Family factors are important for radicalization, but only limited evidence exists

This systematic review focuses on family-related risk and protective factors for radicalization, the impact of radicalization on families, and family-based interventions against radicalization. The review finds that parental ethnic socialization, having extremist family members and family conflict increase the risk of radicalization, whereas high family socio-economic status, bigger family size, and high family commitment are protective factors.

What is this review about?
Radicalization to violence is extremely harmful to social groups and the society as a whole, and has been found to be related to terrorism. Terrorism is a significant threat in 21st century societies, and countering radicalization to violence has become a national and international policy priority and a crucial public safety issue worldwide.

There is reason to believe that families can be crucial to radicalization. Group influence on individual action is a well-known phenomenon, and families are the most important social groups for many individuals. Transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to children has been confirmed in several studies, mostly explained by the fact that children learn by observing and imitating their parents. Parenting styles are also known to have short and long-term impact on children’s lives.

Thus, family-related factors could be crucial to explain radicalization, but most of the empirical studies in the field include a limited number of participants and variables.

Families are also likely to be negatively impacted by radicalization and, given the importance of families for individuals and societies, family-focused prevention and intervention programs against radicalization could be especially effective.

What studies were included?
The review includes 33 studies on family-related risk and protective factors, but there are no included studies on the impact of radicalization for families or family-based interventions.

The review includes 14 family-factors for radicalization. This is a broad set of factors, although the number of studies per factor was limited.

Parental bias and mistrust towards other cultures, having extremist family members and family conflicts were related to more radicalization.

What is the aim of this review?
This Campbell Collaboration systematic review focuses on family-related risk and protective factors for radicalization, impact of radicalization on families, and family-based interventions against radicalization. The review examines evidence based on 89 effects from 33 studies.
What are the main findings of this review?

The number of high-quality studies on radicalization is relatively low. Given that high-quality interventions against radicalization are urgently needed, it is crucial to inform practitioners, policy makers and researchers about possible components to be included in those interventions.

If risk and protective factors against radicalization are discovered using rigorous scientific methods, interventions could focus on decreasing risks and increasing protective factors. It is also crucial to identify the impact of radicalization on families so that this could be mitigated.

We found that parental bias and mistrust towards other cultures, having extremist family members and family conflicts were related to more radicalization. High family socio-economic status, bigger family size and family commitment were related to less radicalization.

The review also describes family-related factors separately for cognitive and behavioral radicalization, and for different radical ideologies such as Islamist, right-wing and left-wing. The results of this systematic review confirm the importance of families for radicalization, although they should be interpreted with caution, taking into account a relatively low number of studies per analysis. More studies on family-related risk and protective factors for radicalization are needed.

What do the findings of the review mean?

Some family-related factors seem to be crucial for understanding and preventing radicalization, but evidence is still limited. Family factors are among the most important predictors of delinquency in general, and this also seems to be true for radicalization.

Research on the impact of radicalization is urgently needed, and it is crucial to design, implement and evaluate family-focused interventions against radicalization. These interventions should be evaluated through robust scientific designs, especially randomized controlled trials.