Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) and Violence Fixated Individuals – Executive Summary

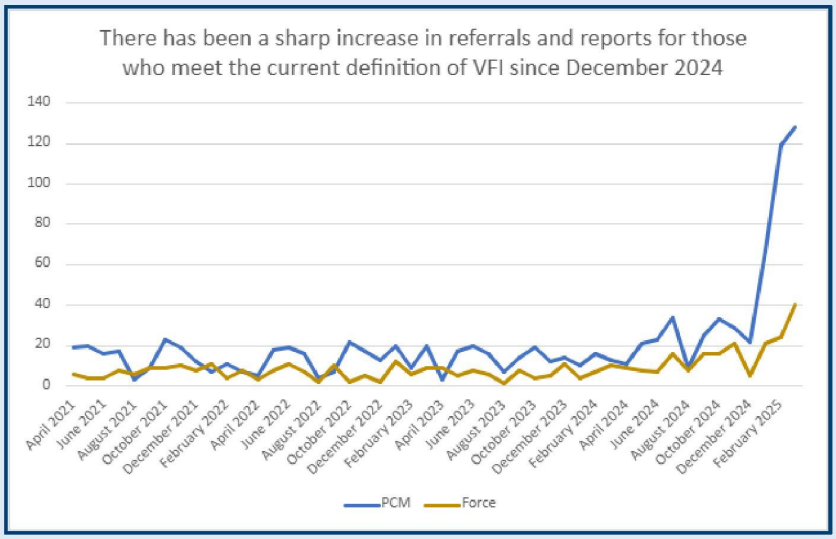
Background

CTPHQ Analysis & Research (A&R) has produced two papers on Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) and a subset of those engaged in NIEV, Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs). These have been published simultaneously and written to complement each other. The papers focus on the characteristics associated with NIEV that might help to aid identification prior to their mobilisation to violence, and the size and trajectory of the cohort of individuals known to police who are assessed to meet the definition of VFIs.

VFI Cohort Overview

When looking for individuals meeting the current definition of VFI (individuals who have a fascination with extreme violence and intent to inflict extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver) within data from UK Police Forces as well as Prevent Case Management, 1551 unique individuals were identified as meeting the definition over a four-year period (from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2025).

While there are some caveats and data gaps that should be borne in mind when considering these findings, we assess with a reasonable degree of confidence that this is a likely benchmark of the size and scale of the current VFI cohort within UK Policing. The main caveats to note are; data returns were only received from 73% of forces, a set of keywords was provided to guide forces on data collection, but processes for searching and collation of data will vary across forces and therefore will affect the accuracy of data provided and lastly, it is impossible to make a confident assessment of 'intent' to commit extreme violence from the data provided.



Based on the compiled data, the number of VFIs has trebled in 2024/25, compared to the last three years and it is likely this trend will persist into 2025/26. It is assessed that this increase, which was seen most prominently between January and March 2025, is likely due to increased awareness (both from the public and frontline workers) as well as heightened tensions as a result of the Southport attack and subsequent trial. Currently, it is assessed to be highly likely that many categorised as VFIs are not being actively managed by Police or Prevent due to the individuals not being of CT concern, potentially leading to significant un-managed risk.

Also of note is the finding that the VFI cohort mirrors a similar age demographic to the wider Prevent cohort, with the majority of referrals being below the age of 18 years old. It is highly likely that potential VFIs will be flagged to policing between the age of 12 to 16, with 86% of all cases with an accurate date of birth relating to individuals aged 18 years or younger at the time of reporting. There is a clear peak between 12 and 16 years of age (59%), and those aged 14 and 15 account for 37% of all cases where an accurate date of birth has been recorded.

While education remains the biggest source of referrals into Prevent, and therefore a focus on minors should be expected within the data (it should be noted that being a minor in itself is not a social risk factor and those on the pathway to violence will present a unique interplay of factors that are highly individualistic and may co-exist), there is nonetheless a concern that minors with developing faculties for critical thinking may be being routinely exposed to extreme violence online. A 2024 Ofcom report exploring "Pathways to Online Violent Content Among Children" identified that many children in their sample were encountering violent content online without seeking it out. In the dataset, one case outlined that an individual was targeting a fellow minor via Snapchat with threats and images of extreme violence, including dismembered bodies, a video of someone being shot in the head, execution and pornographic videos.



Graphic shows prevalent keywords for Trigger Factors and Potential Risk Factors within the collected force data

Characteristics of those engaged in Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV), including Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs)

The T1D - Cabinet Office Body working definition of Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs) is "fascination with extreme violence and intent to inflict extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver". CTPHQ has chosen to examine both the VFI cohort and a wider superset of individuals that the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) has identified as those who commit acts of NIEV. The rationale for this is based on a CTPHQ assessment that fixation with violence is only one of several pathways to non-ideologically motivated extreme violence and should be considered as part of a broader constellation of risk factors.

A literature review undertaken by CTPHQ identified six principal strands of risk factors for NIEV:

1. **Violence;**
2. **Personality traits;**
3. **Mental ill-health;**
4. **Neurodivergence;**
5. **Personal Grievance; and**
6. **Misanthropic and Nihilistic beliefs**

These psychological and social factors are not exhaustive and not all factors will be identifieable in each NIEV case. Individuals on a pathway to NIEV will present a unique interplay of factors that are highly individualistic and may co-exist.

It is likely that the risk factors and warning behaviours exhibited by perpetrators of NIEV are the same as Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs). While the characteristics of perpetrators of NIEV and S-ITs will not always be identical, in CTP's judgement they will likely correlate. Examples of these characteristics include, but are not limited to, propensity to violence, criminality and loneliness. It is recommended that further work is conducted to analyse where these traits overlap and how S-ITs and NIEVs differ.

It is highly unlikely that violence fixation, when flagged in isolation, will act as a reliable predictor of individual's risk of mobilising to non-ideological extreme violence (NIEV). It is almost certain that perpetrators of NIEV will have experienced a unique combination of psychological and social risk factors that subsequently influence their pathway to violence. Consideration of a range of factors, in addition to violence fixation, will improve the ability to identify those at risk of committing NIEV.

It is likely that personality traits, such as lack of empathy, desire for notoriety and general aggression influence an individuals' pathway to NIEV. These personality traits were identified in the literature as factors which increase the risk of non-ideologically motivated extreme violence. Although prominent in the academic literature, it is unlikely that these traits will offer support in predicting NIEV due to the inward nature of these traits. However, outward expressions of these personality traits (i.e. aggressive behaviour as an expression of general aggression) can be used to infer personality types.

It is highly unlikely that mental ill-health will act as a primary driver towards NIEV. However, there is a realistic possibility that acute symptoms of mental-ill health (e.g. suicidal ideation and psychosis) will exacerbate co-existing risk factors, furthering an individual on the pathway to NIEV. Mental ill-health continues to be one of the most discussed factors in the violent offending literature, as is seen in terrorism and general offending research. Furthermore, in CTP's quantitative assessment, "mental health episode" and "poor mental health" were both highly prevalent key words in the dataset collected (see Trigger Factors and Potential Risk Factors chart above).

There is a realistic possibility that traits associated with neurodivergence will increase exposure to co-existing risk factors, such as social isolation or perceived injustices, which in turn influences their pathway to violence. However, it is almost certain that neurodivergence in isolation is not a causal driver of NIEV. The literature review highlighted that neurodivergence continues to present a greater prevalence in offending populations compared to the general population. However, it is almost certain that neurodivergent individuals, without co-existing factors, will not go on to conduct NIEV.

It is likely that grievances developed from negative personal experiences will act as a key driver towards NIEV. Throughout the literature review, factors influencing non-ideological violence were not dissimilar to those of ideological violence. However, where acts of terrorism are driven by the desire to advance a political, religious, racial or ideological cause, perpetrators of non-ideological violence were likely to be driven by a personal grievance. Personal grievances will vary dependent on an individual's negative life experiences and will often be difficult to recognise unless assessed alongside other risk factors.

It is highly likely that a perpetrator of NIEV will adopt misanthropic and nihilistic ideas, however these will play a lesser role in their pathway to violence. In isolation, possession of these ideas is not a reliable indicator for mobilisation to NIEV. In 2024, the Global Terrorism Index reported a 270% increase in violent attacks where the ideological motivation was unclear or undetermined, rising from 14 in 2023 to 52 in 2024'. Despite this increase, ideological fragmentation and unclear ideological mindset is not a new phenomenon. Instead, rapidly increasing access to ideologies, philosophies and theologies online has allowed SOIs to create deeply personal belief systems that do not fit into conventional ideological strands like Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) and Islamist Terrorist. While SOIs appear attracted to misanthropic and nihilistic ideas, other ideas rooted in inceldom and misogyny are also prevalent.

It is likely that warning behaviours associated with NIEV will aid support services in identifying those on a pathway to violence at the earliest opportunity. Seven warning behaviours were highlighted in the literature review, including research and attack planning, propensity to violence, fixated with cause, leakage behaviour, identifying with violent individuals, uncharacteristic social isolation, and previous association with support services (i.e. Prevent). Warning behaviours are highly likely to be influenced by any psychological and social risk factors and rarely exist independently of these.

It is almost certain that social media algorithms act as a gateway to unintentional consumption of non-ideological violent content. CTP are aware that individuals are unintentionally exposed to extremist and terrorist content online due to social media algorithms. This is a trend that is mirrored within consumption of violent content and is difficult for CTP to mitigate due to it not meeting the threshold for Terrorism Act Offences. In 2025, The Guardian reported that META algorithms were displaying violent and graphic footage to users, including gore, animal abuse and dead bodies.

It is likely that perpetrators of NIEV will view Terrorist Ideological Propaganda (TIP) for its violence and not for its ideological purpose. Ideological violent content is present on gore sharing platforms and offers SOIs access to additional graphic content and instructional material. Despite not being charged as a Terrorist due to his lack of ideology, RUDAKUBANA was charged under Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 for his possession of an al-Qaeda training manual. RUDAKUBANA's possession of this document highlights the ease of accessibility to TIP and further emphasises the need for nuanced analysis of perpetrators of NIEV.

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