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Under Siege: Families of Counter-Terrorism

Surinder Guru*

Surinder Guru teaches on the social work courses at the Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham. Her research interests relate to 'race' and gender inequalities.

*Correspondence to Surinder Guru, University of Birmingham, Institute of Applied Social Studies, Edgbaston, Birmingham, West Midlands, B15 2TT, UK. E-mail: *s.guru@bham.ac.uk*

Abstract

In the wake of terrorist attacks in New York and in London, Muslim communities in Britain have been blighted by increased racist activity and vilification alongside a systematic strengthening of surveillance and national security. As many Muslim men are incarcerated, the families of detainees and prisoners are often left to fend for themselves amidst economic and social insecurity, giving rise to isolation and ostracisation from within and outside of their own communities. Whilst the declaration of a 'war on terror' by the state has not been conducted through armed conflict on British streets, the effects on innocent women and children in homes affected by counter-terrorist activities can be as traumatising as those for civilians in war-torn zones.

This paper draws upon the findings of an exploratory study addressing these concerns in the West Midlands, UK. It highlights the experiences and the neglected needs of families whose members are accused or suspected of terrorism and suggests that social workers should no longer continue to ignore these issues.

Keywords: Muslim women, children and families, racism, Islamophobia, counter-terrorism, citizenship

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Introduction

In the UK, the cumulative effects of anti-Muslims racism (Islamophobia) and a raft of counter-terrorism measures have left families in despair. Whilst debate around Islamophobia and the treatment of detainees is rife, the focus on the plight of their families is minimal. As with wars

generally, the effects of the 'war on terror' and counter-terrorism are racialised and gendered. The position of Muslim women has been transformed by this conflict: on the one hand, they are called by the state to take centre stage in leading their communities (CLG, 2009) and, on the other, their daily lives become the subject of racist vitriol, their safety threatened and their cultures placed under scrutiny. Many women, who previously had limited contact with the outside world, are isolated and struggle with their sudden exposure to the public world (Brittain, 2009). The paper seeks to highlight the experiences of these women in the West Midlands, particularly the effects of counter-terrorism upon them and their children. Social work is charged with responding to service users' complex, personal and social needs in non-oppressive ways whilst holding to account authorities that engage in discriminatory and oppressive practices. Yet, despite the growing literature on the impact of political conflict upon services users (Campbell, 2007; Ramon, 2008), the profession remains almost oblivious to the needs of the families affected by the response to 'war-on-terror' (Guru, 2010).

This paper hopes to contribute towards further research on this much-neglected area. It sets the social and political milieu in which Muslim communities and women are perceived in the context of terrorism, before discussing the methodology and the findings.

'War on terror'

The tremors of the 9/11 attacks in New York were felt across the world as Western governments unleashed draconian measures to address terrorism. In the UK, a combination of successive events before and after 9/11 thrust Muslims into the hostile public gaze. These included the Rushdie Affair of 1989, the northern England clashes between Asian (Muslim) and white (far right) youth and the police, the 7/7 London attacks in 2005, the abortive bombings of 21 July 2005 and also the Glasgow airport bombings in 2007. Muslims were now accused of 'threatening' the 'British way of life' and destroying Western values, including democracy, tolerance and the rights of women (Fekete, 2004), and were perceived as 'disloyal' and 'self-segregated'—the 'enemy within'. A raft of new measures were aimed at reigning in extremists and potential terrorists, thus reducing immigration and preventing asylum seekers from arriving or remaining in the UK from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan (Peach, 2005). The 'war-on-terror' 'placed issues of (in)security and terror at the heart of state responses to new and established minority communities and [saw] the rolling back of humanitarian obligations around asylum and the commitment to civil liberties' (Alexander, 2007, p. 117). The targeting of Muslims saw their identities as 'Asians' being transformed to 'Muslims' as religion became the primary marker of new racialised boundaries.

Racist abuse, hate crimes and media vilification of Muslims increased the political gains made by the far right on the platform of Islamophobia (CPS, 2007; Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2010; Burnett, 2011).

Multiculturalism, which, prior to 9/11, was seen as a solution to racial conflict, was now denounced (Cameron, 2011); the anti-racist gains made in the McPherson Inquiry (1999) following the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which found 'unwitting' 'institutional racism' to be endemic in British institutions, was now forgotten. Post 9/11 and the 7/7 attacks, demands were made for the transformation of the private spheres of minority ethnic communities; these included calls for English to be spoken at home and for a demonstration of loyalty through participation in citizenship tests and ceremonies. At the same time, demonisation of cultural practices, such as forced marriages, honour killings and the wearing of the veil, were used more to humiliate and vilify Muslims than to raise issues of gender equality (Patel and Bard, 2010).

Simultaneously, faith communities were given a central role in challenging extremism (Denham, 2001; Blunkett, 2002; McGhee, 2005; Blair, 2006; Pilkington, 2008; Cameron, 2011) and Muslim women were provided with a special platform through which to curb terrorism (CLG, 2008). Whilst some supported these developments (Modood, 2005, 2007, 2010; Parekh, 2000, 2007), others were more critical. The support of faith-based organisations and the pursuit of integrationist, community cohesion measures were seen as regressive steps undermining gains made by earlier anti-racist struggles (Kundnani, 2001, 2008, 2009; McGhee, 2005; Worley, 2005; Pilkington, 2008; Sivanandan, 2006; Patel and Bard, 2010; Singh and Cowden, 2011). Despite the diverse nature of Muslim communities in the UK, policy and practice failed to recognise the heterogeneity in Muslim populations in terms of class, gender, age, etc. (Crabtree *et al.*, 2008).

'Hard' and 'soft' approaches

Counter-terrorism measures consist of 'hard' and 'soft' approaches. 'Hard' options include draconian methods ranging from stop-and-searches to extraordinary rendition. 'Soft' policies seek to 'win hearts and minds' through engagement with communities.

Hard responses were felt immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Part II of the 2000 Terrorism Act made it illegal to incite terrorist acts (the 2000 Terrorism Act defined 'terrorism' as any action or the threat of action that advances the cause or attempts to influence the government by causing serious damage to property or disruption of electronic systems); it proscribed 'extremist' groups, including those fighting liberation struggles in their own countries. It gave police extended powers to stop and search and detain suspects for up to fourteen and later twenty-eight days and allowed deportation of those considered a risk to national security. The

police were given up to nine hours to detain people with reasonable suspicion of criminal involvement, while those convicted had no right to maintain silence or to see the evidence against them (Ryder, 2011; English, 2011). Since 9/11, 1,945 terrorism-related arrests were made, which led to 241 convictions (Home Office, 2011*a*) and over 70,000 stop-and-searches were conducted (Home Office, 2011*b*). The cumulative effect of these measures amounted to ethnic profiling (Dodd, 2011) and the criminalisation of Muslims, as Asians became forty-two times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people (Dodd, 2011). It denuded the citizenship rights of Muslims (McGhee, 2005; Kundnani, 2008) and criminalised political refugees opposing oppressive regimes in their countries, thus thwarting the struggle for democracy (McCulloch and Pickering, 2005).

The 2000 Terrorism Act made it an offence for a person to fund-raise for terrorism-related purposes; therefore, activities such as fund-raising for international and humanitarian causes became intensively scrutinised. Offences such as 'acts preparatory to terrorism', 'encouragement to terrorism' and dissemination of terrorist publications, introduced in the 2006 and 2009 Terrorism Acts, gave police and the CPS power to seize property and monies 'used for the purpose of terrorism'. As a result, the families of those convicted under terrorism charges risked losing their homes (as in the case of Munir Farooqi; Bano, 2011) and money. In addition, young people travelling were stopped at airports and interviewed by MI5 and pressured to spy upon their own communities. Moreover, the application of extra-rendition meant that men were forcefully removed, transported and disappeared to countries for interrogation, in breach of international law (Sivanandan, 2006; Fekete, 2006; Qureshi, 2011). Furthermore, the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act introduced control orders: a form of house arrest wherein suspects are tagged and constrained by curfews, and prohibited access to and communication with the outside world. These restrictions were imposed upon the immediate families of suspects, rendering them 'guilty by association'. Raids were conducted on homes and meeting places; foreign clerics judged to represent a threat were deported and trustees of mosques were closely regulated. The panoptical style of surveillance over 'suspect' Muslim communities was epitomised by the placement of cameras in areas with high Muslim populations (e.g. Sparkbrook in Birmingham), which served to illustrate the negative, homogenous portrayal under which all Muslims were put and the failure to design more selective, intelligence-driven strategies that recognised political, cultural and religious plurality amongst Muslims (Crabtree *et al.*, 2008).

The programme to combat violent extremism was encapsulated in Contest: a four-part strategy aimed at the protection, prevention, pursuit and preparedness of terrorism. The 'Prevent Violent Extremism' (Prevent) strategy was geared to reduce extremism and terrorism by funding projects to identify those 'at risk' and to manage perceptions of grievances through police interventions. Prevent was much criticised for

conflating the integration and community cohesion strategies with counter-terrorism: it increased community surveillance, which raised suspicion and distrust among community members; it confused and merged radical, religious and political opinions with terrorist indoctrination. By labelling some Muslims as 'moderates' and others as 'extremists', it constructed binaries of Muslims as 'good' and 'bad' people whilst denying the extremism of the white far right, causing further alienation of Muslims (Bartlett and Birdwell, 2010). In light of these criticisms, the Coalition reviewed Prevent and introduced a separation between community development programmes and counter-terrorism and to distinguish between extremism and terrorist indoctrination. However, it is reported that interventions continue to reign in Muslims for expressing frustrations about inequality or for articulating political opinions, such as on British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, or for visiting radical websites. Details of family and friends, who had no association with criminal activity, continue to be gathered (Kundnani, 2011). The modus operandi by which the police have gathered intelligence to ensure 'national security' and the punishment levelled against individuals and communities have generated a deep distrust between Muslims and the wider society.

Demeaning experiences are likely to produce defensive, 'closed' communities, as they attempt to secure cultural values and practices and foster a sense of 'us' and 'them', as self-serving agendas are promoted on both sides of the divide. Feelings of injustice are likely to fester as people develop a sense of low morale and low self-esteem, resulting in a lack of confidence to exercise their rights and obligations as citizens and to form formal and informal relationships within and across communities (Putnam, 2002). As the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' and the political conflicts in Israel and Palestine show, the effects of such tensions can be long-lasting and may minimise people's abilities to lead fulfilling lives (Ramon *et al.*, 2006; Campbell, 2007). Muslim families are likely to lose their abilities and strengths to survive under such pressures (Crabtree *et al.*, 2008; CLG, 2009) and the casualties may land at the door of social work and other professions.

Social work is a profession seeking to promote social justice and social change, to challenge inequality and discrimination and to empower people whilst enhancing their well-being and providing practical support in their day-to-day activities. It is therefore incumbent upon social workers and social work educators to raise awareness of the environment in which families affected by counter-terrorism live and to become familiar with their social, psychological/emotional, political, economic and religious context (Duffy, 2009; Guru, 2010) so that social workers can be better equipped to negotiate trusting relationships built upon respect, warmth, compassion and non-judgemental attitudes (Trevithick, 2012). Whilst social work literature has begun to acknowledge and to highlight the

differences and the similarities between Muslim communities (Crabtree *et al.*, 2008), the effects of counter-terrorism upon families remain neglected.

'War' and women

War is gendered. Women can be active participants in violence, as illustrated by those convicted of terrorism offences in the UK, Sri Lanka and Chechnya. They can also be peacemakers (Home Office, 2011*a*; Simcox *et al.*, 2010). As civilians, women's bodies often become battlegrounds and subjected to atrocities of rape, forced pregnancies, kidnapping and sexual servitude (Cockburn, 2001; Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler, 2002). Women lack access to resources during wars but are often charged with addressing the effects of war upon their families. These demands can take their toll upon physical and mental well-being (Jansen, 2006).

Women are manipulated by politicians to stabilise their communities and to build bridges between opposing forces. The UN Security Council recognises the gendered processes of reconciliation in political conflict and calls for equal participation and involvement of women in peace processes and nation building. Hearn, in examining women as 'preventers' of violence, states that they can help de-radicalise men by forging stronger family bonds and prevent children from becoming victims of predators; they can 'feminize the face of Islam' (Hearn, 2009, p. 10). Such strategies have been successful in Morocco and Saudi Arabia (Hearn, 2009). In the UK, Muslim women as 'mothers and grandmothers' have been pivotal in policies addressing violent extremism (Brown, 2008). In line with a bid to liberate Afghani women, New Labour sought to 'support', 'skill' and 'empower' vulnerable 'Muslim women to take a proactive leadership role' and to help 'challenge the ideology of violent extremists' (CLG, 2008, p. 6). Baroness Uddin exhorted that Muslim women were a 'source of moral authority … key to unlocking … disillusion'. Aims to protect and promote Muslim women contrast sharply with their construction as fundamentalist and violent and with rejections of their asylum claims made when they are seeking protection in the UK against gender-based persecution (Wilson and Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2006). It reflects the intersectionality of the multidimensional position of Muslim women as the state attempts to manipulate simultaneously their identities in terms of gender, religion, ethnicity and class (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler, 2002; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Patel and Bard, 2010).

Despite efforts to prevent religious and political extremism within Muslim communities, neither strategy has addressed the issues facing families affected by terrorism charges. Counter-terrorism measures have been shown to impact on families in a number of ways. In the USA, Mathur (2006) documents the impact of detention of Muslim men following 9/11

and notes that, as 'suspects' were randomly picked up, families were left wondering about their whereabouts. Many detainees lost their jobs, homes, bank accounts and the ability to support their families. In the UK, Brittain (2009) reveals that families of people who have been detained, deported and imprisoned were branded 'guilty by association'. Given the direct affects of the 'war on terror' on such families, where anger and resentment may fester in the face of perceived injustices levied at husbands, fathers and sons, these may be sites for potential violent extremism. Indeed, one of the lessons of the Northern Ireland 'troubles' is that children are revisited by the conflicts of their parents (Bloom, 1997). Parental imprisonment places specific pressures upon children (Lewis, *et al.*, 2008), as does political conflict (Burrows and Keenan, 2004). Understanding the diverse ways in which family members can be affected by counter-terrorism therefore has the potential of strengthening 'whole-family' approaches (Morris, 2011) and to make children matter by identifying their unmet needs and services to meet them whilst ensuring that responses are based upon the recognition of human rights, equality and diversity (Burrows and Keenan, 2004).

Such responses to Muslim families are particularly important, since practitioners are not immune from reflecting the prejudices of their own social groups against those defined as the 'enemy' (Seeley, 2003; Ramon *et al.*, 2006; Ron and Shamai, 2011). In the USA, Ellis (2006) urges social workers to hone in on their social work values when attempting to manage their feelings about 9/11 and ensure they adhere to their obligations to confront policies that are discriminatory so that they do not compound the discrimination already faced by Muslims.

In addressing the sparse social work literature related to these concerns, this study aims to contribute towards an understanding of the women's experiences after their men have become subjects of counter-terrorism.

The study

A small amount of funding was secured to conduct an exploratory study in the West Midlands and, after some negotiation, ethical approval was gained from the University of Birmingham. Informed consent was gained from participants. This study sought to acquire an understanding of the experiences and issues facing women and their families in the context of the 'war-on-terror'. A feminist standpoint approach was adopted to treat the experiences of women as worthy 'knowledge', against the 'dominant and privileged forms of "knowledge" held by politicians and policy makers'. By 'naming the oppression of women which is grounded in the truth of women's lives' (Letherby, 2003, p. 48), it sought to reveal the inequalities faced by Muslim women tainted by terrorism.

The data were collected largely through semi-structured interviews but other more social spaces were also utilised, away from the interview context, to build stronger and trusting relationships. This was facilitated by the gate-keeping organisation working with the participants.

The sensitivities surrounding terrorism-related research made it extremely difficult to reach the families of individuals charged with terrorism due to fear and suspicion of strangers. In order to help build trust, rapport and to gain access, it was imperative to enlist the support of 'gate-keepers' who had close contact with the families (Emmel *et al.*, 2007). Access to a purposeful, 'opportunistic' sample (Coyne, 1997) was secured and facilitated through a national voluntary organisation, Helping Households Under Great Stress (HHUGS), which provided practical assistance to the relevant families (e.g., help with prison visits, finance, recreational activities and social events). Access to this agency depended upon a demonstration of a sympathetic approach towards the work of the organisation and the families they supported. To build trust with HHUGS, the researcher relied upon her pre-existing personal networks with individuals who helped to provide access to the organisation.

As a reflexive researcher, it was important to consider how the researcher's personal identity and position affected the research process. Being a non-white woman (albeit non-Muslim) with shared experiences of racism helped to gain direct access to participants; a male researcher may have found this to be extremely difficult. However, in other ways, given the lack of trust and fear of strangers, a demonstration of one's political affinity, empathy and understanding of the experiences of Muslim communities was even more significant in helping to establish trust and enabling participants to narrate their experiences without fear of being negatively portrayed or judged and of being labelled 'terrorists'. Trust was also reinforced by the presence of a representative of HHUGS at the interviews; access to participants had been conditional upon agreement of this presence and, although it had the potential risk of preventing participants from opening up about their experiences, particularly those of the services provided by HHUGS (and this may well have been the case with regards to those particular responses), it also enabled women to talk about other experiences in an environment of safety, which was more important in establishing trust and gaining access.

The establishment of trust at different levels (with different sets of gate-keepers and with participants) meant an emphasis upon reciprocity. At times, this included offering transport to visit lawyers, MPs, etc., and, at others, giving information about available services. Emmel *et al.* (2007) state that:

> . . . reciprocity is a strategy necessary to maintain the relationship between researcher and participant during the research process once successful access has been gained (Emmel *et al.*, 2007, p. 2.7).

Feminist methodology has long relied upon developing reciprocal relationships to build trust and to promote the notion of 'exchange' of valuable resources within the research process whilst supporting vulnerable people in need of assistance (Oakley, 1981; Goode, 2000; Emmel *et al.*, 2007). Such relationships do not reduce the power and control researchers have over the interpretation and representation of data, and participants may well feel that their time and emotional investment in the research may have reaped little benefit for them. This can result in a retrospective lack of trust in research(ers). It was therefore important to convince the gatekeepers as well as the participants that the plight of the women would be highlighted in the research—a promise that, it is hoped, is delivered. Hence, what is represented here is dependent upon the researcher's subjectivity; others may make their own meanings.

Currently, HHUGS works with approximately eighty families throughout England; these originate from a range of countries, including Palestine, Algeria, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. The families were mostly based in London but, at the time of the study, a small number (eleven) were in the West Midlands and others elsewhere. Interpreters were used in interviews where it was not possible to communicate directly with participants. One English-speaking respondent wished to answer a questionnaire that was subsequently designed to reflect the semi-structured interview questions and to elicit other information considered important by the participant. The women who did not take part either remained too afraid to talk to outsiders or feared jeopardising their husbands' legal positions.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and copies of the recordings were sent to all the participants, allowing them to reflect and to exclude information they felt inappropriate or to add further comments/clarifications. None requested any changes. Interviews lasted between one and two hours, and took place in the women's homes. The personal details of the women have been kept to the bare minimum in order to protect their confidentiality. In the interest of anonymity, all names used are fictitious and the biographical details are not provided with direct quotes. Drawing upon the literature review, a topic guide was derived to guide the interviews/conversations that included questions such as:

- Tell me what happened when your husband was taken away by the police?
- How did you (and the children) cope?
- How did you manage your everyday life afterwards?
- How did you manage when your husband returned home?
- How have the events affected you and the children?
- Who supported you during this time?

A systematic and a thematic approach informed by grounded theory was adopted to analyse the data from the perspectives of the participants, in terms of what they considered important, as well as to identify themes reflected in related literature (Bryman, 2001; May, 2001; Charmaz, 2008).

Seven women initially formed the subject of this study, though one withdrew due to fears about jeopardising her husband's legal position; the study is therefore based on the findings of six participants. Their age ranges varied between twenty-eight and forty years and all had two or more children whose ages in turn ranged from one to fourteen years. Three of the participants were raised in the UK but the others arrived from other countries since 2002 to join their husbands as refugees. Five women had husbands who had been freed and were no longer under any restrictions but, for two others, the cases were pending, including the participant who withdrew. One of the women had been detained overnight and released without any charges.

In most cases, released husbands were unemployed or doing voluntary work, as they were unable to find employment. The women were not employed; four women had undertaken English classes or training in preparation for employment.

The next section explores the themes arsing from the findings.

Treatment by the police

Counter-terrorism has placed Muslim women in direct contact with police maltreatment. Their experiences paralleled those of African Caribbean women who often became victims of police brutality. Policing is often mediated through notions of race, gender and class and is perceived by black and minority ethnic women as policing *of* communities rather than *for* them (Hall *et al.*, 1978; Gilroy, 1982; Carby, 1982; Amos and Parmar, 1984; Bryan *et al.*, 1985; Lewis, 2004). Efforts to safeguard children from criminalisation through the SUS laws and stop-and-searches have often meant that, as mothers, black and minority ethnic women become victims of police brutality themselves. Their calls for accountability in investigations of murders and racist attacks against their family members often go unheard (Bryan *et al.*, 1985), as the long struggle of Steven Lawrence's family illustrates well. Black women's movements have repeatedly highlighted the racism inherent in police perceptions and attitudes where, for instance, violence against women within the home is labelled as 'honour crimes' rather than domestic violence, thus racially and culturally tarnishing whole communities. When seeking protection against crimes such as sexual abuse, domestic violence and 'honour crimes', many women are fearful of the police being more interested in their 'illegal immigrant' status or drug and gun-related crimes than their vulnerability (Siddiqui, 2003; Patel, 2003). Like black women before them (Bryan *et al.*, 1985), Muslim

women continue to have to manage the stresses that are brought into the home as consequences of the increased levels of stop-and-searches since 9/11, as well as the separation from family members in custody.

All of the women involved with HHUGS had encountered terrorising experience at the hands of the police when their husbands were arrested or returned home on bail or on control orders. The women were gripped with fear by the arrival of numerous vehicles packed with police, often in the early hours of the morning, drawing the attention of neighbours as streets were cordoned off. All of the women routinely wore the *abaya* (long robe) and the *hijab* (head scarf) or the full *burqa* (veil) and were humiliated by appearing immodestly in front of strangers, without appropriate clothing or only in undergarments. They all reported that the police paid no heed to this sensitivity:

> They came at about 5 in the morning, broke the door down . . . they blocked off the roads. There were 20 to 30 of them. There were cars everywhere . . .. They had riot shields. They forced entry, broke the door . . .. They filled every single room, kitchen, garden, living room. They were screaming 'police,' 'police'. They didn't give me a chance to get dressed (Fatima).

When the men were held under control orders, visits from the police were endless and women and children repeatedly suffered ordeals that left them permanently traumatised and humiliated:

> Every week they'd come and search everything . . .. Their intrusion was incessant. They'd come and say the tag's not working . . .. Many officers would . . . stay in the house for about 5 hours, search and strip everything . . .. Even my underwear! They'd open the draws; I felt so disgusted, I binned away the underwear afterwards . . . even now I am traumatised, I have nightmares, I still remember, I wake up thinking they're in the house (Hala).

Basic rights of women to make contact with family or legal representatives were withheld:

> . . . they wouldn't even let me make a phone call to the solicitor which I understand now that they're not meant to stop you doing, but they wouldn't let me at the time. And, they actually took the phone off me; I wanted to phone my father in law to see if they were ok (Mariam).

This helpless state left women anxious about the safety of their family and unable to access support.

Moreover, as homes were ransacked and men removed, women were left to sort out the mayhem left behind whilst consoling children who watched the humiliating treatment meted out to their parents. Some of children were prevented from going to school on the day of the raids. A basic lack of concern and sensitivity about children's safety and well-being was evident:

> The school tried to phone on the mobile to ask me to collect the kids. The police had our mobiles. Even when the house phone rang I was not allowed

> to answer it. They wouldn't let me get up. I had to stay in the same place . . . when I went to the toilet they followed me (Fatima).

This lack of police regard, care and concern contradicts the protection enshrined in child protection legislation that instructs professionals to act in the best interest of the child (1989 and 2004 Children Acts; Every Child Matters, dfES 2003). Whilst Every Child Matters is concerned with securing family ties between imprisoned parents and children, little attention is paid to the impact policing techniques have on children.

As pious women whose modesty is sacred, the policing visited upon Muslim women in the name of counter-terrorism leaves them humiliated, vulnerable and isolated at the very time they most need to be strong for their children and families. Their experiences are not only reminders of the abuse of Abu Ghraib prisoners, but also demonstrate intersectionality of their position where their racialised, ethnic, religious and gendered identities shape their experiences as 'citizens'. Such pressures are likely to add to the existing pressures that women face and heighten their vulnerability to depression and self-harm (Bhardwaj, 2001; Raleigh *et al.*, 2007) and so become potential casualties that social workers and other practitioners must address in order to provide relevant and adequate services that can deal with the specificities of their circumstances.

Isolation

Being tainted by terrorism meant that women and children were shunned by their own communities and by their neighbourhoods. Meaningful social interaction with people is a part of validating oneself as a human being. The absence of normal social interaction leads people to fester in their own negative thoughts and to a lack of mental stimulus and is psychologically destructive; it can lead to depression, despair, anxiety and rage (House, 2001). Many reports on Islamophobia document the isolation that Muslim communities, particularly young people, experience due to the government's approach to counter-terrorism (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2010; Qureshi, 2011) but the isolation of families and women is rarely considered. Brittain (2009) describes the isolation that is transferred from the prison to the home when men under control orders are prevented from seeing friends and family. She narrates experiences of families of men held in Guantánamo, stigmatised and shunned by their communities for being 'associated' with terrorism, and of wives who, tainted with 'guilt by association', may have nothing but a letter on which to hang their hopes as they prey for their husbands to return.

In the immediate aftermaths of the raids, women in Britain were left to their own devices to right the ransacked home, and manage their own

and their children's psychological well-being whilst feeling that they were under constant watch:

> I was broken for a good few years. The first year I cried almost every day. I didn't know how I was going to get through the pregnancy let alone life without my husband. I spent time with other people as much as I could, but the evenings and nights I spent with so much heartache. Every phone call, every visit was monitored so I could never discuss anything with my husband. The lawyer wouldn't discuss anything with me as our case had high media profile (Ameena).

As men returned, it was the wives who were required to pack and move to new accommodation, of which they were informed only on the day of the husband's release. Remarkably, without the offer of any assistance, women managed to move as required. Any promise of resumption of normal life, however, would soon be dashed, as the men's arrival would be conspicuously announced by a blaring convoy of police sirens bringing them 'home'. Being placed in a new community and tainted as terrorist, even before they had the opportunity of establishing their own identity, minimised the chances of the families integrating and mingling within the community.

Moreover, control orders, designed to isolate individual suspects by imposing curfews and or restricting visitors to the home, actually extended punishment to the women and children:

> They would only allow 1 person at a time, the majority stopped themselves anyway . . . they thought they might be watched (Hala).

Visitors were therefore reluctant to visit due to fears of being criminalised themselves.

The possibility of racial attacks based upon their visible Islamic appearance was also a factor that inhibited women from going out and presented further challenges to their well-being:

> . . . I became depressed; isolated; like zombies, statues sitting at home . . .. I used to take children to school; grown men would spit at me, called me ninja; a car passed me, waited for me to pass and spat at me (Armani).

The effects of these traumatising experiences left women afraid, anxious, lacking in confidence and almost psychologically paralysed. All of the women said that they were depressed and had nightmares about the raids and police in their homes; in two of the cases, mothers had approached their doctors for help with depression. Often, women wanted to avoid contact with doctors, fearing they would be judged or because they lacked trust in professionals and strangers generally:

> My own health has suffered; I get depressed, crying . . . I haven't seen the doctor about it. I don't want to talk about it; it's the suffering inside (Salma).

This isolation and anxiety were further aggravated for women whose families lived abroad. In an effort to spare their own parents and siblings the worry and concern, none of the women shared their ordeals with their families:

> I didn't tell my family because my father was ill and I didn't want to trouble them (Fatima).

This exacerbated their isolation and left them without support.

Whilst some respondents received occasional support from the Muddrassas or from Muslim doctors, the only consistent source of support identified was from HHUGS. Women were grateful for the practical and financial support received which meant that they could gain some independence and make the necessary visits to doctors, solicitors, etc., as childcare was provided. HHUGS support meant they could go on outings with children and, importantly, get together during Eid and enjoy the festivities with other families, which they would be unlikely to do otherwise. Agencies such as social services or schools offered no help; in fact, social services were seen as obstructive or irrelevant. In one of the cases in which the husband was to be released, the women talked about social workers coming to make an assessment, presumably to establish that the father would not present a risk to their children. The mother felt that she was on trial because she was implicitly quizzed about her own political views. The social worker also appeared to be uncomfortable and merely ticked boxes whilst asking irrelevant and absurd questions, such as whether her husband was violent towards her over the previous year, knowing fully that he had been in prison throughout.

All the women were relieved to have their husbands return from prison, but this often came with control orders and police presence that took its toll upon them, as they felt imprisoned and cut off from the world with no visitors being allowed. Whilst their husbands were imprisoned, women knew that they had sole responsibility for domestic affairs, yet control orders brought consistent intrusion and disruption, which was unsettling for the whole family and which they resented. The pressures sometime tore the marriage apart:

> ... under a control order the police would come at any time, day or night. Now we are divorced. The police kept coming to the house, scaring the kids. I couldn't cope with all the questions.... I still didn't feel secure; even when I was asleep I would wake up panicking, thinking the police were in the house.... I feel that the police are to blame (Fatima).

Thus, counter-terrorism measures served to isolate and marginalise women and families and had a devastating impact upon the women's abilities to manage and maintain their families. The isolation was compounded for women who had joined their husband as asylum seekers. Upon detention or conviction of their husbands, their own and the

children's travel documents were withheld by immigration authorities and they were unable to visit their own families. They worried that their children would never meet their extended families or visit countries abroad. Hence, control orders and the raids stigmatised women and held them guilty by association; women became withdrawn, reluctant or unable to build successful social networks and trust within the communities in which they were placed.

Immigration rules compounded these difficulties and kept families apart; they prevented children from bonding with extended family members, which, potentially, may present detrimental effects upon their identities. These policies stand in direct opposition to the rhetoric of successive governments that emphasise the importance of family life and family solidarity and the protection of women against violence within the home. Experiences of raids here highlight the violence imposed upon women as innocent victims and these (public) practices violate the domestic (private) spaces of women and children; as such, they breach basic human rights. These experiences have serious ramifications for policies of social cohesion and 'winning hearts and minds' that the Prevent agenda has been so concerned to secure. They also present future challenges for social care practitioners who, in the pursuit of social justice and empowerment, may need to challenge their own perceptions about families affected by counter-terrorism before they can demonstrate an active role in listening, understanding and in raising awareness of the experiences and issues that women and children encounter as a result of counter-terrorism practices.

Effect on children

The relationship between mothers and children came under extreme pressure as a result of counter-terrorism practices. Attachment and bonding between parents and children rest on the ability of the child to be secure, safe and be nurtured at home. In legislation and policy matters, this is the cornerstone of social work with children, underpinned by Every Child Matters, the 2004 Children Act, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all underlining the 'best interest of the child' and the importance of the child's economic, social, psychological well-being and right to private family life. Whilst the principles of maintaining family ties are ingrained in Every Child Matters (Lewis *et al.*, 2008), it does not take account of the trauma and anxieties produced by the raids and life under control orders, which intrude upon family privacy and present challenges to the relationships between parents and children and leave them traumatised and helpless.

The police showed total insensitivity and disregard towards children in terms of the information they shared and this had detrimental effects

upon the relationships between mothers and children. The anger that children felt was often directed at the mothers:

> Police came once, after I divorced; they gave my 12 year old daughter a leaflet and said if you suffer any racism or anything, contact this number. They said 'because your father is a terrorist, this is the number you should ring in case anyone tries to harass you'. Five officers brought that to the house! Why five officers and why speak to my daughter in that way? They should have brought a translator to talk to me. My daughter was crying, saying 'my Dad's not a terrorist'. She became angry at me for not answering them back (Fatima).

Moreover, the children were traumatised by police raids and the mothers felt helpless to assist:

> The kids were frightened—crying . . . screaming. They even wet themselves standing. They were so scared when they saw their father on the floor . . .. Even the older ones urinated themselves because they were so scared. I tried to reassure them that he would be back soon . . . but I could not stop them crying (Fatima).

Mothers reported that their children were withdrawn; they would not move around the house by themselves, they feared the police and hid under bed covers when the police came or if someone knocked on the door loudly. Some of the children were still bedwetting at the age of ten, three years after the events.

Outside of the home, the neighbourhood, too, was hostile:

> Children got bullied; other kids would shout at the children, smash our windows and called us terrorist; these were English children who lived at the back of our house. My children would get depressed and afraid (Hala).

Sometimes, mothers were anxious about the consequences of telling their children the truth about their father's imprisonment:

> When children asked where Dad was I would tell them he had gone on holiday . . . or when we saw him in prison I would say he works there. He [son] is older now . . . he's gluing pieces together and asks what job Daddy was doing for police dogs to be sniffing around . . . until today he doesn't know the truth . . . it could traumatize him (Armani).

Hence, mothers lived in anxiety about the detrimental effects of the imprisonment of fathers upon their children.

As well as confining children largely to the home, the control orders affected the children in preventing access to internet facilities, which could affect their education, or mobile telephones with which they may be able to keep in touch with their parents if they went out.

Jameela's parenting abilities were affected. She said that, despite attempting to keep the children secure and happy, she had not been able to spend enough time with them, since she was pre-occupied with calling and seeing lawyers and trying to organise and adjust to the events that

had left her feeling like a pariah. One of her children changed from being a very sociable child to one who was constantly worried, withdrawn, nervous and lacking in confidence.

There were also stories of children counting the days to when their fathers would return home and of prison authorities lying that the men had not wanted to get in touch with the families, when in fact they were in solitary confinement. Women told of their despair of travelling hours to prisons only to have a twenty-minute face-to-face meeting by the time prison security was granted and then having to manage distraught children.

In most cases, the schools were unaware of what was happening to the children at home. Mothers preferred not to inform the teachers, to prevent stigmatisation. Those who had informed the school found they offered little assistance. In one case, in an Islamic school, the school fees for one of the families were reduced but no other assistance was offered. Despite the drawbacks, many of the children were reported to be achieving well at school, regularly winning prizes. However, the education of the children was being hampered in other ways by their insecure immigration status, particularly when it came to travelling abroad:

> My eldest son . . . wins awards at school—trips to France and Spain, but [he] can't go because—no travel documents. He gets very upset. He keeps asking why we are prisoners here. I have come to terms with the fact that they have taken my husband but what have the children done? Why are they blaming them? (Fatima)

There were also financial implications as mothers and fathers found gaining employment impossible or as funds were seized and bank accounts frozen. Any amounts of money found on the property during the raids were confiscated. Families were sometimes left unable to feed themselves, acquire basic necessities or pay existing debts and mortgages, thus risking the loss of homes:

> . . . I had saved £3000 from child benefit; they took that accusing us that we used it for terrorism. I had £5 in my pocket, which they also took. All the benefits were in husband's name; 3 months when the benefits were in his name I was begging from people to give me food; some days I had no milk to feed the children (Armani).

The intrusion into children's family life and the trauma caused by the raids, imprisonment and control orders meant that children witnessed the humiliating treatment meted out to their parents. This threatened their physical and psychological well-being and placed pressures upon families, causing high levels of anxiety that challenged healthy, happy and secure relationships between them. The consequences of the children's terror of the police and the hostilities they experienced within the neighbourhoods remain to be seen, but they present problems associated with attachment, identity and lack of 'belonging' and may have consequences that run counter to the policies embedded in Contest and Prevent and do little to

reduce extremism in future generations (Burrows and Keenan, 2004). Regardless of these adversities, the fact that parents were able to keep the children healthy, safe and successful at school is testament to their dedication and resolve to keep families secure in the face of adversity.

The protection of children and support for parents to parent children in safe and engaging ways is a key concern of social work. It is clear from the experiences highlighted above that the risks to children and the mothers' ability to care are significantly hampered by traumatic events faced during and after homes are raided by the police and families subsequently ostracised and left with little support. If every child realistically matters, then the underlying principles of the Children Act should guide social workers and other practitioners to pay serious attention to the experiences of the families that are affected by counter-terrorism and lead to supportive mechanisms. These may include therapeutic services, advocacy and multi-agency work as well as engagement with the police to increase awareness and to mitigate the effects of police practices whilst working towards more sensitive policing.

Conclusion

Social work cannot be taken out of its political context, as the clients and the service users with whom it works are connected to the political as well as social and economic circumstances that surround their environment. The political effects of 9/11 and 7/7 have unfolded in ways that have tyrannised Muslim communities through counter-terrorism legislation. Amidst the widespread concerns about Islamophobia, there remains a hidden population of women and children who suffer the repercussions of the punishment meted out to their men-folk. This has received little attention, particularly in social work research and literature. However, the experiences of the women and the children testify to their isolation, police brutality, undignified treatment, financial hardship, and emotional and psychological difficulties. Whilst more extensive and rigorous research in this area is necessary, these examples highlight how state policies manipulate the intersections of gender, 'race', religious and class divisions and the ways in which these processes are continuously renewed.

The new Contest approach places greater responsibilities upon public sector agencies to assist in the prevention of violent extremism. Counter-terrorism policies need to take into account their effects on families and communities in order to be effective. Since social work embeds social justice and human rights approaches in its work, it is incumbent upon social work practitioners and educators to be aware of the precarious situation of the families who manage the domestic burden of the 'war on terror'. Meaningful participation with the families that assists in defining their own needs and the best ways to provide and access services will also

go some way in addressing the gaps that exist (Beresford, 2000, 2007; Cowden and Singh, 2007). It would be helpful for practitioners and policy makers to critically engage in debates about government responses to terrorism at both the national and international levels and to advocate *for* and *with* the families.

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