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Inheriting Hatred? A Systematic Review of the Intergenerational Transmission of Extremist Ideologies

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Abstract

Scholars and policy makers across the world have expressed their concerns about children growing up in extremist households. It is feared that these children might eventually take on their parents' ideas – thus becoming the next generation of extremists. In reality, much is still unknown about the degree to which extremist ideologies are in fact intergenerationally transmitted, as well as the mechanisms and factors associated with these processes. This study is the first to systematically synthesize findings on the transmission of extremist ideologies from parent to child. Based on 53 (mostly qualitative) studies, we found that the intergenerational transmission of right-wing extremist, jihadist and ethnonationalist beliefs does occur, although methodological differences inhibited a meta-analysis. According to our review, transmission takes place through discursive, socio-spatial, temporal, moral-educational and symbolic mechanisms. Risk factors associated with transmission include parental experiences of victimization and oppression; financial concerns; the presence of extremist siblings; and conventional gender role patterns within the family. Protective factors include children's engagement in prosocial hobbies and relations outside the family sphere; age; and cognitive and critical thinking skills. Interestingly, both negative family relations (e.g., abuse, neglect) and warm or loving family relations seem to enable intergenerational transmission processes – suggesting that extremist ideologies can be transmitted in households of all parenting styles.

Key words Intergenerational transmission · Extremism · Socialization · Radicalization · Parenting

Highlights

- This systematic literature review synthesizes the findings of 53 empirical studies on the intergenerational transmission of extremism.
- High quality data on the prevalence of intergenerational transmission of extremism is still lacking.
- Various mechanisms, risk factors and protective factors of extremist transmission were identified.
- Findings suggest that the role of loyalty, trust and warm family relations are often overlooked in the study of extremist transmission processes.

Introduction

Academics and practitioners alike agree that processes of radicalization are inherently social in nature (Crone, 2016;

Knott & Lee, 2020; Schuurman et al., 2019; Scremin, 2020). For example, there is ample evidence supporting the role of radical leaders, peer groups and online or offline networks in processes of radicalization (for a recent overview, see Winter et al., 2020). When it comes to the link between family dynamics and extremism, however, academic studies emphasize the indirect effects parents may have on radicalization processes (e.g., through the transmission of risk factors, see Zych & Nasaescu, 2022) or their perceived deradicalizing potential (El-Amraoui & Ducol, 2019; Schewe & Koehler, 2021). Moreover, while different studies have shown how various ideologies and behaviors can be transmitted from parent to child (e.g., Carlson & Knoester, 2011;

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Murray & Mulvaney, 2012), the family as a source of extremist ideas remains largely understudied. The intergenerational transmission of extremism within a family context is therefore at the core of this systematic review. By synthesizing existing knowledge on the prevalence, factors and mechanisms of extremist transmission, this review may aid our understanding of the ways in which transmission can be countered or prevented, and as such, may contribute to new and existing policy frameworks.

Intergenerational Transmission

The concept of intergenerational transmission generally refers to a multidirectional process, in which both parents and children directly or indirectly influence each other in their beliefs, norms and values (Bernardi, 2013; Knott & Lee, 2020; Roest, 2007). In practice, processes of transmission can take various shapes and forms within the family context. Perhaps the most well-known mechanism of parent-to-child transmission is socialization - or transmission through social interactions. This includes modeling (learning through observation, see Bandura, 1971; Shettleworth, 2010), and formal training, such as classical and operant conditioning (learning through neutral, rewarding or punitive stimuli, see Grant, 1964; Grusec & Lytton, 1988; De Houwer, Thomas & Baeyens, 2001; Min, Silverstein & Lendon, 2012). Terms commonly used to describe the more controversial forms of transmission are “indoctrination” and “brainwashing” – which generally refer to authority figures imposing certain ideas on others through psychological pressure, manipulation and deception (Merry, 2005; Winn, 2000). Here, the difference with formal training (or regular education) is considered the absolute lack of freedom with which subjects are subjected to these practices, as well as the fundamental rejection of contradictory perspectives (see also Hocutt, 2005).

The concept of intergenerational transmission is used in a wide variety of research areas, including in the study of marital divorcing (Amato, 1996), intimate partner violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003), and deviant behavior (Kaplan & Tolle, 2006). This broad application is reflected in its use in various disciplines, including child studies, sociology, psychology, philosophy, religious studies and criminology. Specifically, within the latter, ample research has been conducted on the parent-to-child transmission of criminality and violent behavior (Van der Weijer, Bijleveld & Blokland, 2014). Here, intergenerational transmission is considered as a causal explanation for criminal conduct, and the results of several empirical studies confirm the influence that earlier generations can have on the manifestation of deviance in children (Rowe & Farrington, 1997; Farrington et al., 2017; Van de Rakt et al., 2008; Van de Rakt et al.,

2009; Thornberry et al., 2003; Van der Weijer & Spapens, 2019).

Extremist Ideologies

This review focuses on the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies and behaviors. Extremist worldviews are generally held and advocated by extremists – which terrorism scholar Alex Schmid (2013) defines as “political actors who tend to disregard the rule of law and reject pluralism in society” (p. 8). He distinguishes four elements of extremists and their organizations (Schmid, 2013, p. 9). They (1) are anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist and authoritarian in nature; (2) rely on fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising black-or-white thinking; (3) reject the rule of law while adhering to an ends-justify-means philosophy; (4) seek to realize their goals by any means, including, when the opportunity presents itself, the use of massive political violence against opponents. In trying to realize their agendas, extremists rely on the use of force or violence (instead of persuasion); uniformity (instead of diversity); collective goals (instead of individual freedom); and giving orders (instead of dialogue) (Schmid, 2013). The strength of Schmid’s definition is in its conciseness and the emphasis he places on extremists’ (legitimization of the) use of violence – thus differentiating extremism from radicalism and activism.

From a policy perspective, concerns have been voiced that children growing up in extremist environments will eventually adopt their parents’ beliefs (e.g., National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security [NCTV], 2019). Academic reflections on extremist transmission mirror these concerns (Lee & Knott, 2017; Knott & Lee, 2020; Scremin, 2020). Nonetheless, scholars acknowledge processes of parent-to-child transmission of attitudes and behaviors to be complex and not at all clear-cut (Bernardi, 2013; Knott & Lee, 2020; Roest, 2007). Therefore, some argue that it is “by no means a foregone conclusion” (Lee & Knott, 2017, p. 8) that children raised in extremist households will indeed adopt their parents’ beliefs (see also Scremin, 2020).

Taken together, so far there is little known about the degree to which the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies indeed occurs. Even less is known about the mechanisms by which these processes take place, nor about their associated risk and protective factors. This review aims to synthesize empirical knowledge on (1) the prevalence of intergenerational transmission within extremist families; (2) the mechanisms of transmission, and (3) the factors related to these processes. As such, this review offers a systematic overview of what is known about this topic, which can be used for both future research endeavors

and evidence-based policies for diminishing the potential adverse effects of intergenerational transmission within extremist families.

Methods

Search Strategy

In this systematic review we followed the PRISMA guidelines (Shamseer et al., 2015). All relevant empirical peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and (unpublished) dissertations were included in the review. Fifteen electronic databases were consulted in the identification of relevant studies: PubMed (including MEDLINE); PsycINFO; PsycARTICLES; ScienceDirect; Social Science Research Network; Sociological Abstracts; Scopus; Web of Science (including SSCI, AHCI); Child Welfare Information Getaway; ERIC; Social Care Online; Social Services Abstracts; Criminal Justice Abstracts; NCJRS Abstracts; Worldwide Political Science Abstracts. ProQuest and EThOS were consulted to identify any relevant (unpublished) dissertations. Google, Google Scholar and the OpenGrey database were used to identify potentially additional “gray” literature on this topic. In each of these databases, we used the following search query to identify eligible studies.

(intergeneration* OR crossgeneration* OR multi-generation* OR generation* OR transmi* OR continuity*) AND (father* OR paternal* OR mother* OR maternal* OR son* OR daughter* OR parent* OR child* OR offspring* OR famil*) AND (jihad* OR islam* OR salafi* OR terroris* OR radicali* OR extremi* OR “religious fundament*” OR sectar* OR ideolog*) AND (risk* OR mechanism* OR factor* OR intervention)

The search strategy was designed to be as broad as possible while aligning with the original scope of the project. This study was commissioned by the Research and Data Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security as a follow-up to previous research on the role of family members in jihadist radicalization (Weggemans et al., 2018). As such, while we included terminology intended to capture a range of ideological contexts, the search terms retained a slight emphasis on jihadism to ensure continuity with earlier work.

To make sure that all relevant literature was identified, we also performed manual searches for studies within published meta-analyses or systematic reviews on similar topics (e.g., regarding the role of family factors in radicalization), and within the journals and the reference lists of

included studies. This yielded 49 potentially relevant studies, which were included in the screening process. In order to prevent publication bias and as a way to include the results of ongoing research projects, we contacted 36 scholars in our (international) network to identify (unpublished) sources and upcoming publications, which yielded 8 additional studies.

Screening and Data Extraction

In our review, we made use of a three-step screening process where we consecutively screened eligible studies on their titles (step 1), abstracts (step 2) and full texts (step 3). Studies were included if they were empirical in nature and concerned the intergenerational transmission of extremism from caregiver (including step-, grand-, adoptive and foster parents) to child. Only studies dating between 2000 and 2022 were included. We chose 2000 as a cut-off to ensure the review reflects contemporary ideological, familial, and sociocultural contexts. Earlier studies may be less relevant due to modern-day shifts in gender roles, parenting norms, and the influence of digital media on children’s ideological socialization. All study populations were considered eligible – regardless of demographic characteristics such as age, gender, or country of origin. Studies were excluded if it concerned an ineligible document type (e.g., media sources, non-scientific op-eds, book reviews, etc.); a duplicate; an irrelevant topic; or a non-empirical study. Studies dealing with other types of extremist transmission (e.g., child-to-parent or sibling-to-sibling) were excluded. Data extraction was conducted by one of our team members – whose work was cross-checked by the co-authors through sampling. Any discrepancies were resolved through team discussions.

Synthesis

In examining prevalence of the intergenerational transmission of extremism, only two studies include intergenerational correlates of extremist values (see Table 1), which was insufficient for a meta-analysis. Moreover, while five studies contain effect size data on potential risk factors and protective factors (see Table 2), we were unable to conduct a meta-analysis, due to their vast differences in choice of (independent and dependent) variables, unit of analysis, methodology and reporting. Therefore, we opted for a descriptive synthesis of quantitative findings of both factors and mechanisms (following Mugadza et al., 2019). Qualitative findings were coded inductively using software program Atlas.ti (Friedse, Soratto, & Pires, 2018). We conducted a thematic analysis, based on our elements of interest (prevalence, mechanisms, risk factors and protective factors). This allowed us to synthesize the findings while adhering to the nature of these studies. Common patterns

Table 1 Quantitative findings regarding the intergenerational transmission of extremism

Authors	Sample	Data	Main findings
Asal et al. (2010)	Family members of Pakistani suicide terrorists (N = 141, $\mu = 46.19$ y/o)	Survey data	70% of households gave permissions for a sons' participation in jihad, of which 63.4% reported no one in the family refusing
Boehnke (2017)	German students and their parents (N = 147, 80% male, $\mu = 20.5$ y/o)	Survey data	Father-child scores on right-wing extremist attitudes are significantly positively related ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). Mother-child scores are not significantly related.
Botha (2014)	Kenian Al-Shabaab members and their families (N = 141, 96% male)	In-depth interviews	3% of sample became involved in extremist network through family members. - Parents were supportive of decision to join extremist group in 21% of cases.
King et al. (2011)	Family members of Indonesian Jema'ah Islamiyah members (N = 20, 55% male)	Survey data	- On average, using a scale from completely agree (5) to completely disagree (–5), family support their son's decision to join the JI terrorist organization ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 2.10$). - On average, families scored slightly above neutral on support for violent jihad' ($M = 0.60$, $SD = 2.12$)
Kule (2007)	Convicted terrorists from Turkey and the Kurdistan Region (N = 200, 94.5% male)	Criminal case file data	8.8% of sample became involved in extremist network through family members, and 9.8% through extended family.
Malik (2019)	Children in British family court cases (N = 20, 24% female, 44% male 32% unknown)	Casefile data	52% of cases had a family history of extremist activity. 48% of cases contained a family member that had joined IS.
Oepke (2008)	German youth and their parents (N = 149, 55,1% male, $\mu = 14.8$ y/o at first interval)	Longitudinal survey data	- Right-wing extremism among children is significantly positively related to right-wing extremism among parents ($r = 0.19$ to 0.40). - Right-wing extremist attitudes of parents ($r = 0.96$ to $r = 0.98$, $p < 0.05$) and their children ($r = 0.70$ to $r = 0.79$, $p < 0.05$) are stable over time. - Right-wing extremist attitudes of parents are significantly positively related to the attitudes of their children years later ($r = 0.17$ to $r = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$). 'Acceptance of violence' among parents is not a significant predictor of 'acceptance of violence' among children one year later.
Post et al. (2003)	Convicted secular and Islamic terrorists from the Middle East (N = 35, 100% male)	In-depth interviews	- In total, 30% of secular terrorists and 20% of Islamic terrorists of sample became involved in extremist network through family members. - Over 30% of the Islamic terrorists reported extensive radical involvement by family. For secular terrorists, this was 15%.
Pritchett & Moeller (2022).	US individuals convicted for radicalism (N = 2148) based on the PIRUS database	Secondary data (PIRUS)	The variable <i>radical family</i> scores $M = 0.85$ on a 0–3 score (N = 734, 65,9% missing data)
Sageman (2004)	Convicted terrorists from various countries (N = 172, 100% male)	Open-source data	14% of sample became involved in extremist network through family members
Windisch (2019)	Former white supremacists from the US (N = 91, 78% male)	Life course interviews	13% of sample mentioned having white supremacists in the family 73% of sample mentioned growing up with white supremacist discourse as a child

Table 2 Quantitative findings on risk factors and protective factors of intergenerational transmission of extremism

Authors	Sample	Data	Main findings
Asal et al. (2010)	Family members of Pakistani suicide terrorists (N = 141, $\mu = 46.19$ y/o)	Survey data	- Significant predictors of family consent for jihad: age of the participant ($\beta = 0.03821$, $SD = 0.0200$, $p < 0.05$); family economic status ($\beta = -2.1286$, $SD = 1.161$, $p < 0.10$); nr. of men in the family attending madrassah ($\beta = 6.6109$, $SD = 2.628$, $p < 0.001$); family being Deobandi ($\beta = -1.7858$, $SD = 0.9989$, $p < 0.10$). - Significant predictors of family refusing consent for jihad: family economic status ($\beta = 1.7000$, $SD = 0.7842$, $p < 0.05$); female family members in religious study groups ($\beta = -1.0961$, $SD = 0.5331$, $p < 0.05$); son being unemployed ($\beta = -0.76468$, $SD = 0.4569$, $p < 0.10$); son attending madrassah ($\beta = -0.95122$, $SD = 0.5827$, $p < 0.10$). - The variable 'hierarchical self-interests' moderated mother-daughter relationships ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), father-daughter relationships ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$) and father-son relationships ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$) regarding right-wing extremist attitudes. - No significant difference in political extremism in the three cohorts. For all three cohorts, religiosity is significantly negatively associated with political extremism. Other significant factors are mass media consumption ($\beta = 0.114$) in the second cohort, and personal relevance of the Spanish Civil War ($\beta = 0.113$) and family relevance of the Spanish Civil War ($\beta = 0.067$) in the third cohort. - In all three cohorts, religion (an individual's perceived importance of religion) is a significant moderating factor on the transmission of political extremism ($t = -2277$, $p < 0.05$; $-r = -5035$, $p < 0.01$; $r = -8142$, $p < 0.01$). - Both fathers and mothers can be significant factors in the transmission of extremism to their children. The effect of mothers appears to be somewhat stronger (effect size unknown) - Having convicted family members increases probability of PKK membership ($\beta = 1.104$; $SD = 0.488$; $p < 0.05$). - The number of JI members in the family did not significantly predict family support for sons' involvement in JI. Similarly, participants support for violent jihad did not significantly predict family support for sons' involvement in JI. - Sons' martyrdom was significantly related to less family support for their involvement in JI (effect sizes unknown). Perceived community opinions were significantly related to family's support for sons' involvement in JI (effect sizes unknown).
Boehnke (2017)	German students and their parents (N = 147, 80% male, $\mu = 20.5$ y/o)	Survey data	
Estévez (2021).	Spanish participants of three different generations (N = 2,936)	Survey data	
Kule (2007)	Convicted terrorists from Turkey and the Kurdistan Region (N = 200, 94.5% male)	Judicial case file data	
King et al. (2011)	Family members of Indonesian Jema'ah Islamiyah members (N = 20, 55% male)	Survey data	

and themes across studies will be presented as qualitative summaries.

Results

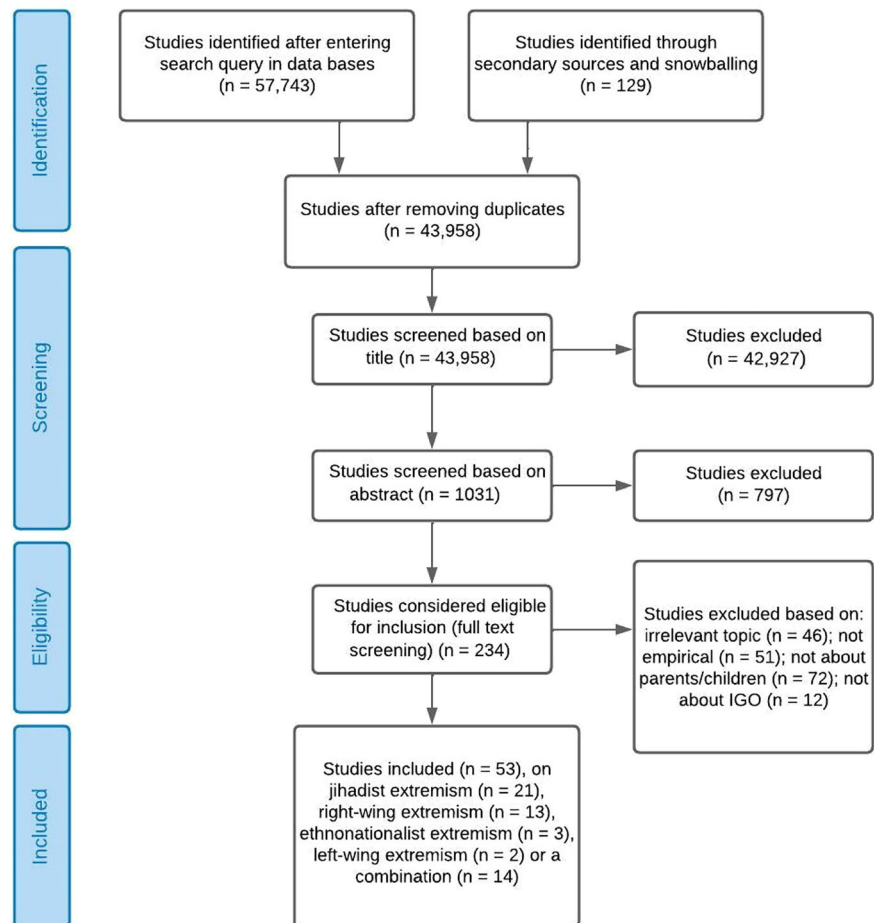
The literature search yielded 53 studies, of which the majority were qualitative in nature ($N = 39$). Other studies used either a quantitative ($N = 8$) or a mixed method ($N = 6$) approach. As their main type of data, the included studies used interviews ($N = 21$), open sources ($N = 13$), surveys ($N = 5$), judicial case files ($N = 4$), (auto)biographies ($N = 4$), ethnographic observations ($N = 3$), focus group discussions ($N = 1$), historical archives ($N = 1$), and written testimonies ($N = 1$). Most of the included studies dealt with Islamic-inspired or jihadist extremism ($N = 21$) (see Fig. 1). Others concerned right-wing extremist ($N = 13$), ethno-nationalist ($N = 3$), and left-wing extremist ideologies ($N = 2$) – or a combination of various extremist ideologies ($N = 14$). The studies originate from the US ($N = 19$), the UK ($N = 10$), Germany ($N = 5$), The Netherlands ($N = 4$), Australia ($N = 3$), Sweden ($N = 2$),

Indonesia ($N = 2$), Canada ($N = 2$), Italy ($N = 2$), South-Africa ($N = 1$), Spain ($N = 1$), Belgium ($N = 1$), and Switzerland ($N = 1$). All included studies are indicated with an asterisk (*) in the bibliography.

Prevalence

Quantitative findings on the prevalence of the intergenerational transmission of extremism are summarized in Table 1. Both Boehnke (2017) and Oepke (2008) observe positive and significant intergenerational correlations of right-wing extremist attitudes (based on parent-child and child-parent correlates, respectively). Moreover, five studies on jihadism or Islamic inspired extremism include data on the percentage of the sample that became involved in these ideologies through first-degree family members – ranging from 3% (Botha, 2014) to 20% (Sageman, 2004). While these authors indicate that these percentages include transmission by parents and caregivers, the precise contribution of this subgroup remains unclear. Three studies focus on parental permission for their sons' decision to participate in jihadist

Fig. 1 PRISMA Flowchart of the literature search and screening process



extremism, whereas four others examine extremists' family backgrounds, including parents' involvement in extremist movements.

Mechanisms

The included literature suggests that the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies takes place through various transmission mechanisms – in which parents can take on both active and passive roles. To identify these mechanisms, we conducted multiple rounds of inductive coding. We then combined and grouped codes based on the respective objectives they serve within the general transmission process, which yielded five distinct mechanisms, on the discursive, socio-spatial, temporal, moral-educational and symbolic level. We will discuss each of these mechanisms and their workings.

Discursive Mechanisms

Of the included qualitative studies, 31 mention the use of discursive transmission mechanisms by parents. Discursive mechanisms concern verbal interactions between parent and child, through which parents learn their children how to interpret the world around them. This is first and foremost reflected in the black-and-white nature of parental discourse. Extremist parents generally make a sharp distinction between the in-group and the “evil” outside world by using dehumanizing terminology – also known as “othering” (see Said, 1979). In the jihadist context for example, Huggins (2013) described how parents refer to “infidels” as “Christian and Jewish pigs” (p. 64). In right-wing extremist families, children are taught early on that non-white people are “mudpeople” (Blee, 2002) — and that LGBTQIA+ community members are “fags” (Windisch, 2019, p. 117).

In total, ten studies indicate a certain “herofication” or “glorification” within parental discourses. Here, children are entrusted with the protection of the community and the family name, and where participation in the armed struggle is presented as a major responsibility (Copeland, 2020; Pape, 2005; Riany et al., 2018). Parents often refer to an extremist family line and the “hero blood” (Riany et al., 2018, p. 21) that runs through their children's veins, and how this “hero status” is within their arm's reach (Huggins, 2013; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003; Post, 2005; Weggemans, Van der Zwan & Liem, 2018). Parents' stories about the struggle and resistance of previous generations (“tales of glory”, Windisch, 2019, p. 138) play an important role in this respect (see e.g., Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Köttig, 2004; Köttig, 2008; Köttig, 2013).

In contrast to this heroic discourse, 13 studies emphasize the role of extremist families' perceived victimization. As

the literature indicates, this victimization is experienced in relation to police arrests and executions (Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Copeland, 2020; Pape, 2005; Post Sprinzak & Denny, 2003; Von Kellenbach, 2013). More general experiences of exclusion and marginalization may similarly feature in these victimization discourses – which extremist parents use to legitimize their violent ideologies both to their children and to themselves (Bickerton, 2019; Malik, 2019; Pape, 2005; Riany et al., 2018).

Socio-Spatial Mechanisms

In total, 24 of the included studies indicate the relevance of socio-spatial mechanisms of extremist transmission. This dimension concerns children's participation in social gatherings, where they are introduced to like-minded individuals, often in the context of their parents' extremist network (Blee, 2002; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Manning & Bau, 2015). Socio-spatial transmission takes place, for example, by allowing children to participate in extremist “living room meetings” or study circles (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Malik, 2019); having them participate in ideological youth movements (Blee, 2002; Reinisch, 2020); or by taking them to important ideological gatherings such as demonstrations and rallies (Schils & Verhage, 2017; Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015). The included studies suggest that there is a sphere of playfulness or informality to these gatherings – where personal connections are placed over (ideological) content. Nine studies indicate that extremist parents have their children partake in small chores within their ideological movements, such as assisting in organizing gatherings (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010), folding and distributing pamphlets or newspapers (Blee, 2002; Raposo-Quintana, 2009), and bringing tea and cigarettes to members of the movement (Crawford, 2013). In all instances, extremist ideologies are indirectly transmitted by introducing children to a larger social network of extremists.

Temporal Mechanisms

Temporal mechanisms of intergenerational transmission are discussed in 22 of the included qualitative studies. These mechanisms relate to the ways in which parents establish a continuity to their extremist socialization efforts, by fully integrating their ideology into the lives of their children – with the difference between the two ultimately completely dissolving (see Futrell & Simi, 2004; Windisch, 2019). In the jihadist context, for example, marriage agreements with other extremist families are a reoccurring theme (Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Harris-Hogan, 2014). It is suggested that as such, parents can ensure social (and

ideological) control over their children through their spouse and parents-in-law (Sageman, 2004). Other studies mention how extremist parents actively engage in children's friendships, for example by putting them up with pen pals from like-minded families (Blee, 2002) and by explicitly forbidding contact with children from other backgrounds (Windisch, 2019).

School selection is also a relevant temporal mechanism, as observed in 14 of the included studies. Blee (2002) describes how right-wing extremist parents in the US send their children to "Aryan-only schools", to avoid exposure to alternative ideologies that can make them "double minded" (p.127). Others emphasize the importance of home-schooling in extremist families (Ahdash, 2019; Blee, 2002; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Huggins, 2013; Malik, 2019; Windisch, 2019). To illustrate, Andre and Harris-Hogan (2013) describe how French children of jihadists are subjected to a homeschooling curriculum "that praises the heroism of Salafists and normalizes violence" (p. 311).

Lastly, 12 studies indicate that extremist parents make deliberate choices in their media consumption. Radio stations appear to play an important role in the political education of children from leftwing extremist and ethnonationalist families (Hamilton, 2000; Orsini, 2012). Similarly, extremist parents make choices about the (comic) books to which they expose their children, as well as the music, poetry and literature that is consumed (Futrell & Simi, 2004). This aspect seems somewhat less prominent in the studies on jihadist transmission, although some mentions are made of children being raised with radical Islamic literature (Andre & Harris-Hogan, 2013) and jihadist parents prohibiting music and television altogether (Manning & Bau, 2015).

Moral-Educational Mechanisms

Of the included studies, 18 reveal a moral-educational pattern. Parents implicitly or explicitly teach their children about the (moral) ways they should live their lives, and the repercussions of not adhering to the parental ideology. In the literature it is mentioned that parents themselves – and fathers in particular – function as an important role model in this regard (e.g., Mattheis, 2018; Milla et al., 2013). The expression "following in their father's footsteps" comes up in various studies, thus underlining the importance of paternal modelling within these families (Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Copeland, 2020; Cook & Vale, 2018; Milla et al., 2013). In nine studies, the moral-educational transmission is more explicit in nature. To illustrate, literature describes how jihadist parents tend to verbalize their expectations that their sons will become martyrs (Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Pape, 2005; Riany et al., 2018), or even stress their duty to kill "disbelievers" (Huggins, 2013).

In the included literature, the use of punishments and rewards is discussed as a moral-educational transmission mechanism. Six studies mention that extremist parents use threats and fearful imagery to make their children adhere to their ideology. For example, Blee (2002) describes how an extremist father in the US threatens to kill himself if his daughter ever comes home with a black boy. Parents similarly use rewards as moral-educational mechanism, as shown by nine studies. Pape (2005) describes how jihadist parents promise their children access to heaven when becoming a martyr. Parents giving emotional or practical support for children's decisions is equally featured in the literature (Khoo, 2018; Pape, 2005; Riany et al., 2018; Sikkens et al., 2017; Weggemans, Van der Zwan & Liem, 2018). Weggemans et al. (2018) refer to parental expressions of pride as a type of reward. Similarly, Sikkens et al. (2017) mention extremist parents "applauding" (p. 2281) their children's actions, which may also serve as a stimulating mechanism. Other studies use the terms "approval", "consent" and "encouragement" in this context (see Felices-Luna, 2005; Hamilton, 2000; Orsini, 2012).

Symbolic Mechanisms

A final dimension emerging from the literature concerns the use of symbols and rituals within the family – as discussed by twelve of the included studies. Parental use of costumes, flags and toys related to their beliefs in the upbringing of their children – and as such, further intertwine the familial sphere with the ideological sphere. To illustrate, Futrell & Simi (2004) note in their observational study of white supremacist movements in the US that "movement memorabilia around the home, such as pictures, posters, cards, newsletters, racist comic and coloring books, and movement uniforms (e.g., adult and children's Klan robes, T-shirts, fatigues), [which] also reinforce political identity in unambiguous ways" (p. 25). These authors also note that family members wear T-shirts emblazoned with Hitler and other right-wing extremist figures and symbols. Windisch (2019) similarly describes how right-wing extremists use symbolic clothing and uniforms, flags and other decorations to solidify the ideology within the home sphere. Only one study emphasizes the importance of traditional dressing in relation to jihadist socialization (Copeland, 2020).

Six of the included studies indicate that the use of toys is a symbolic mechanism of transmission in extremist families. Extremist parents let their children play with fake guns, for example (see Blee, 2002; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Windisch, 2019; Horgan et al., 2016). Moreover, five studies point at the importance of naming, suggesting that right-wing extremist families give their children symbolic names at birth – such as "Ariana", "Thor" or "Valkyries" in reference to the Norse-Aryan history (Futrell & Simi, 2004).

In the case of jihadist converts, parents might choose to give their children Islamic nicknames later in life (Ayres, 2018).

Finally, seven studies suggest that the role of symbolism is most evident in exposure to, or even involvement in, (online) violent propaganda material. For example, Bickerton (2019) describes how British jihadist parents showed their sixteen-year-old daughter videos of beheadings and photos of “smiling corpses” (p. 10), which catalyzed her radicalization process. Here, again the value of symbolism as a means of extremist transmission is illustrated.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

The effects of the discussed mechanisms are both enhanced and diminished by factors inside and outside the family sphere. To better understand these dynamics, we included a quantitative overview of risk factors and protective factors that emerged from the included studies (see Table 2).

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

One of the most frequently mentioned risk factors (33 studies) of intergenerational transmission, is parental membership of an extremist organization. Studies indicate that such membership can manifest also itself in indirect ways, such as providing support for terrorist groups through arms and drug trafficking (Harris-Hogan, 2014), and terrorist financing (see Ahdash, 2019). Moreover, twelve studies point at the role of extremist siblings within the family. While this potential risk factor is expressed in studies on ethnonationalist (Reinisch, 2020) and left-wing extremist (Lanzona, 2000) families, it is especially in relation to jihadist families that the role of siblings is highlighted (Andre & Harris-Hogan, 2013; Copeland, 2020; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Malik, 2019; Sageman, 2004). Here, literature suggests that when children have an older brother or sister to whom a child looks up, this can aid the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideas (Copeland, 2020; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010). In contrast, one study mentions having a non-extremist sibling as a potential protective factor – since these siblings could challenge the extremist ideology of the family system (Malik, 2019).

Additionally, multigenerational extremism, or being born into a family of extremist “hardliners” (see Pepich, 2018, p. 111) was identified as a risk factor in nine studies. The fact that the extremist ideology has been part of the family history for many generations, may cause children to take their own involvement in extremist groups for granted (Copeland, 2020; Köttig, 2008; Noor, 2021; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003). To illustrate, Post (2005) observes that for Islamic terrorists, “hatred was bred in to the bone” (p. 616). Chernov-Hwang and Schulze (2018) even speak of “being

born into jihad” (p. 19) in an Indonesian context, while Sageman (2004) refers to the “green diaper mujahidin” of the Middle East.

The perceived victimization of family members (specifically parents) by authorities was identified as a potential risk factor in 20 studies – which is related to the discursive transmission of victimization narratives as discussed in the previous section. Experiences of familial imprisonment or assassination, for example, appear to aid intergenerational transmission processes in ethnonationalist (e.g., Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Crawford, 2013; Noll, 2012) and jihadist families (e.g., Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Noor, 2021; Riany et al., 2018). Findings suggest that first-hand experiences of violence and oppression serve to confirm the parental discourse, which emphasizes the victim status of the in-group and the hostility of the outside world. As Copeland (2020) notes, the feeling of wanting to protect the community or family against further suffering can further stimulate intergenerational transmission processes. Other studies note the importance of intergenerational trauma (e.g., Huggins, 2013; Köttig, 2008; Köttig, 2013; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003) – as it is suggested that this, too, facilitates the transmission of perceived grievances from parent to child, which may in turn solidify the transmission of extremism.

Eight of the included studies suggest that experiences of physical and/or emotional abuse might aid the intergenerational transmission of extremism – which ties into the moral-educational mechanisms discussed earlier. To illustrate, Huggins (2013) describes in the case “Kamal” how a jihadist father and mother burn their son’s left hand whenever he improperly uses it (since, according to them, infidels were “the people of the left”) (p. 64). Interestingly, however, eleven studies note that children who come from a relatively warm nest, can also adopt their parents’ violent ideas and behaviors. For example, Noor (2022) observes the interactions between an imprisoned Indonesian jihadist father and his children, which she thought “seemed close and warm” (p. 79). Bickerton (2019) similarly describes how Islamic extremist parents can hold violent worldviews while offering their children a loving and warm upbringing at the same time – and concludes that these qualities are therefore in no way contradictory. Most notably, children’s loyalty to their extremist parents, and their need for parental validation, appeared to be an important element here (Copeland, 2020; Huggins, 2013; Noor, 2021). Copeland (2020) describes that while in their memoirs, jihadists tend to claim that they would also have participated in the violent jihad without parental consent – “their narratives nevertheless unconsciously reveal a personal desire to receive this validation” (p. 130).

Six studies refer to financial concerns within families as a possible driver of the parental transmission of extremism.

For example, it is suggested that financial motivations could drive parents to encourage their children to join IS (Horgan et al., 2016; Khoo, 2018; Motaparthy, 2014). Post (2005) discusses how relatives of martyrs may receive material and financial support from their extremist communities – which could also facilitate the intergenerational transmission of violent ideologies within marginalized families.

In seven studies, children's participation in non-ideological extracurricular activities or hobbies was identified as a protective factor against the radicalizing influence of parents. Here, it is argued that pro-social hobbies may not only stimulate contact with dissenters and counter the familial discourse, but they may also enable children to get their sense of identity and belonging from groups other than the parental network (Ahdash, 2019; Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Malik, 2019). Nevertheless, the literature also shows that in extremist communities, children's hobbies are rarely completely separate from the family ideology. Githens-Mazer & Lambert (2010), for example, observe that in jihadist communities in the UK, even rather innocent games of soccer are combined with religious education – which suggests that here, the protective effects of such hobbies is limited.

Eight studies mention the importance of age as a factor. These studies indicate that in extremist families, exposure to extremism already starts young (e.g., Copeland, 2020; Khoo, 2018; Mattsson, 2021; Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2015). Nonetheless, Malik (2019) stresses that for children, a higher age may be associated with a greater risk of actual radicalization – due to increased agency and because older children are able to seek out (online) extremist content themselves. They are less dependent on their parents for ideological development, and may act as recruiters themselves towards younger siblings (Malik, 2019). Others additionally point out that young children are often merely “parroting” their parents, and that only older children are cognitively able to understand (and act on) the family ideology (Cook & Vale, 2018; Horgan et al., 2016; Khoo, 2018). Nonetheless, Malik (2019) perceives exposure at a young age as a risk factor for radicalization, since “the fact that [a child] is not old enough to articulate radical or extremist views, does not mean that they are not held latently” (p. 43).

Nine studies mention gender dynamics as a potential risk factor. Familial gender roles and patterns may influence transmission processes, since in extremist families, violence can be perceived as a symbol of power and masculinity by both daughters and sons (e.g., Felices-Luna, 2005; Hamilton, 2000; Köttig, 2013; Manning & Bau, 2015). Malik (2019) additionally suggests that boys in Western families may be more susceptible to the intergenerational transmission of jihadist ideologies than girls: while daughters tend to radicalize independently, sons primarily build upon their parents' ideologies. However, the broader literature doesn't unequivocally support this hypothesis. Though most studies focus

on boys, findings from several authors indicate that girls can be similarly susceptible to their parents' extremist worldviews (see Andre & Harris-Hogan, 2013; Bickerton, 2019; Pepich, 2018). Still, boys are typically considered “more valuable” within extremist organizations because they can be trained as “fighters” and terrorists-to-be. Consequently, sons are often primarily the ones that parents introduce to their respective extremist networks. (Cook & Vale, 2018; Horgan et al., 2016). Gender dynamics are also reflected in child-rearing practices of extremist families, as regardless of ideology, this tends to be predominantly a woman's responsibility (Copeland, 2020; Kisyova, Veilleux-Lepage, & Newby, 2022; Mattheis, 2018; Malik, 2019; Windisch, 2019). This suggests that while fathers are often most involved in extremist movements, the duty of ideological transmission commonly rests on the shoulders of mothers.

Finally, seven studies mention factors related to intelligence, digital literacy and critical thinking as having protective properties. For example, Manning & Bau (2015) illustrate how intergenerational transmission can be countered through exposure to alternative worldviews in higher education. Nonetheless, other studies suggest that higher intelligence stimulates the transmission of extremism (Andre & Harris-Hogan, 2013; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010) – since this facilitates children's understanding of the main principles underlying the family ideology.

Discussion

This review supports the observation that extremist ideologies can be transmitted across generations, yet it is unable to make hard claims about the prevalence of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, a key finding of this review is that extremist transmission does not always occur directly. As observed, parents also make choices that indirectly help to instill their beliefs in their children. These findings fit with the channeling hypothesis of religious socialization (see Erickson, 1992), which argues that in order to prompt children's religious development, parents “channel” their children into certain institutions, such as schools and youth organizations, which in turn shape their social interactions – and thus their religious identity. Our study suggests that extremist parents indeed map out the ideological paths of their children, by controlling their social lives – which allows for their further socialization. Similarly, the observation that extremist parents influence their children's friendships and romantic partners can also be understood as support for the channeling hypothesis.

This review further points at family narratives as a core component of the intergenerational transmission of extremism. The use of family narratives related to either heroism or victimhood suggests that storytelling plays a pivotal role

in solidifying the extremist ideology. Rooted in experiences of family adversities, marginalization and social exclusion, these narratives may give rise to the black-and-white perceptions that characterizes extremist ideologies (see Schmid, 2013), again illustrating the indirect nature of such transmission. Furthermore, the role that (perceived) victimhood plays in the intergenerational transmission of extremism mirrors previous research on the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Previous studies show how collective experiences of shame, anger and grief are passed on to later generations, through both direct and indirect socialization mechanisms (Iliceto et al., 2011; Lev-Wiesel, 2007). It has been observed that traumatized families feel more connected to the in-group; value community and family ties more; and are less trusting of outsiders (Bezo & Maggi, 2015; Iliceto et al., 2011), which could again explain the findings of this review. After all, the desire to protect the in-group can reinforce an “us versus them”-thinking; feelings of exclusion; and a desire for revenge – which may increase polarization and radicalization (Vollhardt, 2020).

Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly, the role of emotional and physical abuse appears to be limited. Although some studies do point at the use of threats and psychological manipulation as a means of extremist transmission, this appears to be far from the norm. Instead, we observed that more often, studies observed loving family relations, loyalty, trust, and seemingly positive parenting practices. This fits with previous observations that emotional warmth and trust are important factors in the socialization process: children are more likely to adopt the ideas and attitudes of loving parents, and will likely rebel against those of cold or distant parents (Jaspers et al., 2008).

Limitations and Implications

This is the first study to systematically synthesize empirical knowledge on the intergenerational transmission of extremism within family contexts. Although this review provides a comprehensive and exhaustive discussion of previous research on this topic, this study has some limitations. First of all, the mechanisms discussed in this review may overlap – and their distinction may not be as clear-cut as presented here. Nonetheless, our categorization does not serve as a set-in-stone model, but rather as a conceptual frame of reference that may help us better understand the elements that intergenerational transmission could consist of.

Additionally, criticisms that have been directed at radicalization literature at large, may also apply to this study. For example, due to the nature of this review, most included studies focus on cases in which intergenerational transmission resulted in serious harm (in the form of violence or

terrorism). As such, this review gave us only limited insight into the cases in which these consequences did not come about. Moreover, this review is predominantly occupied with the unidirectional (parent-child) transmission of extremist beliefs, although such relationships are inherently much more complex and reciprocal in nature. The distinction between parents as “active radicalizers” and children as “passively radicalized” is perhaps all too simplistic, as it ignores the role that children themselves may have in their radicalization process (see also Qureshi, 2018; Weggemans, Van der Zwan & Liem, 2018). Lastly, approaching intergenerational transmission as a linear or static phenomenon denies it of its dynamic qualities. It can be expected that transmission effects (and thus, the respective “successfulness” of socialization efforts) vary over time – where children might move away from their parents’ ideologies as they hit puberty, yet may revert back to them as they settle into adulthood.

While we aimed to keep our search terms as broad as possible, the initial design and scope of this study were shaped by its role as a follow-up to earlier research. The current study was funded by the Research and Data Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, as a continuation of our previous work on the role of family members in jihadist radicalization (Weggemans, Van der Zwan, & Liem, 2018). As such, the search strategy included broad terms to allow for the identification of diverse ideological contexts, but with a slight emphasis on jihadism-related terminology to ensure continuity with the previous work. This may have limited the inclusion of studies focused on other forms of extremism, such as far-right, ethno-nationalist, or left-wing ideologies. We recommend that future systematic reviews build on the current findings by employing more targeted search strategies that explore ideological subtypes in greater depth, thereby offering a more comparative perspective on the intergenerational transmission of extremist beliefs.

Despite of these limitations, our results may have implications for policy and practice. The finding that extremist parents may raise their children with love and care goes against the popular notion that extremist parents are inherently “bad” parents (Hamilton, 2018) or even “child abusers” (Palmer, 2014). Such argumentation has previously been used to justify far-reaching policies or interventions in extremist families (Bickerton, 2019). This review thus supports a general reluctance in applying these profound interventions, unless severe harm is imminent. Even more so, since this review illustrates the importance of victimhood narratives within extremist families – which authorities may contribute to when unjustly applying such measures. A more tailor-made and holistic approach, centered around the unique dynamics and experiences of each respective family, is advised.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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