The Prevent strategy's impact on social relations: a report on work in two local authorities

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Abstract *The Prevent Strategy is often accused of being detrimental to social relations in the UK. Criticisms include the securitisation of engagement with Muslim communities, conflation of counter-terrorism and community cohesion, repression of public debate, and the undermining of free speech in schools and universities. This article does not suggest that all criticisms are necessarily invalid or that Prevent, like most strategies addressing complex social issues, is without flaws. However, through analysis of original primary data collected from five years of Prevent delivery in two west London boroughs, the authors find that many criticisms of Prevent neglect to address the diversity and nuance of impact across the UK as well as the many positive impacts Prevent has on social relations. Criticisms seem partly a consequence of the scarcity of data available to researchers. To address this, the article presents new data to demonstrate a wider range of social impacts, with reference to specific experiences in two Local Authorities.*

Keywords: Prevent, Islam, Counter-Terrorism, Community Cohesion

Introduction

In early 2016, UK tabloid media (Shammas 2016), broadsheet newspapers (*The Guardian* 2016), and mainstream news channels (*BBC* 2016b) reported a story of a 10-year-old schoolboy being questioned by police based on a spelling mistake – he had written that he lived in a 'terrorist house' (rather than a 'terraced house'). The case, which was reported in reference to the Prevent Duty, was picked up by international media and reported across the globe in countries as diverse as Russia (*RT* 2016), Israel (*Ghert-Zand* 2016) and New Zealand (*news.com.au* 2016). The reports influenced UK civil groups in their assessments of the social impact of the Prevent Strategy. For instance, following this case, the Muslim Council of Britain suggested that Prevent views young people through 'the lens of security and [they] are being seen as potential terrorists rather than students' (*BBC* 2016b). This example is illustrative of much of the reporting and negative perceptions of the Prevent Strategy, despite Lancashire Police clarifying that the visit to the child's house was a joint one made between the local police and social services, which took place because of a wider range of safeguarding concerns, and was not investigated as a terror incident (Barrett & Jamieson 2016; *BBC* 2016b).

In the same period, a referral was received by the Prevent Team in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (henceforth referred to as the Kensington team) regarding an isolated teenager, where concerns were raised regarding proximity to far right extremism. Practitioners had noted several worrying comments denigrating Muslims, including suggesting that 'all Muslims are terrorists'. The teenager had also made some comments regarding purchasing weapons and viewed online videos about explosives. To address these concerns, support around critical thinking

was provided to the relevant teaching staff and advice around e-safety and general safety was provided to the family. An intervention provider engaged with the teenager to unpick and critically discuss some of the messaging the individual had encountered online. This intervention, typical of Prevent's focus on safeguarding, was not published in a single media, government or civil outlet. These two examples illustrate the nature of much of the analysis carried out in relation to the Prevent Strategy: i) legitimate challenges to the conceptual underpinnings of Prevent and its practical implementation are often intertwined with misreporting and misunderstanding, ii) analysts and reporters have little sight of Prevent's successes and, iii) individual incidents are taken as reflective of national delivery, with analysis frequently failing to reflect the nuances and variations within local work.

These issues, while more prominent amongst activists and popular media, are also apparent in much of the academic response to the Prevent Strategy, with researchers relying on often partial, or in some cases inaccurate, information. Unsurprisingly, framings of the Prevent Strategy as damaging to social relations in the UK are common. While some criticisms may have validity, discussions to date have often been one-sided and based on anecdotal information or single-case studies, in part because of the scarcity of primary data available to researchers. This article seeks to address this by contributing original primary data to provide an empirically rich analysis of the impact of the Prevent Strategy on social relations, with reference to women and girls where possible. The paper will summarise academic literature addressing the social impact of Prevent, highlighting two of the most consistent and prominent criticisms, and assess some of the assumptions they are based on. The article does not seek to suggest all criticism is invalid – like many strategies designed to address complex, social issues, Prevent is not flawless. The article is not a dogmatic defence of Prevent (although the

authors accept that their perceptions are likely to be partly shaped by their roles), nor does it reject the potential for negative or unintended consequences to result from poorly designed or delivered efforts to prevent terrorism (Schmid 2013: 48; Sageman: 2016). However, the authors aim to demonstrate that criticisms of Prevent are often over-simplified, neglecting to address the diversity of impact across the UK as well as the many positive impacts on social relations. As such, its intention is to add to and inform the debate about the social impacts of the Prevent Strategy.

Methodology

A search of multiple academic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, was conducted across February to April 2017 to identify English-language peer-reviewed journal articles and books focused on the social impact of the Prevent Strategy. A small number of documents produced by independent think-tanks were also included, where they focused directly on the topic. A review of the documents allowed the authors to collate a catalogue of the primary criticisms and to draw out two of the most prominent to form the focus of this article. To ensure policy relevance, the article focuses on post-2011 criticisms, following the review and update of the Prevent Strategy that year (Henry 2016). English and international media sources were used to illustrate the reach and frequency of these criticisms, but these sources did not influence the selection of the key critiques. To address the two primary criticisms of the Prevent Strategy's impact on social relations, with reference to women and girls, the authors drew on primary data collected by the Kensington team over the past five years of local authority Prevent delivery. The data includes information from the delivery of Prevent projects, safeguarding activities (e.g. Channel), and conversations with representatives of the community and wider public sector partners. The

approach employed in the two boroughs towards Prevent delivery is known as the 'Kensington Model' (Parker & Davis 2017). While there are several criticisms that the article could have focused on, it is limited to two in order to allow space for in-depth analysis and presentation of new data – areas where many studies of Prevent are lacking.

Through the literature review and access to primary data, the authors identify instances where the criticisms are either factually incorrect, excessively sweeping through their neglect of local variances, or ignore (or, more likely, were unaware of) the positive social impacts of the strategy. The Kensington team aspires to be as transparent as possible (Patel 2016; Parker & Davis 2017) but the importance of preserving the right to anonymity of individuals involved in Prevent projects and safeguarding means that information provided by the Kensington team is not referenced, other than to explain here that it is drawn from secure, local authority information that is overseen by a robust management and governance structure. The data presented is the limit of what can be shared within the confines of the Data Protection Act 1998 and no further information will be shared on individual cases referred to in this paper.

The authors recognise that several of the terms used throughout the article are debated both theoretically and politically in relation to counter-terrorism, particularly 'radicalisation', 'extremism', and 'vulnerable'. For instance, there are a range of scholarly models used to explain or analyse radicalisation (King & Taylor 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko 2008; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010), debates about the most appropriate level of analysis (Sageman 2004), a wide range of proposed definitions (Schmid 2013), and competing positions over whether the focus should be on cognitive or behavioural aspects (Neumann 2013).

Some scholars even contest the utility of the term, arguing that its (usually) cognitive focus often has little connection to actual terrorism (Borum 2011) or is used instrumentally by governments or the media (Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2009). However, to ensure consistency within this special edition, this article accepts the definitions of these three terms as provided by the Prevent Strategy (HM Government 2011).

Literature Review

As Henry (2016) notes, academic critiques of the Prevent Strategy have evolved over time. Distinctions vary most significantly before and after the review of the Prevent Strategy in 2011. Pre-2011 assessments of social impacts focused on issues that included framing Muslim communities as 'suspect', creating resource envy amongst non-Muslim organisations, and conflating counter-terrorism and community cohesion (Henry 2016; Mythen et al. 2016: 195; Thomas 2014; Briggs 2010; Stevens 2009). While some criticisms remained consistent following the review, the more focused project work, the stated distinction between counter-terrorism and community cohesion, and the removal of National Indicator 35 (Understandings of local Muslim communities) meant that the focus of critiques changed in some respects. This was particularly so following the 2015 Prevent Duty, which introduced a legal requirement for a range of public sector organisations and professionals, including teachers and healthcare staff, to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (HM Government 2015b: 2).

Prevent's statutory footing and tighter focus on security has meant that more recent analysis has had a strong focus on the perceived erosion of civil liberties and human rights, with authors identifying various issues within this theme. For instance, Kundnani suggests that a state narrative which assigns extremist speech and beliefs as the most significant factors

in causing terrorism 'legitimizes the erosion of civil rights and fosters social divisions' (Kundnani, 2015: 8). Stanford and Ahmed (2016: 42) suggest that restriction of free speech could leave families reluctant to discuss issues at home which would impinge upon their right to respect for family life, while monitoring of students' online use would undermine privacy rights. As will be outlined below, this theme extends to reviews of the strategy's impact on freedom of debate and dissent across a range of groups in society (Ramsay 2017) and broader social impacts, such as the potential for the strategy to undermine freedom of expression within academia (Durodie 2016; O'Donnell 2016) and to 'go against the essential nature of higher education' (Kyriacou et al. 2017). This attention on the implications of Prevent to public sector professionals is increasingly prominent, focusing not only on schools and universities, but also on the potential impacts on social workers and health professionals, with concerns around the securitisation of their work and undermining issues of confidentiality, trust, and care (Summerfield, 2016; McKendrick & Finch, 2017).

As will be detailed, emphasis on the securitisation of Muslim communities is the primary criticism that has remained prominent across assessments of both versions of the Prevent Strategy, with some scholars arguing that, despite a more theoretical distinction, the strategy has been impossible to disaggregate in this way in practical delivery, thus creating Muslims as an 'other' and undermining cohesion work (Thomas, 2014; Awan, 2012). Other works expand on this theme with Thomas (2015), for instance, arguing that resources put towards a 'securitised' Prevent policy could have been more productively spent on non-securitised efforts to promote good community cohesion. Perhaps the most critical line of assessment found amongst both pre and post-2011 articles is that activities delivered under the Prevent Strategy are counter-productive and could fuel, rather than prevent, extremism

(Stevens, 2009; Kundnani, 2015). The following sections will address the two most prominent and pervasive criticisms in the academic literature, seeking to add nuance to their framings and to introduce wider understanding of Prevent's social impact, including positive impacts.

Critique 1: Securitisation of Muslim Communities

One of the most common critiques of Prevent is that the strategy securitises Muslim communities, suggesting that it targets Muslims, rendering Muslim communities a suspect 'other' (Awan 2016: 1166). This argument is common in mainstream media and some educational unions. Dr Fahid Qurashi goes as far as to argue that Prevent 'gives people permission to hate Muslims' (Qurashi, 2016) and a National Union of Teachers motion posited that Prevent 'risks being used to target young Muslim people' (Harris 2016). Critiques are also common in the academic community. For example, Heath-Kelly argues that Prevent views Muslims as either 'at risk' or 'risky' (2016: 10), while others have raised concerns about 'surveillant aspects of the strategy […] directed squarely at the Muslim communities' (Mythen, Walklate & Peatfield 2017: 183) and the 'securitising approach that affects the lives of young British Muslims' (Coppock and McGovern 2014: 242). These criticisms not only fail to fully account for efforts to counter the risk of far-right extremism in the UK; they also paint the work Prevent does in partnership with Muslim communities as potentially Islamophobic. Overall, this securitisation argument fits into two broad strands. The first is that Prevent is focused on Islam and Muslims. The second is the notion that Prevent's engagement with Muslim communities reflects the government's belief that Muslims are a threat. Despite this critique being objectionable in itself, the consequence may also fuel grievances within Muslim communities.

Prevent is focused on Muslims/Islam

The first component of the securitisation critique is that Prevent is focused exclusively or primarily on Islam and Muslims. Employing Hillyard's theory of 'suspect communities' (1993), Awan argues that elements of the Prevent Strategy 'alienate[s] sections of the Muslim community' and ultimately 'target[s] a certain faith (Islam)' (Awan 2012: 1168 & 1170). Ragazzi adds nuance to the idea of a 'suspect community', contending that Prevent contributes to 'policed multiculturalism', whereby some community members are considered to be 'risky' (Ragazzi 2016: 14). Elshimi (2017) similarly argues that Prevent has entrenched the notion of a problematic Muslim identity, while Ramsay posits that Prevent 'is in practice targeting coercion at Muslim students' (2017: 1762). Other assessments argue that Prevent's consideration of far right extremism is not given appropriate levels of focus (Bentley 2015), or that Prevent's focus is narrowly targeting Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism (Powell, 2016).

These assessments do not always consider the strategy's stated goal to 'address all forms of extremism' (HM Government 2011: 6), which is regularly reflected in the Kensington Prevent team's experience. The Kensington team have been approached with concerns relating to violent anarchism, animal rights extremism, the expressed desire to kill members of the armed forces, and far right extremism. In responding to varied local risks and vulnerabilities, the Kensington team liaises and works with a wide range of third sector groups, such as charities, women's organisations, and religious institutions. This approach to delivering Prevent is recognition that vulnerabilities to radicalisation are not limited to one religious or social group (*The Telegraph* 2015; *BBC* 2013; Sageman 2011: 74). For example, in the 2016/17 financial year, the Kensington team provided training designed to help attendees understand

radicalisation and recognise vulnerabilities to over 3,600 staff in schools, community based organisations, and the local authority. This training addressed the risks posed by far right extremism and Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism equally, with case studies from both ideologies. The sessions also explored broader vulnerabilities that could be relevant to radicalisation, irrespective of religion or social background.

The Kensington team also offers schools activities to support students through commissioned third-party organisations and its Prevent Education Officer. Engagements can be delivered to whole assemblies, specific year groups or single classes. The approach is broader than discussing issues relating to extremism alone, particularly with younger audiences, and instead seeks to foster greater resilience among students. In the 2016/17 financial year, the Prevent Education Officer and third-party organisations engaged over 4,800 students in classroom workshops or assemblies. These sessions worked with students on issues including identity, stereotyping, propaganda, and the importance of critical thinking.

As noted, the Kensington team's training to local authority and school staff handles the issue of far right extremism and Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism equally. As illustrated by the actions of Thomas Mair and Pavlo Lapshyn, and the increase in the number of terror arrests linked to far right extremism, this approach reflects the diverse threat picture which the UK faces (Farmer 2017). To address this risk, a variety of projects and engagements nationally are tailored to meet the threat of far right extremism. One example is 'No Love For Hate' project, which runs between two colleges in Luton and explores a range of issues, including tolerance, radicalisation, and far right extremism (Bedfordshire on Sunday 2017). As such, Prevent's local and national approach to

extremism is a response to a threat-picture that varies significantly across boroughs and regions, is liable to change, and does not focus exclusively on one ideology or social group. Indeed, national figures show that almost one-in-three Prevent referrals now relate to far right extremism (Pasha-Robinson 2017).

Nonetheless, while Prevent addresses a breadth of ideologies and engages individuals from a range of communities, the argument that Prevent targets Islam and Muslims overlooks a crucial counterpoint: Daesh, and attacks inspired by the group, pose what then-Prime Minister David Cameron described as a 'greater and deeper threat to our security than we have known before' (Cameron 2014). In a 2015 press release, MI5 reported that 'the UK is facing an unprecedented level of threat with Syria and Iraq increasingly at the forefront of MI5's work' (MI5 2015), indicating that the threat posed by Daesh and al Qaeda is a high priority for the intelligence services. This national picture is mirrored in the two boroughs. Of the individuals who were referred to the team in the 2016/2017 financial year and subsequently discussed at the Channel Panel during the 2016/17 financial year, just under 70% of individuals were considered, in view of concerns relating to vulnerabilities to Islamist-inspired extremism.

While Muslim scholars have widely denounced al Qaeda and Daesh's acts as being un-Islamic (Markoe, 2014), these extremist groups nonetheless target men and women of the Muslim faith with highly sophisticated propaganda, posing a serious safeguarding risk. This propaganda also targets women (Ingram 2016), as demonstrated by Daesh appointing a female spokesperson, 'reflecting the key roles of women in communication, propaganda and recruitment' (Gaub & Lisiecka 2016: 2). Consequently, part of Prevent's role is to challenge Daesh narratives and

provide safeguarding support to Muslim individuals identified as vulnerable, in view of concerning behaviours identified on an individual basis. This is a proportionate response for a Prevent team working in an area where individuals from the Muslim and black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BME) communities have travelled to Daesh-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq (Booth et al. 2016). While the Kensington team's Prevent delivery reflects the varied risks present across the two local authorities, engagement with Muslim communities is an important response to Daesh's and al Qaeda's sophisticated propaganda, which has targeted Muslim communities (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016). Working with the principle that support should be prioritised in keeping with evidence based risk or vulnerability, the Kensington team have also developed support options specifically for women, in response to the demonstrated risk of young women supporting extremist groups or travelling to Daesh-controlled areas of Syria and Iraq (Evans 2016).

Engagement with Muslims shows that Prevent views Muslims as risks/threats and fuels grievance

Some assessments view Prevent practitioners' efforts to engage with Muslim communities as a reflection that the government views Muslims broadly as a risk. Heath-Kelly argues that Prevent has resulted in Muslims being viewed as risky by identifying risk factors and linking them to a single community, ultimately making terrorism pre-emptively 'governable' (2013: 395). Ali (2015) similarly criticises Prevent for seeking to govern Muslim conduct. O'Toole suggests that this approach has led to 'a series of wide-ranging interventions in Muslim religious, social and civil structures, with the aim of reforming, managing, regulating and "disciplining" Muslim conduct' (O'Toole et al. 2016: 164). These critiques posit that Prevent creates a framework for risk through which the government can exert control (Heath-Kelly 2012; Mythen et al. 2017;

Ragazzi 2016). Some commentators have suggested that this approach to Prevent is a significant source of grievance for Muslim communities. Indeed, David Anderson QC, former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, argued that:

> It is perverse that Prevent has become a more significant source of grievance in affected communities than the police and ministerial powers […] that are exercised under the Pursue strand of the CONTEST strategy. (Anderson 2016: 3)

The authors agree that engagement activity that treats a group, whether a Muslim community or another, homogeneously and through the prism of risk is flawed and counter-productive. However, framing all engagement with Muslim groups through this lens fails to recognise the range of positive engagements conducted through Prevent and undermines successful partnership working that produces positive social impacts. The Kensington team engages Muslim community groups based on the premise they are one of many actors that can help to keep vulnerable people safe (notably considering the theological elements of much of Daesh's propaganda), not because they are a risk.

One example is the Prevent Advisory Group (PAG), which was established in 2011. Although initially met with suspicion by some community groups (Patel 2016), after regular meetings consisting of frank and open conversations, PAG now has a regular membership of 24 faith, community, and youth organisations. The monthly meeting between the Kensington team and local community groups, including women's groups, is a vital element of the Kensington Model (Parker & Davis, 2017). PAG is an opportunity for local groups to make suggestions for local Prevent delivery and to receive updates from the Kensington team. The meetings reflect the importance placed on being embedded in local

communities, being aware of concerns, and working together. One PAG member from a local mosque commented that:

> We believe the PAG partnership is extremely useful and helpful as seen at times of great emergencies as well as for promoting common understanding on issues of common concern. (West London mosque representative, 2017)

Indeed, the relationship has developed to the point where some of the safeguarding support that can be offered is delivered with local community and faith groups. One example of this is through work with women and girls. It is apparent that groups, including Daesh, have targeted women using social media campaigns to encourage them to play an active role (Gaub & Lisiecka 2017; Pues 2016): recent arrests in London (Harley 2017) and a precedent of young women travelling from London to Syria (BBC 2016a) indicates such tactics may be working. The Kensington team's work with PAG has enabled a range of support options to be made available to women, including a 20-week Supporting Vulnerable Women (SVW) project and the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) programme.

The SVW project was co-designed with a community organisation during the 2013/2014 financial year. These workshops were run for women – where concerns had been raised regarding isolation, troubled upbringings, lack of interaction with British society, and holding conspiratorial views – to promote discussion and awareness of several topics, including participation in British society and how to challenge extremist narratives. The SVW project had a positive social impact on many of the women who took part in the workshops. For example, when asked 'do you feel more confident about engaging in wider society?' upon completion of the programme, 85% of those vulnerable women felt 'more confident' or 'much more confident' about engaging with wider

society. These support options contrast with Thomas' critique that Prevent has a 'clear reluctance to support empowerment work with Muslim women' (Thomas 2014: 33) and highlights the positive social impacts that can result from working and engaging with Muslim groups.

Another support option provided by community groups working with the Kensington team is SFSC, a parenting class. In the 2016/17 financial year, six parenting programmes were delivered to 84 parents, comprising 14 three-hour sessions. This project has been particularly well attended by mothers who accounted for just over 80% of attendees during the 2016/2017 financial year. Local community organisations delivered these parenting programmes with qualified facilitators and sought to raise parents' awareness of the risks their children may face, including substance abuse, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, and learning how these risks could be mitigated or countered. Over 500 participants across the two boroughs have completed the programme since it began in 2011, showing the benefits of partnering with local community groups in tackling radicalisation and other safeguarding concerns. The team received positive feedback from attendees regarding the ability to protect and support their children. One mother from a 2014/15 class said:

> [I have] established '15 minutes' with each child. I have learnt so much about my child. Now my child will talk and discuss issues with me whereas before I never knew what was going on in their head. (Project Participant, 2014/15)

Similarly, one mother from the 2014/2015 financial year cohort said the 'course has filled a big gap' and a mother from the same cohort said:

> The course has given me confidence not only to speak to my children about sensitive issues like extremism, but also has given me

confidence to speak to teachers and to ask for help if I need it. (Project Participant, 2014/15)

One of the community groups we worked with engaged significantly with female community members and worked in partnership with the Kensington team to deliver the SFSC programme. That organisation shared the below feedback:

Both community groups have benefited from the awareness raised of issues around radicalisation which was done through the projects with parents. That is why I am happy to be a part of all the meetings and discussions [that] took place during the past 18 months. (Local community group representative 2017)

This feedback suggests that, through meetings such as PAG, community groups can influence and guide local delivery of Prevent projects. In some cases, the groups can co-deliver projects to ensure that the Kensington team's outputs are impactful and reflect the needs of local communities, as opposed to fuelling community grievance. Engagement with Muslim communities enables groups to influence local delivery as partners, not as perceived risks, resulting in better social impacts for communities, including women.

Critique 2: Repression of Debate and Dissent

A second prominent criticism is that the Prevent Strategy impacts on free speech by repressing debate and dissent. This criticism can be subdivided into two separate concerns. The first is that Prevent is - at least partially - responsible for the creation of an environment in which people are afraid to discuss certain topics. Several dynamics are often identified as contributing to this. Firstly, individuals may exercise self-censorship (Wolton 2017: 7; Ramsay, 2017) in a context where practitioners, who are unclear as to how the strategy relates to them, may consider

expressions of religious or political interest to be concerning and undertake well-intentioned but misguided referrals (Ragazzi 2016: 728). Additionally, concerns have been raised that, by distinguishing between a 'trusted' or 'moderate' group of Muslims and other Muslims, the strategy is silencing or 'regulating' the latter (Ragazzi 2016: 737-738; Aly 2013: 11). Secondly, some researchers have argued that Prevent has pushed discussion of sensitive topics away from safe spaces. For example, it has been argued that Prevent undermines universities' ability to encourage robust challenge of unpalatable ideas (Durodie 2016; O'Donnell 2016: 62). This has led critics to argue that Prevent has been counter-productive by creating an environment in which individuals 'feel angry, or have a sense of injustice but nowhere to engage in a democratic process and in a peaceful way' (Wolton 2017: 7).

It is important to clarify the scope of these criticisms. Firstly, engagement with Prevent support is voluntary. Any engagement offered by Prevent can be refused, meaning that Prevent's ability to prohibit comments is non-existent. For example, while making extremist comments may lead to an offer of support by Prevent, this support would be voluntary. As such, while it may be argued that Prevent may hamper free speech by creating conditions in which an action may result from the expression of certain ideas – what Ramsay calls the 'threat of regulatory action' (2017) – Prevent cannot prohibit behaviour. Some researchers also overstate Prevent's focus on ideas. While ideological considerations are relevant and considered by Prevent, much safeguarding support and many projects seek to address broader vulnerabilities. The Channel Duty Guidance highlights the relevance of several factors when assessing an individual's vulnerabilities to radicalisation. These factors span across engagement, intention, and capability, and include non-ideological considerations, like having a history of violence (HM Government 2015a: 11-12). Locally, guidance and advice was provided to the carers and/or

practitioners of just under 65% of the residents who received some safeguarding support in 2016/2017.

Individuals are Afraid to Talk

Recognising that this study focuses only on two boroughs while some of the concerns raised may be national, locally there is nonetheless limited evidence of individuals being afraid to talk because of the work undertaken by the Kensington team. While there have been occasional instances in which concerns around individuals feeling afraid to talk have been noted by members of the team (including an instance documented in the media where a staff member was asked to close his laptop should it be acting as a recording device) (Patel, 2016), this is not in keeping with the team's overall experience of community engagement. This is notably true of the claim that, by engaging with a certain section of the Muslim community, Prevent may be silencing other views. The aforementioned monthly PAG meetings constitute an example of Prevent engaging with community groups, including Muslim organisations, which may be critical of the strategy (Patel 2016). Indeed, the Terms of Reference document of the PAG explicitly stresses the responsibility of members to 'provide constructive criticism or analysis of Prevent that can be fed up to government.' One PAG member, who had made the aforementioned request for a laptop to be closed, commented that:

> Having been a vocally critical member within PAG from the outset, [PAG meetings] convinced me it was best for Muslim groups to engage…Prevent has evolved, learned lessons, and achieved significant strides during the last five years. (PAG member and Governor of an Outstanding School 2016)

Another example is the Community Questions project, in which the Kensington team supports local community groups in running public discussions around key issues and themes that have been highlighted by

communities as being important. These discussions typically cover controversial, contentious or current topics and bring together experts and interested community members. Attended by an estimated 450 individuals over the four events held during the 2016/17 financial year and covering topics including Islam and women and Prevent itself, these events offer a platform where views are discussed openly and freely. Working in partnership with a local youth organisation and PAG member, the Kensington team attracted panellists including a Member of Parliament, independent scholars, and community members to discuss these topics. One such event was held at a mosque and provided an opportunity to discuss Prevent delivery in West London. An Imam, a Prevent Safeguarding Officer and two local community group members sat on the panel with an estimated 120 people in attendance. Following brief presentations, panellists responded to any questions and criticisms from the audience, including queries which were particularly critical of the government and of Prevent. Feedback from the event was broadly positive, with 90% of evaluation respondents feeling 'very confident' or 'confident' with safeguarding efforts, including Prevent, after the event, as compared to 30% before. Furthermore, feedback included positive comments such as 'Very interesting, great to hear from the professionals on the panel' and 'Excellent event. I would like to attend more events like this'.

Although there is no means of definitively knowing that the implementation of the Prevent Strategy has not led to any self-censorship, the experience of the Kensington team has found little evidence of this occurring in community settings. This also seems to be the case in schools. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that sensitive and controversial topics are still being discussed in local schools. Indeed, there have been several instances where primary and secondary schools have approached the local authority Prevent team for support in

view of such topics being discussed, should the team be able to provide specialist content to regarding these topics. For example, schools reached out to the team for support after the attack in Westminster in March 2017 and as a consequence of discussions around sectarian conflict among students. This reveals that sensitive topics are still being discussed within school settings and that certain schools view the local authority Prevent team as a valuable partner able to support schools when engaging with this.

Having reviewed the Kensington team's experience of open discussion with community members and anecdotal examples of ongoing discussion of sensitive topics within school settings, it is also relevant to consider whether the training delivered may be contributing to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to such self-censorship. Indeed, concerns have been raised that uncertainty and poor training delivered to practitioners may foster an environment in which the risk of misguided referrals may, in turn, lead to self-censorship. A national executive member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), for example, is quoted in a report as raising some concerns about the quality of some of the Prevent training delivered, explaining that 'it's very varied in content and very varied in quality – that is exacerbating the confusion [around Prevent]' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016: 44). This same report notes that such concerns have been raised by a 'significant number of health and education professionals' who 'said that the Prevent training they received was wholly unsatisfactory and, in some instances, counterproductive' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016: 44). Locally, however, feedback from school staff trained during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 financial years, alongside the first quarter of the 2017/2018 financial year, indicates that the percentage of practitioners who felt that their understanding of Prevent was 'Very Good' and 'Good' went from 15.6% before the training to 89.8% after the training. Additionally, 95.9%

of school staff stated after the training that they understood 'the purpose of Channel and its role in safeguarding vulnerable individuals'. A similar trend can be identified regarding local authority staff trained. During the first quarter of the 2017/2018 financial year, the percentage of attendees who rated their understanding of Prevent to be 'Good' and 'Very Good' went from 21.5% before the training to 89% after the training. Feedback provided by local authority and education staff who received the training notably includes the following:

Very good presentation and clarification on the subject. Overall - more confident. (Education staff trained in 2016)

Excellent, informative & now have a much better understanding about 'Prevent'. (Education staff trained in 2016)

Very clearly and confidently presented. Good to respect and reinforce different kinds of extremism across cultures and religions. Thank you.

(Local Authority staff trained in 2016)

Looking at a national level, a 2017 report also found that school staff 'expressed fairly high levels of confidence with regards to implementing the Prevent duty' which is noted as being the result of a combination of factors including, amongst others, 'effective training' (Busher et al. 2017: 6). While acknowledging anxieties with regards to the aforementioned concerns, the report also notes that it 'found relatively little support among respondents for the idea that the duty has led to a "chilling effect" on conversations with students in the classroom and beyond' (Busher et al. 2017: 6) and that the 'largest proportion of respondents (56%) expressed the view that the Prevent duty had not resulted in any change in the levels of trust between students and staff' (Busher et al. 2017: 50).

Pushing Debate Outside of Safe Spaces

The evidence drawn from the Kensington team also provides us with an insight regarding whether Prevent is pushing debate outside of safe spaces (O'Donnell 2016: 62). For example, the Kensington team encourages discussion of sensitive topics within schools. Over the course of the 2015/2017 financial years, the Kensington team has facilitated eight events about the Israel-Palestine conflict in schools, reaching approximately 1,010 students. These sessions, in which a former British Ambassador provides an overview of the conflict and of his experiences, are then followed by a debate. A community organisation has also run four sessions over the course of the 2015/2017 financial years reaching at least 600 students to discuss potentially conflicting identities. Muslim members of the armed forces ran eleven discussions to a total of 1,734 students discussing a range of topics, including the perception that the military is preoccupied with killing (as opposed to its humanitarian function) and the view, sometimes espoused by the far right, that no British Muslims serve in the military. The 'Syria/Iraq Tabletop', in which Prevent staff provide students with an overview of the conflict in Syria/Iraq prior to discussing the risks originating from this conflict, was delivered to 209 students over the course of nine sessions during the 2015/2016 financial year. Where possible, these sessions are tailored to audiences. For example, 'Syria/Iraq Tabletop' sessions delivered in girls' schools discussed the experiences of female foreign fighters and the treatment of women by Daesh. Lesson plans have also been produced around several topics, ranging from far right extremism to fake news, and represent another means by which Prevent supports debate in safe spaces. With regards to Prevent's impact on social relations, far from the concerns that Prevent is pushing debate outside of safe spaces, the Kensington team's experience is one in which Prevent has encouraged debate and discussion within safe spaces.

Beyond educational settings, the Kensington team also support open debate in local community settings. The workshops delivered as part of the SVW project enabled in-depth discussion of sensitive issues over 20 weeks, covering issues such as British identity, isolation, and extremism. Quotes from participants prior to the start of project illustrate the isolated and sceptical nature of some attendees:

> I am an alien in my home country and when I come to Britain I am again an alien, nobody wants Muslim people in [their] country because they think we are all terrorist. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

> I don't feel like the British people want me or my kind in this country anymore (Project Participant 2013-2014)

Far from the claims that Prevent pushes debate outside of safe spaces thereby increasing risk, feedback from participants at the end of the project highlights how well the workshops were received and their positive effects.

> I am really pleased with myself for finishing the course, I learned a lot about myself, I didn't understand why my identity was questioned, until I realise how I was confused and did feel disconnected but was unaware of it. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

> I don't feel angry anymore, you made me realise that I should always have open mind and I feel more positive in this country. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

We have argued in this section that, while the scope of this inquiry is limited, at the very least, the experiences here demonstrate that the delivery of Prevent by the Kensington team offers a different experience from the concerns raised by researchers who have stressed Prevent's impact on the repression of debate and dissent. Specifically, the Kensington team has found little evidence of Prevent stifling discussion

and, on the contrary, has substantial quantitative and anecdotal evidence of individuals speaking freely and critically, and of Prevent actively encouraging the discussion of sensitive topics in safe spaces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, whilst not seeking to suggest that Prevent is a flawless strategy, this article has outlined that its social impacts are more diverse than often reported. It has provided examples of positive social impacts, including in relation to work with women and girls, that add nuance to some of the main critiques of Prevent. This is particularly so in relation to assessments of the Prevent Strategy as securitising Muslim communities and stifling debate and dissent, with new primary data illustrating deep community support for local approaches in areas of West London and Prevent serving to facilitate and foster public discussion of sensitive and complicated issues in schools and community venues. Future research into the impacts of the Prevent Strategy would benefit from considering in greater detail local variances in delivery and community reception, as well as considering the views of a wider range of smaller, local community, and faiths groups.

The views expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations that they represent.

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