

# Understanding autism in CVE practice: Findings from a baseline study to inform a national Community of Practice



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## Background

- Australian Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) teams engage individuals identified as at risk of radicalisation.
- While Autistic people are not more likely to engage in terrorism-related violence, CVE teams report increasing referrals involving young Autistic people.
- Limited practitioner understanding of autism may affect risk assessment and engagement.

## Objectives

- Implement a Community of Practice (CoP) using an adapted ECHO tele-education model.
- Assess practitioner autism knowledge and self-efficacy before attending a CoP.
- Identify motivations for CoP attendance and barriers to working with Autistic individuals.



## Method

### Online survey

Collecting quantitative and qualitative data from CVE practitioners before attending the CoP.

### Measures

- Demographics
- Autism knowledge (perceived and actual)
- Practitioner self-efficacy
- Motivations for participation
- Barriers when working with Autistic individuals

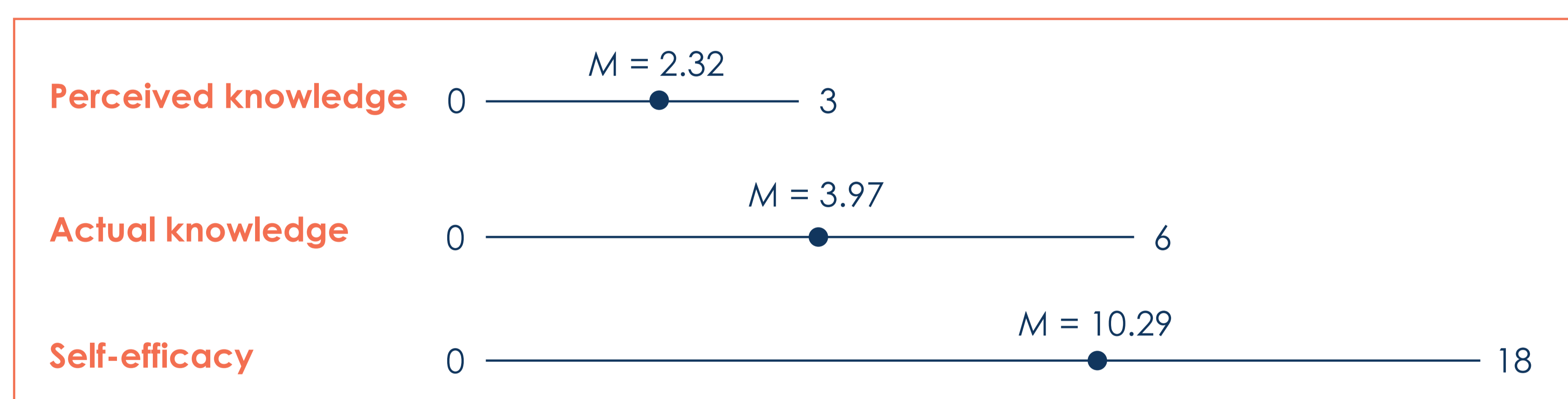
### Online sessions

Monthly 90-minute online sessions (Sept 2025 – Feb 2026) including expert presentations, case discussions, lived experience and peer learning.

### Participants

- 34 CVE practitioners, including psychologists, forensic clinicians, case managers, police;
- 44% < 1 years experience
- 29% no prior autism training
- Participants represented all Australian states and territories

## Results



### Motivations for joining the CoP:

- Access practical tools/resources – 85%
- Increase confidence – 79%
- Build autism knowledge – 77%

### Key barriers or challenges:

- Misinterpreting behaviours as risk indicators – 85%
- Limited autism knowledge – 62%
- Limited access to specialist services – 56%

### Actual Autism Knowledge - item, % correct

- No direct link between autism and violent extremism – 73.5%
- Intense interests are not a strong indicator of radicalisation risk – 55.9%
- Rules and routines can be protective factors – 79.4%
- Standard free-narrative interviews are less effective for Autistic people – 50.0%
- CVE strategies should address needs and supports rather than challenging ideology – 73.5%

## Conclusion

- Prior to the CoP, participants reported moderate perceived and actual knowledge of autism, with no participants rating themselves as experts.
- Item-level analysis of the actual autism knowledge measure identified several practice-relevant gaps, particularly in relation to interviewing approaches and the relevance of intense interests.
- Overall self-efficacy was moderate, with some items indicating low confidence (e.g., 30% reported being “not at all confident” in identifying appropriate intervention strategies in a CVE context).
- Motivations for joining the CoP highlighted a need for practical tools, resources, and intervention support.

## Practical Implications

These findings were used to directly inform and tailor training and resource development for CVE professionals, ensuring alignment with identified knowledge gaps and clinician-reported needs.