

Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyse whether the Prevent policy in the United Kingdom has resulted in the labelling of the Muslim community as ‘suspect’ and to assess the impact this has on potential victims of terrorism related trafficking. The strategy was first implemented in 2003 in the wake of 9/11 and in the early years of the ‘War on Terror’. It has been accused of being Islamophobic and playing a large role in labelling Muslims as a suspect community. Prevent is a referral system through which anybody who causes concern regarding extremism can be reported. Once reported the case is assessed and it is decided if it will be dismissed, signposted to other services or taken further (UK Government 2019). This report will analyse statistics released by the government regarding Prevent referrals as well as case studies through which it is evident that the policy creates a suspect community. The rise of ISIS in 2011 led to a rise in people travelling to join in the following years. Among these people there were children aged under 18. The international definition of human trafficking lays out that there does not need to be proof of deception involved in order for a child to have been a victim of trafficking (OSCE 2021). Prevent is the policy that would be employed if there was believed to be risk of a child travelling to Syria. The Prevent Duty Statutory Guidance was introduced in 2015 and legally obliges professionals who work in healthcare, schools, nurseries, prisons and other settings to take Prevent training and report any concerns they might have about individuals regarding extremism (UK Government 2018). This has been problematic as it involves civilians carrying out counterterrorism work with minimal training which appears to have led to overreporting of cases with concerns of Islamist extremism. There have been accusations that the policy infringes on children’s rights and makes it difficult for them to discuss potentially sensitive topics about religion and politics in public spaces. There is concern that this can drive young people into online spaces to discuss such issues where they are vulnerable to be groomed. Overall it is clear that the Prevent policy has solidified Muslims as a suspect community in the UK and this framing of Muslims as suspects endangers potential future child victims of trafficking.