

# Conspiracy mentality and violent extremism: A developmental inquiry

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# Introduction



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# Consumed by Conspiracy?

The risks and solutions for youth radicalization

1. Interviews with at risk youth (16-25-years-old)  
→ How do youth (de)radicalize?
2. Survey study youth ( $N = 1000$ ) in schools and online  
→ Which youth are vulnerable?  
→ What are risk & protective factors?  
→ Solutions?



UK



NL

## Which conspiracy believers are at risk for violent extremism?



# Conspiracy belief and violent extremism

- CTs as “radicalizing multipliers” (Bartlett & Miller, 2010)
  - Grievance
  - Wrongdoer
  - Provide narrative
- Conspiracy mentality associated with violent extremism (Levinsson et al., 2022; Uscincki & Parent, 2014; Jolley & Patterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020)



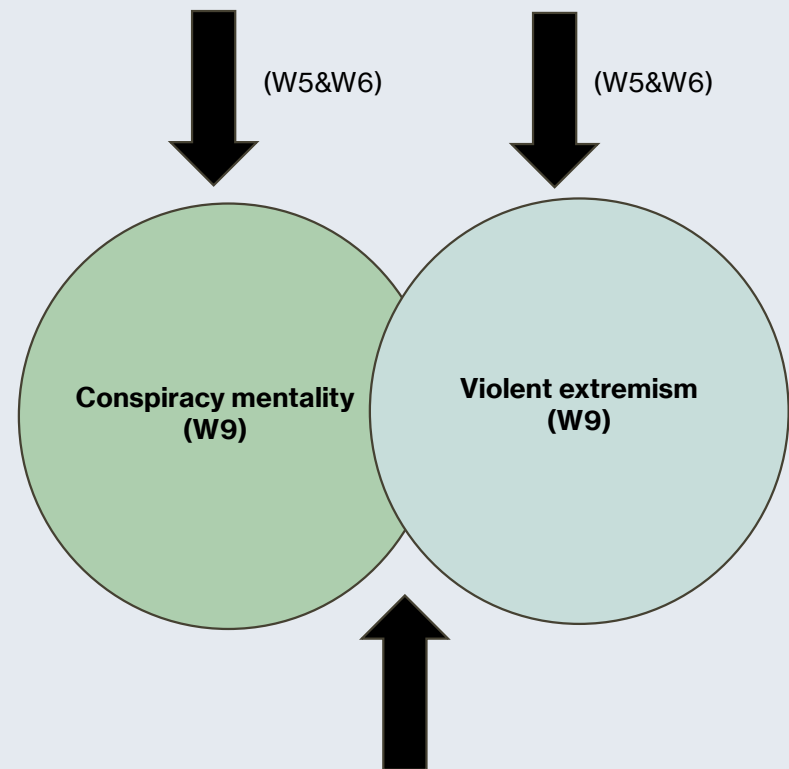
# Who might be vulnerable?

- CTs less influential for those high on self-control and with a stronger law – relevant morality (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020)
- ‘Common’ criminogenic factors play a role in conspiracy-radicalization (Duindam et al., 2023, *under review*)
- Developmental factors have been overlooked (Hornsey et al., 2022)



# Current research

1. Identify developmental predictors
2. Compare impact developmental predictors



# Developmental predictors – Violent extremism



Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969)



General strain theory (Agnew, 1992, 2006)

- Aversive parenting (+)
- School commitment (-)
- Deviant friends (+)
- Bully victimization (+)
- Moral neutralization (+)



Social learning theory (Akers et al., 1997)



Moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1986, 1999)



# Developmental predictors – Conspiracy mentality



Psychological motives theory  
(Green & Douglas, 2018)



Victimhood perspective  
(Bilewicz, 2022)

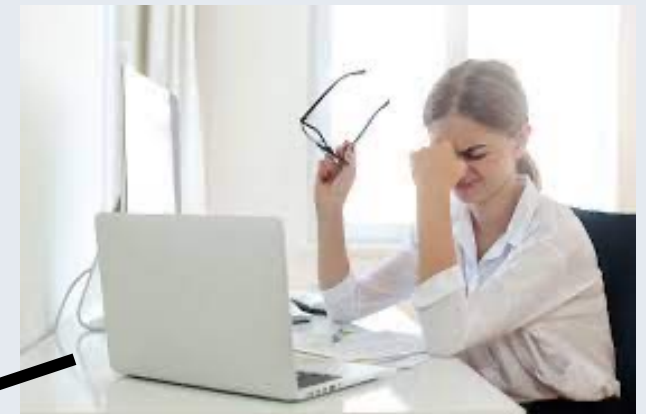


Aversive parenting (+)

Anxiety (+)

Bully victimization (+)

Total media use (+)



Adult factors (Hornsey et al., 2022)

# Developmental predictors - Impact

- Aversive parenting (inconsistent & corporal punishment)
  - Bully victimization
- **Impact on violent extremism & conspiracy mentality**

# Developmental predictors - Impact

- Aversive parenting (inconsistent & corporal punishment)
  - **School future commitment (Violent extremism)**
  - **Deviant friends (Violent extremism)**
  - **Anxiety (Conspiracy mentality)**
  - Bully victimization
  - **Total media consumption (Conspiracy mentality)**
  - **Moral neutralization (Violent extremism)**
- **Impact on violent extremism & conspiracy mentality**

# Methods

- z-proso data were imputed in Mplus ( $N = 1522$ ) (Rubin 1987; Schafer, 1997)
- Developmental predictors were combined by taking the mean score of W5&W6
  - Conspiracy mentality (W9) = propensity toward conspiracy thinking
  - Violent extremism (attitudes; W9) = endorse/support violent criminal acts for political, ideological, social or economic goals
- Education & gender included as control variables
- Multivariate Multiple Linear Regression, using robust standard errors (Afifi et al., 2004)
- Coefficients test were conducted to test whether development factors had an equal effect on outcomes (Afifi et al., 2004)

# Results

## Violent extremism

	$\beta$
Aversive parenting	<b>.078*</b>
School future	<b>-.123***</b>
Deviant friends	.061^
Anxiety	.017
Bully victimization	.061^
Media use	.010
Moral neutralization	<b>.085*</b>
Education	<b>.117*</b>
Gender	<b>-.175***</b>

Notes.  $R^2$  violent extremism .127\*\*\*;  $N = 1522$ .

# Results

## Conspiracy mentality

	$\beta$
Aversive parenting	.057 <sup>^</sup>
School future	.034
Deviant friends	.000
Anxiety	.038
Bully victimization	-.028
Media use	<b>.193***</b>
Moral neutralization	<b>.192***</b>
Education	<b>-.189*</b>
Gender	<b>.063*</b>

Notes.  $R^2$  conspiracy mentality .167\*\*,  $N = 1522$ .

# Results

	Conspiracy mentality	Violent extremism	Comparison
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$p$
➔ Aversive parenting	.057 <sup>^</sup>	<b>.078*</b>	.7199
School future	.034	<b>-.123***</b>	<b>.0002</b>
Deviant friends	.000	.061 <sup>^</sup>	.1620
Anxiety	.038	.017	.5983
Bully victimization	-.028	.061 <sup>^</sup>	<b>.0358</b>
➔ Media use	<b>.193***</b>	.010	<b>.0000</b>
➔ Moral neutralization	<b>.192***</b>	<b>.085*</b>	.1600
➔ Education	<b>-.189*</b>	<b>.117*</b>	<b>.0023</b>
➔ Gender	<b>.063*</b>	<b>-.175***</b>	<b>.0000</b>

Notes.  $R^2$  conspiracy mentality .167\*\*;  $R^2$  violent extremism .127\*\*\*;  $N = 1522$ .

# Discussion

- Violent extremism:
  - Males, with university degree, experienced aversive parenting, lack a commitment to school future, and have tendency to neutralize use of violence
- Conspiracy mentality:
  - Females, without a university degree, who spend a more time on media, and neutralize the use of violence
- Deviant friends, anxiety, and bully victimization did not play a role
- Moral neutralization as a form of cognitive distortion



# Going forward...

- Other developmental predictors?
- Other types of analyses?
- Assessment of conspiracy mentality



	<b>Somewhat true/fully true</b>
<b>Many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about</b>	75.5%
<b>Politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decision.</b>	72.4%
<b>Government agencies closely monitor all citizens.</b>	37.7%
<b>Events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities.</b>	30.8%
<b>There are secret organisations that greatly influence political decisions.</b>	50.6%

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