

Muslim children and the Prevent Strategy by Anna Lockley-Scott, University of Warwick, reviewed by the SOAS COP Team (17th August 2020)

The Prevent Counter-terrorism Strategy is causing an **environment of anxiety amongst Muslim pupils**. The Government's Prevent Review must acknowledge the anxiety it creates.

In the last three years, I have carried out research with 220 pupils and 84 teachers about the experiences of Muslim pupils in secondary schools in the context of the Prevent Duty since 2015 and made the following findings:

- **Muslim pupils aged 16-18 are anxious about the Prevent Strategy.** They worry that their religious actions risk being misinterpreted. They view the Prevent Strategy as a government policy to assess how religious they are and identify whether they are extremist.
- **Muslim pupils aged 13-15, worry that they are being viewed as extremist,** even if they did not know about the Prevent strategy. They are anxious about the repercussions, so **they self-censor**, modifying their behaviour and speech in order to prevent anyone viewing them as extremist.
- **Muslim pupils find it hard to trust their teachers because of their anxieties around society's perceptions of Muslims and the teacher's role in implementing the Prevent Strategy.**
- **Muslim pupils consider that the media plays a big part in fostering society's view that they are extremist.** They do not trust the media to give an objective account of Muslim communities in society.
- **Muslim teachers share the anxiety** of the Muslim pupils about the Prevent Strategy. They are anxious about being seen as extreme too.
- **Muslim pupils feel vulnerable not to extremism but to Islamophobia.** They feel ashamed of these experiences and do not share their experiences with their peers, their teachers or others in authority.

Recommendations:

- **The Prevent strategy which constructs the pupil as a potential extremist must be reviewed and overhauled.**
- Teachers and policy makers should be **aware of the level of anxiety experienced by Muslim pupils** concerning the fear of being perceived as extreme.
- Teachers, policy makers and counsellors should **be aware of the mental health issues** for Muslim pupils that arise from the constant **anxiety of feeling under surveillance** for extremism.
- Teachers should be aware of the position they are placed in by the Prevent Strategy and of the **fragility of their relationship with Muslim pupils** if the teachers are perceived to be assessing and reporting the pupils for extremism.
- **Opportunities should be opened up in schools to talk about experiences of Islamophobia** as Muslim pupils fear it and often experience it without feeling able to share it with teachers or others in authority.

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