

CT Awareness Campaign 2015 - Key points and Q&As

Key points

- We are reaching out to mothers and families to urge them work with us to safeguard their young people and children
- We believe in women protecting other women and girls
- We need to talk openly about the risks that are posed when we talk about travelling to Syria
- We want to talk openly about the signs families should be looking out for
- We want to talk about a more sinister risk that is posed to our young people
- We want to talk about the steps the police are taking and the support that can be offered to communities

Narrative

'We are increasingly concerned about the numbers of young women who have or are intending to travel to Syria. It is an extremely dangerous place and the reality they are greeted with when they arrive is far from the ideal lifestyle being promoted online by terrorist groups. The option of returning home is often taken away from them, leaving families in the UK devastated and with very little options to secure a safe return for their loved one.

'We want to ensure that people who are concerned about family members or friends are given enough information about what they can do to prevent this from happening.

We want to increase their confidence in the police and partners to encourage them to come forward so that we can intervene and help. This is not about criminalising people it is about preventing tragedies.'

Q&As

= Why are you targeting minority ethnic media?

This campaign has been designed to reach communities most affected by this issue. Our media buying agency have advised us on the most appropriate channels to reach our target audience.

= What is the scale of the problem?

In the last year a total of 87 people were reported missing by their families to police nationally. These individuals are believed to have travelled to Syria. Of those, 22 are women, with the majority under 20-years-old.

= Do you think families can play an important role in combating this type of radicalisation?

Yes - many of us have sisters and brothers, friends and families who care for us. If a young woman or girl is thinking of travelling to a conflict zone such as Syria, she may not want to say what she intends to do but she may be doing things to get approval for travel, making preparations to say goodbye to those that she cares for. That is another sign to look out for.

Families are the people who are going to be able to most effectively persuade girls and young women not to travel - the heartbreak that we have seen from families where young women have travelled is so awful, they are completely devastated. We hope that families will feel able to come and talk to the police, talk to people in the community, talk to their local doctor, or a teacher about their concerns because help is available.

= When spotting the early signs of radicalisation, some parents may feel unsure about what steps to take, what would you suggest?

Parents might think that their child is getting angry with things, they might be agreeing with what they are seeing in Syria, agreeing with the violence, they might be becoming more secretive, starting to say goodbye. Families who are noticing this type of behaviour should open a dialogue with their loved one, ask them what's going on in their lives and seek help from a range of different people and agencies, not just the police - there is help out there for those that need it.

Police and partners have launched a new website www.preventtragedies.co.uk This is designed to be a one-stop-shop for worried family members to visit to get some early advice.

= Is it the police's role to be delivering these messages?

The 'Prevent tragedies' campaign is a partnership approach to a very serious issue and police are one of the partner agencies involved in this campaign.

= What do you think the attraction is for young women to travel to Syria?

We believe that for some of the young women and girls who travel abroad in the hope of marrying fighters, or to join the fighting, they are looking for a sense of purpose. Some are showing teenage rebelliousness by doing something that their parents won't agree with - they can be very intent, full of purpose, and seeking a sense of belonging.

= Are you suggesting that Muslim are more likely associate with violent extremists or support terrorism?

No. In the current climate we want to protect our communities from organisations who may seek to target or exploit them. We want to help increase their awareness of individuals who try to justify and promote violent extremism. In doing so we hope to increase their resilience to violent extremist objectives.

= Is Prevent a toxic brand?

The Prevent programme is based on the successful work British police carried out with community groups and families to reduce gun and gang crime in our big cities. It is supported by the huge commitment we have made to neighbourhood policing and building strong relationships with local people, including minority groups.

Extremist voices have been allowed to fill spaces in the media too regularly and this misrepresents the vast majority of Muslims who are committed to British values. Surveys have shown that confidence in policing in the Muslim communities is actually higher than the population as a whole.

Everybody has a responsibility for stopping young people thinking of travelling to Syria or other warzones, including families and carers, who know them and are able to spot the early signs of radicalisation. And we work in partnership with community members and groups to do this.

It would help to have more Muslim police officers but officers working on the Prevent programme have developed an extensive knowledge of minority groups and the different facets of the Muslim religion in particular.

It is always difficult to measure the success of Prevent in counter-terrorism. Success is ultimately that attacks do not take place. Nevertheless thousands of people have received help from projects supported by Prevent following concerns being raised about their behaviour and attitudes.

Prevent

The Government launched the revised Prevent Strategy on 7th June 2011. Its key aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

Prevent has three objectives:

- To respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- To prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
- To work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address.

The revised Prevent strategy differs from the previous one in a number of ways. It has a broader scope in that it covers all forms of terrorism, but a tighter focus. Work under the strategy is specifically aimed to stop people becoming or supporting terrorists, with all wider integration work now falling to DCLG.

Prevent is designed to work with individuals who may be attracted to messages promulgated by radicalisers and extremists. It is not designed to reach those individuals who are already walking the path to terrorist action. Such individuals need to be dealt with by the police as they were in this case.

Prevent is about communities and bodies, like the police, working together to understand and address the risk of extremist activity locally. It is not about getting communities to inform on individuals to the police. Communities may talk to the police about specific concerns, but they may do this equally where individuals are involved in drugs, child abuse, or crime.

Local delivery

- The police cannot and do not deliver Prevent work on their own. We work very closely with local authorities in our priority areas and they engage with a range of partners including faith institutions and civil society groups. We also work with other local authorities as required.
- Prevent also works through local authorities to fund outreach projects that reach a large number of young people in areas targeted by extremists.

= How important a role do you think social media and internet propaganda play in all of this?

Social media and propaganda on the internet is a huge problem. People see items that are posted by people like them, that they can often identify with and they are very

convinced by what they see. The content is often very glossy and professionally produced and it can be persuasive and dangerous.

Removing extremist material from the internet

The Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) is part of the National Counter Terrorism Network and assesses terrorist and violent extremist material on the internet. The unit is proactive in its approach to terrorist content, but also receives referrals through a public online reporting tool that allows members of the public to report their concerns anonymously.

Where material breaches UK terrorism laws the unit will (where possible) remove the content by working with the relevant internet hosting company. The CTIRU is also responsible for alerting police forces to online terrorist offences, that may fall within their jurisdiction, in order to enable action to be taken, when possible, against individuals engaged in the promotion, glorification or encouragement of terrorist acts.

The unit works with UK based companies that are hosting such material. However the unit has also established good working relationships with companies overseas in order to make the internet a more hostile place for terrorists.

In the last four year the CTIRU has instigated the removal of over 60,000 pieces of on line content.

At the moment on an average week the unit is removing over 1,000 pieces of TACT (Terrorism Act 2006) breaching content. Approximately 800 of these are Syria/Iraq related and posted on multiple platforms.

The CTIRU seeks removal of the material on a consensual basis, built up through good working relationships, but will when appropriate utilise legislation in the host country.

= Do you think that parents need to be more aware of the danger posed by social media, because a lot of radicalisation takes place online?

Parents are becoming increasingly aware of the danger posed by social media and that if they know their child is sitting in their bedroom on social media for hours at a time, we would urge them to sit down with their child and look at what they have been browsing through. Talk to them about their feelings about what they have seen, because there are signs and symptoms shown by those who are thinking of travelling to Syria and often spending long periods of time on the internet can be one of them.

= In terms of young women and girls who have returned to the UK from Syria having now realised that they had made a terrible mistake, should they still be seen as a threat to our safety?

Everybody would expect the police to investigate people who are coming back to the UK from Syria and other conflict zones. The first thing we would need to do is find out whether they are people who are deeply radicalised, have been trained as dangerous terrorists or whether they are people who have made a mistake and are coming back and want to leave that completely behind them.

We want people to speak to police, allow us to investigate - at the same time as we are doing that, we will support the individual involved and also their families.

= Do you think that families can be blamed if they have not been able to spot the early signs of radicalisation?

We would not blame a family for not spotting the early signs of radicalisation; however if we can explain to families what the signs and symptoms are, then they are more equipped to spot them and what I would hope they would then do is come and find someone that they can talk to about it. There is a range of different help that we can give to a family and to the person who is thinking of travelling that will help them to change their mind.

= What work are you doing with borders and airlines?

We work very closely with UK Borders and airlines so that everybody involved in travel understands this problem and are being vigilant, highlighting to police potentially vulnerable individuals at risk of travelling to war zones.

Police have the new powers provided by Schedule 1, Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to seize an individual's passport if there are reasonable suspicions they are intending on travelling for terrorist purposes. Police have already made use of this new power.