which their role included an additional designated Prevent element. Some had been assigned Prevent-related roles or were responsible for managing and coordinating responses to Prevent concerns, while others had no additional responsibilities beyond fulfilling the Prevent duty. A distinction has therefore been made between these types of role in the analysis and throughout the report, which is explained in more detail in section 2.5.

2.3. Quantitative research

Overall design

An online survey (5-7 minutes in length) was distributed through an open link to public sector practitioners involved in delivering Prevent in Scotland. This was available for public sector practitioners to complete between 8 July and 30 September 2022.

The survey was disseminated through several methods in order to maximise the overall sample size. Firstly, partners of the Scottish Government helped to distribute the link. This included the sector leads on the Prevent Sub Group⁷, the Prevent Single Points of Contact (SPOCs)⁸ and Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP)⁹ leads in each local authority. Secondly, participants who had already taken part in the qualitative research were also encouraged to engage with the quantitative research. Thirdly, participants were asked to forward on the email to their colleagues to enable the link to reach a wider range of practitioners in their organisation. Finally, contacts in relevant organisations were identified through desk research using publicly available information and asked to participate. Follow-up telephone calls were made to ensure that the invitation had reached the appropriate individual.

Sample

Quotas of at least 50 respondents per sector were put in place prior to the launch of the survey. This threshold was set to allow for indicative significance testing at the analysis stage. These quotas were met, meaning that the sample was large enough to provide a sufficient spread of views and experiences of public sector practitioners working in different sectors and areas of Scotland. Despite this, due to the opt-in

⁷ The Prevent Sub Group is a multi-agency governance group that holds the strategic lead for the co-ordination and support of Scotland's delivery of Prevent.

⁸ A lead for each sector which, under the Prevent duty, must pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

⁹ The Prevent Multi-Agency Panel is a programme which identifies and supports individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

approach of the survey, the findings cannot be considered representative of the whole population of public sector practitioners working in the relevant sectors in Scotland.

The final survey sample, by sector and region, is shown in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2. Breakdown of survey sample by sector

Total	Health and social care	Schools	Further / Higher education	Local authorities (and social work)	Police Scotland	Scottish Prisons Service
492	141	62*	31*	99*	74*	85*

Table 3. Breakdown of survey sample by region

Total	Aberdeen & North East	Highlands & Islands	Tayside, Central & Fife	Edinburgh & Lothians	Glasgow & Strathclyde	Scotland South
492	118	20**	145	52*	148	6**

* small base (under 100); ** very small base (under 30) meaning ineligible for indicative significance testing

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was developed in partnership with the Scottish Government. The survey questions were informed by the qualitative findings, to ensure all questions were relevant to public sector practitioners and reflected the language they used.

The majority of the questions were closed, with answer categories provided. However, two open questions were included to allow public sector practitioners to explain their experience, if applicable, in more detail.

A summary of the broad topics covered in the survey is provided in Appendix B.

Analysis

The survey was scripted and hosted by a third party provider, Yonder Data Solutions. The qualitative findings informed the tabulation specification, which is a set of instructions for setting out the data tables, including outlining the variables that the data will be analysed by (e.g., by job sector, by geographical location, by age). This allowed for analysis and comparison of subgroups. The specification evolved throughout the analysis process, with additional variables requested as the analysis progressed.

Significant differences were reported for all groups with a sample size of greater than 50, however it should be noted that any base size of less than 100 is considered a small sample. See note on limitations below in relation to reporting on statistical significance.

Due to some regions not achieving a base size of 50, regional differences were treated with caution as they could not be compared across all regions of Scotland. Therefore, regional differences have been reported on where the difference appeared relevant and was supported by evidence in the qualitative research. In contrast, as each job sector achieved at least a base size of 50 (once the education sectors are combined), these differences have been reported on with more confidence.

2.4. Limitations of the research

There were several limitations to this research, which are explored in this section.

One limitation was that this research was relatively small scale, in terms of the overall number of participants, when compared to the size and breadth of the police, local authority, health and social care, prison and education sectors in Scotland. While a diverse range of opinions were included, this sample cannot be considered representative of the population of interest (i.e., all employees in each of these sectors who have an obligation to carry out the Prevent duty).

In addition to this, some participants were recruited through existing Scottish Government contacts, so there is a possible risk of bias given that the work was commissioned by the Scottish Government.

A broader limitation is that the research relies on participants' own recollections, assessments and descriptions of their knowledge, thoughts or experiences, rather than an observation of their behaviour or an objective view of their experiences (e.g., they might make incorrect assumptions about a person they encounter, but the research can only explore what the perception was, rather than the reality).

This means that participants may sometimes overstate or understate their true knowledge, thoughts or experiences, as established by research into cognitive biases and heuristics. Some relevant cognitive biases include the overconfidence effect, whereby people tend to report higher levels of confidence in their knowledge than their objective level of knowledge (Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, 1977), the Dunning-Kruger effect, whereby people with the lowest level of knowledge are most likely to overestimate their level of knowledge (Kruger, Dunning, 1999), and social desirability bias, whereby due to societal norms people tend to overreport socially desirable activities and underreport socially undesirable ones (Krumpal, 2011).

To address these cognitive biases and heuristics, this report has referenced where there was a difference between participants' self-assessments and their other responses, and caveated findings where biases might be relevant. It has also been made clear in the body of the report that findings are based on participants' perceptions, which may not always be accurate.

There were also some limitations which were specific to the qualitative research. Incentives are often given to qualitative research participants, to compensate them for their time and to encourage participation from individuals who may not otherwise take part, either due to logistical barriers (i.e., not having sufficient time to participate) or perceived lack of benefit (e.g., due to lack of interest in the topic

area). For this research, it was decided that incentives would be used because the audience is typically time-poor, and could therefore be difficult to recruit. It was also deemed to be important to ensure that the sample was not solely comprised of individuals who had strong pre-existing views of the topic (and would therefore be willing to take part without an incentive) and whose views may therefore be atypical. This was considered as part of the ethics assessment (see Appendix B).

However, Police Scotland and the Scottish Prisons Service have organisational policies that do not allow staff acceptance of incentives for participation in research. This presented two key challenges for this research. The first of these challenges related to recruitment of practitioners from these sectors, where the inability to provide an incentive meant that interest in participation was initially lower than in the other sectors. Nevertheless, the sample size achieved for these sectors was ultimately similar to the other sectors. Secondly, it is possible those who did take part were particularly motivated by the topic of extremism, and had views they wished to voice in research, as opposed to being motivated to take part because they were being compensated for their time. This higher level of motivation on the topic of extremism may have meant that their views were atypical compared to others in their sector. This limitation is to some extent mitigated by the mixed-methods approach, as a much greater number of public sector practitioners in these sectors gave their input to the research through the survey.

Other limitations specifically impacted the quantitative research. There were some challenges when distributing the survey, for example, email addresses which were out of date, meaning it was not possible to reach all potential participants. In addition, when sending the survey to organisations, it was difficult to ensure that the survey had reached public sector practitioners at all levels of that organisation, since this was dependent on the survey being circulated internally. Furthermore, as the survey was self-selecting, it is possible the views of these practitioners may be atypical compared to others in their sector. Lastly, the timing of the survey – being distributed during the summer – may have impacted the participation of some sectors more than others, such as those in the education sector. For this reason, the survey period was extended through the autumn months to ensure sufficient responses were received across sectors, and additional work was undertaken to raise participation from education practitioners.

Particular regions of Scotland had much greater representation in the survey than others. For example, Tayside, Central and Fife, and Glasgow and Strathclyde were much more strongly represented in comparison with areas such as the Highlands or South Scotland. Although some of this variation reflects population differences between regions, as mentioned above, this limits the ability to make regional comparisons.

Significance testing was used on the data, where sample sizes were sufficient, to report key between-group differences, such as between sectors or between practitioners with different levels of Prevent knowledge. Significance testing allows for a consistent threshold to determine whether or not between-group differences are highlighted and reported on. Triangulating these differences with the qualitative findings creates an additional factor to determine whether the group differences

warrant highlighting in this report. However, as representative sampling methods were not used, strictly speaking, statistical significance should not be applied, and has only been used in the analysis of this survey data as an indication of differences that are likely to be of importance. Due to the non-representative nature of the sample, these differences should be treated with caution.

2.5. Methodological notes

Practitioners' roles in relation to Prevent

A key difference of relevance to the research in terms of practitioners' job roles was the extent to which their role included an additional designated Prevent element beyond the Prevent duty.

All the public sector practitioners in the qualitative sample held roles which are expected to comply with the Prevent duty. A subset of the sampled practitioners had additional designated Prevent-related responsibilities in their role, such as managing Prevent concerns made by colleagues. These practitioners are referred to as having 'Prevent-related roles' in the report text (12 participants). The other 22 participants in the qualitative research did not have a designated Prevent role beyond complying with the Prevent duty.

In the survey, respondents were asked whether managing or coordinating a response to Prevent concerns was part of their role. In analysis of the survey findings, those who did (29% of participants) were categorised as having 'Prevent managerial roles', while those who did not (71% of participants) were categorised as having 'Prevent non-managerial roles', meaning they did not have these responsibilities.

In both the qualitative and quantitative research, consistent differences were found between the two groups in respect of their views and experience of Prevent and extremism. Therefore, throughout the report, differences will be reported by job sector, 'Prevent-related roles' compared with roles without a designated Prevent element (when referring to the qualitative discussions) and 'Prevent managerial' compared with 'Prevent non-managerial' roles (when referring to the survey). Additionally, differences are also reported by job sector, experience with Prevent and whether they saw Prevent as part of their role.

Participant priming

Participants in both the qualitative and quantitative research were told at the recruitment stage that the research was about extremism and Prevent. This report refers to 'initial' or 'unprompted' views, which are therefore not entirely unprimed, but were those given before extremism was discussed in more detail and before public sector practitioners were given an explanation of Prevent.

3. Understanding extremism

3.1. Introduction

This section addresses the following research questions:

- How do public sector practitioners working to deliver Prevent in Scotland define and understand extremism?
- How far do public sector practitioners' understandings of extremism in Scotland align with definitions and categorisations adopted in other contexts?
- What are public sector practitioners' views on the boundaries of extremism? For example, when does an act or behaviour cross the threshold into extremism?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they understand and perceive extremism?

This section will first cover the initial associations public sector practitioners made with extremism, followed by an exploration of public sector practitioners' confidence in defining extremism, their own definitions of extremism, their views on factors leading people to become vulnerable to extremism, their responses to prompted definitions of extremism, their understanding of extremism in relation to terrorism and hate crime and, finally, conclusions relating to this section.

3.2. Initial associations with extremism

At the very start of the qualitative discussions, participants were asked 'What comes to mind when you think of extremism?', and to define extremism in their own terms.

Terror incidents, particularly related to Islamist extremism, were the most frequent associations with extremism, particularly for public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles, who often did not have experience of extremism from their work. This suggests primary associations with extremism, especially for those without personal experience of it, were often shaped by the most severe examples of violent extremism, such as those reported in the media.

Beyond associating extremism with high profile acts of terrorism, public sector practitioners had a range of other associations. More common associations included:

- Specific groups or individuals (Al Qa'ida, IRA, Shamima Begum, Bader Meinhof gang, extreme right-wing groups)
- Vulnerability
- Violence
- Religion
- Manipulation

- Radicalisation

Slightly less common associations included:

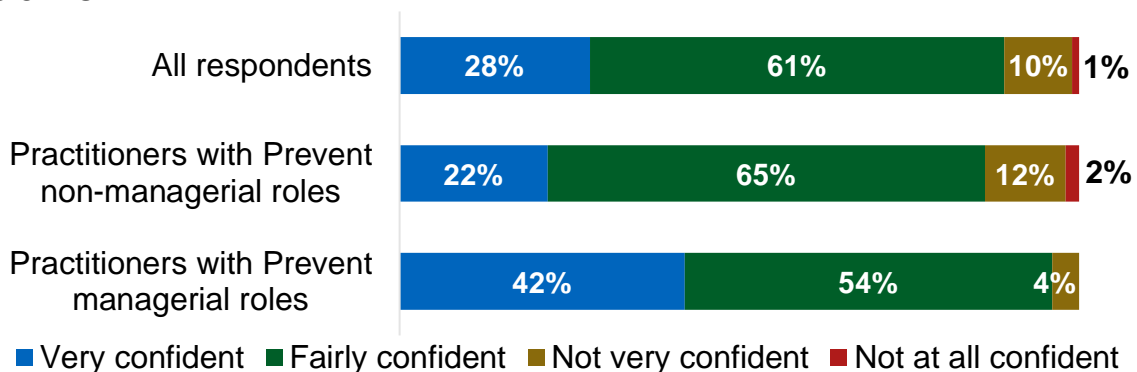
- Political views
- Islamist extremism
- Aggression
- Forceful with ideas
- Extreme behaviours
- Obsessive behaviours
- Domestic violence
- Stalking
- Shootings
- Anti-law

There was a difference in associations raised by practitioners with and without Prevent-related roles in the qualitative sample. Those with a Prevent-related role were more likely to discuss extremist ideologies, while those without a Prevent-related role were more likely to discuss specific acts of terrorism.

3.3. Confidence in defining extremism

The survey asked respondents how confident they were that they understood what is meant by the term ‘extremism’. As displayed in Figure 1, the majority of survey participants (61%) felt ‘fairly confident’ that they knew ‘what is meant by the term extremism’, and nearly three in ten (28%) felt ‘very confident’.

Figure 1. Practitioners’ confidence that they know what is meant by the term ‘extremism’



Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? ‘What is meant by the term ‘extremism’.’

Base: All respondents, n=492; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142

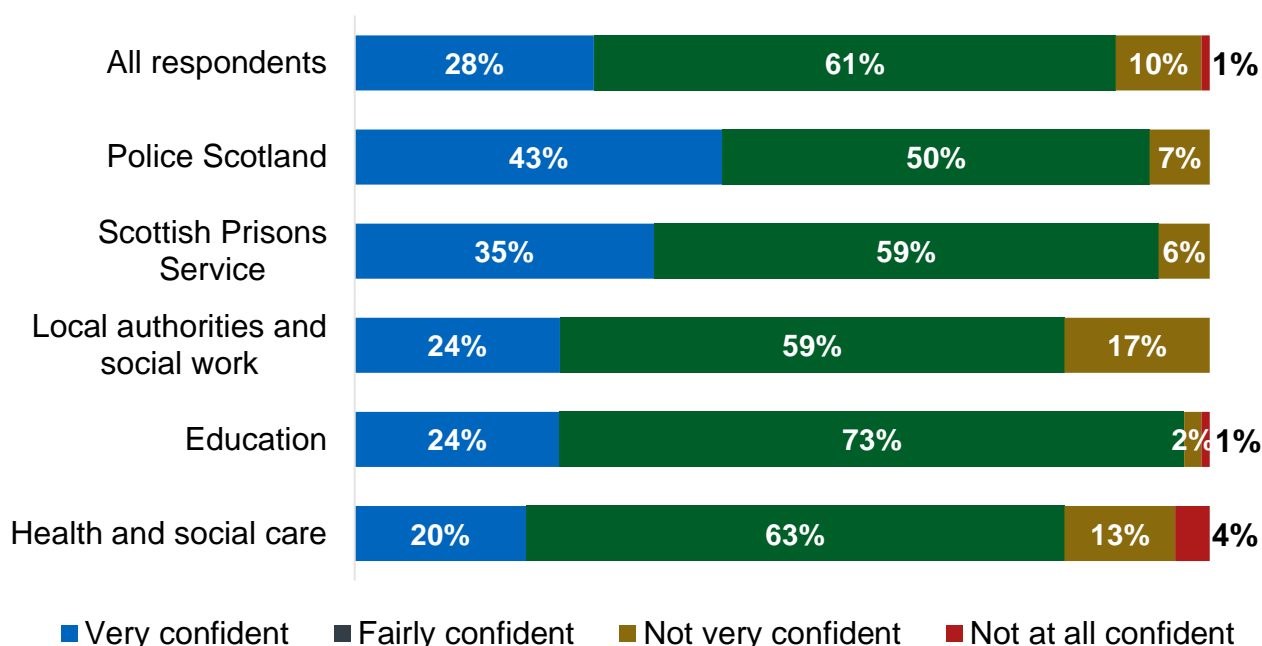
However, while a high level of net confidence (i.e., combination of ‘very confident’ and ‘fairly confident’ responses) was observed across roles and sectors in the survey, the analysis of survey findings has focused on those self-describing as

‘very confident’ as a benchmark for confidence in knowing what is meant by the term extremism, rather than including those who also describe themselves as ‘fairly confident’.

The reason for this is because of the overconfidence effect, a well-established bias whereby people tend to report higher levels of confidence in their knowledge than their objective level of knowledge (Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, 1977). The applicability of this bias to this research was substantiated by findings from the qualitative research, where the difference in knowledge of extremism between public sector practitioners identifying as ‘very confident’ compared with ‘fairly confident’ was more stark than the difference between those identifying as ‘fairly confident’ and ‘not very confident’.

In the survey, public sector practitioners with Prevent managerial roles (i.e., responsible for managing Prevent concerns) were more likely to self-describe as being very confident (42%, compared with 22% in Prevent non-managerial roles). Additionally, public sector practitioners with experience of Prevent in their roles were more likely to select they feel very confident (35%, compared with 24% without experience).

Figure 2. Practitioners’ confidence that they know what is meant by the term ‘extremism’, by sector



Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? ‘What is meant by the term ‘extremism’.’

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

Respondents in the police and prison sectors had higher levels of reported confidence than other sectors (43% and 35% very confident, respectively), with less than a quarter (24%) of public sector practitioners in the education sector saying they feel very confident they knew what is meant by extremism. This is despite the fact that public sector practitioners in the education sector were the most likely to

report experience of Prevent in their roles, which is covered in more detail in section 5.

3.4. Defining extremism in their own words

In the qualitative research, public sector practitioners were prompted to define extremism in their own words, which many found difficult to do. Many participants readily admitted that they found it difficult to define, even when they gave the impression of confidence in being able to answer other questions about extremism.

“It’s difficult to define but we know what it is when we see it. We would recognise it.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

Public sector practitioners with more experience of extremism (such as those with Prevent-related roles) often immediately started to define extremism when asked what they associate with the term, and were more confident in doing so when prompted than those who did not identify as having experiences of extremism.

The main difficulty with defining extremism appeared to be the broad range of beliefs and behaviours that it could potentially cover. The key concepts practitioners referred to in these discussions are listed below.

Public sector practitioners’ perceptions of extremist beliefs

Participants found it particularly difficult to identify the exact point at which a belief becomes ‘extreme’. Many defined extremism as ascribing to beliefs or group identities (e.g., political, religious) to an ‘extreme’ level, beyond what is considered ‘average’, ‘normal’ or ‘mainstream’, but struggled to specify what an ‘extreme’ level would be.

Often, the way public sector practitioners distinguished whether a belief was extreme or not was whether violence was used to express those beliefs, or justify their ideological aims. For example, holding a belief that other views or ideologies are so wrong as to warrant violent action against people with different views or ideologies, or supporting the use of violence in aid of their beliefs.

Public sector practitioners’ perceptions of extremist behaviours

Therefore, the use of acts of physical violence, or advocacy on behalf of people who commit acts of violence, was the most common feature of definitions of extremist behaviours. Attempts to use force or violence to promote beliefs, or recruiting or radicalising others to commit violence were seen as clearly extremist behaviours.

The second most common behaviour seen as extreme was expressing ‘extreme’ opinions or beliefs, although as noted above, defining extremist beliefs (aside from those that advocated for violence) was difficult for public sector practitioners. Public sector practitioners felt that this could include joining groups or events that support those beliefs.

Some public sector practitioners also mentioned broadly ‘obsessive’ behaviour (e.g., stalking) and a sense of secrecy (i.e., keeping extreme views to themselves) as extreme behaviours. However, these were discussed less than other behaviours.

“Forcing one’s views upon others. Getting them to believe their views are better, ‘come onto my way of thinking.’”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, Mini focus group)

“Viewpoints that either predispose or encourage violent actions against sectors of the general public.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, In-depth interview)

“Extremism is a reaction against rule of law and the kind of accepted standards of society. And I would say it’s usually tied to some sort of ideology.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

3.5. Views on factors leading people to becoming vulnerable to extremism

In contrast with the difficulty public sector practitioners had in defining extremism in the qualitative discussions, most found it easy to articulate why someone might become vulnerable to extremism when asked what factors they believe might lead to this.

Views on the factors that make someone vulnerable to extremism were very similar between participants who had experiences of extremism in their job role and those who did not, but for those without experience, views about who is vulnerable often appeared to be based on their perceptions of the characteristics of someone who is more vulnerable generally, such as being isolated, lonely or living in disadvantaged conditions, rather than being based on risk factors that specifically make someone vulnerable to extremism. Notably, however, research has demonstrated associations between these factors and vulnerability to extremism (e.g., Pfundmair et al., 2022; Bhui et al., 2014).

Participants generally cited a list of interlinked factors as influencing someone’s vulnerability to extremist ideologies. Participants considered that an individual being affected by one factor (e.g., growing up with negative familial relationships) often increased the likelihood of being affected by another (e.g., looking for a sense of belonging).

These factors broadly fall into the following categories and subcategories. They are presented in order from most- to least-frequently mentioned by public sector practitioners in each category:

Individual factors

- Looking for a sense of belonging was seen as one of the key reasons someone would be drawn into extremism. This was usually linked to lacking a sense of community or a role model.
- A sense of unfairness about one's life was seen as another key reason someone would be drawn into extremism. This was often linked to feeling isolated or marginalised and/or experiencing poverty or other socioeconomic challenges.
- Mental health problems in general came up frequently, such as having suffered trauma, along with closely aligned challenges such as having low self-esteem.
- Neurodiversity came up less frequently, but strongly amongst those who often work with neurodiverse members of the general public. Some practitioners expressed a concern that some neurodiverse people might be more vulnerable to manipulation.

Social factors

- Experiencing poverty was often cited and seen to feed into a sense of unfairness about one's life, as well as a sense of marginalisation.
- Growing up in or going through the care system was mentioned by some, and similarly seen to feed into a sense of unfairness, marginalisation and isolation. Some felt a need for connection may lead an individual to be negatively influenced by others.
- Going through the prison system was also mentioned by some as an experience that feeds into a sense of unfairness and marginalisation. The space itself (i.e., prison) was also seen as a place where people may become radicalised.

Behavioural factors

- Being online a lot was seen by many public sector practitioners as something that could make someone more vulnerable to extremism through increased volume of exposure to extremist content or ideologies. Time spent online was perceived to have increased during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Relationship factors

- Relationship factors arose particularly in the context of negative family dynamics (e.g., generally poor or abusive relationships with parents), but also the failure of romantic relationships.
- Some participants also discussed how individuals with family members or friends who hold extremist views can be influenced by those close, positive relationships, and come to hold those views as well.

“Any kind of isolation. Anything that makes people feel they need to identify with a group of some sort can encourage them to go down routes they wouldn't have otherwise.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

“I suppose that for communities who live in poverty, life is really hard... I can see why people would feel angry that that is their situation when other people don't live in that way and don't have to live in that way. And so, I guess that's where there's a sense of 'actually, let's fight this together.' So it's that sense of belongingness I suppose that allows you to survive.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authorities and social work, In-depth interview)

“It's the same as the reasons of them coming into prisons – poorly educated, poor social circle, lack of role model through their parents, being through the care system, latching onto wrong people.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, Mini focus group)

“If they're feeling excluded from society... picking up extremist views from the internet. There's so much information out there that you can fit into your world view, that's the problem.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

3.6. Responses to prompted definitions of extremism

After exploring initial associations with and definitions of extremism in the qualitative discussions, participants were prompted with three existing definitions. The first was based on the Australian Government's (2015) definition of violent extremism, the second on the Swedish Government's (2015) definition of violent extremism, and the final is the UK Government definition of extremism (Home Office, 2011):

Australian definition: Extremism is a willingness to use unlawful violence, or support the use of violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or religious goal.

Swedish definition: Extremism is engagement with ideologies that accept and legitimise violence as a means of realising extreme ideological opinions and ideas.

UK definition: Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths.

Survey respondents were also asked for their views on these definitions, though the Swedish definition was adapted further for use in the survey based on the way participants defined extremism in their own words in the qualitative discussions:

Extremism is active support of an ideology that accepts and legitimises violence as a means of realising extreme ideological opinions and ideas.

In addition, a fourth definition was developed for use in the survey which was also based on the definitions provided by public sector practitioners in their own words during the qualitative research:

Extremism is when somebody subscribes so strongly to a political, ideological or religious belief that they do not tolerate other people having different beliefs to theirs.

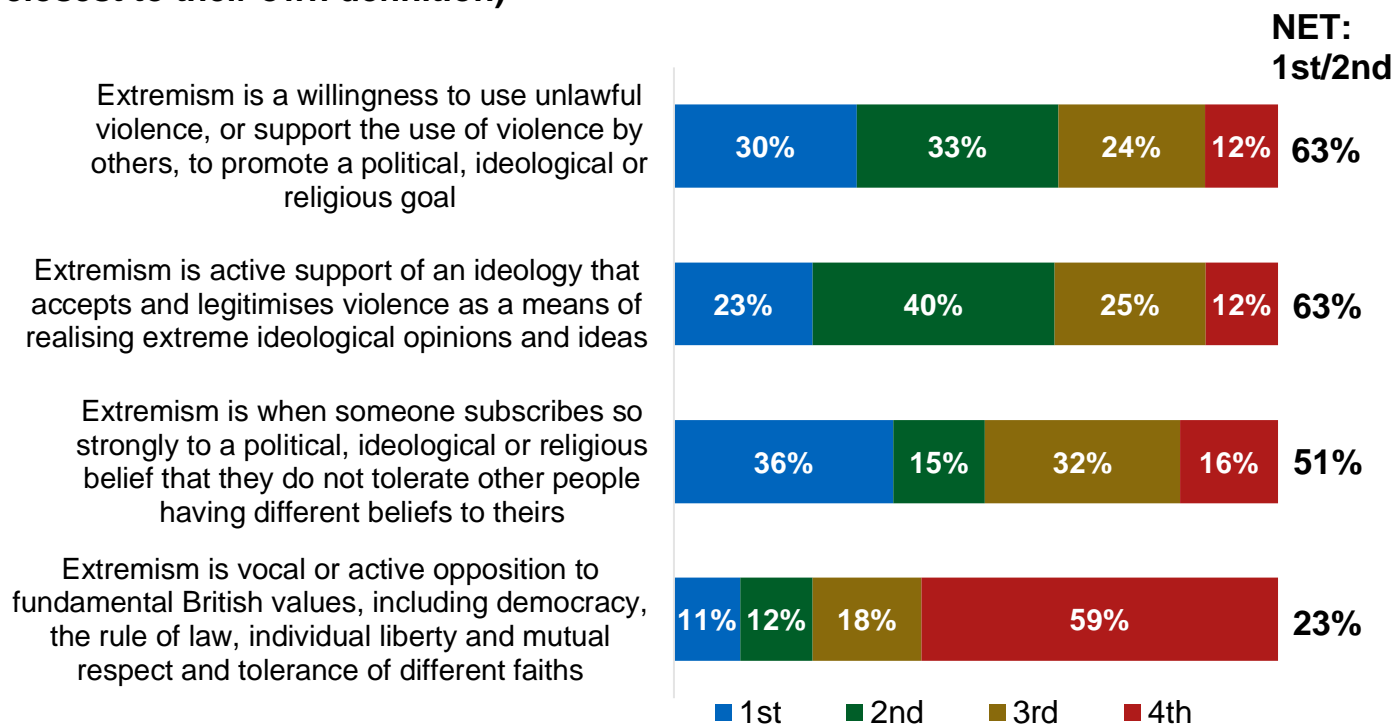
The qualitative research explored participants' views on the definitions of extremism in detail, while the survey focused on obtaining a quantitative ranking of the definitions.

There was no clear consensus on which of the presented definitions was the best among public sector practitioners in the survey or qualitative discussions. However, the overall most popular definitions included reference to violence.

As shown in Figure 3, in the survey, the definitions based on the Australian Government's (2022) and Swedish Government's (2015) definitions of violent extremism were most commonly rated as the first or second closest to how respondents would define extremism.

Almost two thirds (63%) of public sector practitioners chose these two definitions as their first and second preference in the survey, confirming that violence is an important part of the definition of extremism for many, as had been seen in the initial responses. Some participants highlighted during qualitative discussions that they would include verbal abuse within that definition, not just physical violence.

Figure 3. Practitioners' ranking of definitions of extremism (with 1st being closest to their own definition)



Q5. Please rank these definitions from the one that is closest to how you would define extremism, to the furthest from how you would define extremism.

Base: All respondents, n=492.

However, some participants in the qualitative discussions objected to the inclusion of violence within the definition, as not everyone associated extremism with violence and felt that there were other ways extreme views could be expressed, for example, misogynistic behaviour. Additionally, some had concerns around the word ‘unlawful’ in the Australian definition. Since some violence can be supported by those in power, they felt that this definition allowed violence to be ‘lawful’ in certain contexts.

“There’s violence in all walks of life, it doesn’t have to be an extremist thought for that.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, Mini focus group)

“Violence has to be an important part of the definition [of extremism]. A warped belief that escalates to something.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

The definition based on the Australian Government (2022) was universally popular in survey responses, with no differences based on sector or type of role. The definition based on the Swedish Government (2015) definition was more likely to be ranked as the top definition and in the top two by respondents who have experience of Prevent (28% and 70%) compared with those who do not (19% and 58%).

The definition that was most commonly rated in first place, but which placed third overall when first and second place rankings were combined, was the following:

Extremism is when somebody subscribes so strongly to a political, ideological or religious belief that they do not tolerate other people having different beliefs to theirs.

This definition was rated as the best by over a third (36%) of people, but also by many in third or fourth place (49%). This suggests that those who aligned with this definition tended to do so strongly, despite it not being the most popular definition. As noted above this definition was not discussed during the qualitative research, as it was developed based on practitioner feedback that a lack of tolerance is an important element of extremism.

“I like the mention of mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authorities and social work, In-depth interview)

Despite there being no clear ‘best’ definition of extremism, the UK Government’s definition (Home Office, 2011) was the least popular. Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents rated this as the 1st or 2nd closest to how they would define extremism, with the majority (59%) rating it as the furthest from how they would define extremism of the four definitions. Over three quarters (77%) rated this definition in the bottom two. There were no notable subgroup differences in views for this definition.

The main objection to this definition was the inclusion of the term ‘British values’. Participants struggled to come to a consensus on what a ‘British value’ is and some felt the phrase had colonial associations.

“I’ve always struggled with the British values thing. Maybe 5 or 10 years ago but there’s something racist about the language in that... it’s almost comical when you think about British values, what even are they? Is that sitting in a beer garden on a sunny bank holiday? There’s the whole colonial aspect of it.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

“I don’t know what the fundamental British values are, but [they could instead include] global values, the rule of law and liberty and respect and tolerance.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

However, this definition was more popular amongst those who felt violence should not be included in the definition.

“Most referrals are [about] what people are planning to do, not actual violence done, and it’s about diverting away from that.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

3.7. Understanding of extremism in relation to terrorism and hate crime

After considering existing definitions of extremism, participants in the qualitative discussions were asked about their views on the differences between extremism, terrorism and hate crime.

Terrorism

Participants typically found it difficult to distinguish clearly between extremism and terrorism and often felt that they go ‘hand-in-hand’. This was especially true for public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles. However, introducing ‘terrorism’ to the conversation in qualitative research sessions changed how many participants defined extremism.

Many participants cited violence when defining extremism early on. However, when asked to distinguish between extremism and terrorism, their views changed, with the majority feeling that terrorism was the violent act, with extremism being the underlying belief system.

“Extremism is happening in a person’s head and terrorism is the outward expression of that belief. The physical act is the terrorism.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, In-depth interview)

On the other hand, the consensus on the inclusion of violence was consistently clearer for terrorism. For many, terrorism was centred around the desire to incite fear in others and violence or aggression was a clear part of this.

“Terrorism is a tool that can be used by extremists. But not necessarily all extremists are terrorists.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / Secondary education, In-depth interview)

“Terrorists are always doing physical harm but with extremists are we always clear that it will end in violence? An extremist might not lead on to harming themselves or somebody else, it might all be more intellectual their ideas, rather than taking it forward to an actual event.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, In-depth interview)

Some public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles associated terrorism more with certain religious groups, generally Islamist extremists, and large-scale events that would be reported in the news.

This was less common amongst public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles, who seemed more confident on the distinction between the two. However, views still centred around terrorism being the intent to incite fear, with extremism the belief system.

Hate crime

Similarly, participants found hate crime difficult to distinguish from extremism. Some felt that hate crimes were a more common, sometimes less violent, expression of extremist beliefs, while others separated it from extremism entirely.

There was a sense amongst some that extremist behaviours involved long-term, thought-out processes, whereas hate crimes could arise spontaneously, from any situation and within any sector of the community, although they may be expressions of extremist beliefs.

Public sector practitioners with specific experiences of hate crime, such as police officers, felt there was a pronounced difference between hate crime and extremism, based on the underlying ideology (or lack thereof). Hate crimes were most commonly linked to views discriminating against those with protected characteristics such as racism or homophobia, while extremism tended to be seen as aimed at broader society.

Although not explicit in their responses, there was also a sense that extremism and terrorism felt like issues that affected other people in other areas, whereas hate crime was something that could feasibly occur in their community. Comments from some practitioners gave the impression of a degree of normalisation of hate crime as an issue, making it feel less extreme to these practitioners than terrorism.

“There’s a lot of low-level hate crime that doesn’t go down the route of violence or extremism [...] I can get kids of primary school age committing hate crime and a lot of it is they don’t know what they’re doing. They’re not realising that that is a hate crime, so I would say there is a massive difference myself.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, Mini focus group)

However, public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles were more likely to see hate crime as an expression of extremism, albeit generally a less serious expression of extremist ideologies. Nevertheless, there was still confusion amongst this group as to how they would define hate crime.

“I think hate crime is more on an individual basis [...] but I know a terrorist act can be towards one person as well. [...] Yeah, it’s not all that different, I guess. It’s still, you know, with an ideology.”

(Practitioner with Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

3.8. Conclusions

All participants, including those familiar with Prevent in their roles, struggled to define extremism, while terrorism was felt to be much easier to define. However, those familiar with Prevent were more likely to be able to define extremism in qualitative discussions, and felt confident in this in the survey (42% of practitioners in Prevent managerial roles said they were very confident in knowing what is meant by the term 'extremism' compared with 22% in Prevent non-managerial roles).

Violence (or the potential for it) stemming from extreme views was a top-of-mind association with extremism initially, with views that may lead to or incite violence seen as more clearly extreme than views that would not. When shown examples of various definitions of extremism, public sector practitioners also favoured definitions that referenced violence – although there was little consensus on which best reflected participants' own understandings, aside from consensus that it was not the current UK Government definition.

However, when asked to differentiate between extremism and terrorism, this view shifted. Participants tended to say that terrorism always involved violence, whereas someone could hold extremist views but not be violent themselves.

Terrorism was therefore viewed by public sector practitioners as the most serious form of extremism. Some practitioners used an analogy of a spectrum of extremism, with individuals who hold (but do not act upon) extremist beliefs at one end of the spectrum and those who perpetrate acts of terrorism at the other end.

Practitioners were split as to whether hate crime was considered extremist or not. However, there was consensus that it was a serious issue. For those who used the analogy of a spectrum of extremism, hate crime was generally viewed as being a more serious issue than those who simply hold extremist beliefs (but don't act on them) and less serious than acts of terrorism.

In contrast with defining extremism itself, public sector practitioners found it much easier to explain factors that can lead someone to be vulnerable to extremism. Public sector practitioners often cited multiple factors that might make someone more vulnerable to extremism and there was a strong sense that these factors are often interlinked (e.g., living in poverty was seen to increase the likelihood of an individual being socially excluded, which may then make extremist ideologies more appealing).

4. Views on extremism in Scotland

4.1. Introduction

This section will address the following research questions:

- To what extent do public sector practitioners perceive extremism to be a threat or problem in Scotland? Do they feel that this has changed over time?
- How do public sector practitioners perceive extremism in Scotland to manifest as views, behaviours and actions, particularly in the communities they work in?
- What are public sector practitioners' views on the ideologies or types of extremism that are of most concern or growing concern currently, and why? What are views on the key sources / drivers of these concerns?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they perceive current threats?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns had an impact on what public sector practitioners are seeing in terms of spread of ideologies?

In qualitative discussions, participants were asked to what extent they considered extremism to be a problem in Scotland and in their local areas, and whether they felt this has changed over time. Participants were also asked what types of extremist ideologies they think are present in Scotland, whether this varies (e.g., by region) or has changed over time (including as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns).

In the survey, respondents were asked for their views on the extent of the problem of extremism on a scale from 'no problem at all' to 'a big problem' (with an option for 'don't know') in their local area, Scotland, the rest of the UK and worldwide. Subsequently, respondents were asked the extent to which they feel the threat from extremism has increased or decreased in Scotland in the last five years.

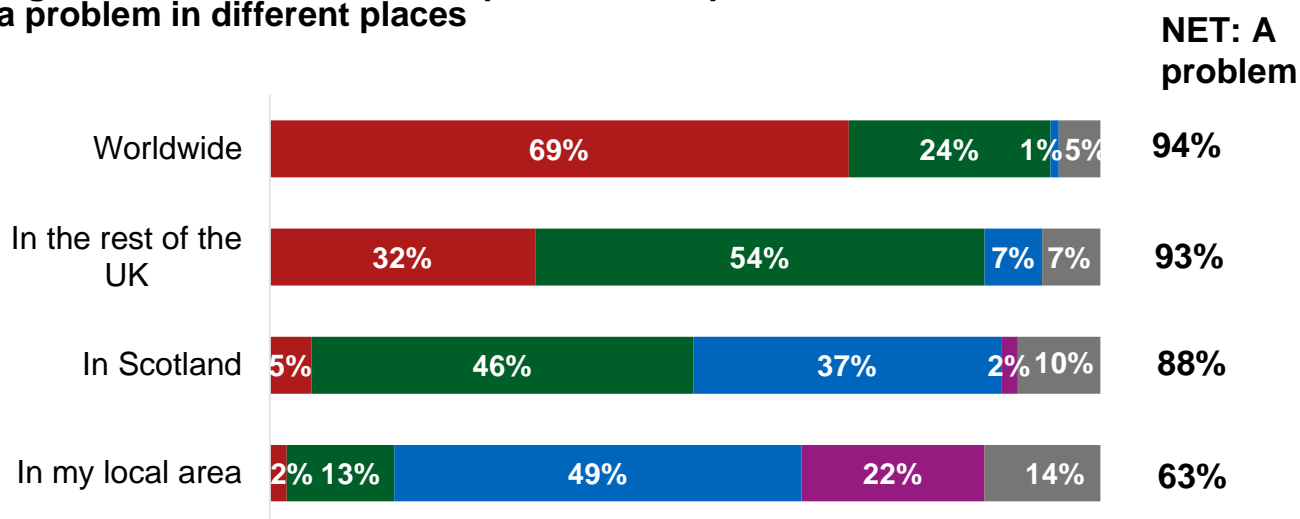
Participants in both the qualitative discussions and the survey were also prompted with a list of groups which could potentially be viewed as extremist. In qualitative discussions, researchers probed around views on the perceived prevalence of the listed groups in Scotland. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate the extent of each in Scotland from 'no problem at all' to 'a big problem' (with an option for 'don't know').

This section will first examine public sector practitioner perceptions of the prevalence of extremism in Scotland, followed by perceptions of the changing picture of extremism in Scotland, then an exploration of perceptions of the types of extremist ideology present in Scotland, including detail from practitioner experiences of extremism, followed by conclusions.

4.2. Perceived prevalence of extremism in Scotland

While public sector practitioners broadly felt that extremism exists in Scotland, it was viewed as less of a problem in Scotland than in the rest of the UK or the world. Practitioners were more likely to answer 'don't know' when asked about the extent to which extremism is a problem in their local area or Scotland more widely. This was particularly the case for public sector practitioners who were less familiar with Prevent in their work.

Figure 4. The extent to which public sector practitioners consider extremism a problem in different places



■ A big problem ■ A moderate problem ■ A minor problem ■ No problem at all ■ Don't know

Q6. How much of a problem do you consider extremism to be in the following places?

Base: All respondents, n=492.

In the survey, almost all public sector practitioners saw extremism as a problem (to some degree) in Scotland (88%), in the rest of the UK (93%) and worldwide (94%). A smaller majority (63%) saw extremism as a problem in their local areas, while over a fifth (22%) felt it was not a problem in their local area at all.

The perceived scale of the problem of extremism in Scotland was far smaller than in the rest of the UK, with nearly nine in ten (86%) seeing extremism as a big or moderate problem in the rest of the UK, compared with half (51%) for Scotland. In the qualitative research, public sector practitioners often compared Scotland to England, particularly larger English cities such as London and Manchester. Many, especially public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles, could more easily point to examples of extremism in England than in Scotland.

This reflected the reasonably high level of uncertainty when it comes to the level of extremism in public sector practitioners' own local areas in the survey (with 14% saying 'don't know') or Scotland (with 10% saying 'don't know'). This was particularly true of those who either had not heard of Prevent or did not feel it was part of their role. A quarter (25%) of this group answered 'don't know' when asked about the extent of extremism in their local area and 17% when asked about Scotland. In contrast, their levels of uncertainty about extremism in the rest of the UK and worldwide were similar to those who felt Prevent was part of their role.

In qualitative discussions, where participants were unsure of the extent of the problem of extremism in their local areas or in Scotland (which were more likely to be practitioners without Prevent-related roles) they often turned to what they had heard in the media. This tended to be stories of extremism in England or worldwide, particularly Islamist extremism, rather than examples from within Scotland.

“In the Borders we don’t tend to think about it very much. If something happens in London or abroad, yes it brings it back into attention but I wouldn’t say it’s the focus here, I haven’t thought about it every day. I think about it when I see the news.”

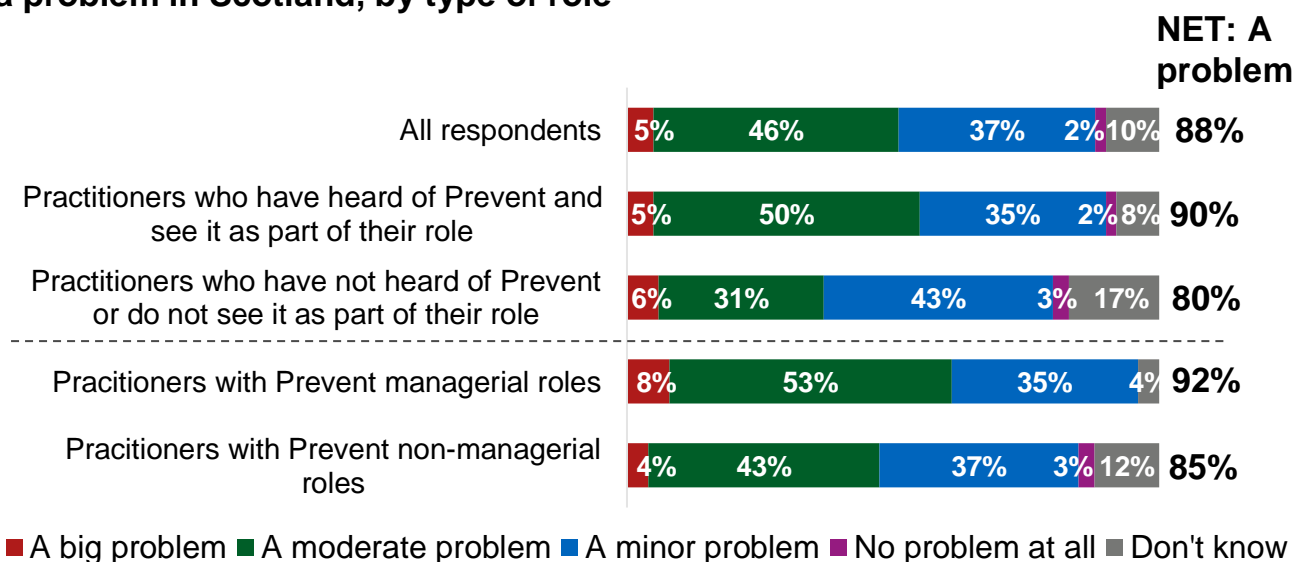
(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

“When terrorist attacks happen, they want the biggest coverage, so they target well known places like London and Manchester.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, Paired in-depth interview)

In contrast, public sector practitioners in Prevent-managerial roles were more likely to see extremism as a problem in Scotland and in the area they work in (detailed figures for each of these questions are covered below). In qualitative discussions, public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles spoke far more confidently about the existence of extremism in Scotland and were able to talk in more depth on the topic.

Figure 5. The extent to which public sector practitioners consider extremism a problem in Scotland, by type of role



Q6. How much of a problem do you consider extremism to be in the following places?

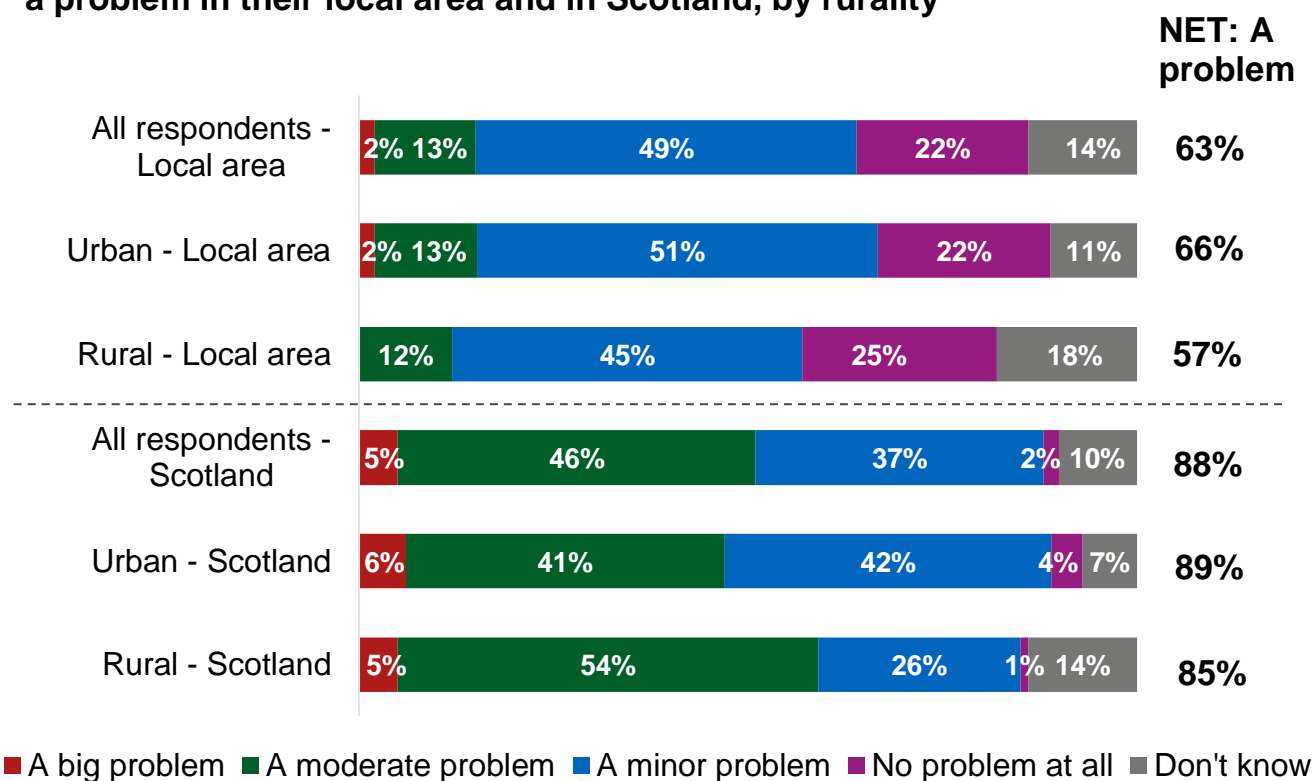
Base: All respondents, n=492; Practitioners who have heard of Prevent and see it as part of their role, n=380; Practitioners who have not heard of Prevent or do not see it as part of their role, n=88; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350.

Almost all public sector practitioners who saw Prevent as part of their role (90%), or who were in a Prevent managerial role (meaning they managed or coordinated responses to Prevent concerns; 96%) saw extremism as a problem in Scotland. In comparison, four fifths (80%) of public sector practitioners who had not heard of Prevent, or did not see it as part of their role, and 85% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles, saw extremism as a problem in Scotland.

Nevertheless, few respondents considered extremism to be a big problem in Scotland. Of those who saw Prevent as part of their role, half (50%) said that extremism was a moderate (rather than big or minor) problem in Scotland. This reflects the sentiment heard from many public sector practitioners in the qualitative research that while extremism exists in Scotland, the problem is not as serious as in other places.

Similarly, when public sector practitioners were asked to what extent they considered extremism to be a problem in their local area, those who saw Prevent as part of their role (68%), or had Prevent managerial roles (75%), were more likely to see extremism as a problem, compared with those who had not heard of Prevent or did not see it as part of their role (42%) or those in Prevent non-managerial roles (59%). Overall, extremism was viewed as an even smaller problem in local areas than in wider Scotland, with over half (51%) of those who see Prevent as part of their roles considering it as only a minor problem.

Figure 6. The extent to which public sector practitioners consider extremism a problem in their local area and in Scotland, by rurality



Q6. How much of a problem do you consider extremism to be in the following places?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Public sector practitioners who work primarily in an urban area, n=178; Public sector practitioners who primarily work in a rural area, n=148.

Public sector practitioners in the qualitative and quantitative research viewed extremism as more likely to be encountered in urban areas. Practitioners working in rural areas were more likely to see extremism as a moderate rather than minor problem compared with those in urban areas. Over half (54%) in rural areas (compared with 41% in urban areas) saw extremism as a moderate problem, and only a quarter (26%) (compared with 42% in urban areas) a minor problem.

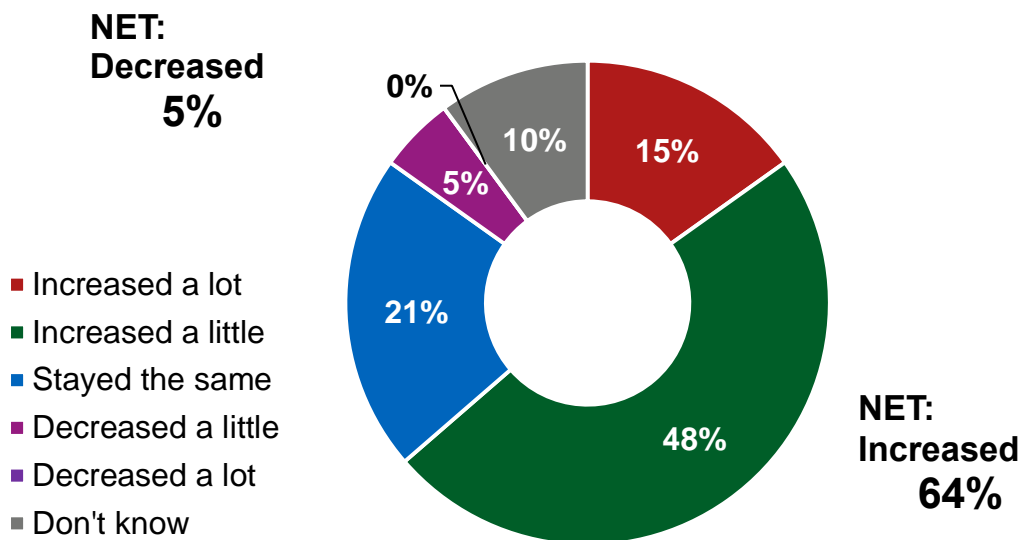
The perception that extremism is more likely to be encountered in urban areas was held both by those working in urban and in rural areas. In the survey, two thirds (66%) of those working in urban areas saw extremism as a problem in their area compared with 57% of those in rural areas (Figure 6). Additionally, public sector practitioners in rural areas were much more likely to answer 'don't know' when asked about the extent of the problem (18%) compared with urban (11%) or mixed or suburban public sector practitioners (15%).

The reasons given for this varied. They included the perception that there is greater opportunity for extremism to develop in areas of larger population; the higher levels of deprivation in cities (which is perceived as a risk factor for vulnerability to being drawn into extremism in section 3.5); and more ethnically 'mixed' communities. On the latter, there was a sense from some that this could lead to tension and hate crimes, while a minority made a link between extremism and ethnic minority and immigrant populations, as is explored in section 4.4).

4.3. Views on the changing picture of extremism in Scotland

There was overwhelming consensus that the threat from extremism has increased in Scotland over the past five years. In the survey, most public sector practitioners (64%) felt the threat has increased, compared with only 5% who felt it has decreased. Public sector practitioners were much more likely to feel the threat has increased a little (48%), rather than a lot (15%).

Figure 7. The perceived level of threat from extremism in Scotland over the last five years, among public sector practitioners



Q7. In the last five years, do you think the threat from extremism has increased or decreased in Scotland?

Base: All respondents, n=492.

Public sector practitioners with experience of Prevent in their roles were more likely to say the threat from extremism has increased in the last five years than those without experience of Prevent (71% compared with 60%). Conversely, those without experience were approximately twice as likely to say they did not know whether the threat had changed than those with experience (12% compared with 7%).

This supports findings from the qualitative research. Public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles tended to see extremism as a problem in Scotland, and immediately noted that the problem was increasing.

These public sector practitioners pointed to young people spending more time online as a key cause of this increase in extremism. Social media in particular was seen as a ‘breeding ground’ for extremism where young people can pick up extremist views and be manipulated into taking or supporting violent action. Some felt there had been an increase in people being radicalised since the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, speculating that people may have felt more isolated, and that young people would have been spending more time online while not in school.

“Online forums are a breeding ground for extreme views and the algorithms [sic] in your computer emphasise that and you’re down a rabbit hole of repeating opinions with no balanced view. I think it will increase. People spend so much time online now and people will say far more extreme things online than face to face.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

“That’s the kind of thing that does concern me, that you’re going to get vulnerable people who can be easily manipulated on social media... It’s not kind of, you know, have six political meetings and then build a bomb, and blow something up. It’s somebody somewhere else, maybe not even in the same country, getting a 14-year-old to go and set fire to a building. That’s where I think you’re going to find most extremism now.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

However, there was a sense among some public sector practitioners familiar with Prevent that any increase in referrals could be in part due to increasing awareness of Prevent rather than a reflection of an increase in extremism. For example, some thought that increases in referrals might happen as a result of increased practitioner awareness about what extremism looks like and what a practitioner should do if they come across someone vulnerable to extremism.

“The Prevent guidance only came out last March so lots of local authorities haven’t implemented Prevent into their safeguarding role or been through a PMAP process with particular individuals. It’s difficult to gauge what [extremism] looks like in Scotland when the guidance is so premature... I think there’s lots [of extremism] out there but more Prevent training delivered will mean more Prevent referrals.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

4.4. Views on the types of extremist attitudes, beliefs or ideologies present in Scotland

Participants in both the qualitative discussions and the survey were prompted with a list of groups. This list was drawn from the work of Michalski (2019), who examined 8,000 terrorist attacks that took place in the UK and the US between 1970 and 2017 and classified them according to their underlying motivation. The groups he identified included:

- Anarchists or anti-government agitators
- Animal rights or environmentalists
- Anti-abortionists
- Leftists or Marxist groups
- Nationalists or separatists
- Racists or hate groups
- Radical Islamist extremists

- Right-wing extremists, religious or otherwise
- Promoters of sectarian violence

This list reflects the ideologies and motivations which underpinned the terror incidents examined by Michalski (2019), but not all groups who adhere to these ideologies or who hold these beliefs are necessarily extremist in nature. Michalski's (2019) list was used to prompt discussion among participants, and is not indicative of the officially adopted position of the Scottish Government, or the view of the researchers. The list was adapted for the purposes of this research, with the addition of 'incels'¹⁰ and small changes to the language used.

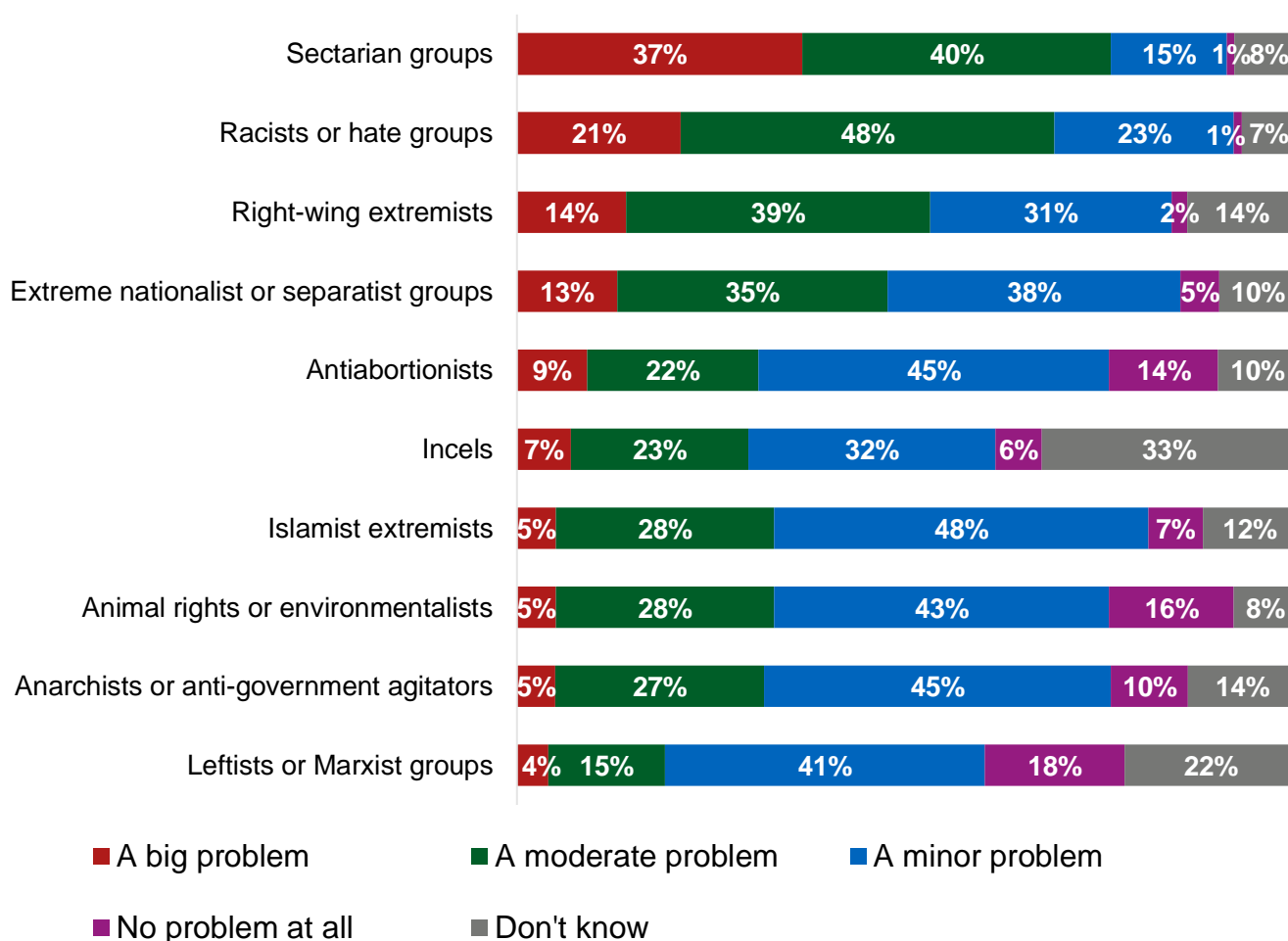
It is important to note that the use of a prompted list may have increased the likelihood of public sector practitioners to define specific ideologies as extremist. For example, some participants may not have defined sectarian or certain racist beliefs as being extremist if they had not been prompted with these beliefs as part of a broader list of extremist views.

Almost all public sector practitioners said that racists or hate groups (92%) and sectarian groups (91%) were a problem in Scotland. Sectarian groups were seen as the biggest problem, with over three quarters (77%) considering these as a big or moderate problem in Scotland, followed by over two thirds (69%) considering racists or hate groups as a big or moderate problem in Scotland.

After racism and sectarianism, extreme nationalist or separatist groups were seen as a problem by 85% of public sector practitioners, right-wing extremism by 84% of public sector practitioners and Islamist extremism by 81% of public sector practitioners.

¹⁰ The incel community is comprised of individuals who feel rejected by women – and arguably society more generally – and turn to the Internet to voice their anger, and often, desire for revenge (Regehr, 2022).

Figure 8. The extent to which public sector practitioners consider different groups to be a problem in Scotland



Q8. How much of a problem do you consider the following to be in Scotland?

Base: All respondents, n=492.

Sectarianism

When asked about sectarianism, almost all public sector practitioners who took part in the qualitative research talked about intra-Christian sectarianism. This was often from experience in their personal lives if they lived in areas where it is prevalent, or from hearing stories in the media if they did not, as opposed to experience in their professional lives.

Most initially linked sectarianism to extremism, although in general, they did not deem their own experience of sectarianism severe enough to be a Prevent concern. In contrast, others brought sectarianism up only when prompted with a list of groups, rather than initially associating it with extremism. This was especially true of public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles who had more experience of extremism in their work. Research previously carried out by the Scottish Government highlighted that there is evidence to suggest that pockets of sectarianism exist in Scotland, with more violent and extreme forms concentrated in particular areas (Scottish Government, 2015).

Despite not always being immediately associated with extremism, there was a strong sense amongst participants that sectarianism is pervasive, and that it has been widespread in Scotland for a significant period of time. However, some participants felt that sectarianism had declined in severity, and linked this to the end of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. Practitioners believed that sectarianism rarely leads to violence in Scotland today. This led to many seeing it as commonplace, but less of a problem than previously. In line with the strong link participants drew between violence and extremism, this meant participants were less likely to classify it as extremist.

“Sectarianism has calmed down, it’s not the issue it was before.”

(Practitioner without Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, Mini focus group)

“Sectarianism is probably, in today’s context, largely a form of discrimination. Historically, it has precipitated violent actions. Northern Ireland comes to mind and some of that is still simmering. At that time, that was extremism, that bred terrorist actions and violence. But sectarianism now is less extreme in my view.”

(Practitioner with Prevent-related role, Health and social care, In-depth interview)

Sectarianism was seen to be most prevalent in the West of Scotland and particularly Glasgow. The survey found that public sector practitioners working in Glasgow and Strathclyde were indeed most likely to see sectarianism as a big problem, with half (51%) seeing it this way, compared with the average of 37%. In the qualitative discussions some spoke about sectarianism in terms of Protestants and Catholics, but for most it was more strongly linked to the ‘Old Firm’¹¹ football rivalry in Glasgow. This rivalry was seen to be present not only in football matches, but in conversations in everyday life with family, friends and colleagues.

When asked in the survey, ‘What experience, if any, have you had with extremism as part of your work?’ a small minority (7%) reported experiences relating to sectarianism. Of all the attitudes, beliefs or ideologies cited in relation to this question, sectarianism was the most common. As noted above, sectarian groups were also seen as the most prevalent problem in Scotland, with 77% of survey respondents viewing this group as a big or moderate problem in Scotland. To a small extent, then, this perception of prevalence may be linked to an experience in work, but from qualitative discussions it appeared that experiences in participants’ personal lives (most often relating to football) were more likely to shape their views of sectarianism.

When participants talked about experiences of sectarianism in the workplace, these were often linked to football, such as witnessing sectarian views expressed at football matches when policing them (often through chants, with alcohol seen as a catalyst for problematic behaviour), or general comments, whether from colleagues

¹¹ The Old Firm is the collective name for the Scottish football clubs Celtic and Rangers.

or the general public, relating to football teams. However, participants also mentioned other experiences such as policing marches and parades (e.g., the Orange Walk), hearing sectarian comments not related to football, or seeing tattoos relating to sectarian groups.

“Sectarianism is something living within the West of Scotland which continues to be an issue. Working in education you sometimes hear comments which reflect an opinion held at home.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Primary / secondary education, Survey)

“Sectarian staff members using the disguise of ‘banter’ to say derogatory things about Catholics or people they assume to be Catholic because of the football team they openly support.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Scottish Prisons Service, Survey)

Participants were divided in their views as to whether expressions of sectarianism constituted extremism or not. While some felt they did as they demonstrated intolerance of other groups, others felt this was generally linked to football, and therefore surface level, or just harmless ‘banter’, rather than reflecting deeply-held beliefs or prejudices. On rare occasions, sectarianism was seen to lead to violence, usually relating to football, such as fighting at a football match. This, for many, was where it may more definitively cross into extremism.

“With extremism there are more victims, it could be fatal. Sectarianism is wrong, but it can be just words, and often people don’t know what they’re saying... historically, it all comes from a dark place, but in today’s world, my experience is people say words they don’t really understand, it’s just because they support a team or something, they don’t intend to really harm people.”

(Practitioner without Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

“With sectarian violence and prejudice, that has probably become more normalised over time, and now is just accepted as football rivalry, when in actual fact it’s rooted in something more sinister.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

Racism

Most public sector practitioners also spoke about the prevalence of racism in Scotland. The proportion of participants who said they had experienced racism in their work was similar to those who had encountered sectarianism through work (6% compared with 7%).

When detailing their experiences of extremism, participants who mentioned racism generally pointed to racist comments they had heard either from the public or colleagues. Less frequently, public sector practitioners mentioned witnessing racially motivated violence, or dealing with a member of the public who had committed such violence.

“Supervising people who have been violent towards people based on racial prejudice.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

“Verbal only, occasional refusal by public to consult with professional of non-white race. Occasional comments from non-white colleagues about racist comments towards them.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

As with sectarianism, the perceived prevalence of racism contributed to some practitioners struggling to determine the extent to which racism was an extremist problem. This difficulty was especially pronounced when it came to racism related to far-right views. These views were definitively considered to be a form of extremism by those who spoke about them, with far-right views often seen as an extremist expression of racism. However, practitioners struggled to define the boundary between racism and extremism; for example, some asked when an offensive racist comment becomes an extremist one.

In the survey, there was a pronounced difference between the proportion of public sector practitioners who saw extremism as a big problem in Scotland (5%), and the proportion who saw sectarianism or racism as a big problem in Scotland (37% and 21% respectively). This suggests that the majority of public sector practitioners do not view these groups as extremist. This may be driven by a perception that sectarianism and racism are more commonplace in Scottish society.

“Working with older adults, you hear racist views frequently, but never enough to pass on concerns or think of extremism as they are unlikely to act on it in a violent way or share their views.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

“Certainly, where I live there isn’t a great deal [of extremism]. That may be different elsewhere. There’s more sectarianism going on.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

Public sector practitioners also felt that these issues would be difficult to completely eradicate. This appeared to be due to their perceived prevalence and scale, as well as a desire to focus on attitudes, beliefs or ideologies that were seen as more extreme, such as Islamist extremism or, for practitioners with greater experience of extremism and Prevent in their work, right-wing extremism.

There was a sense that racism and sectarianism were not usually seen to lead to violence, which many felt was a key component of extremism. Almost by definition of their pervasiveness, racism and sectarianism were seen to exist in society without leading to violence most of the time. In contrast, Islamist extremism was seen to be less prevalent in Scotland, but most associations with it assumed that it would lead to violence.

“Racism will always be an issue, but again that’s also getting better and I’m not seeing it as a big problem anymore.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

“It’s always been there. If you go to a Rangers / Celtic game, there are huge numbers of fans chanting sectarian abuse that is probably seen as too many people to arrest at that given time.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

“I don’t see [extremism] as a massive problem in Scotland. Are people racist? Absolutely. Are they sectarian? Absolutely. But thank God up until now there seems to be a lack of real appetite to go from bigotry and sectarianism to something that is much worse and has a violent aspect to it, and also an organised aspect to it.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, In-depth interview)

Right-wing extremism

Most public sector practitioners saw all of the listed groups as a problem. However, right-wing extremism was seen as a far smaller problem in Scotland than racism and sectarianism. Only 14% of public sector practitioners saw right-wing extremists as a big problem, compared with 37% for sectarian groups and 21% for racists or hate groups.

Despite this, when right-wing extremism was discussed in the qualitative research, it was seen more definitively as a form of extremism than racism or sectarianism where it did exist, as the views were seen to be less commonplace and were also seen as more likely to lead to violence.

In the qualitative research, public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles felt that right-wing extremism was the main form of extremism present in Scotland today. Usually, they were drawing from their own experience, often the experience of seeing Prevent referrals for right-wing extremism increase. Participants believed that young people spending an increasing amount of time online was an important causal factor in increasing right-wing extremism. As discussed earlier, this was considered to be a crucial space where extremism is spread, particularly right-wing extremism.

In contrast, public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles were far less likely to mention right-wing extremism or to be able to talk about it in detail. Those without direct experience of Prevent were more likely to draw on examples of extremism covered in the media (particularly Islamist extremism).

“Right-wing extremism is massively on the rise. Percentage wise there has been an increase of 400%. In the last 3 years, we’ve gone from 3 cases to 48. That’s a massive increase. It is a problem.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

“Right-wing is on the rise. That’s what we’ve seen here. Of 11 referrals, 10 were right-wing.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

The survey found that public sector practitioners who see Prevent as part of their role (although not necessarily having a designated Prevent element to their role – see section 6.3 for more detail) were more likely to consider right-wing extremism to be a problem (87%), and in particular a big or moderate problem (56%), than public sector practitioners who had not heard of Prevent or did not see it as part of their role (75% and 44% respectively). The latter were twice as likely to answer ‘don’t know’ when asked about the extent of the problem of right-wing extremism in Scotland (22% compared with 11% of public sector practitioners who see Prevent as part of their role).

A very small proportion (4%) of the sample reported experiences of right-wing extremism in their work, the third most common attitude, belief or ideology cited after sectarianism and racism. Some public sector practitioners were able to give clear examples of right-wing extremist behaviour and symbols they had experienced. Generally these examples related to Nazism or neo-Nazism, such as displaying swastikas, reading books, or expressing admiration for Adolf Hitler.

When asked about experiences of extremism, those who had experience of right-wing extremist views often mentioned other potentially offensive views, from sectarian to misogynistic to anti-LGBTQ views, suggesting that those who hold right-wing extremist views often hold other extreme views. Some mentioned young people as particularly vulnerable to right-wing extremist ideologies, and attributed the growth of these, along with other potentially offensive views, to engagement with extremist content on the internet.

“Working with young people who identify with incel ideologies and have been influenced by others, mostly online. Use of racist language, Nazi iconography and the demonstration of intolerance of LGBTQ individuals.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Primary / Secondary education, Survey)

“A patient of mine lived with a grandson, who was referred to Prevent. He expressed extreme right-wing, Nazi and racist viewpoints, has swastika flags in his bedroom. He never expressed these opinions in front of me, only his grandmother told me about them.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Health and social care, Survey)

Islamist extremism

Throughout qualitative research sessions discussing extremism, public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles often discussed examples of Islamist extremism, but had rarely experienced this directly. Islamist extremism was seen definitively to be a form of extremism as respondents associated violent events such as Islamist terror attacks with the concept of Islamist extremism.

A few public sector practitioners also made a link between extremism and immigration or ethnic minority populations. This small group of practitioners suggested in qualitative discussions that places with larger ethnic minority populations are more likely to have a significant extremist problem than those with smaller ethnic minority populations (such as Scotland compared with England or rural areas compared with urban areas).

While some practitioners articulated these views in more nuanced ways, referencing how religious or ethnic minority groups may be marginalised within society and therefore more vulnerable to radicalisation, a small number of public sector practitioners made statements that were explicitly prejudiced against Muslims.

However, public sector practitioners did not feel that Islamist extremism was particularly prevalent in Scotland, as the main examples of Islamist extremism that they could recall had taken place in England or other parts of the world. Although 81% of public sector practitioners said they saw Islamist extremism as a problem in Scotland, just under half (48%) saw it as a minor problem, compared with 33% seeing it as a big or moderate problem. In response to the open question around experiences of extremism in the survey, only a handful of public sector practitioners reported experiences with Islamist extremism in their work.

Public sector practitioners who saw Prevent as part of their roles were more likely to see Islamist extremism as a minor problem in Scotland (50%) and less likely to see it as a big problem (4%) than those who had not heard of Prevent or did not see it as part of their role (38% saw it as a minor problem, 10% as a big problem). The latter were more likely to be uncertain about the extent of the problem, with 19% saying they ‘don’t know’ compared with 9% of those seeing Prevent as part of their roles.

This suggests that public sector practitioners who were more familiar with Prevent as part of their roles were more likely to feel certain about the extent of the problem

of Islamist extremism, and to see it as less of a problem than public sector practitioners less familiar with Prevent as part of their roles.

Extreme nationalist or separatist groups

‘Extreme nationalist or separatist groups’, which was terminology presented to participants without any prior definition, were seen to be almost as problematic as right-wing extremism, with 85% seeing the former and 84% the latter as a problem in Scotland and 48% seeing the former as a big or moderate problem, compared with 53% for the latter. Participants tended to describe anti-English sentiment, usually related to the Scottish independence debate, when referring to such groups. However, as with racism and sectarianism, in contrast to right-wing extremism, there was a sense that while these groups exist and the views may be extreme, they are unlikely to lead to more concerning forms of extremism such as violence and/or acts of terrorism.

“I had never thought of nationalist as being extreme. You can have extreme views but not act out on them.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

Other groups

The greatest level of uncertainty was around the prevalence of ‘incels’ and leftist / Marxist groups, with a third (32%) and a fifth (22%) of public sector practitioners saying they did not know the extent of the problem in Scotland for these two groups respectively. In qualitative discussions, leftist / Marxist groups were generally understood as a category, but broadly not seen to be a big source of extremism in Scotland. In the survey, nearly one fifth (18%) of public sector practitioners saw leftist / Marxist groups as ‘no problem at all’, the highest proportion across the groups listed. On the other hand, there was generally low awareness of what ‘incels’ are, with public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles more likely to be aware of them, and consider them a problem than those not in Prevent-related roles.

Several public sector practitioners who were responsible for dealing with Prevent referrals mentioned ‘incels’ as an increasingly prevalent group in the qualitative research, often before being prompted with the list of possible extremist groups. In contrast, in discussions with public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles, ‘incels’ did not come up until prompted, and few were aware of this group at that point. Although more public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles were aware of ‘incels’ and some could point to examples of ‘incel’ ideology or related terror acts, most did not bring this group up, or were not aware of them when prompted.

“I read about this and in America it seems to be quite strong, but a lot of the bad things about America may come here later, so we may get it in a few years’ time.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Primary / Secondary education, Mini focus group)

“The rise of that I’ve been more aware of certainly. For example, the Chad or Stacy¹² language used by incel community.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

This was reflected in the survey, with public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles (i.e., those with a responsibility to manage or coordinate a response to Prevent concerns) more likely to see ‘incels’ as a problem in Scotland than those in Prevent non-managerial roles (71% compared with 57%). The results were similar for those with experience of Prevent in their roles compared with those without (72% compared with 57% seeing it as a problem). Additionally, public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles (24%) and those with experience of Prevent (24%) were less likely to say ‘don’t know’ than those in Prevent non-managerial roles (36%) or those without experience (35%) about the prevalence of ‘incels’.

Other suggested types of extremism in Scotland mentioned by public sector practitioners beyond the list presented to them included groups relating to LGBTQ rights (mostly citing homophobia or transphobia, but a few citing ‘pro-LGBT drives’ or ‘transgender rights groups’) and ‘mixed or unclear’ (as described by participants) attitudes, beliefs or ideologies.

Although mixed or unclear beliefs or ideologies were only mentioned by a few police public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles, it was notable as they were public sector practitioners who work closely with Prevent referrals, and saw this as a prominent and growing concern. Of the Prevent referrals in Scotland over the period of April 2021 to March 2022, the most common type of concern related to a mixed, unstable or unclear ideology (54%), defined as ‘instances where the ideology presented involves a combination of elements from multiple ideologies (mixed), shifts between different ideologies (unstable), or where the individual does not present a coherent ideology yet may still pose a terrorism risk (unclear)’, followed by right-wing extremism (31%) (Police Scotland, 2023b). There appears to be a lack of awareness amongst public sector practitioners about this type of concern.

“The majority of referrals I see are now unclear or mixed ideologies and right-wing... People are just bringing together different ideologies and picking the bits that suit them.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

¹² Within the incel community, popular men and women are referred to as Chads and Stacys Regehr (2022).

4.5. Conclusions

Extremism was seen to be a problem in Scotland but was perceived to be a much smaller problem for Scotland than the rest of the UK and the rest of the world. There was also a clear perception that extremism is an increasing problem in Scotland. However, some in Prevent-related roles questioned whether this was due to increasing awareness and knowledge of Prevent, rather than a genuine rise in the prevalence of extremism.

Amongst public sector practitioners there was a relatively high level of uncertainty about the prevalence of extremism in their own local areas and in Scotland more widely compared with further afield. This was particularly the case for those who were less familiar with the Prevent aspect of their roles, suggesting that their perceptions were less likely to be drawn from their own experience. Instead, these practitioners often referred to large-scale terrorist events outside of their own experience.

Racists or hate groups and sectarian groups were seen as the most prevalent types of problematic beliefs within Scotland that were tested in the survey. However, they were not always classed as extremist, likely due to perceptions that these attitudes and beliefs are both commonplace and that they do not frequently lead to violence and/or acts of terrorism. Conversely, Islamist extremism was seen as very uncommon in Scotland, and was usually associated with violence and/or acts of terrorism. A small number of public sector practitioners expressed explicitly prejudiced ideas when discussing Islamist extremism.

There were differences in perceptions about the prevalence of extremist ideologies in Scotland between public sector practitioners who were more familiar and those who were less familiar with Prevent as part of their roles. Those who were more familiar were more likely to cite right-wing extremism as a big problem in Scotland than those who were less familiar. Similarly, only a handful of public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles who worked closely with Prevent referrals mentioned mixed, unstable and unclear concerns as being prevalent in Scotland.

Conversely, public sector practitioners were more likely to see Islamist extremism as a big problem in Scotland if they had not heard of Prevent or did not see it as part of their role.

5. Public sector practitioners' experiences of extremism in their work

5.1. Introduction

This section will address the following research question:

- To what extent have public sector practitioners observed or experienced extremism in Scotland?

In both the qualitative and the quantitative research, before being shown any definition of extremism, public sector practitioners were asked if they had ever dealt with extremism as part of their work. In the qualitative discussions, a time frame of the last five years was specified.

In the survey, respondents were told that their answer 'could include observing behaviour that is motivated by extremist views'. This instruction was designed to make the survey easier to complete, rather than to dictate how respondents described their experience with either extremism or Prevent, and no further prompting was given, in order to draw out participants' unprompted responses.

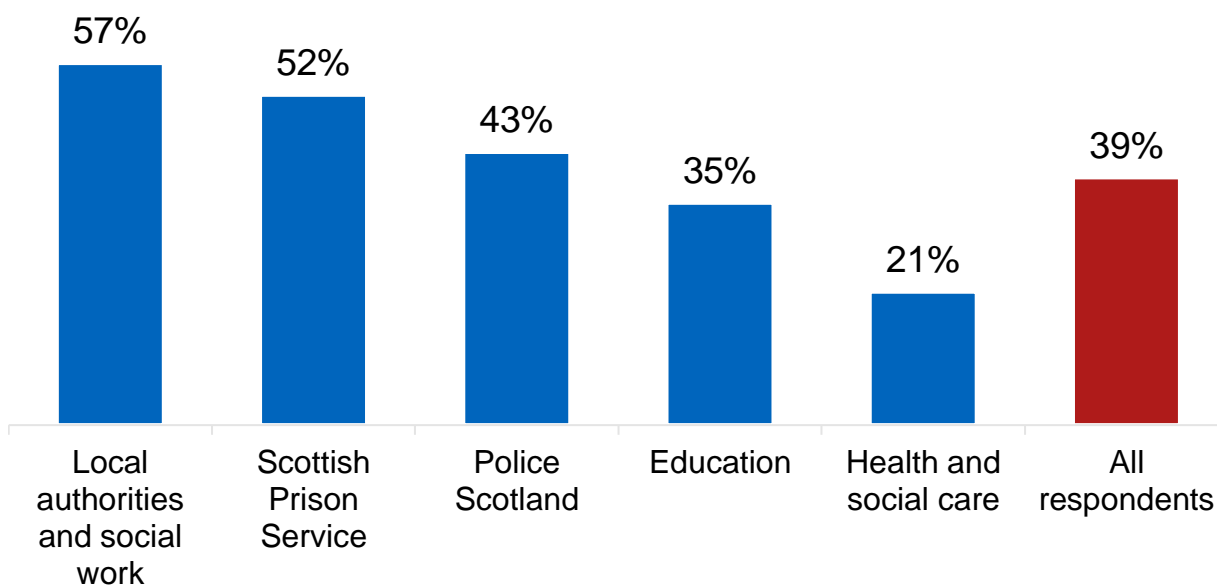
This section will cover the extent to which public sector practitioners reported an experience of extremism at work in the survey, including differences by job sector and role type. The section then explores the details of the experiences reported by public sector practitioners in both the quantitative and qualitative samples, starting with the personal characteristics and circumstances relating to the individual of concern, then turning to any actions and behaviours cited, and any detail on the setting of the experience. Finally, the conclusions of the section will be set out.

5.2. Prevalence of experiences of extremism

In the survey, approximately two fifths of public sector practitioners (39%) reported having had personal experiences of extremism in a work setting. Public sector practitioners who reported an experience were more likely to talk about the attitude, belief or ideology they encountered when describing their experience than any other aspects of the experience, such as the behaviours witnessed, where it occurred or who was involved. The attitudes, beliefs or ideologies encountered are discussed in section 4.4, meaning this section focuses on the other aspects of the experience that were mentioned.

As shown in Figure 9, public sector practitioners working in local authorities and social work were most likely to report having had an experience of extremism (57%). Public sector practitioners in this sector, along with the prison and police sectors (52% and 43% respectively) were significantly more likely to report an experience of extremism than those in education (35%) and health and social care (21%).

Figure 9. The proportion of public sector practitioners who reported experiences of extremism, by sector

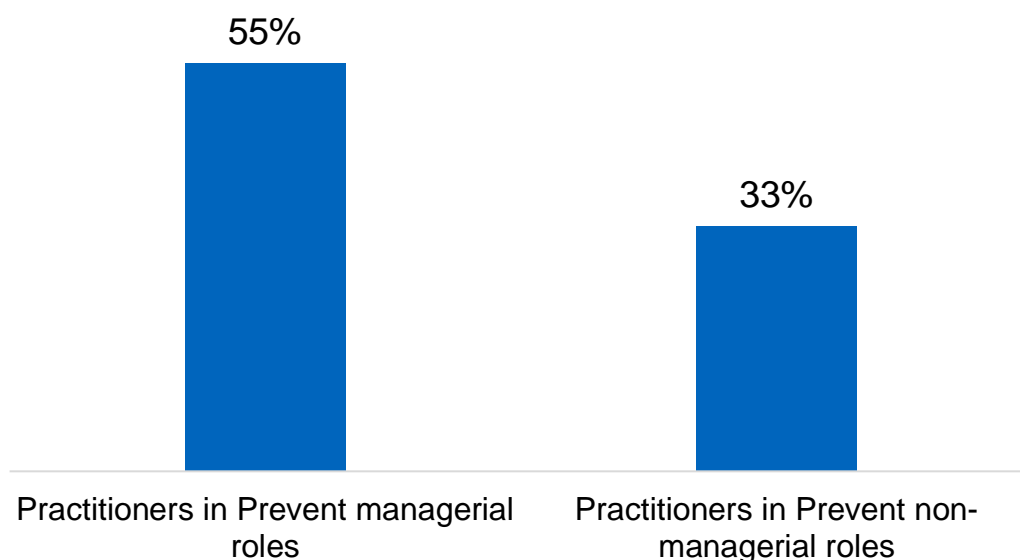


Q9. What experience, if any, have you had with extremism as part of your work?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

As shown in Figure 10, public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles were significantly more likely to have had an experience of extremism than those in Prevent non-managerial roles (55% compared with 33%).

Figure 10. The proportion of public sector practitioners who reported experiences of extremism, by role



Q9. What experience, if any, have you had with extremism as part of your work?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles n=350.

In the qualitative research, practitioners with Prevent-related roles were similarly much more likely than those without a Prevent-related role to have had an experience relating to extremism in a work setting. This was a result of the fact that Prevent was a key aspect of their role. However, the experiences they recounted were often Prevent concerns being reported to them by colleagues rather than their own direct experiences of extremism. In contrast, experiences cited by practitioners without Prevent-related roles were more likely to be direct experiences with a member of the public.

5.3. Personal characteristics and circumstances

When public sector practitioners described their experiences of extremism as part of their work, many referred to the individual characteristics of the person who exhibited the extremist views, or to their personal circumstances.

The most common characteristic referenced was age, in particular that the experience involved a child (often a school pupil) or young person; for example, a child using racist language in school. According to the Prevent referral data (Police Scotland, 2023b), of the 91 referrals made to Prevent in Scotland in 2021/22, the largest proportion (37%) were for individuals aged 15-20 years.

Several experiences also referenced people who were felt to be vulnerable to being radicalised, for example, individuals who are isolated or lonely. A small proportion of experiences specifically cited individuals with mental health difficulties or autism, although it was not clear whether named conditions were officially diagnosed or simply practitioners' own assumptions.

“[A] young person with autism with whom I work expresses a desire to gain an authoritarian position within Scotland to create his fantasy of a ‘white, Celtic, ethno-state’. He believes English people are persecuting Scotland. He is also afraid of Islamic terrorism. He idolizes Adolf Hitler who he admires for having gained strong control and leadership over his country.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Primary / secondary education, Survey)

Due to the nature of their work, those in the prison sector presented specific examples involving those in custody, such as attempts to radicalise other prisoners, or using extremist language (for example, racist slurs) in an attempt to threaten prison workers.

These findings are supported by the qualitative interviews, where public sector practitioners brought up similar themes around vulnerability.

5.4. Actions and behaviours

While very few public sector practitioners referenced specific actions or behaviours in describing their experiences of extremism, when behaviours were referenced, these included verbal abuse (for example, in-person and online harassment of

individuals within the LGBT community), spreading or promoting extreme views, and attending marches, demonstrations and rallies.

Public sector practitioners in the qualitative research also spoke about actions and behaviours across various settings, which included drawing swastikas, echoing extreme opinions from online sources, and idolising extreme right-wing political figures.

“I had a school once where two boys were writing stuff about Oswald Mosley on their Chromebooks and they were drawing swastikas and National Action logos. The logo is where we thought there’s a bit more knowledge there, as lots of kids just draw swastikas.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

5.5. Setting

Schools (typically secondary schools) were the most common setting reported in the research when detailing an experience of extremism at work, despite education practitioners being one of the least likely sectors to report an experience with extremism. In addition to education practitioners working in schools, practitioners working in the police and local authority sectors often mentioned behaviour that was identified in a school when detailing their experiences. For example, one police officer spoke about being the local liaison officer for schools in their area, meaning they get contacted if education practitioners have a concern. Another officer described that part of their role is to raise awareness of extremism in schools, and they may identify extremist behaviour that way.

Furthermore, schools were seen as places where public sector practitioners can intervene before behaviours become more extreme. For example, one police officer spoke about calling social workers or someone with a designated Prevent-related role at the school for guidance if a young person exhibited troubling behaviours, rather than immediately making a Prevent referral. This is because they felt the school would have more information on the individual and be better equipped to deal with the case.

“School link officers [are roles more likely to deal with extremism]. Concerning views are particularly obvious in younger people and they might not be so guarded in what they say. They might not conceal it as well as adults, who might be worried about what people might think.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

A finding that came out more strongly in the qualitative research is the extent to which homes can serve as a setting for extremist views and behaviours to develop amongst adults, and be identified. It was suggested that this can be identified by social workers or police officers on home visits, for example.

“We speak to a lot of people in their own homes, so you get quite an idea of their views and lifestyles by just what is around them. Any kind of worrying imagery, logos, singing certain [football] songs and so on.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

5.6. Conclusions

Approximately two fifths of survey respondents (39%) reported an experience of extremism as part of their work. Public sector practitioners working in local authorities were most likely to have reported an experience of extremism at work, followed by those in the prison and police sectors.

Public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles were also more likely than those in Prevent non-managerial roles to report an experience (55% compared with 33%).

Public sector practitioners' descriptions of their experiences were more likely to mention the attitudes, beliefs or ideologies behind the extremism than refer to specific behaviours.

The most common setting for an experience of extremism referenced in both the qualitative and quantitative research was in schools, which was mentioned not only by education practitioners, but also those working in the police and local authority sectors.

6. Understanding the Prevent duty

6.1. Introduction

This section will address the following research question:

- To what extent are public sector practitioners aware of the Prevent duty, and how well do they feel they understand it?

In the qualitative discussions, participants were asked about their familiarity with the Prevent duty and their understanding of it. Participants were prompted with a definition of the Prevent duty if they were not aware of it.

Towards the start of the survey, respondents were asked to choose one or more options (or 'none of the above') from a list of possible aspects of their role and responsibilities:

- Working directly with the general public to deliver frontline services
- Working directly with vulnerable members of the general public to deliver frontline services
- Managing or supporting colleagues who work directly with the general public to deliver frontline services
- Reporting safeguarding concerns (e.g., those at risk of abuse or neglect)
- Reporting Prevent concerns
- Managing or coordinating a response to safeguarding concerns made by colleagues
- Managing or coordinating a response to Prevent concerns made by colleagues

Respondents were later shown a definition of the Prevent duty:

Prevent is the first of the four 'P's of the UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, known as CONTEST; Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare. The purpose of Prevent is to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism'.

Public sector practitioners working within certain sectors have a duty to pay due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, which is called the 'Prevent duty'.

Following this, they were asked to what extent they think it is part of their job and its level of importance to their job, with the option to say that they had never heard of Prevent.

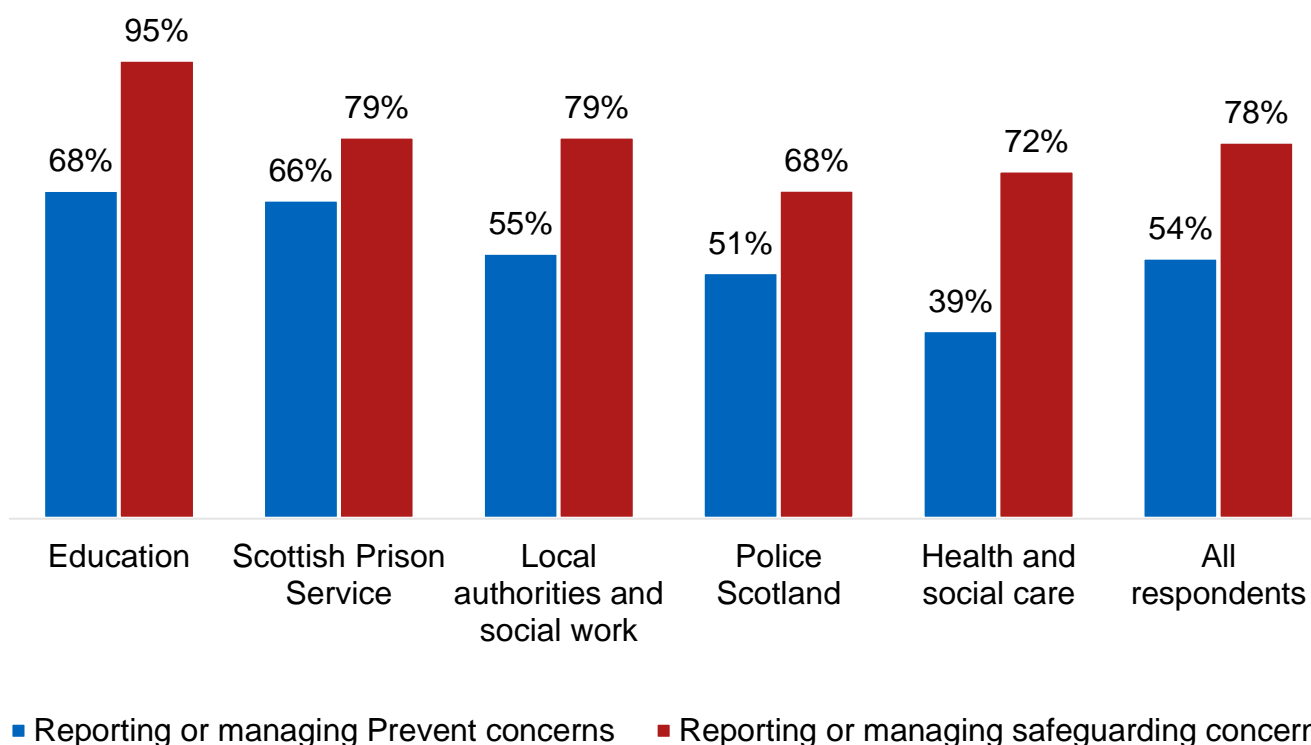
This section will cover initial awareness and understanding of safeguarding and Prevent duties as part of public sector practitioners' roles followed by awareness after being prompted with an explanation of the Prevent duty. Then perceived importance of the Prevent duty as part of public sector practitioners' roles will be

explored, followed by understanding of the Prevent duty after being prompted with the explanation, before turning to conclusions for the section.

6.2. Initial awareness and understanding of safeguarding and Prevent

Initial awareness of Prevent amongst public sector practitioners in the quantitative sample varied greatly, from those who had never heard of Prevent, through to those who had designed and delivered Prevent training to colleagues. A significant minority (16%) of respondents reported never having heard of Prevent.

Figure 11. The percentage of public sector practitioners who raised the following as part of their role and responsibility



Q3. Which of the following, if any, are part of your role and responsibilities?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

As shown in Figure 11, over three quarters (78%) of public sector practitioners listed reporting or managing safeguarding concerns as part of their role. In contrast, just over half (54%) of all public sector practitioners saw Prevent concerns as part of their role before having been prompted with an explanation of the Prevent duty.

Public sector practitioners in the prison and education sectors (66% and 68% respectively) were significantly more likely to consider reporting or managing Prevent concerns as part of their role than public sector practitioners working in the police and health and social care sectors (51% and 39% respectively).

In the qualitative research, when asked about their day-to-day role and responsibilities, the Prevent duty did not spring to mind for most people unless it was central to their role. For example, when asked to outline their job role, around half of those with Prevent-related roles mentioned Prevent without being prompted, while none of those without a Prevent-related role spontaneously mentioned extremism or Prevent.

Similarly, safeguarding duties more broadly were not felt to be a key part of most public sector practitioners' day-to-day roles, but instead something that comes into play if a concern comes up. The difference was that public sector practitioners were more likely to see safeguarding as part of their role, even if not a key part, than Prevent.

However, the extent to which public sector practitioners were likely to prioritise safeguarding depended on their job sector and interaction with the public. Education practitioners were most likely to see safeguarding as part of their role (95%), compared with police (68%), health and social care (72%), prisons (79%) and local authority (79%) practitioners. Safeguarding was considered to be a more key aspect of roles by public sector practitioners who were working with vulnerable children or adults.

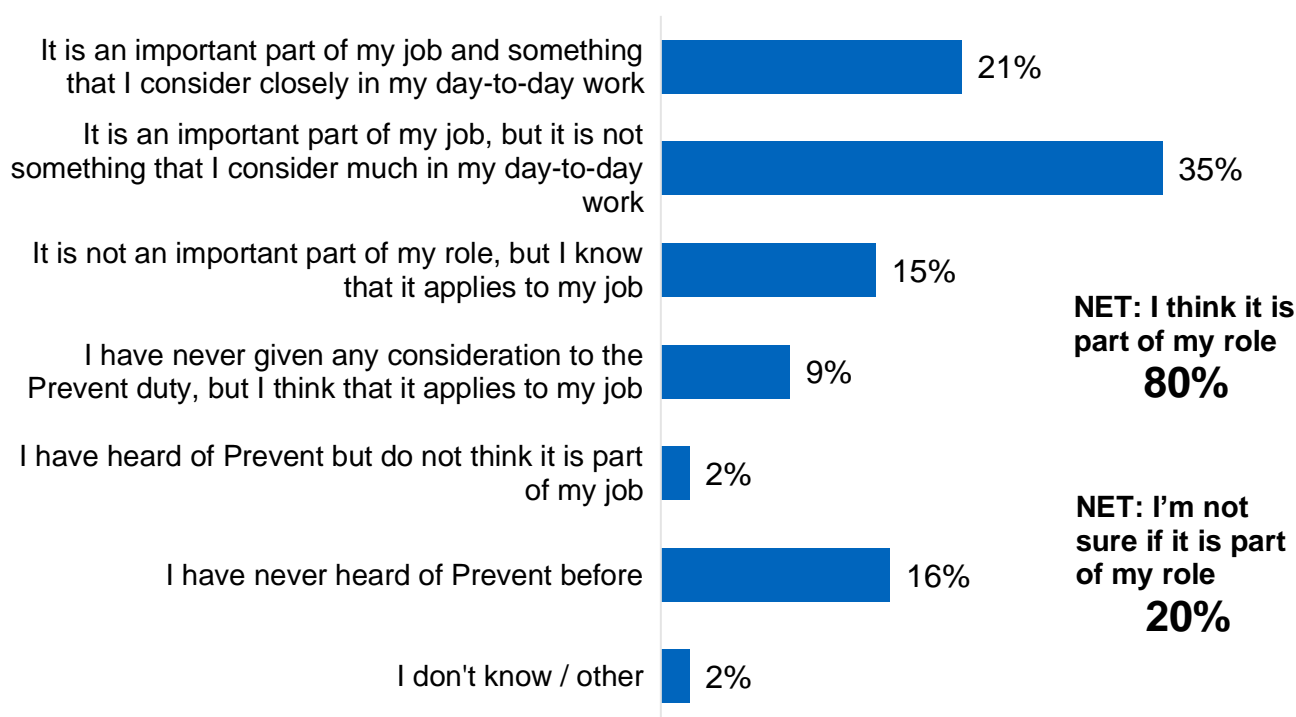
[How does Prevent fit into your role?] "It doesn't. It's an extracurricular responsibility. It's alongside any other mental health, safeguarding, plagiarism concerns. Ok, just add that to the list. It would not be given any separate weighting or importance."

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

6.3. Prompted awareness of how the Prevent duty fits into their role

Following the provision of a description of the Prevent duty, a greater proportion of respondents saw Prevent as part of their role. Before being shown the definition, half (54%) of respondents said that they thought Prevent was part of their role, compared with eight in ten (80%) respondents after being shown the definition. This was higher than the proportion of those considering safeguarding part of their role (78%).

Figure 12. The extent to which public sector practitioners consider the Prevent duty part of their job



Q10. To what extent do you think that the Prevent duty is a part of your job?

Base: All respondents, n=492.

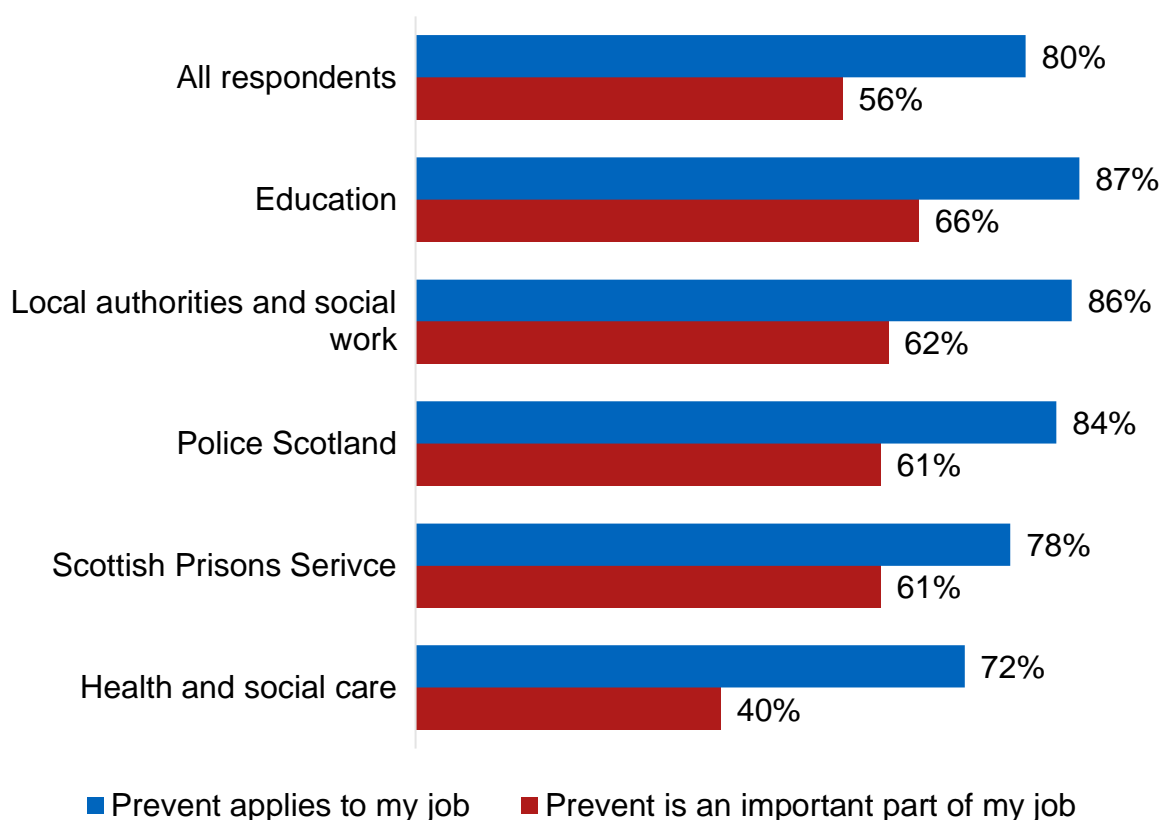
Just over one in five (21%) respondents said they consider the Prevent duty closely in their day-to-day work, with a larger proportion (35%) not considering it much day-to-day. As has been noted in relation to safeguarding, an obligation can be seen as part of a practitioner’s role, even if it does not form a central aspect of their day-to-day work.

In the qualitative research, public sector practitioners with roles that did not involve managing safeguarding or Prevent concerns were much less likely to have heard specifically about Prevent in the context of their work and some were uncertain exactly what the Prevent duty entailed.

Practitioners in the health and social care and prison sectors were less likely to have heard of Prevent (23% and 19% respectively), with other sectors ranging from 10-14%. This reflects findings from the qualitative discussions, in which health and social care workers without Prevent-related roles were least likely to be aware of Prevent or recall having taken part in Prevent training. There was also a sense that it was not an important priority in their roles.

Just over one in five (21%) respondents said they consider the Prevent duty closely in their day-to-day work. More broadly, eight in ten (80%) felt the Prevent duty applied to their job, while just over half (56%) saw it as an important part.

Figure 13. Perceived importance of the Prevent duty to practitioners' roles, by sector



Q10. To what extent do you think that the Prevent duty is a part of your job?

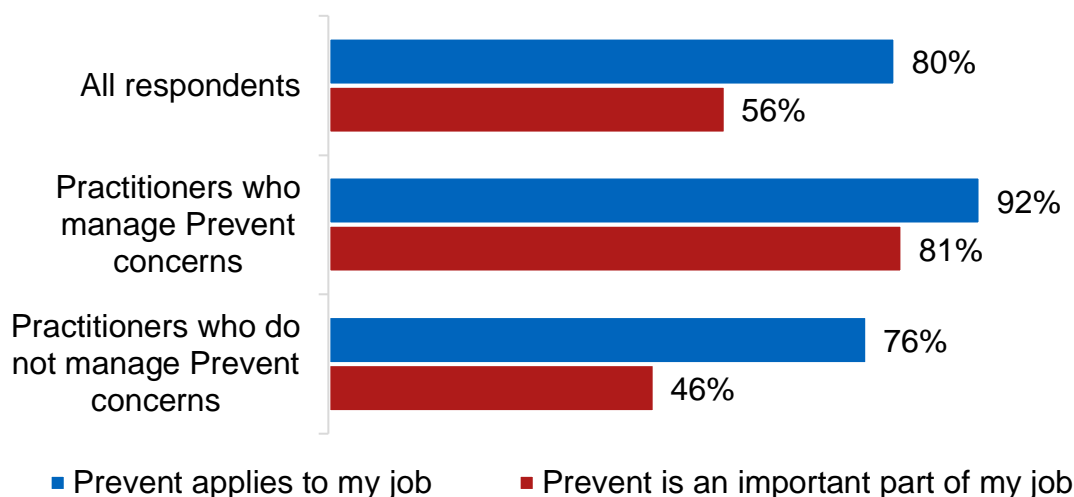
Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

The biggest discrepancy between awareness that the Prevent duty applies to their role and its perceived importance was in the health and social care sector, with approximately seven in ten (72%) being aware that it applies to their job, but less than half (40%) seeing it as an important part of their role. This again mirrors qualitative findings that public sector practitioners in this sector were least aware of Prevent, and felt it was not an important priority in their roles.

Meanwhile there were substantial differences between those in Prevent managerial roles (i.e., with a responsibility for managing or coordinating a response to Prevent concerns) compared with Prevent non-managerial roles with regards to the perceived importance of the Prevent duty in their role. As displayed in Figure 14, almost all respondents who held Prevent managerial roles felt Prevent was an important part of their role (81%).

In contrast, while three quarters (76%) of respondents in Prevent non-managerial roles said that Prevent applied to their role, only 46% felt it was an important part of their role.

Figure 14. Perceived importance of the Prevent duty to practitioners' roles, by type of role



Q10. To what extent do you think that the Prevent duty is a part of your job?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350.

This was also reflected in the qualitative research, where public sector practitioners without a responsibility for managing safeguarding or Prevent concerns occasionally understood that Prevent was part of their job role and responsibilities, but did not view it as priority in their day-to-day work or give it any greater weighting relative to other similar tasks, such as safeguarding.

[Are you familiar with Prevent?] “Not really, I just saw from the information pack, I’ve not looked it up. It’s important to be aware of and have training on it. Day-to-day, probably not really part of my role. I need to be aware, but it doesn’t need to be at the front of my daily role.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

“We are all aware of Prevent to varying degrees. I’ve had limited Prevent training and done bits and pieces. But because you don’t use it very often, you have it in the background.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

6.5. Prompted understanding of delivering the Prevent duty

In the qualitative research, public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles had a far clearer sense of how to deliver the Prevent duty than those without Prevent-related roles. This high level of understanding was due to the Prevent-specific aspect of their roles, rather than being exposed to extremism naturally in their day-to-day work. For example, some admitted knowing nothing about Prevent before taking on their Prevent-related role.

While public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles clearly understood the stages involved in a Prevent referral, not all of them had experienced one. They were also able to name specific roles within their sector or organisation who would respond to a referral.

Even amongst these public sector practitioners, there was a scale of involvement in Prevent from being aware and having it on their radar, but it not being their entire role, to being hired into a role because of their knowledge of and experience with Prevent.

“My build up to Prevent was all part and parcel of when I joined [redacted]. [...] One of the reasons I was employed in this job was because I knew about Prevent.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

In contrast, public sector practitioners without a Prevent-related role who had heard of Prevent tended to have done so through general safeguarding training and were typically not able to describe the specifics of the Prevent duty. They knew they had a responsibility to be broadly aware of extremism issues and who to raise these with, but were unclear of their exact level of responsibility and what would happen following a Prevent referral.

In general, public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles were not aware of the process of a Prevent referral, or what would happen once someone else in the organisation took the concern on. There was a broad sense of what to do, for example, ‘we call social work for guidance’, or ‘my role is to make sure the next step is in place’, but participants did not have a clear understanding of what would happen next, apart from one practitioner in social work who worked more closely with Prevent. Although public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles are not expected to have an understanding of the referral process as part of the Prevent duty, for some this contributed to a lack of clarity around the specifics of the Prevent duty, leading these practitioners to feel less confident about their own knowledge and ability in this area.

“I think I would be listened to [if reporting a concern] but whether any action would be taken, I don’t know. Sometimes I feel we’re less likely to challenge, so you might raise an issue but you never feel it’s been resolved, and you certainly don’t get any feedback.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, In-depth interview)

Most public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles were able to identify another person or role within their organisation or sector who they would approach for help as a first port of call in the event of a safeguarding or Prevent concern. Among many such public sector practitioners, this was the extent of their knowledge of what to do following a Prevent concern.

“If it sounds like a possible Prevent incident, we pick up the phone and always have guidance there, because there are departments that that’s all they deal with.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

Within schools, these roles included student guidance councillors, who the public sector practitioners felt would follow a safeguarding protocol (not specifically related to Prevent) and have a more informal conversation with the individual about their general wellbeing, mental health etc.

Those working in the police sector mentioned the counter-terrorism police department, which, along with school link officers, they felt would be more likely to deal with extremism. However, some public sector practitioners, particularly in Further / Higher education, were unaware of who to approach, while some others said they would defer to ‘more experienced staff’ as opposed to being able to name specific roles that would deal with Prevent. Health and social care workers without Prevent-related roles were particularly uncertain who would deal with the concern, as they felt a referral could sit in a number of different areas, such as adults with incapacity, children and families, and mental health services. They therefore viewed the system as complicated.

“I would imagine it [the referral process] working in the same way as referring a student about mental health. Referring to someone with the expertise and qualifications to help someone with what they’re dealing with, whether it’s mental health or extremism.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

“I don’t know the official process, but anything at all we notice, there is an intelligence process to go through which is our first point of call.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

[Who would deal with a referral?] “Probably just experienced, older staff. There’s enough experienced staff to keep an eye on it. [...] They have a general overview of who prisoners are talking to.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, Mini focus group)

6.6. Conclusions

A significant minority (16%) of respondents reported never having heard of Prevent, with public sector practitioners in the health and social care sector (23%) and public sector practitioners in Prevent non-managerial roles (20%) most likely not to be aware of Prevent.

There were a wide range of starting positions when it came to public sector practitioners' understanding of Prevent, although the majority were aware of the Prevent duty. However, before seeing an explanation of the Prevent duty, fulfilling the Prevent duty tended not to be seen as a key part of public sector practitioners' roles.

In contrast, public sector practitioners were more likely to see safeguarding as part of their role. They tended to be more familiar with safeguarding duties, and saw them as more directly relevant to their work, particularly those working with vulnerable adults.

After being shown a description of the Prevent duty, a greater proportion of respondents saw Prevent as part of their role. After seeing this description, eight in ten (80%) respondents said that they thought Prevent was part of their role, compared with 54% before, bringing the proportion up to over the level of those considering safeguarding part of their role (78%).

7. Delivering the Prevent duty

7.1. Introduction

This section will address the following research questions:

- Do public sector practitioners consider Prevent as part of their day-to-day work? What processes are in place for this in their workplace?
- What aspects of extremism do public sector practitioners feel more and less confident in understanding or tackling?
- How well equipped and supported do public sector practitioners feel in their ability to recognise and respond to extremism?

In both the qualitative and the quantitative research, after familiarity with Prevent had been established, participants were asked whether they had any experience with Prevent. In qualitative discussions, the researcher then probed to understand details of any experiences reported. Subsequently, participants in qualitative discussions and the survey were asked to what extent they feel well-equipped to identify those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into extremism or terrorism (i.e., deliver the Prevent duty).

In the survey, respondents were initially asked about their levels of confidence that they know:

- How to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism
- What to do if you come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism in your line of work

Later in the survey, after being shown a description of the Prevent duty, respondents were asked 'What experience, if any, have you had with Prevent?' and told that their answer 'could include making a Prevent referral, receiving or delivering training'. This instruction was designed to make the survey easier to complete, rather than to dictate how respondents described their experience with Prevent; no further prompting was given, such that there was an opportunity to hear participants' initial responses.

This section will firstly examine reported experiences of Prevent, including a breakdown by job sector, before turning to a comparison between reported experiences of extremism and Prevent. The section will then explore public sector practitioners' self-reported confidence in identifying extremism, self-reported confidence in what to do if they identify extremism, and a final examination of practitioner confidence in delivering the Prevent duty. Subsequently, conclusions will be drawn from the section.

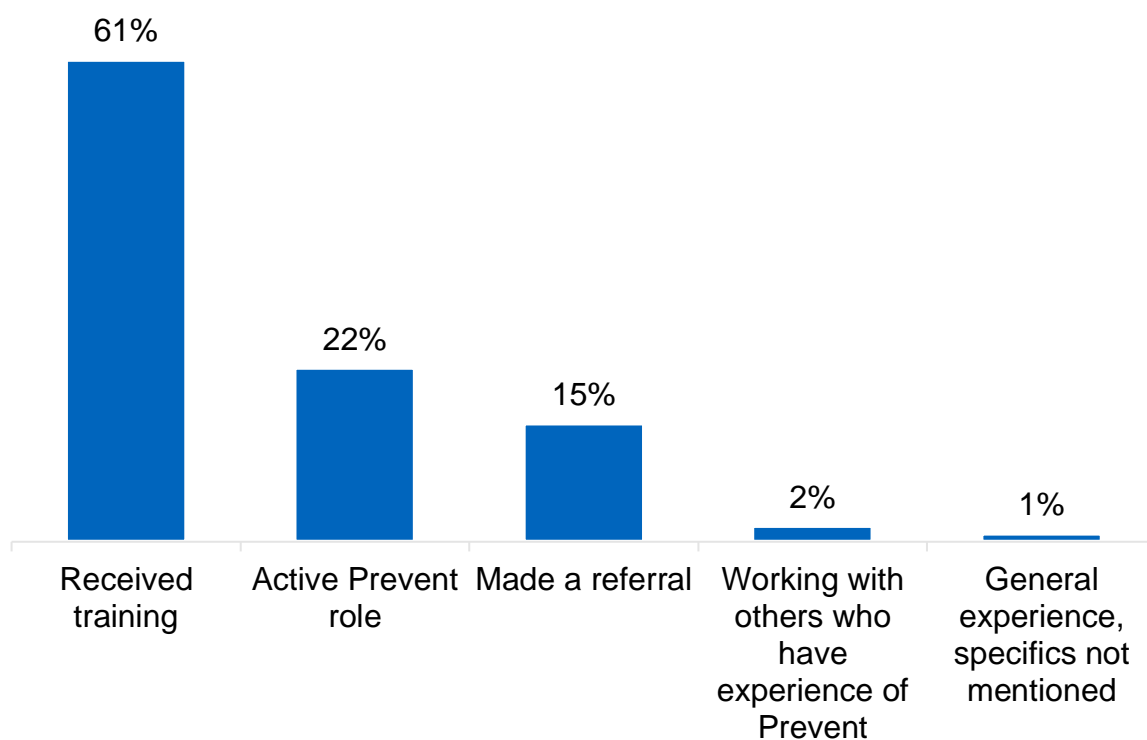
7.2. Experiences of Prevent

Over four fifths of respondents (83%) in the survey reported that they were familiar with Prevent to some extent. Half (51%) of those who were familiar, and therefore

just over two fifths (42%) of all respondents, reported an experience with the Prevent duty.

Approximately three fifths of public sector practitioners who reported experiences with Prevent (61%) referred to receiving training. Over a fifth (22%) referred to the practitioner having an active role in carrying out Prevent in their job, such as delivering training or managing referrals, while 15% involved the practitioner making a referral themselves. This indicates that most public sector practitioners gain experience of Prevent through job-related activities, such as training and/or managing referrals, rather than making a referral, which requires a practitioner to identify and follow up on potential extremist behaviours.

Figure 15. Types of experience with Prevent reported



Q11. What experience, if any, have you had with Prevent?

Base: All respondents with experiences of Prevent in their job, n=208.

“I have received training in Prevent, but have never had to make a referral.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

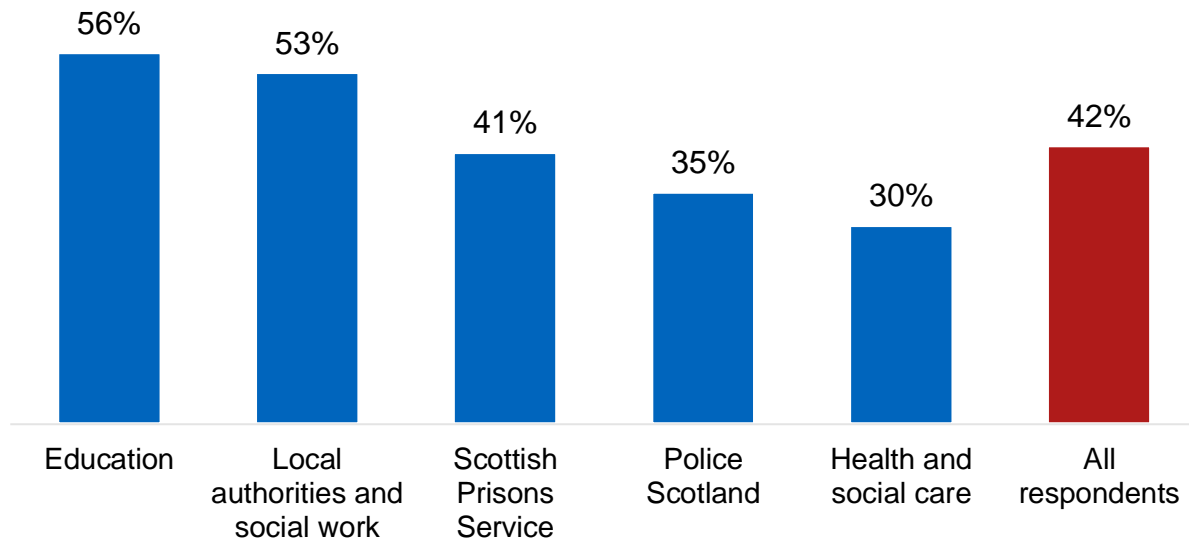
“I have attended training courses and am updated by the local officer on any incidents.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

As shown in Figure 16, public sector practitioners working in education were most likely to have had experience with Prevent (56% of all respondents). This was

followed by practitioners working in local authority or social work roles (53%), then prisons (41%), while police and health and social care practitioners were least likely to report an experience with Prevent (35% and 30% respectively).

Figure 16. The proportion of practitioners who reported experiences with Prevent, by sector



Q11. What experience, if any, have you had with Prevent?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

“I am familiar with Prevent... I have been involved in two referrals under Prevent and am aware of the pressure it can bring to employees dealing with such issues.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent non-managerial role, Further / Higher education, Survey)

“[I] received training and sit on other delivery sessions as part of a wider training package we deliver in Perth and Kinross.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent managerial role, Local authority, Survey)

Public sector practitioners in Prevent managerial roles were significantly more likely to report an experience with Prevent than those in Prevent non-managerial roles (62% compared with 46%). This reflects the qualitative findings, where few public sector practitioners without a role which involved overseeing Prevent had experience of it.

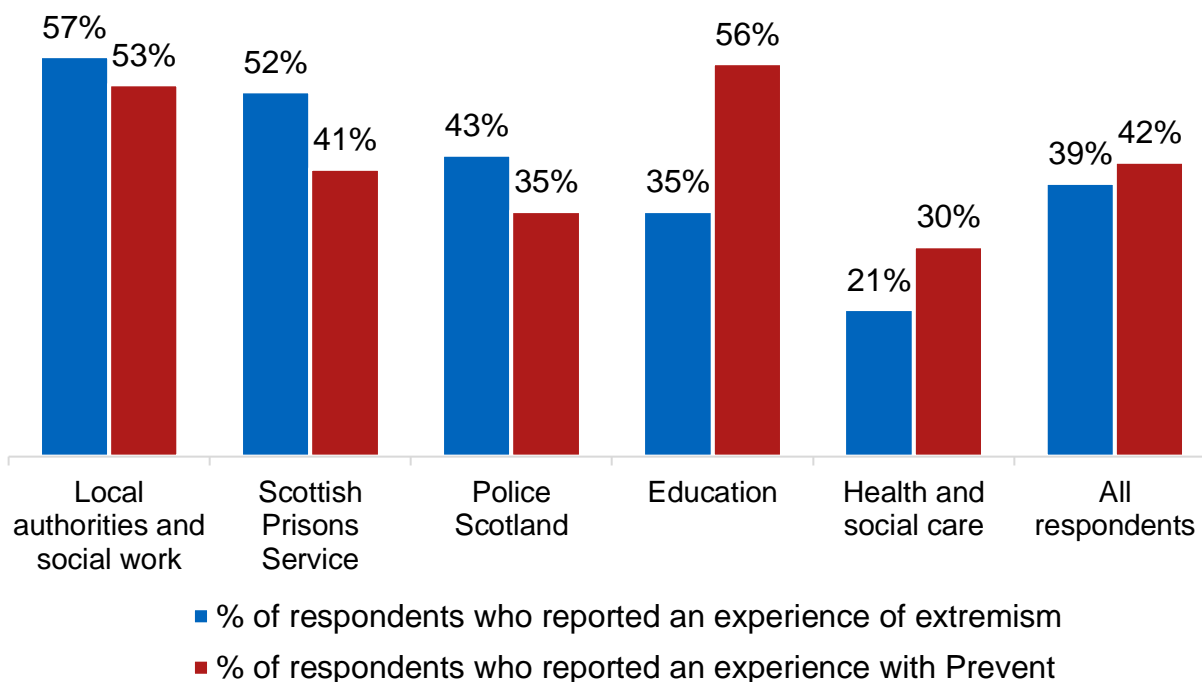
“I wouldn’t be able to define Prevent. I know roughly what they’re responsible for and where and who they are, so I could contact them for advice if needed.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, Mini focus group)

7.3. Experiences of extremism and Prevent compared

Overall, the proportion of respondents who had experienced extremism at work (39%) is very close to that of respondents who had an experience with Prevent (42%). However, there was variation between these two figures when broken down by job sector.

Figure 17. Comparing the prevalence of experiences of extremism with experiences with Prevent, by sector



Q9. What experience, if any, have you had with extremism as part of your work?

Q11. What experience, if any, have you had with Prevent?

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

As displayed in Figure 17, the proportion of local authority public sector practitioners and/or social workers who reported coming across extremism in their jobs (57%) was broadly in line with the proportion who reported an experience with Prevent (53%). However, public sector practitioners from the prison and police sectors were considerably more likely to say they had had experiences of extremism at work (52% and 43% respectively) compared with having experience with Prevent (41% and 35% respectively). Conversely, education practitioners were much more likely to say that they had experience with Prevent than to report an experience of extremism (56% compared with 35%, respectively).

One of the primary reasons for these disparities between sectors was the extent to which practitioners in different sectors had received Prevent training. For example, a much higher proportion of education, and health and social care practitioners mentioned training in their reported experience with Prevent (69% and 67% respectively) than police practitioners (35%).

Additional context from the qualitative research suggests that the police and prisons sectors held a higher benchmark for what is considered 'extreme' enough to warrant a Prevent referral. This is because extreme and/or violent behaviour was commonly witnessed in their jobs, and as such there were internal processes in place to deal with problematic behaviour before a Prevent referral would be deemed necessary:

"[For Prevent referrals] we look out for guys with a more forceful personality who could influence others. But the three we have at the moment don't have a forceful personality. For example, we've got [someone] who is actually more intimidated by other prisoners and that's a good thing in a way because they won't be passing on what they believe."

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

Conversely, the education and health and social care sectors saw a relatively high proportion of public sector practitioners with experience of Prevent (56% and 30% respectively) compared with experience of extremism in their job (35% and 21% respectively).

"Yes, I'm reasonably familiar with the Prevent role and the duties. We're not asking questions to draw it out, but if you come across something of concern then we try to assess exactly what that is, preferably with a second opinion. This is pre-criminality, but if they have engaged with criminal activity, then that becomes a police action."

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, In-depth interview)

Lastly, public sector practitioners who were familiar with Prevent as part of their role (44%) were significantly more likely to report an experience with extremism than those who were not familiar with Prevent as part of their role (20%), with over one in ten (11%) experiences mentioning either delivery of the Prevent duty (6%) or other anti-terror protocols (5%). This may be because this group are able to more effectively and confidently label behaviour as extremist due to a better understanding of extremism.

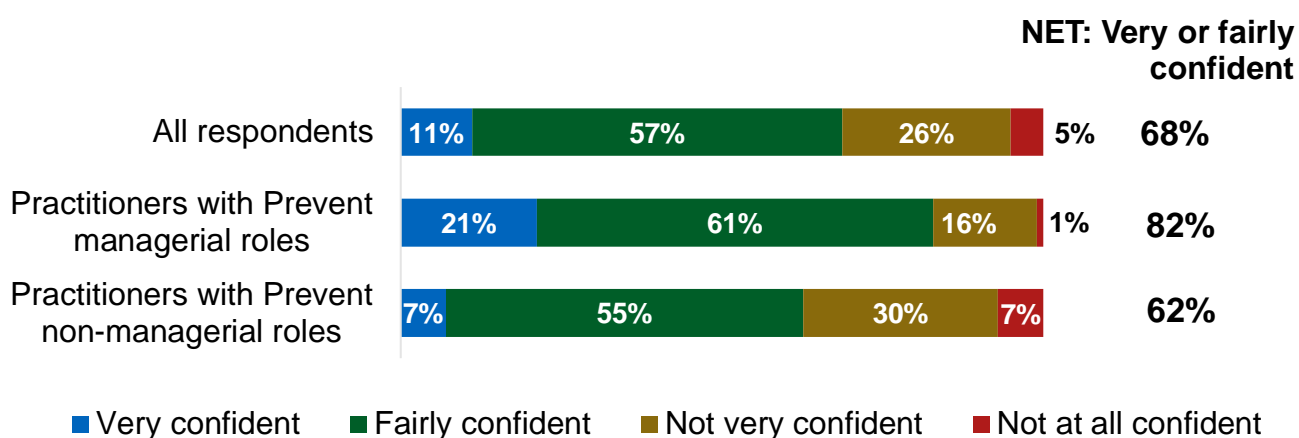
"I'm not really familiar with Prevent... Day-to-day, it's probably not really part of my role... We've not had training on that, that's maybe bad... I'm quite oblivious to it, so I should be more aware of it. I would just try and notice the vulnerable people."

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

7.4. Confidence in identifying signs of extremism

Although two thirds (67%) of public sector practitioners felt confident that they could identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism, only one in ten (11%) felt 'very confident'. Due to the overconfidence effect (Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, 1977), 'very confident' was used as the benchmark measure of confidence. Confidence was higher amongst individuals in Prevent managerial roles (i.e., responsible for managing Prevent concerns) than in Prevent non-managerial roles (21% compared with 7% saying 'very confident'). Furthermore, it was more common for practitioners to be confident in identifying signs of extremism, compared with defining it.

Figure 18. Public sector practitioners' level of confidence in how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism



Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? 'How to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism.'

Base: All respondents, n=492, Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350.

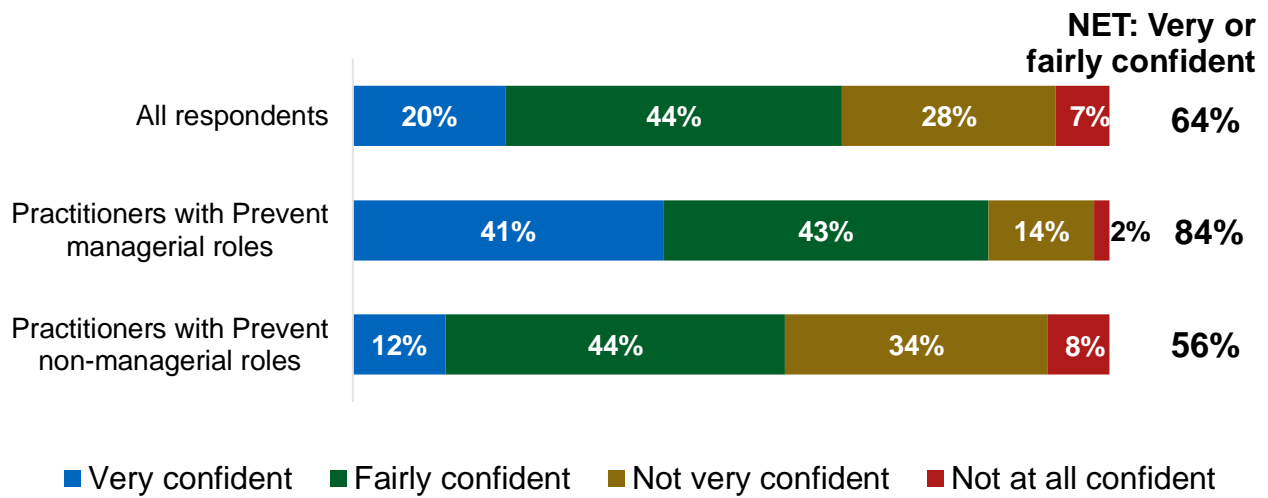
When asked to explain the signs of extremism they would look for during qualitative discussions, many found this very difficult to articulate, and often talked of 'gut instinct' or 'just knowing', which may suggest a lower ability to spot signs of extremism in practice. Some also appeared to lean on more serious examples of behaviours, particularly public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles, such as going abroad to join Islamic State, rather than less clear-cut signs and symbols of extremist behaviour or beliefs.

7.5. Confidence in what to do if you come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism

One fifth (20%) of public sector practitioners had a high level of confidence in knowing what to do if they came across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism, although confidence levels were significantly higher than for identifying signs of extremism (11% very confident). Over a third (35%) did not feel confident, including 7% who felt 'not at all' confident. This may reflect the uncertainty

surrounding the Prevent referral process when prompted, as explored in section 6.5.

Figure 19. Public sector practitioners’ level of confidence in what to do if they come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism

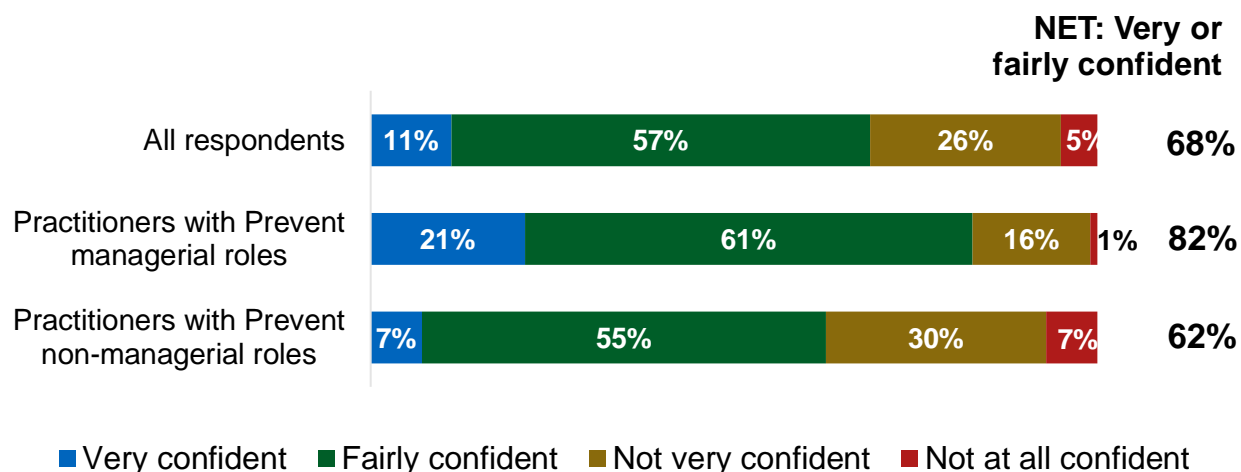


Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? ‘What to do if you come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism in your line of work.’

Base: All respondents, n=492, Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350.

Those in Prevent managerial roles had higher confidence levels (41% answering ‘very confident’), compared with those in Prevent non-managerial roles (12% answering ‘very confident’). However, as shown in Figure 20, this difference is far more pronounced than when it comes to confidence in how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism, where the gap between those in Prevent managerial roles saying they were very confident (21%) and those in Prevent non-managerial roles (7%) was smaller.

Figure 20. Public sector practitioners' level of confidence in how to identify some at risk of being drawn into extremism



Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? 'How to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism'

Base: All respondents, n=492, Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=142; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles, n=350.

Among those in Prevent non-managerial and non-Prevent related roles, several potential reasons for lower levels of confidence in knowing what to do if they came across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism were raised or discussed. One was a lack of experience. In the survey, over half (54%) of public sector practitioners in Prevent non-managerial roles had no experience with Prevent. In qualitative discussions, public sector practitioners without experience of Prevent or extremism as part of their roles did not have a clear sense of what signs to look out for, and discussed not wanting to base a referral on a 'hunch'. As explored in section 6.5, many without Prevent-related roles felt they would seek guidance from those with specialist Prevent knowledge, or even just more experienced staff, before referring someone.

"I've had limited Prevent training and done bits and pieces. But because you don't use it very often, you have it in the background. But you can email or phone somebody who knows more than I do."

(Practitioner without a Prevent related role, Police)

Another was a lack of training. Those who spoke of having Prevent training often mentioned a 'one-off' session, or an online training module. This may contribute to Prevent not feeling 'front of mind' for many public sector practitioners, and may present a barrier to acting when potentially concerning behaviours are encountered.

"We do have mandatory training and what we need to report. In terms of confidence, we have a good public protection unit we can go to and I would feel confident doing that but I don't know the actual document and Prevent policy as well as I should for sure."

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

“Even as a local authority social worker who deals with Prevent, I don’t think I’m trained enough to look out for the risk factors. We use common sense and judgement, but actually how to support them and work with young people – I don’t think the training is good enough.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Local authority, Mini focus group)

Another factor was a sense from some that Prevent processes might not be the most appropriate way to provide help and support, or that it was not the practitioners’ place to do so. Public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles were more confident in talking about potential extremism risks through the lens of their safeguarding and child protection duties, which they were much more familiar with, and indicated that they would deal with a potential risk through safeguarding channels other than Prevent. For example, police officers talked about calling social workers or someone with a designated Prevent-related role at the school for guidance if a young person exhibited troubling behaviours rather than jumping straight to a Prevent referral, as they felt there were other departments that would have more information on the individual and be better equipped to deal with the case.

“I’ve definitely had to work with young people with mental health problems that are vulnerable. I would say it’s probably a mixture of healthcare and social care that’s helped some of those people [...] I’m concerned post-COVID we’re being contacted a lot more with vulnerable young people.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

Finally, some were concerned about making a mistake. Public sector practitioners had worries around the potential of making a mistake in referring someone, and not wanting to appear prejudiced against any viewpoints. It is possible that, amongst those who feel their role sits particularly within safeguarding, there is a reluctance to use the official Prevent processes to raise a concern, due to the stigma that they feel this may place onto the vulnerable individual, particularly children.

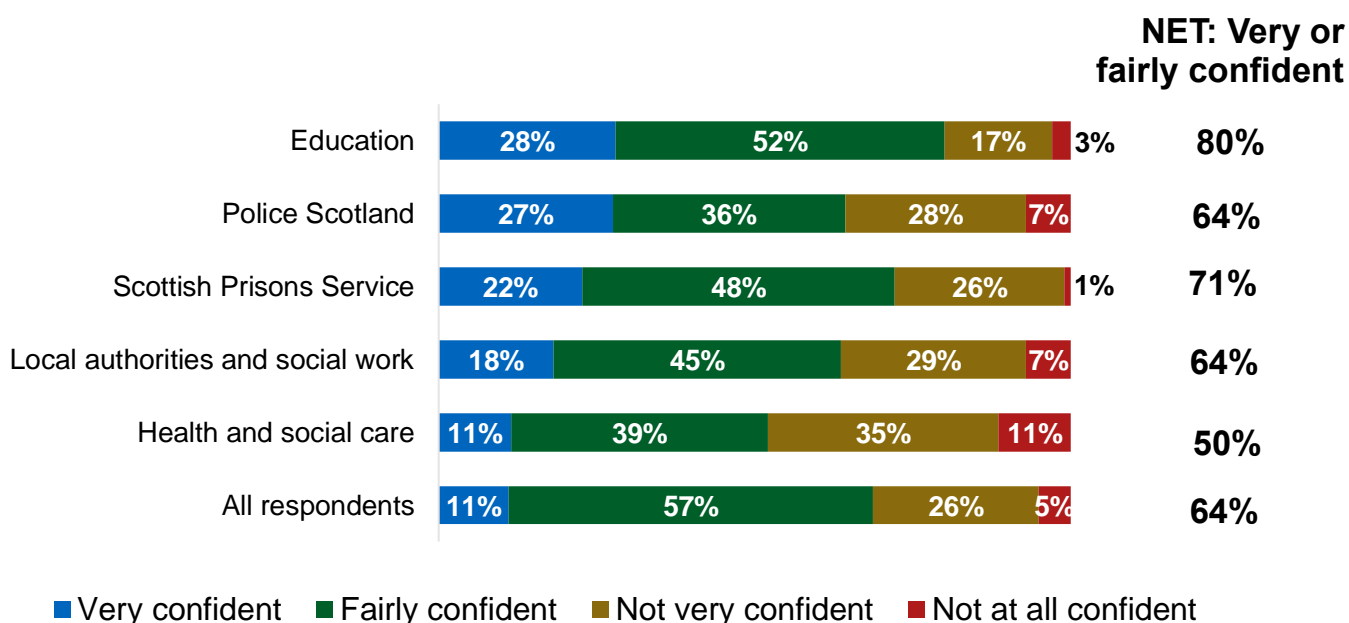
“I wouldn’t feel confident approaching a person. I’d be mindful I was making an awful mistake [...] I’ll just do my job and someone else can deal with this because I don’t want to be accused of whatever.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education)

Confidence levels in what to do if you come across someone vulnerable to extremism also varied by sector. As shown in Figure 21, education practitioners were the most confident (80% overall, with 28% feeling ‘very confident’), followed

by prison workers (71% overall, with 22% 'very confident'). Confidence amongst police was more mixed, with only 64% confident overall, but a relatively high proportion 'very confident' (27%). Confidence was lowest amongst health and social care workers (50% confident, with only 11% feeling 'very confident').

Figure 21. Public sector practitioners' level of confidence in what to do if they come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism, by sector



Q4. How confident, if at all, are you that you know the following? 'What to do if you come across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism in your line of work.'

Base: All respondents, n=492; Police Scotland, n=74; Scottish Prisons Service, n=85; Local authorities and social work, n=99; Education, n=93; Health and social care, n=141.

Reflecting high levels of public sector practitioners responding 'fairly confident' as opposed to 'very confident', most participants in the qualitative research felt they could deliver the Prevent duty if required, even the frontline public sector practitioners with no direct experience. Participants explained that they would expect to use their common sense, experience or judgement to identify those at risk of being drawn into extremism and felt fairly confident in their ability to do so. However, when asked, they found it difficult to clearly articulate what actions they would take if they did identify concerning behaviour. Ability to articulate the steps involved varied across participants, and may reflect the level of training they have received. In particular, practitioners with Prevent-related roles, who were more likely to have had in-depth Prevent training or even to have delivered it, were much more confident in explaining the referral process they would follow.

"I would highlight it to management and go down the safeguarding route, but I'm not exactly sure of the pathway, but I'm sure there is one in place."

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

“I found out fairly recently because of the Prevent training day. There’s a referral form we can fill in to refer someone to the Prevent group. First point of call would be my sergeant, who would escalate to the inspector. I would fill in a form and list my concerns.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

“We’ve got a Prevent concerns email at [Council], but it also goes straight to the Prevent Delivery Unit at Police Scotland. And they immediately start assessment and deconfliction work. I can guarantee that social work, for example, have already started looking at that referral and saying, ‘Is this going to PMAP or not?’ [...] Usually, it comes to the experts at PMAP. We get all the information on the family, there’s NHS there, psychiatric manager, housing, etc. [...] And then as a panel, we make the decision whether there is that counter-terrorism risk.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, Mini focus group)

7.6. Conclusions

In the survey, over half (51%) of public sector practitioners who had heard of Prevent reported an experience with the Prevent duty, with most of these people citing training as their experience. In contrast, only 15% had made a Prevent referral.

The self-reported data suggest that a minority are highly confident in their ability to identify vulnerability to extremism and knowing what to do. While large proportions are ‘fairly confident’, as outlined in section 3.3, ‘very confident’ is likely to be a more accurate measure of self-assessed knowledge or ability, adjusting for the overconfidence effect.

The qualitative data supported this, indicating that many public sector practitioners, including those in Prevent-related roles, struggled to clearly articulate the signs of extremism they would look out for, and instead often relied on ‘gut instinct’. There was more variation between practitioners on their ability to describe what to do in the event of identifying someone vulnerable to extremism, with practitioners in Prevent-related roles far more likely to be able to describe the process they would follow than practitioners without Prevent-related roles. For those without Prevent-related roles, the first port of call tended to be reaching out to more experienced or specialised colleagues.

Public sector practitioners were more likely to feel confident in their ability to know what to do if they came across someone at risk of being drawn into extremism (20% saying very confident) than to identify such a person (11% saying very confident). Moreover, the difference between practitioners in Prevent managerial and Prevent non-managerial roles was far more pronounced in terms of confidence about what to do if they came across someone at risk of extremism (41% in Prevent

managerial roles saying very confident compared with 12% in Prevent non-managerial roles) than how to identify an at-risk person (21% in Prevent managerial roles saying very confident compared with 7% in Prevent non-managerial roles).

These findings suggest that the increased training on and experience of extremism and Prevent that those in Prevent managerial roles were likely to have had was more successful in building confidence in knowing what to do when faced with a risk than in how to identify that risk.

This indicates that while both identifying an at-risk person and knowing what to do are important areas to address in terms of increasing practitioner confidence, building practitioners' confidence in how to identify an at-risk person may be a particular priority, including with practitioners who are broadly more confident and knowledgeable about Prevent.

8. Views on Prevent in Scotland

8.1. Introduction

This section will address the following research questions:

- How favourable are public sector practitioners' opinions or impressions of Prevent?
- How effective do public sector practitioners consider the current approaches to reducing extremism in Scotland to be, and why?
- Do public sector practitioners working in different areas of Scotland or with different communities diverge in how they perceive the effectiveness of responses to current threats?

In qualitative discussions, participants were asked for their opinions of Prevent in Scotland, including their favourability towards it, the extent to which they feel it is effective in reducing extremism, and views on any potential improvements that could be made.

The improvements mentioned by public sector practitioners in the qualitative research were used to create a list of potential improvements to Prevent. Survey respondents were presented with these and asked to select the top two most effective options (with options for 'Other' and 'None of the above'):

- Increase awareness of the Prevent duty among those who are required to fulfil it
- Increase understanding of how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism among those who are required to fulfil the Prevent duty
- Increase understanding of what to do if someone is at risk of being drawn into extremism among those who are required to fulfil the Prevent duty
- Update Prevent training to ensure it is relevant to the types of extremist ideologies that exist in Scotland
- Update Prevent training to make it more engaging
- Opportunities for organisations to share and discuss best practice for delivering Prevent
- Increase resources for fulfilling the Prevent duty (e.g., more staff, more time)
- Ensuring that the responsibility for delivering Prevent is shared evenly amongst the sectors that have a statutory duty to do so (i.e., local authorities, health and social care, education, prisons, and police)

Additionally, survey respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements about Prevent:

- Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland
- Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland

- Prevent is delivered in the right way in Scotland

This section will first examine overall perceptions of Prevent in Scotland from participants, then perceptions relating to each statement (effectiveness, favourability, and delivery), and finally views on potential improvements to Prevent in Scotland. Subsequently, conclusions from the section will be drawn.

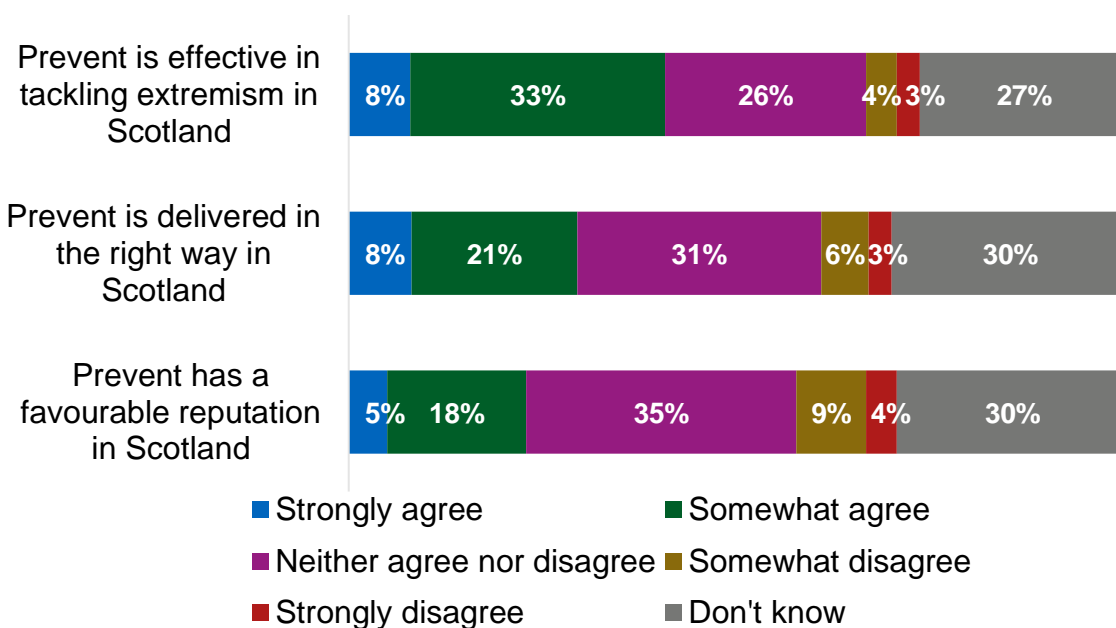
8.2. Overall practitioner perceptions of Prevent in Scotland

In qualitative discussions views on Prevent tended to be uncertain or neutral, with public sector practitioners feeling they did not know enough to have a strong view either way. This was particularly true for those without Prevent-related roles.

Similarly, in the survey views on Prevent were also largely uncertain or neutral. As shown in Figure 22, in the survey most participants answered ‘neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ for each statement – almost two thirds (65%) for ‘Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland’, three fifths (61%) for ‘Prevent is delivered in the right way in Scotland’, and half (52%) for ‘Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland’. At the same time, a significant proportion answered positively, with 23%, 29% and 41% saying they ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ agree with the statements, respectively, with very few answering negatively (13%, 9% and 7% respectively).

This may reflect the relative lack of detailed awareness and understanding about Prevent, particularly amongst those not in Prevent managerial roles or Prevent-related roles.

Figure 22. Practitioners’ views on Prevent across three measures



Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Prevent in Scotland?

Base: All respondents who have heard of Prevent, n=407.

Some practitioners in Prevent-related roles commented that the PMAP process (Home Office, 2021d), which outlines guidance for the multi-agency approach to Prevent in Scotland, has been rolled out in Scotland relatively recently, leading to caution about making a judgement too early.

Although the survey showed uncertainty about the effectiveness, favourability, and delivery of Prevent in Scotland, there was a broad consensus in the qualitative research that tackling extremism was important, and, by extension, Prevent was also important. Despite an underlying sense that a focus on extremism and Prevent was more of a priority in the rest of the UK than Scotland (due to perceptions that Scotland has less of a problem with extremism than the rest of the UK), there was an appetite to improve Prevent and to promote it more widely. Views on specific improvements will be explored in the final part of this section.

“I think it’s necessary, a necessary evil you might say. We would be naïve if we thought we shouldn’t have something like that. But it’s about how it’s implemented.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, In-depth interview)

However, when it comes to their own roles, public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles did not feel they needed to consider Prevent any more than they currently do. When compared with other safeguarding issues such as child abuse or mental health concerns, particularly in roles with safeguarding as a more central feature (e.g., working with children or with mental health), Prevent appeared to be a less important or relevant concern (especially given low perceived prevalence of extremism in Scotland).

8.3. Perceptions of the effectiveness of Prevent

When asked about whether Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland, four in ten (41%) agreed, with one third (33%) saying they ‘somewhat agreed’ that it is effective. This statement had the highest level of agreement of the three statements.

“[Prevent is a] good programme, necessary in the UK, but we have an awful lot of other issues to think about in Scotland and that’s where the greatest harm is likely to come from.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Primary / secondary education, Mini focus group)

Public sector practitioners without experience of Prevent were more likely to be uncertain or neutral about its effectiveness than those with experience, with two thirds (66%) without experience of Prevent in their roles saying they ‘neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ (compared with 40% of those with experience). The same was true when comparing those with Prevent managerial and non-managerial roles, with those in Prevent managerial roles more likely to see extremism as a problem in Scotland (96% compared with 85% of practitioners in Prevent non-managerial roles) and be more certain about Prevent’s effectiveness (37% saying

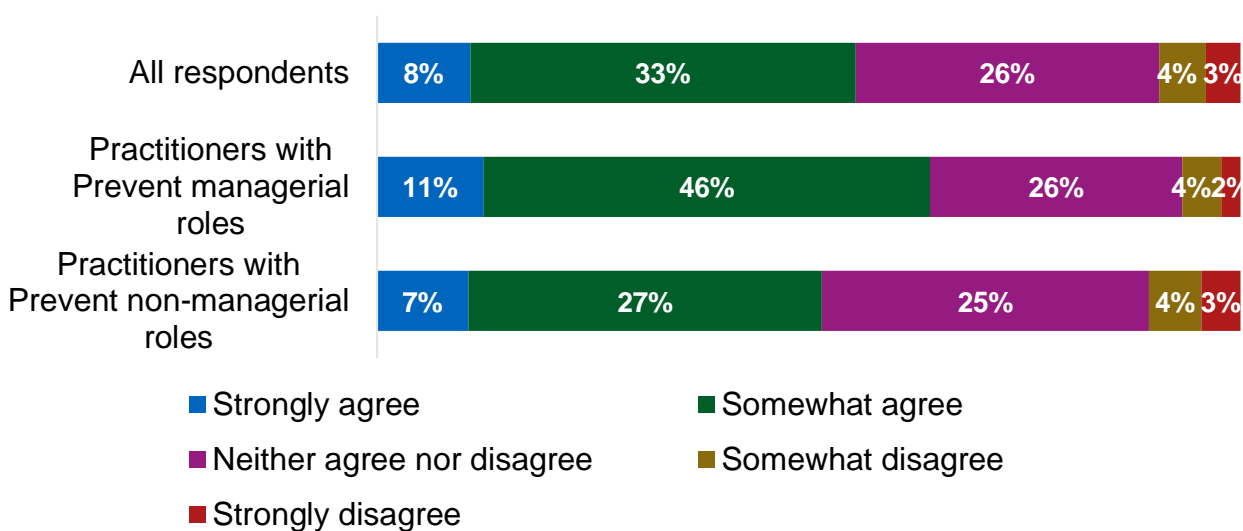
‘neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ compared with 59% of practitioners in Prevent non-managerial roles).

“Part of me thinks, if there was [extremism], would we know? If it’s being managed, we probably wouldn’t be told. It doesn’t have an impact in our daily lives.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

On the other hand, those in Prevent managerial roles (i.e., with a responsibility to manage or coordinate a response to Prevent concerns) or with experience of Prevent in their roles tended to be more positive about Prevent’s effectiveness. Over half (53%) of those with experience and those in Prevent managerial roles (57%) thought that Prevent is effective in Scotland, compared with 28% of those without experience and 34% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles. This is shown in Figure 23 below.

Figure 23. Practitioners’ views on Prevent’s effectiveness in Scotland, by role



Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Prevent in Scotland? ‘Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland.’

Base: All respondents who have heard of Prevent, n=407; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=130; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles n=277.

While some noted a perception of Prevent as ineffective in the aftermath of terrorist attacks due to not having prevented them, these views were not held by public sector practitioners themselves.

“I know Prevent gets slated in the press when someone is part of Prevent and goes on to do something. I think it’s important, it is a good process, we just need to promote it more.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

8.4. Perceptions of the favourability of Prevent

The statement that ‘Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland’ elicited the highest level of uncertainty and neutrality, with two thirds (65%) saying ‘neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘don’t know’. Only a minority (22%) agreed that Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland. While still low, this elicited the highest level of disagreement of the statements, with 13% disagreeing that the reputation is favourable.

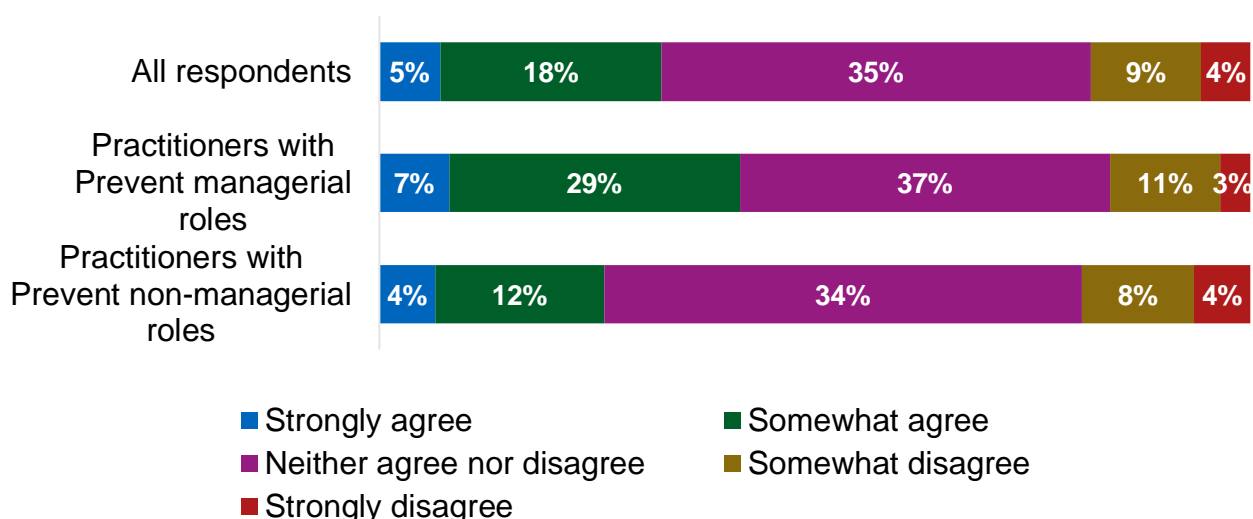
“[Prevent is] something that’s hard to have an opinion on. I don’t know.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, Mini focus group)

Practitioners in the police sector were most likely to agree that Prevent’s reputation is favourable (33%), with those in the education sector least likely (16%). Practitioners in the health and social care sector were similarly unlikely to agree, but in this case due to a high level of uncertainty about the favourability of Prevent, with 41% answering ‘don’t know’ (compared with 29% saying ‘don’t know’ in the education sector, for example).

Again, as shown in Figure 24, those in Prevent managerial roles and with experience of Prevent in their roles were less likely to be uncertain and more likely to agree that the reputation was favourable. Over a third (36%) in Prevent managerial roles agreed with the statement and 13% answered ‘don’t know’, compared with 16% and 38% for those in Prevent non-managerial roles. Similarly, 28% with experience agreed and 25% answered don’t know, compared with 16% and 36% without experience.

Figure 24. Practitioners’ views on the favourability of Prevent, by role



Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Prevent in Scotland? ‘Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland.’

Base: All respondents who have heard of Prevent, n=407; Practitioners with Prevent managerial roles, n=130; Practitioners with Prevent non-managerial roles n=277.

Positive views of Prevent often stemmed from the idea that extremism exists in Scotland and therefore Prevent is important, rather than being focused on specific aspects of it. However, as will be explored below, among public sector practitioners working more closely with Prevent, the safeguarding approach contributed to a favourable view.

“We need to have it. I’ve been on a couple of day courses about it... We need to highlight that extremism is an issue within society.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

Public sector practitioners in urban areas were most likely to disagree with the statement that Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland (22% disagreed it was favourable compared with 8% in rural areas and 6% in mixed or suburban areas). Similarly, male public sector practitioners were also more likely to disagree with the statement than female practitioners (21% compared with 7% of women).

In the qualitative research, several public sector practitioners noted that Prevent has a negative reputation, particularly those whose roles most closely involved Prevent. However, this was often seen to be the case for the rest of the UK more than Scotland specifically. Reasons cited for a negative reputation included a perception of excessive surveillance and an overemphasis on Islamist extremism. However, only a few public sector practitioners held these views themselves about Prevent.

“I think [Prevent is] okay, I’ve had stories mostly in England where it’s been applied poorly.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, In-depth interview)

8.5. Perceptions of the delivery of Prevent

Perceptions of whether Prevent is delivered in the right way in Scotland also tended to be neutral or uncertain, with a minority (29%) agreeing with this statement. This may reflect a lack of clarity or knowledge amongst many public sector practitioners about how Prevent is delivered, including a lack of understanding of how the referral process works.

As with other perceptions of Prevent, those with experience of extremism in their roles or who held Prevent managerial roles were less likely to be uncertain or neutral and more likely to agree that Prevent is delivered in the right way. Two fifths (40%) of those with experience and almost half (46%) of those in Prevent managerial roles agreed with this statement, compared with 16% of those without and 21% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles.

There was low awareness of the approach taken in Scotland to Prevent, which places safeguarding at its centre, amongst public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles. As examined in section 6.2, there was a higher level of awareness amongst public sector practitioners of the safeguarding elements of

their role, compared with the Prevent aspects. However, among public sector practitioners familiar with the more safeguarding-oriented approach, this was broadly felt to be the right direction for Prevent in Scotland, and there was a feeling that this should be more widely known.

“Prevent wasn’t really branded in the right way – it’s seen as a snooper’s charter rather than a safeguarding measure.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Further / Higher education, In-depth interview)

“Previously we had a presentation on Prevent years ago and team members didn’t enjoy it as it was too targeted to specific groups. We do the training from a safeguarding children and adults point of view – they found that much easier to accept.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Local authority, In-depth interview)

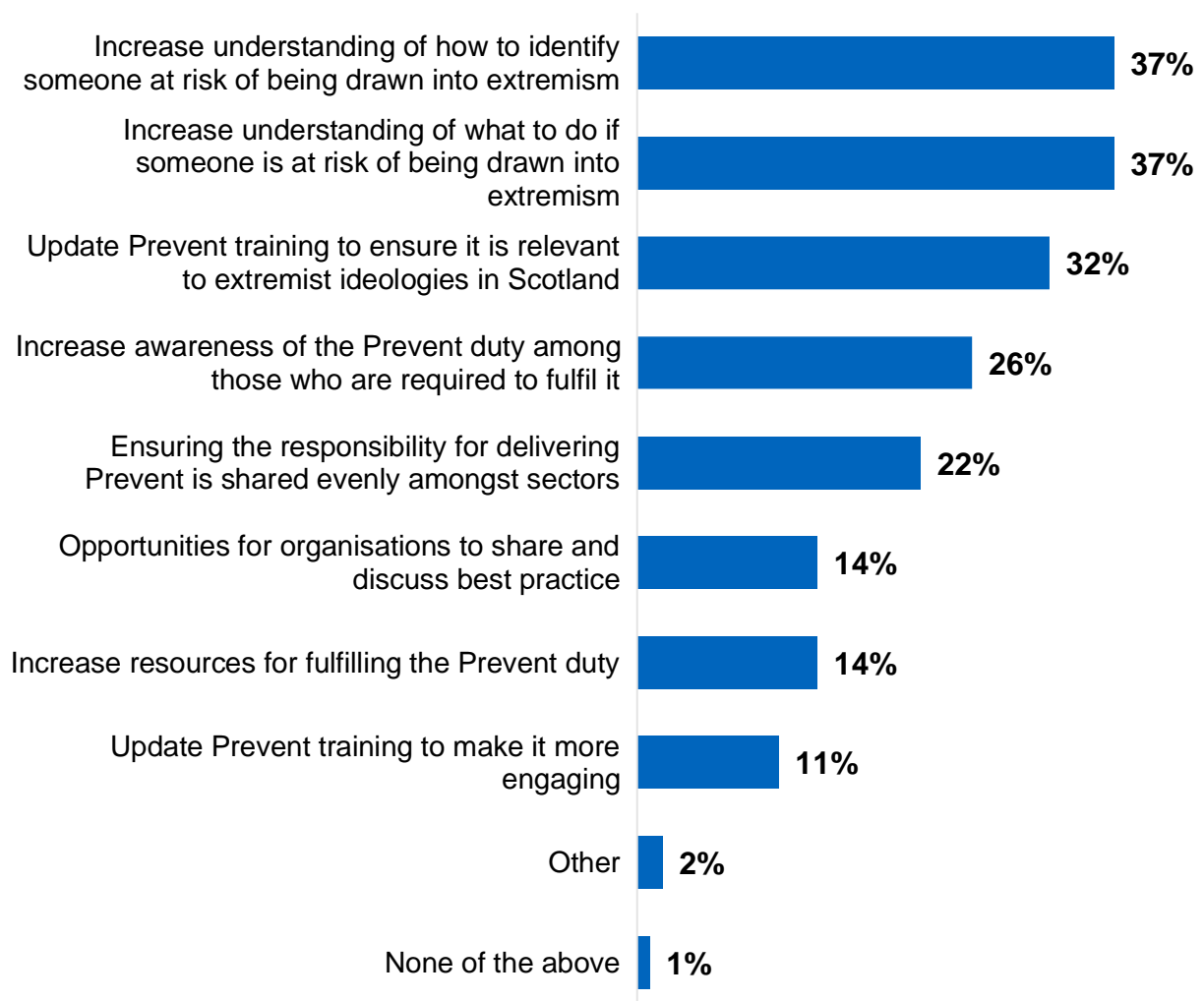
There was a sense from some in Prevent-related roles that the delivery of Prevent is working well in that it is being delivered at all, given the relatively recent implementation of some aspects in Scotland (such as the PMAP guidance) and the feeling that extremism is an important issue to tackle. At the same time, there was a recognition from public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles that improvements could be made to the way Prevent is delivered, as will be explored in the following section.

8.6. Views on how Prevent could be improved

There was a consensus among public sector practitioners about the importance of increasing practitioner understanding about Prevent and extremism. Increasing understanding of how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into terrorism and what to do once identifying an at-risk person were the most popular potential improvements, with over two thirds of public sector practitioners selecting each in their top two most effective improvements for better tackling extremism in Scotland (37% for both options).

Additionally, ‘updating Prevent training to ensure it is relevant to extremist ideologies in Scotland’ was rated as highly effective, with 32% selecting it as one of their top two most effective improvements.

Figure 25. Proportion of public sector practitioners selecting potential improvements as top two most effective improvements for better tackling extremism in Scotland



Q13. Below are several ways that some have said Prevent could be improved. Please select the top two options you think would be most effective in better tackling extremism in Scotland.

Base: All respondents who have heard of Prevent, n=407.

Public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles recognised that those without an explicit focus on Prevent within their roles may have relatively little understanding of Prevent, leading them to prioritise this as an area for improvement. Public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles confirmed this to be the case themselves, and were keen to learn more about the Prevent duty and how to deliver it – they often felt that they did not know enough to suggest specific improvements beyond this.

Therefore, there was little difference by type of practitioner when it came to advocating for increasing understanding about how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism and what to do, whether this was intended for themselves or for others.

Given low awareness of Prevent amongst the sample, raising awareness of the Prevent duty among those who are required to fulfil it was another popular improvement. A quarter (26%) of public sector practitioners put this in their top two most effective improvements, with very little difference between types of public sector practitioners.

The only exception was those in the education sector who were by far the least likely to select this as one of their top two improvements, with only a minority (12%) doing so. This was likely due to their already high awareness of the Prevent aspect of their roles.

“I don’t really have an opinion, because this is the first I’ve really seen anything about it, I’ve not really thought about it... I do think it’s important and I do think it’s something we should all be a wee bit more aware of.”

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Scottish Prisons Service, In-depth interview)

As explored earlier, especially for public sector practitioners less familiar with Prevent, there was some uncertainty about the types of extremist ideologies present in Scotland. Conversations with those more familiar with Prevent focused on different ideologies than conversations with those less familiar.

The biggest differences arose in relation to right-wing extremism, ‘incels’ and ‘mixed or unclear’ ideologies, all of which were seen by public sector practitioners with knowledge and experience of these ideologies to be recent and increasing problems in Scotland, but which appeared to be less well known – compared with, for example, Islamist extremism – when speaking to public sector practitioners less familiar with Prevent.

Therefore, updating the training to ensure it is relevant to extremist ideologies in Scotland was seen to be a key improvement for Prevent. Of those with experience of Prevent in their work, just over two fifths (43%) selected this as one of their top two most effective improvements to tackle extremism in Scotland, compared with one fifth (20%) without experience.

“WRAP [Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent] training is outdated. It’s been around for a few years. There is right-wing stuff, but nothing about unclear or mixed in it. Nothing about incels.”

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

Although few chose making Prevent training more engaging as one of the most effective options, multiple public sector practitioners mentioned this in the qualitative research. This suggests that while this would be a welcome improvement, it is not the highest priority for public sector practitioners. The main suggestion was to make the training more interactive, as public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles in particular felt it was currently somewhat of a ‘tick

box exercise', if they remembered completing it at all. Examples of improvements included making the training face-to-face and building in more discussion sessions.

"A lot of the modules we do online is a tick box exercise rather than anyone caring whether you do it or not... most of the time you're clicking through all of the slides because you have five minutes and have to get back to your patients."

(Practitioner without a Prevent-related role, Health and social care, Mini focus group)

Finally, over a fifth (22%) of participants selected ensuring the responsibility for delivering Prevent is shared equally among sectors as one of their top two most effective improvements. In the qualitative discussions, there was concern from a handful of public sector practitioners in Prevent-related roles that practitioners in other sectors were not as involved in delivering the Prevent duty as they were, for example a sense that they were not taking cross-sector Prevent meetings seriously enough. Similarly, some public sector practitioners felt that different sectors should work together more on Prevent, for example, sharing of information between sectors on individuals of concern.

"[One improvement would be] getting other sectors to be more a part of it. They're aware of it but it feels like it is just something else to do when they're busy enough."

(Practitioner with a Prevent-related role, Police Scotland, In-depth interview)

8.7. Conclusions

In the qualitative and quantitative research, views tended to be uncertain or neutral about Prevent, particularly amongst those less familiar with Prevent as part of their roles. Practitioners without Prevent-related roles tended to feel they did not know enough to have a strong view either way in qualitative discussions, which may help explain the quantitative findings.

In the survey, a majority of respondents said they 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' for each statement they were presented with – almost two thirds (65%) for 'Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland', three fifths (61%) for 'Prevent is delivered in the right way in Scotland', and half (52%) for 'Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland'.

Few felt entirely negatively, with only 13%, 9% and 7% saying they 'somewhat' or 'strongly' disagree with the statements, respectively. Instead, larger minorities agreed that 'Prevent is effective in tackling extremism in Scotland' (41%), 'Prevent is delivered in the right way in Scotland' (29%) and that 'Prevent has a favourable reputation in Scotland' (23%). There was broad consensus in qualitative discussions that tackling extremism in Scotland was important, and that Prevent is therefore necessary.

Those with more familiarity with Prevent tended to be more positive about it, with practitioners in Prevent-related roles seeing it as particularly important in qualitative discussions. In the survey, practitioners in Prevent managerial roles (i.e., with a responsibility to manage or coordinate a response to Prevent concerns) were much more likely to see Prevent as effective (57% compared with 34% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles), that the reputation was favourable (36% compared with 16% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles), and that it is delivered in the right way (46% compared with 21% of those in Prevent non-managerial roles).

Public sector practitioners broadly felt it was important to improve Prevent and promote it more widely. When prompted with a list of potential improvements to Prevent, those that were ranked as most effective were those aiming to increase practitioner understanding of extremism. The most popular potential improvements were: support to increase practitioner understanding of how to identify someone at risk of being drawn into extremism; and support to increase practitioner understanding of what to do in the event that someone at risk is identified.

9. Conclusions

This section will firstly summarise the key findings and implications of the research, before providing some suggestions for further research.

9.1. Implications and considerations

Understanding of extremism

The research found that public sector practitioners struggled to come to a clear definition of extremism, even when prompted with potential definitions. Rather than using a set definition of extremism, practitioners tended to say that extremism was something that they would recognise if and when they saw it, and were often more comfortable focusing on the set of factors that may make an individual more vulnerable to extremist ideologies, rather than a specific set of behaviours that might indicate someone holds extremist beliefs.

Taken together, this indicates that practitioners currently have a limited understanding of what is meant by extremism. There are two key implications of this for the Scottish Government.

Firstly, it will be difficult for public sector practitioners' understanding to inform the development of a definition of extremism by the Scottish Government. Practitioners' limited understanding and lack of a consensus on what defines extremism means that their ability to inform these discussions is limited, unless they are given significant additional information and time to deliberate on this (more detail on how this could be done is included in section 9.2).

Secondly, assuming that the Scottish Government does produce a definition of extremism, there will need to be significant thought and effort put into ensuring that this definition is clearly understood by public sector practitioners. Given that current understanding of extremism is low and that some of the language used by public sector practitioners either does not match the language currently used by the Scottish Government or is used to communicate different meaning, there is a risk that a new definition of extremism may not be fully understood or may be misinterpreted. Reflecting the language that practitioners use and/or producing educational material on the meaning of different terminology may be required to ensure that a new definition is fully understood and has a positive impact on public sector practitioners work in relation to Prevent.

Views on extremism in Scotland

The research found that behaviours which might in other contexts be seen as extremist – particularly those related to sectarianism – were not always considered to be manifestations of extremism in Scotland.

There was a gap in awareness and understanding about what kinds of extremism exist in Scotland between practitioners who were more familiar with Prevent and those less familiar with Prevent in their roles.

Public sector practitioners less familiar with Prevent were less likely to be aware of or see right-wing extremism and mixed, unstable and unclear concerns as a problem in Scotland, and more likely to make an association with Islamist extremism, and see it as a bigger problem, compared with public sector practitioners more familiar with Prevent. According to the latest Prevent referral data for Scotland (Police Scotland, 2023b), the most common type of concern for which individuals were referred related to a mixed, unstable or unclear ideology (54% of referrals), followed by right-wing extremism (31%). Right-wing extremism referrals made up the greatest proportion of referrals deemed suitable for Prevent Case Management¹³ (64%). These data highlight the need for public sector practitioners to have a good understanding of these ideologies.

A small number of public sector practitioners expressed views prejudiced against Islam and used this as an explanatory factor for why they believed extremism is not a major issue in Scotland.

The research findings suggest that providing up-to-date guidance on the extremist beliefs, ideologies, behaviours and trends that public sector practitioners should be aware of in the Scottish context may help increase understanding. This may include promoting the Prevent eLearning products (online resources to educate public sector practitioners about Prevent) more widely.

Additionally, this research suggests that work may need to be done to address problematic or offensive views amongst a small number of public sector practitioners to ensure they are fairly and consistently applying the Prevent duty.

Understanding of the Prevent duty in public sector practitioners' work

The vast majority of practitioners initially considered safeguarding, but not Prevent, as part of their role. There was a sense that safeguarding duties felt more familiar, with more direct relevance to their roles than Prevent duties. This was especially pronounced for practitioners who frequently work with vulnerable people.

Nonetheless, the research found that there was appetite for increasing awareness and understanding of Prevent among public sector practitioners. This research also found that presenting public sector practitioners with a definition of Prevent raised awareness of the Prevent duty as part of their role.

Therefore, this research suggests that more needs to be done to raise awareness that the Prevent duty is part of public sector practitioners' roles, and of the risk attached to it not being properly understood and delivered. The findings also suggest that emphasising the safeguarding aspect of Prevent may increase the relevance of Prevent for public sector practitioners who see safeguarding as a relevant aspect of their role.

¹³ Where a vulnerable individual is referred to Prevent and identified as requiring support, this is provided via Prevent Case Management (Police Scotland, 2023b).

Delivery of the Prevent duty

Even among those who were aware of Prevent and who saw it as part of their role, public sector practitioners were more likely to feel confident in describing the characteristics or circumstances of an individual who might be vulnerable to extremism than in identifying potentially extremist behaviours. Public sector practitioners often had difficulty articulating what signs they would look out for, and, especially for those without Prevent-related roles, what the exact Prevent referral process was in a situation where they came across someone vulnerable to extremism.

Based on this finding, this research suggests that raising awareness among public sector practitioners of training and guidance which provides practical advice on behaviours to look out for would be beneficial.

In terms of potential improvements to the training provided, given the diversity of public sector practitioners' interaction with the public in relation to their job roles and sectors, guidance on behaviours to look out for should ideally be tailored to their roles and sectors. More broadly, tailoring the information within the Prevent duty guidance to specific job roles may also help public sector practitioners engage with it.

9.2. Suggestions for further research

Further social research

Two of the original objectives were found to be beyond the scope of this research and may be suitable for further research with public sector practitioners working closely with extremism and Prevent:

- What do public sector practitioners find to be most effective in preventing the spread of extremist ideologies?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns had an impact on public sector practitioners' abilities to monitor or respond to any changes in terms of spread of ideologies?

Further deliberative research

This research has found that public sector practitioners struggled to come to a definition of extremism, due to low starting levels of knowledge about the topic. If the Scottish Government wishes to use the views and experiences of public sector practitioners to inform the design of its own definition of extremism, it may be useful to undertake a programme of deliberative research¹⁴ with public sector practitioners on how to define extremism.

¹⁴ The [Association for Qualitative Research](#) (AQR) defines deliberative research in the following way: "Deliberative research focuses upon participants' viewpoints after they have been presented with the opportunity to 'deliberate' the issue(s) in question (as opposed to traditional qualitative methods that seek to understand current viewpoints). The sessions which usually take the form of an extended workshop, present a range of information and encourage differing points of view and

Further communications research

As many of the key findings of this research relate to a lack of clarity around terminology, it may also be useful to undertake a programme of ‘communications testing research’¹⁵ to identify the best way to communicate with public sector practitioners on the complex topic of extremism and the Prevent duty.

perspectives to be presented, before considered decisions are finally sought. It can be a useful approach for policy consultations as it allows the public to be involved in decision-making that incorporates a wide range of viewpoints and ideas”.

¹⁵ ‘Communications testing research’ is a standard research methodology often used by Government bodies, commercial and third sector organisations to help to inform the development of communications materials with specific target audiences. It is used to provide evidence-led recommendations on the best way to achieve communication objectives, including identifying where a different approach may be required for different sub-groups within a broader audience (for example, sub-groups within the broader category of public sector practitioners). Typically, communications testing research is qualitative in nature and involves the use of methodologies such as focus groups, 1-on-1 in-depth interviews and online community research platforms to prompt members of a specific target audience with communication materials (such as text, imagery, audio and video content).

Appendices

A. Full breakdown of job roles

Table 4 below shows the broad job roles represented in this research, broken down by sector and classified as either a non-managerial or a managerial role.

Table 4. Examples of job roles included in the sample

Sector	Job roles	
	Non-managerial	Managerial
Schools	Subject-specific teacher Educational psychologist Inclusion officer Development officer Custody officer Business manager School counsellor	Head teacher Quality improvement officer Senior leadership Administrative coordinator Teacher of ASN
Further / Higher education	Lecturer Student experience Precinct services Security operations manager Tutor Student support and development Assistant principal Administrator	Director of safeguarding services Student welfare, support & experience roles Corporate governance and planning officer Safety & security roles Professor Senior HR roles Compliance manager
Health and social care	Nurse Therapist (specialist areas) Support worker Community mental health nurse GP Early years worker Arch responder Equality and diversity roles Policy & risk officer COVID testing	Emergency planning roles Adult & child protection advisor Consultants (specialist areas) Team leaders & managers Risk and resilience roles Senior nurse Doctor
Local authorities and social work	Education manager Principal educational psychologist Service manager (various departments) Housing officer Support workers (various departments) Equalities team leader Solicitor COVID officer Department directors Social worker	PMP roles Deputy Prevent SPOC Resilience and deployment manager Head of departments Senior managers (various departments) Social inclusion officer
Police Scotland	Police constable Police officer Police custody roles	Counter-terrorism roles Detective constable – Prevent duty

	School-based police officer Service delivery	Detective inspector Custody inspector Team leader Duty officer Police chief inspector
Scottish Prisons Service	Social worker General Prison Operations roles Prison officer Psychologist roles Programmes Officer Prison chaplain Charity worker Parole coordinator	Manager roles Intelligence roles Prison governor HR roles Interventions officer Employability / labour allocation officer

B. Methodological detail

Ethical considerations

Table 5 below outlines the key ethical issues identified, and the measures that were put in place to mitigate them.

Table 5. Key ethical issues and mitigations

Ethical sensitivity	Mitigating actions
<p>Ensuring the identity of participants is protected and that their views are not attributed to them</p>	<p>Trust in the research process depends on the secure collection, handling and deletion of personal data, and this is particularly important when asking research participants to speak openly about sensitive topics such as extremism. An online format was chosen for the survey, as this typically feels more anonymous and helps respondents feel more comfortable when answering.</p> <p>Thinks Insight & Strategy is fully compliant with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation. Explicit, informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were aware of their right to withdraw at any time.</p> <p>Thinks Insight & Strategy has a robust data security and protection approach in place to ensure that the identity of participants is protected. All outputs were checked thoroughly to ensure that the identity of respondents could not be identified, particularly in cases where the pool of public sector practitioners is smaller and the risk of being identified is higher, such as for public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles.</p>
<p>Ensuring the research includes a diverse range of perspectives, and that the public sector practitioners who participate in the research do not represent a biased or minority view</p>	<p>A social model of accessibility was adopted for the research. This meant every participant was supported in taking part, regardless of; digital engagement, any special assistance required, mental or physical health conditions or a lack of confidence. For example, participants in the qualitative strand were reminded they could take breaks whenever required and telephone interviews were offered to those who were not comfortable using video-conferencing technology.</p> <p>In order to hear a diverse range of perspectives, a free-finding method was used to recruit participants for the mini-groups. The free-finding method involved recruiting individuals through a recruitment agency (Taylor McKenzie), using a screener questionnaire.</p>

	<p>This was used as opposed to wholly relying on the Prevent Sub Group.</p> <p>(The Prevent Sub Group is a multi-agency governance group that holds the strategic lead for the co-ordination and support of Scotland’s delivery of Prevent. Its membership includes a lead for each of the sectors which, under the Prevent duty, must pay ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’, including the police, education, prisons, health and local authority sectors.)</p>
<p>Minimising discomfort for participants, given that public sector practitioners may discuss challenging experiences they have faced as part of their role, and that discussion of extremism in general may also cause anxiety or distress, particularly if topics related to extremism arise such as terrorism and violence more broadly</p>	<p>Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, steps were taken to minimise distress, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online survey method was used, which public sector practitioners could complete in their own time, rather than feeling forced to give a response to a telephone interviewer. • Participants were assigned an individual, named and primary point of contact at Thinks Insight & Strategy for the duration of the research. Participants were given an information sheet prior to taking part, and a debrief sheet following their participation, which advised them to reach out to the named Thinks Insight & Strategy contact should they have any questions or concerns. • Sensitive interview techniques were used, including letting people know the structure and content of the interview ahead of the session, and offering regular breaks to avoid participant distress as a result of recounting their experiences. • Participants were also offered relevant information and support related to the discussion at the end of the session.
<p>Ensuring the research is conducted in line with Scottish Government COVID-19 restrictions</p>	<p>The latest UK Government, Scottish Government and MRS advice in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic was monitored throughout the research. As a result, no face-to-face research was undertaken.</p>
<p>Ensuring the research does not place unnecessary burden on respondents, and that time and resource requirements placed on organisations and individuals</p>	<p>The following considerations were taken in recognition that the audience for the research were time-poor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The qualitative research included mini groups, which took place in the evening after office

<p>to participate are managed to minimise impacts on other work</p>	<p>hours, and in-depth interviews, which could be scheduled to best suit participants' needs (including outside office hours).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants (dependent on their sector of work) were incentivised to take part, to recompense them for their time. It was not possible to offer incentives to public sector practitioners working in the Police and Prison sectors. This is because Police Scotland and the Scottish Prisons service have policies against accepting incentives for participation in research. • The quantitative survey was conducted online, making it easier for public sector practitioners to complete in their own time.
<p>Ensuring any ethical issues around the use of incentives with public sector workers are managed</p>	<p>Offering an incentive to participate is important, particularly as this may be a low salience topic for some of our participants (especially the public sector practitioners without Prevent-related roles) in their daily lives. Incentives also help protect against high drop-out rates.</p> <p>Public sector practitioners with Prevent-related roles, who are more involved in the Prevent duty may have considered there to be ethical barriers to their participation. These participants were offered the option of a charity donation in place of a personal incentive, or no incentive.</p> <p>Participants from the Police and those working as Prison Officers were not offered incentives, in line with the policies of Police Scotland and the Scottish Prisons Service.</p>
<p>Ensuring interviewers and fieldwork are fully briefed and sufficiently trained to conduct data collection and to handle any potentially difficult situations</p>	<p>All fieldwork was carried out by members of the Thinks Insight & Strategy project team, who are trained to meet ethical standards. Specifically, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are DBS checked to enhanced level. • Receive training at induction, annually and in their ongoing personal development training on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data protection and information security. ○ Qualitative research skills, (including sensitive interviewing techniques and accessibility and inclusion in the research process). ○ Safeguarding.

	<p>The team members were also highly experienced and trained in conducting research on sensitive topics, such as child sexual abuse, modern slavery and terrorism.</p>
<p>Ensuring there are procedures in place to deal with safeguarding concerns</p>	<p>Due to the specific risks associated with this project, a comprehensive Safeguarding Policy was in place, which informed staff and associated personnel of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. All colleagues received training on safeguarding at induction, annually and in their ongoing personal development training.</p> <p>To address any unreported Prevent concerns, there was a safeguarding procedure in place to ensure that the researchers would know what to do in the event that a participant said something that could have given rise to a Prevent concern.</p>

Qualitative interview outline

Table 6 below shows the broad outline of the qualitative discussion guide and the topics covered. The guides were adapted for each audience type (with or without Prevent-related roles) as needed.

Table 6. Outline of qualitative discussion guide

Section	Topics covered
Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A short warm up to get participants thinking about their typical working day and main roles
Views and definitions of extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associations with extremism • Participant's own definition of extremism • Views on provided definitions • Difference between extremism and terrorism
Extremism in Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of the extremism problem in Scotland • Types of extremism present in Scotland • Vulnerability to extremism
Experiences of extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of dealing with extremism, or those vulnerable to extremism • How to tell if someone is vulnerable to extremism • What to do when coming across someone vulnerable • Other job roles in their organisation that might deal with extremism
Understanding and experiences of Prevent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with Prevent duty • Experiences fulfilling Prevent • Confidence in fulfilling Prevent • Opinion on Prevent in Scotland
Wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything else to consider for the research

Quantitative survey outline

Table 7 below shows an outline of the topics covered in the online survey.

Table 7. Outline of topics in online survey

Section	Topics covered
Background and job role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment sector • Location • Job title
Experiences of and views on extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in defining extremism, identifying someone at risk of being drawn into extremism, what to do after identifying someone • Ranking 4 definitions of extremism • Extent of the extremism problem in their local area, Scotland, the UK and the rest of the world • Change of extremism threat over time • Extent of different types of extremism in Scotland • Experience of extremism
Experience of and views on Prevent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respondents shown description of Prevent</i> • Extent Prevent is part of their job • [If indicated familiarity with Prevent] details of experience • [If indicated familiarity with Prevent] views on effectiveness and favourability of Prevent • [If indicated familiarity with Prevent] Ranking possible improvements to Prevent
Demographic questions (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age • Religion • Ethnicity

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