

Title

An Examination of Partnership Approaches to Challenging Religiously-Endorsed Violence involving Muslim Groups and Police



What this Study Contributes

This project explored how Muslim groups work through partnerships with the police to engage their communities in challenging religiously-endorsed violence.

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Basia Spalek (Birmingham)

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University

University of Birmingham

Award

Phase 1 Small Grant £83,211

Research Partners

Robert Lambert (University of Exeter)

Approach

The project comprised semi-structured interviews with police officers, Muslim community members (44 in total); participant observation of community meetings and police-community meetings; research diary notes of researchers. It focused on two case studies: the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), a small policing unit within the

Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) set up post 9/11, and the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), an umbrella organisation made of a large number of Muslim organisations and acting as an advisory body to the MPS.

Findings

Project finished 30th September 2008 and the findings may be summarized as follows:

1. A key feature of the MCU is that Muslim police officers have been employed on the unit (a rare feature of counter-terrorism units). MCU Muslim police officers not only have brought with them operational policing and community policing experience, but also social and cultural capital that has enabled the MCU to build partnerships with particular minorities of the Muslim population, including communities labelled and/or self-identifying as Islamist and Salafi.
2. The research found that Muslim community members are generally supportive of the MCU; individuals have engaged with MCU officers on a regular basis, and working partnerships have been built between community members and MCU police officers. MCU is one identifiable counter-terror unit within London that community members can approach. MCU has also had considerable success in helping to over-turn police misunderstandings or stereotypes of Muslim communities.
3. Positive engagement such as that practised by policing units the MCU and the ongoing dialogue and partnership work of the MSF can be compromised by wider factors including foreign policy, national political agendas, and, equally importantly, instances of poor police-community engagement.
4. Success of the MSF might be viewed according to the following key issues: *Bringing multiple communities together with police.*Enabling Muslim community groups to present community perspectives on the impact of counter-terrorism policing and the wider war on terror.*Enabling an exchange of information on counter-terrorism, Islamophobia and other policing issues.*Allowing Muslim community groups to raise issues of concern.*Allowing police to explain policy, strategy and tactics to Muslim organizations.*Working consultations between police and Muslim organizations.*Providing the opportunity for communities to scrutinise and challenge police policy and action.
5. The study highlights that community policing within a counter-terrorism context can help build trust between police officers and communities, not only through responding to individuals' everyday concerns and experiences of crime, including individuals' experiences of Islamophobia, but moreover, through empowering communities by facilitating working partnerships with community groups for the purposes of preventing terrorism. This work is sensitive and risk-laden and requires trusting relationships between police officers and community members which are built upon mutual empathy.

Activities and Outcomes

This research has led on to a further Phase 2 Small Grant: 'A Study exploring Questions relating to Partnership between Police and Muslim Communities in the Prevention of Violent Extremism amongst Muslim Youth': http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/projects/phase_two/small_research_projects and numerous activities including:

- Spalek, B. and Lambert, R. 2010 'Policing within a counter-terrorism context post 7/7: the importance of partnership, dialogue and support when engaging with Muslim communities' in *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain*, edited by Roger Eatwell and Matthew J Goodwin, pp. 168-201, published by Routledge: <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415494359/>.
- Appearance by Basia Spalek on BBC Radio 4's *Sunday* programme on religion and ethics on 16th November 2008.

All the project's outputs are listed here:

http://www.iass.bham.ac.uk/study/socialresearch/religion_and_society/project-outputs.pdf

Further Information

Access the project's final report here:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News/Latest/Documents/Rad%20Islam%20Summary%20Report.pdf>.