

## Shattered Safety?

Developmental risk trajectories for conspiracy mentality  
and violent extremism

*Analyses in progress*

6<sup>th</sup> zIReN Meeting, Bari/Italy, 2024

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OPENBARE PLAKPLAATS

NIET BESTEMD VOOR HANDELSRECLAME

wordt verschoond laatste week van de even maand.



THIS WINTER, COMING FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY THIS WINTER



THE GREAT RESET

"YOU WILL OWN NOTHING, AND YOU WILL BE HAPPY"

KLAUS SCHWAB - WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

CONSPIRACY BELIEF



Regardless of who is officially in charge, there is a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the world together



## CONSPIRACY BELIEF MIGHT...



**FUEL VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM**



**UNDERMINE  
DEMOCRATIC  
PROCESSES**





CONSPIRACY-EXTREMISM :

Storming of the US Capitol

Image: Kent Nishimura/LA Times





World Economic Forum

Threats to public figures



Persbureau Heitink

5G Towers



Ons Van Gennip

Sovereign citizen conspiracy

# EXAMPLES

# VIOLENT EXTREMISM & CONSPIRACY BELIEF

There might be a relationship...

- Both are seated in deep mistrust ('anomie');
- Rely on a perceived threat and enemies;
- Play into the need to cope with uncertainties and make sense of the world;

# VIOLENT EXTREMISM & CONSPIRACY BELIEF

Common antecedents...

- Political factors (e.g., powerlessness, group deprivation)
- Personality factors (e.g., dark triad traits)
- Cognitive factors (e.g., rigid thinking style)



DO CONSPIRACY BELIEF AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM SHARE A  
DEVELOPMENTAL FOUNDATION?

# DEVELOPMENTAL FOUNDATION

Theoretical perspective

## **C**onspiracy mentality

- Behavioral adaptation to adversity → Victimhood perspective

Significant threats → unsafe world → seek control through easy answers provided by conspiracy theories





# DEVELOPMENTAL FOUNDATION

## Theoretical perspective

### **Violent extremism**

- Coping reaction to pervasive adversity

### General Strain Theory:

- Negative treatment → strain → feel bad
- Alleviate distress → harmful corrective actions



## SHATTERED SAFETY?



Little developmental evidence



## THE CURRENT STUDY

- Aim:
  1. Identify developmental trajectories of 'shattered safety'
  2. Examine to what extent distal outcomes of conspiracy belief and violent extremism differ between trajectory groups

# DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES SHATTERED SAFETY

- Bullying victimization
  - Related to conspiracy mentality in adulthood (Jolley & Lantian, 2022)
  - Risk factor for violent extremism (Agnew, 2010, 2011; Harpviken, 2020; Sommer, 2014)
- Emotional distress
  - Repeatedly associated with conspiracy belief (Bowes et al., 2021; De Conick et al., 2021; Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013)
  - Relationship with violent extremism found (Bhui et al., 2016, 2020; Rousseau et al., 2019)
- Lack of trust
  - Seen as essential component of conspiracy mentality and violent extremism (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2023; Becker, 2021; van den Bos, 2023)



## HYPOTHESES

- Aim:
  1. Identify developmental trajectories of the 'shattered safety' risk factors
    - Heterogeneity in youth's trajectories to reveal distinct groups
  2. Examine to what extent distal outcomes (conspiracy belief and violent extremism) differed between trajectory groups
    - Problematic developmental trajectories to exhibit higher levels of distal outcomes at age 24

## SAMPLE & INSTRUMENTS

- Participants were from z-proso ( $N = 1482$ )
- Wave K5 (13), K6 (15), K7 (17), K8 (20), K9 (24)
- 'Shattered safety' risk factors (K5-K9)
  - Bullying victimization (BullVict4, 6-point scale)
  - Emotional distress (nSBQ\_anxdep, 5-point scale)
  - General trust (Gtrust, 3 items, 4-point scale)
- Distal outcomes (K9)
  - Conspiracy mentality (ConspMent, 4-point scale)
  - Violent extremism (Viol, 4-point scale)

# ANALYSES

- FIML to address missing data
- **Growth Mixture Model:** Identify similar subgroups within a diverse population by estimating growth trajectories (K5-K9) for each subgroup;
  1. Latent growth curve (LGC) modeling to examine change in developmental risk factors from K5-K9 for whole group (linear + quadratic)
  2. GMM run for 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-class models
    - Model-fit criteria (AIC, BIC, ...), entropy, LMRT tests, interpretability, parsimony.
- Wald tests for estimating differences between trajectory subgroups on conspiracy mentality and violent extremism

## RESULTS (1): LGC

Model	Chi-square	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	BIC	AIC
Bullying + distr + trust <i>linear</i>	4758.998	105	0.824	0.801	0.077*	0.079	34512.382	34289.734
<b>Bullying + distr + trust <i>quadratic</i></b>	<b>4758.998</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>0.954</b>	<b>0.927</b>	<b>0.047</b>	<b>0.034</b>	<b>33974.588</b>	<b>33608.809</b>



## RESULTS (2): MODEL FIT

Classes	AIC	Sample-size adj. BIC	Entropy	LO-MENDELL-RUBIN adj. LRT TEST		Class 1 N (%)	Class 2 N (%)	Class 3 N (%)	Class 4 N (%)	Class 5 N (%)
				Value	P-Value					
2	33454.550	33603.261	0.917	397.126	0.0004	120 (8.01%)	1362 (91.90%)	--	--	--
3	33140.107	33564.199	0.905	329.925	0.0105	1312 (88.53%)	60 (4.05%)	110 (7.42%)		
4	32941.955	33419.058	0.832	215.204	0.0143	127 (8.6%)	1194 (80.6%)	100 (6.75%)	61 (4.12%)	
5	33408.434	33544.398	0.788	67.744	0.1007	42 (2.83%)	1074 (72.47%)	180 (12.15%)	112 (7.56%)	74 (4.99%)

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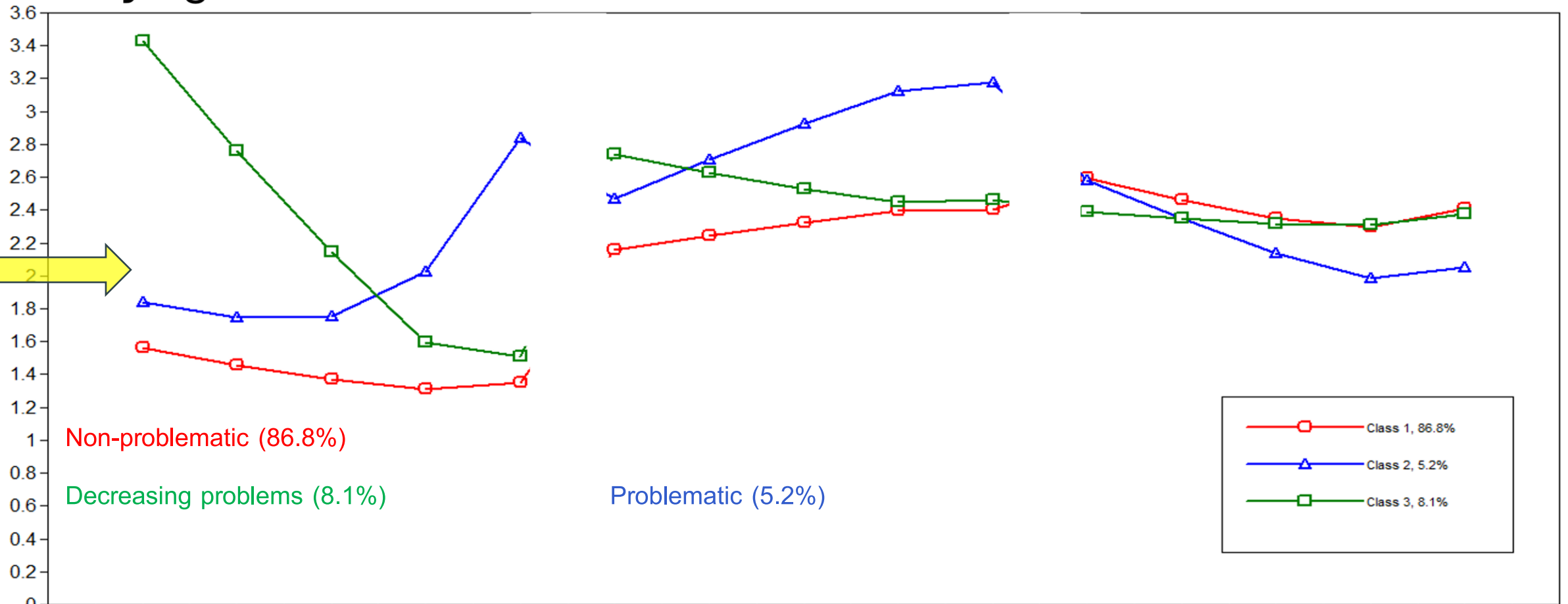
Notes. Emotional distress slope fixed at zero.

# RESULTS: TRAJECTORIES (K5-K9)

Bullying victimization

Emotional Distress

Trust



## RESULTS: DISTAL OUTCOMES

Group comparison on distal outcomes (K9)

Conspiracy mentality				
	Mean (SE)	<i>n</i>	Wald $\chi^2$ ( <sub>a-b</sub> )	Wald $\chi^2$ ( <sub>b-c</sub> )
<b>Non-problematic (a)</b>	2.569 (0.02)	1312	7.032***	
<b>Problematic (b)</b>	2.846 (0.10)	60		8.068***
<b>Decreasing problems (c)</b>	2.477 (0.08)	110		
Violent extremism				
	Mean (SE)	<i>n</i>	Wald $\chi^2$ ( <sub>a-b</sub> )	Wald $\chi^2$ ( <sub>b-c</sub> )
<b>Non-problematic (a)</b>	1.551 (0.021)	1312	6.068***	
<b>Problematic (b)</b>	1.944 (0.152)	60		2.451
<b>Decreasing problems (c)</b>	1.657 (0.095)	110		



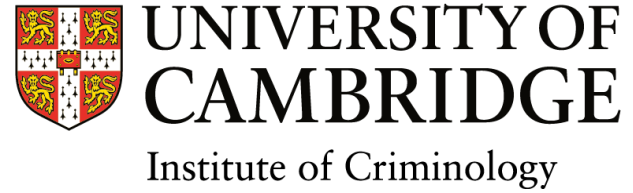
CONCLUSION  
&  
GOING FORWARD

- Three classes with unique developmental trajectories
- Group with increasing problems had highest level of conspiracy mentality and violent extremism at age 24

Going forward....

- Contribution of trajectory versus end point
  - Regressions (trajectory slopes, end points)
  - Comparing model fit
  - ....suggestions are welcome!

THANK YOU



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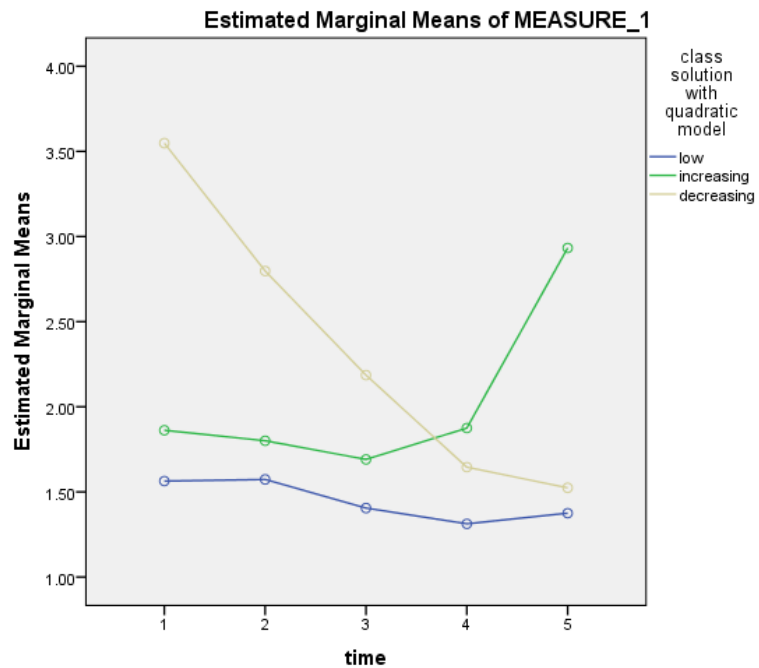
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## RESULTS (EXTRA): GROWTH PARAMETERS

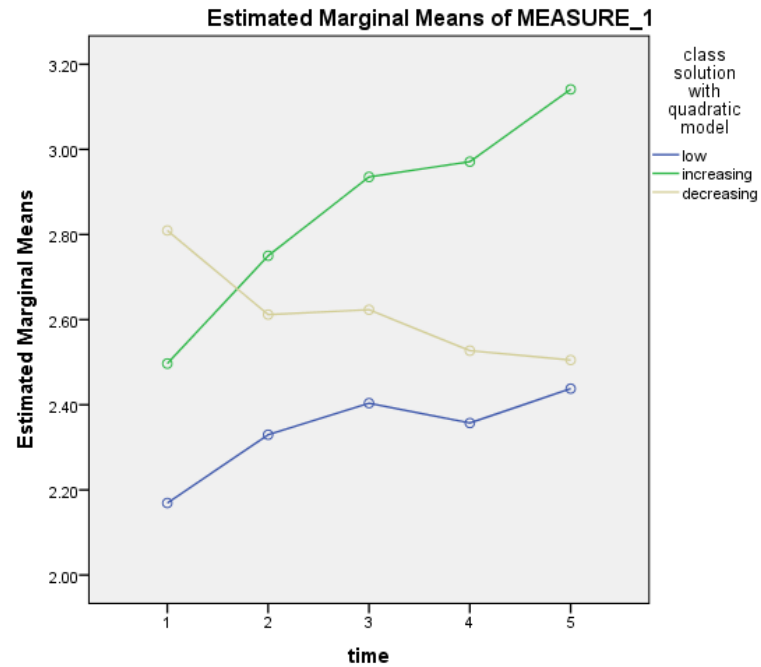
	Domain	Bullying victimization			Emotional distress			Trust		
		Intercept	L	Q	Intercept	L	Q	Intercept	L	Q
<b>Non-problematic (86.8%)</b>	Estimate	1.56	-0.74	0.52	2.15	0.61	-0.37	2.59	-0.96	0.78
	SE	0.03	0.10	0.08	0.02	0.09	0.08	0.02	0.08	0.07
<b>Problematic (5.2%)</b>	Estimate	1.84	-0.91	1.90	2.47	1.60	-0.89	2.58	-1.65	1.22
	SE	0.11	0.54	0.51	0.11	0.53	0.48	0.07	0.31	0.28
<b>Decreasing problems (8.1%)</b>	Estimate	3.43	-4.60	2.68	2.74	-0.79	0.52	2.39	-0.33	0.31
	SE	0.17	0.53	0.48	0.10	0.36	0.31	0.07	0.26	0.24

# RESULTS (EXTRA): TRAJECTORIES

## Bullying victimisation



## Emotional distress



## Generalized trust

