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Securitising education: An exploration of teachers' attitudes and experiences regarding the implementation of the Prevent duty in sixth form colleges.

Moffat, A. and Gerard, J.

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Securitising education: An exploration of teachers' attitudes and experiences regarding the implementation of the Prevent duty in sixth form colleges

Abstract

The government's counter-terrorism policy, known as CONTEST, has four components, Pursue, Protect, Prepare and Prevent. The counter terrorism and security act in 2015 led to changes to Prevent by placing a legal duty on frontline staff, such as teachers, to enact Prevent in schools and colleges. Currently, the impact of these changes is not well understood, and the present study explores the attitudes and experiences of college teachers regarding the implementation of the Prevent duty. Fourteen participants, across three London colleges, took part in semi-structured interviews regarding their training experiences, the implementation of the Prevent duty, knowledge about radicalisation and extremism, and teaching British values. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed five main themes: training experiences; reporting students; confidence; the association of Islam with Prevent; and protecting students. This study discusses possible changes to Prevent's implementation in educational settings and the development of community out-reach programmes. In addition, it suggests future research directions, such as empirical research on the effectiveness of de-radicalisation programmes.

Keywords: Prevent; radicalisation; extremism; teachers; education

Introduction

Prevent is one part of the four components of the CONTEST strategy that was adopted by the United Kingdom (UK) government in 2003 to counter terrorism (Omand 2010), and to address radicalisation (Heath-Kelly 2013), and therefore stop individuals becoming terrorists in the first place (HM Government 2011a).

A report from the International Centre for counter-terrorism has highlighted a significant rise in the numbers of “foreign fighters” and notably of young male British citizens going to Syria to fight in the context of the conflicts in Syria and/or Iraq (Boutin et al 2016). A majority of these youths were found to have recent connections to higher education (Maher 2013) and high profile cases of youths joining Islamic State for Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were reported in the media, suggesting that educational institutions failed to recognise signs of radicalisation and prevent terrorism. One example was the case of three female teenagers (aged 15 to 17) who attended the same school in Bethnal Green, London, and who all travelled to Syria to fight for ISIS (Dearden 2016). Although it was reported that these three girls had been radicalised online, the responsibility of the school was questioned.

A few studies have looked at the interpretation and implementation of the Prevent duty (e.g. Busher et al 2017; Spiller et al 2017). With a decrease in age in youths joining the ISIS fight observed recently by the UK Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) (Boutin et al. 2016), it is important that the experience of the participants reflect interactions with youths who are at the age when they are trying to define and forming their own identity, such as in further education.

This study explores the nature of the attitudes and experiences of 6th form college teachers in London regarding the implementation of the Prevent duty. A qualitative approach was adopted to gather the teachers’ perceptions with regard to their training experiences, the implementation

of the Prevent duty, their knowledge about radicalisation and extremism, and teaching British values.

Literature Review

The context of the Prevent duty

The original Prevent duty, referred to as Prevent 1, focused purely on Islamic extremism (DCLG 2007) and sought to engage Muslim youths through community-based settings (Thomas 2016).

The counterterrorism and security act, (HM Government 2015), led to substantial changes to the Prevent policy, known as Prevent 2 (Thomas 2017). Prevent 2 placed a legal duty on frontline education, health and welfare staff to implement Prevent (Richardson and Bolloten 2014) and undergo WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) training. WRAP training has aimed to develop greater awareness of extremist ideologies and signs of vulnerability to radicalisation (Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher 2012).

Prevent 2 has increased the securitisation of non-juridical environments such as schools and colleges (Stanley et al 2018), and has added to the level of disquiet that was already building regarding the blurring of education, security and intelligence (Gearon 2015). The counterterrorism and security act's (2015) legal responsibility means that teachers become accountable for matters of state security (Arthur 2015). The identification of education as a 'priority' sector was led by the Governments' conclusion that young people have higher levels of sympathy for terrorism, and the observation that the majority of terrorist offences were committed by individuals below the age of 30 (HM Government 2011 Prevent). Students who are suspected to be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, or who are expressing views that might be considered 'extremist' should be referred by the school to Channel (a branch of Prevent and the government's main de-radicalisation programme (Stanley et al 2018). Channel panels,

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HM Government. 2015. "Counter Terrorism and Security Act, 2015". Accessed 11 December 2018. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/contents/enacted

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organised and led by local authorities, rely on referrals from multi agency staff, such as school teachers. The outcomes of these panels include interventions and support for those youths vulnerable to extremism to break away from it (Stanley et al 2018). The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) monitor compliance with the schools within the inspection framework. Schools are judged on how well students are being protected from radicalisation and extremism, levels of vigilance staff show, alongside staff confidence in having discussions with students (Ofsted 2016). Additionally, the Prevent guidance states that failure to comply with the Prevent duty can lead to intervention or termination of funding if Ofsted judge the school as requiring significant improvement (HM Government 2016). Revised prevent guidance 111 in Open society. Lastly, the compliance with Prevent, and promotion of 'fundamental British values' (FBV) has become a part of Teachers Standards (DfE 2011). The implication of the implementation of Prevent in schools has meant that there is no room for non-compliance or for challenges to be raised in opposition of the duty (Miah 2017).

Further and higher education institutions that are publically funded are also required to comply with the Prevent duty and safeguard young people from radicalisation and extremism. Members of staff are required to receive training and identify individuals that are vulnerable to radicalisation and refer them to Channel (HM Government 2015) from 116 open society prevent guidance FE. Ofsted inspections to monitor adherence with the Prevent duty occur also in further and higher education settings, which are both inspected by Ofsted, where monitoring of adherence with the Prevent duty is included as part of the overall inspection judgement. Further and higher educational institutions are also tasked with ensuring that freedom of speech and academic freedom are respected while complying with the Prevent duty (HM Government 2015). as above.

Prevent, radicalisation, extremism and teachers 'roles

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The Prevent duty goes beyond the scope of assessing the expression of extremist ideology, or the consideration of immediate risk (Knowles 2012), rather there is a requirement to identify those at risk of being drawn into extremism. However, radicalisation, and the risk of radicalisation is not yet well understood, which makes the requirement to identify risk, a near impossible task for teachers and other professionals working in public services (Coolsaet 2008).

Radicalisation, as a process, has been represented in different ways. Some policy makers and academics argue that alienated groups or individuals are incrementally radicalised, and some of which will go on to become involved in terrorism (Coolsaet 2009; McCauley 2012; Ranstorp 2010). This has been referred to as the conveyor belt theory (Office for the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 2009). Factors that lead to radicalisation include economic hardship, cultural alienation, relationships with those already radicalised, and religious ideologies (Hafez and Mullins 2015). Another model of radicalisation is "the Prevent pyramid", which was developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers in light of the 2007 Prevent policy (Youth Justice Board 2012a). The pyramid has four levels: tier one (the bottom of the pyramid) are all members of the community; tier 2 are those vulnerable to extremist messages; tier 3 are those who are moving towards extremism but are not yet committing violent acts; and tier 4 are active terrorists (Audit Commission 2008). These theories represent radicalisation as a linear process, where an individual gradually becomes radicalised and gets involved in terrorism. The Prevent policy follows these theories and assumes that radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism are connected (O'Donnell 2016). This assumption is fundamental to the Prevent duty, where frontline staff such as teachers are identified as key people that can interrupt this linear process and therefore prevent extremism.

On the other hand, scholars have questioned the validity of these linear models depicting the radicalisation process (Heath-Kelley 2013; Richards 2010). To date, knowledge of terrorism has been gained from reconstructing information about the background and experiences of

individuals convicted for terrorist related offences (Bhui 2016), which is inherently subject to recall bias. Additionally, both models suggest a degree of stability in the process that may not be present (Heath-Kelly 2013). The implication of this is that Prevent may be based on unsound theoretical knowledge.

The criticisms and concerns over the Prevent duty

Initially, Prevent as a means of security intrusion led to widespread negative responses from schools and universities, with concerns that Muslim students may feel alienated (Gearon 2017). Indeed, little evidence suggests that non-Islamist extremism is being targeted using the Prevent policy (Thomas 2016). For example, schools in areas where far-right extremism is an issue have stated that the white pupils were no risk, but that staff would continue to monitor Black and ethnic minority students (Newman 2015). In addition, universities have begun working cooperatively with the police regarding Prevent, but the central attentions of these efforts have been focused on Muslims (Miller, Mills, and Harkins 2011). In interviews, primary school teachers have also shown signs that they have internalised the view that Muslim communities are a threat as a result of their training experiences (Sian 2015). However, only a very small number of primary school teachers were sampled (n=2) in Sian's (2015) research and therefore may not be representative of primary school teachers generally.

Teachers already have safeguarding duties, and the Prevent duty has been linked to this aspect of the role as it indents to "extend the responsibilities of the teacher designated Child Protection Officer to include Prevent within his/her role" (Clarke 2014, 38). Additionally, schools and further education institutions are expected to refer students to the Channel programme if they are suspected to be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, or are expressing views that might be considered extremist. There are some indications that educators are lacking confidence in the implementation of the Prevent duty. For example, Spiller, Awan, and Whiting

(2017) investigated lecturers' interpretation of Prevent in universities, and their study provides further support to the perspective that the focus of Prevent is directed at Muslim students. University lecturers expressed uncertainty about whether to report students to relevant services when they wore headscarves or had beards and were traveling to countries such as Turkey (Spiller, Awan, and Whiting 2017). Further, evidence was also found to highlight that lecturers considered that they were being asked to act as a law-enforcers, or "control workers", which created a feeling of discomfort (Spiller, Awan, and Whiting 2017, 12). According to the lecturers, the impact of this securitisation is that it limits freedom of expression of students with particular views, or who dress a certain way (Spiller, Awan, and Whiting 2017), thereby contributing to feelings of marginalisation.

However, research from universities must be viewed with caution as evidence suggests that universities, in comparison to schools and colleges, may be lacking in experience with regard to the Prevent duty. For example, Carlile's (2011) review stated that universities were shy to respond to their responsibilities regarding counter-terrorism, and other reports have also stated that some universities and colleges have not engaged with Prevent (HM Government 2011b). The result of this reluctance from some universities is that Prevent training has not been occurring in all institutions, and in Spiller, Awar, and Whiting's (2017) study, none of the participants had been trained regarding their Prevent duties.

In addition to the confidence issues regarding referrals, there are also issues with regard to the promotion of FBV which consist of: "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance for those with different faiths and religions" (HM Government 2014, 24). According to Jerome and Clemitschaw (2012), some teachers are not comfortable with the focus on 'Britishness' and nationalism within the curriculum and reports showed that the training of teachers to explore the interplay of Britishness, race and values is inadequate (Bhopal and Rhome 2014). This has resulted in teachers being unprepared and unable to engage critically

with the promotion of FBV (Elton-Chalcraft et al 2017). The issues of critically engaging with British values on a practical level, is in contrast with the personal and professional views held by school leaders. Revell and Bryan (2016) interviewed school leaders and found that none had uncritical views about promoting British values in schools, ranging from issues defining what British values were, the consideration about whether the values were British, and whether the political aims of FBV undermined the educational process.

Concerns were raised about the extent to which educators have been effectively making referrals to Channel and how the statutory duty had created an incentive to over- refer young people (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016). In 2015, 70% of the referrals to Channel were for Islamic extremism (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016), whilst the Muslim population make up only 4.4% of the total population in the UK (Office for National Statistics 2011). It is also noteworthy that 80% of referrals concerned individuals who were assessed by Channel panels to not be at risks of being drawn into violent extremism (NPCC 2014). Some cases have highlighted that teachers have referred young children on the basis of very weak information. Notably, a four-year-old being reported "at risk" due to his teacher believing that the child's pronunciation of cucumber sounded like "cooker bomb" (Rights Watch UK 2016, 45) and the misidentification of Arabic writing on an eight-year-old's T-shirt saying "I want to be like Abu Bakr al-Siddique" (Rights Watch UK 2016, 32). These cases suggest that the training and guidance given to educators is not clear enough to ensure that referrals are warranted. Moreover, Phillips, Tse, and Johnson (2011) found that schools were reported to be lacking confidence in how to interpret the Prevent duty, although confidence levels seemed to be related to the amount of training received.

Another longstanding concern about Prevent duty in educational institutions is that it will reduce the willingness of teachers and students to debate difficult concepts, and thereby create a 'chilling effect' on the expression of particular opinions (Marsden 2015). The Open

Society Justice Initiative (2016) interviewed students and their families that had been referred to Channel and found that the Prevent duty was securitising relationships between teachers and students, thereby limiting the trust that students put in their teachers. Moreover, the Open Society Justice Initiative (2016) concluded that the Prevent duty was systematically violating the human rights of students (e.g., right against discrimination, right to freedom of expression), and as a result of misguided referrals, it ran the risk of making individuals more susceptible to radicalisation through marginalisation.

Another indication of students feeling marginalised in schools and colleges is students' lack of willingness to engage in open discussions. Interviews with teachers, students and parents have revealed that the Prevent duty in schools is leading to a suppression of free speech or a "chilling effect" on discussions about politics and religion in an environment that should be a safe space for the exploration of identity (Rights Watch UK 2016, 4). Choudhury and Fenwick (2011) note that the British Muslim community specifically, feel that they are being targeted because of their religion, and have resentment towards the Prevent policy as a result.

However, some evidence suggests that the Prevent duty may not be having a detrimental impact on teachers and students. Using a mixed methods design, Busher et al. (2017) surveyed a range of educationalists on their experiences of the Prevent duty in two metropolitan areas in England. The evidence suggested that Prevent was perceived to be a part of the existing safeguarding duties in schools and colleges and was aimed at responding to all forms of extremism. With regard to making referral decisions, levels of confidence amongst staff were generally high but there was worry about being able to manage difficult conversations (Busher et al. 2017). There was little support for the "chilling effect", and while some staff questioned the efficacy of the Prevent duty, most interviewees did not wholly oppose its implementation.

The research conducted by Busher et al. (2017) was extensive and has provided a much-needed insight into how the implementation of the Prevent duty has impacted educationalists

within schools and colleges. However, the base of evidence was gained from a diverse mix of senior leaders, heads of department, teachers, teaching assistants and support staff, with only 14% of the sample representing teachers from both schools and colleges. The result of this is that the attitudes and experiences of the teachers may have become diluted with the more positive attitudes of those with management responsibilities (56% of the sample), who may also be more mindful of the requirements imposed by Ofsted. Therefore, the current study aims to explore: (1) teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of the Prevent duty and promotion of FBV in colleges, and (2) teachers' confidence in implementing the Prevent duty and promotion of FBV in colleges. The research focus is broad to allow for an inductive approach to analysis and to allow for the emergence of all relevant themes, which is most appropriate for an under researched area (Braun and Clarke 2006). According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985, 1991 cited in Ajzen, 2005), the intention to execute (or not to execute) an action is a crucial immediate determinant of that behaviour, that will be positively influenced by a positive attitude and evaluation of the situation, the social pressure to perform the action and the perception of the individual about the behavioural control they have in the situation (self-efficacy) (Ajzen, 2005). Therefore, the implications of the current work will be directly related to the understanding of why and how individuals conform to the PREVENT duty in the classroom and what improvements they might suggest to it. These research aims are important, as they will provide an insight into the effectiveness of current training programmes on preventing radicalisation and extremism in colleges and training on the promotion of FBV, and potential areas for improvement.

Method

Participants

Prior to interviewees being approached and recruited, ethical approval was obtained from Coventry University. At the beginning of each interview session the participants were given a participant information sheet, containing an overview of the research, and a consent form. An opportunistic snowball sample was used to contact further education teachers who had received Prevent or WRAP training, through social media. This was a multisite study of three sixth form colleges within London. The participants were fourteen teachers; nine A-level teachers, one BTEC teacher, one ESOL teacher, and three teachers with additional management responsibilities. The age of participants ranged from 32 to 63 (M = 44.9, SD = 9.4), and eight participants were female, and the remaining six were male. Eleven of the participants were British and three identified themselves as Irish. There was some diversity in religious orientation, with eight participants identifying themselves as atheists, four as Christian, and two as Muslim.

Interview methodology

Interviews were conducted in a quiet room within the teachers' sixth form colleges, at a time that was convenient for both the interviewee and the interviewer. Before beginning the recording, the interviewer reminded participants that the interview would be audio-recorded and that they could withdraw at any point.

An in-depth semi-structured interview was audiotaped for each participant on an individual basis, with an average interview length of 53 minutes. The interview schedule was developed with open-ended questions regarding: (a) training experiences; (b) the implementation of the Prevent duty and responsibilities of teachers; (c) knowledge about radicalisation and extremism; and (d) teaching British values. All interviews were transcribed to allow for effective data analysis, retaining the words used, grammar, pauses, and unfinished sentences. To establish patterns within teachers' attitudes and experiences towards the

implementation of the Prevent duty in colleges, the data was analysed using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages to conducting a thematic analysis were followed, beginning with the process of familiarisation with the data by re-reading the transcripts. Next, codes were generated for interesting aspects of the data semantic content of each interview, and then each transcript was read again, looking for any data missed in the initial coding phase. The third stage was to organise the codes into a potential set of broader themes. At this stage seven themes were identified. Themes were reviewed in the fourth stage by checking the coded extracts and the entire data set, using Patton's (1990) dual criteria for judging categories. During this stage, some of the themes were merged together, leaving a final five themes. During the fifth stage the themes were clearly defined, before moving onto the sixth stage where the write-up was completed.

The thematic analysis adopted was inductive due to a relative lack of research in this area. Themes were identified on a semantic level and the researcher utilised an essentialist/realist epistemology in order to identify the teachers' shared experiences and attitudes.

Results

Five main overarching themes were identified. These themes were: (a) training experiences; (b) reporting students; (c) confidence; (d) association of Islam with Prevent; and (e) protecting students.

Training Experiences

Every teachers who were interviewed, reported that they had received training from external facilitators, who varied in the quality of resources used and the skill of delivery. More than half

of the teachers specifically discussed feeling frustrated that the facilitators showed little to no appreciation of their existing skill set. This served to create resentment towards the facilitators and the training.

> The most memorable one was probably not last summer, the summer before that, which was done in a slightly cack-handed way I guess, that it was a little, it was a little bit patronising and it inspired quite a negative reaction from some members of staff. It was I think perhaps because the videos were sort of very simplistic and like it's perhaps patronising. [Participant 8]

The superficial nature of the training, including the use of videos that the teacher above refers to, meant that teachers were concerned that the training did not adequately equip them to fulfil their Prevent duties. The training created a sense of confusion and frustration. The teachers were aware that they had a serious legal duty but the training had not clarified what the duty was or how to perform the duty to protect students.

> And what I remember not just me, but others. You know I say what I remember, I'm pretty sure I remember we were saying, I still don't really know how to help the kid. Still not really sure what we do when we're worried about. From our teacher's point of view that's our primary concern. [Participant 5]

A minority ($n = 2$) of teachers reported that they had positive training experiences, in which the facilitators were perceived to be knowledgeable and had passed on key information about the Prevent duty. Other features of positive experiences were the effective use of examples to give practical advice and a balance of Right-Wing extremism in addition to Islamic extremism. This seemed to give these teachers greater confidence in implementing the Prevent duty, but even

these teachers expressed doubt that any level of training could fully prepare teachers for the reality that they might be faced with in the classroom and college buildings.

> They gave us a good couple of case studies, reminded us that right wing racism is as extremist as the one that everybody thinks it is, which would be more down the route of fundamentalism for Islam…the guy who did it was an ex-copper, now on the prevent team, he was great. [Participant 13]

Reporting students

Teachers highlighted that a necessary tool for working with young people was the ability to hold open discussions and develop trust. Therefore, more than half (n = 8) of teachers raised the concern that reporting students for suspected radicalisation or vulnerability to radicalisation meant destroying trust, and that this might be irreparable. The damage caused to the trust was considered to be something that students may apply to all teachers and potentially other authority figures in their lives.

> The terrible grey area, if it's just a point of view… what do I potentially do to that young person by having that intervention, then potentially they would see, you just, you know you've just pushed them off a cliff, because they would never trust anybody in authority at any point ever again, because the one so the teacher they opened up to grasses, that the way they'll see it, they will see them being grassed up to the police, and that will stick in their head and that's very dangerous. [Participant 7]

While there are arguments that reporting students can lead to appropriate support being offered, teachers feared that reports may have a long term negative impact on the students. One of the potential consequences that teachers discussed was the concern that it would stigmatise a

student once they were labelled, which was explicitly referred to by more than a quarter (*n* = 5*)* of the teachers.

> I think I would almost be hampered in that by the fear that you label somebody, they get on some security services list, they are deemed to be a dangerous person. I think that might make it actually, might make it harder. I'd want to help that student, I don't know that I'd know how to do it and I'm not convinced in the slightest that reporting them to the security services would necessarily be the right way to do it. [Participant 12]

Half of the teachers (*n* = 7) also stated concerns that making reports would lead to a chilling effect as noted in Rights Watch UK (2016). Generally, the college environment was considered to be a space for young people to develop and explore their identities, where discussions of political and religious issues were valued. However, the teachers felt that reporting students would reduce the possibilities of discussing political and religious beliefs openly in college, and that this might be damaging and lead to marginalisation.

> Because people shut down and…and people of all…I think there's 4,500 people being put through….what's that thing called? [Participant 6]
>
> Channel. [Interviewer]
>
> Channel, right. So that's what, 4,500 families; brothers, sisters, cousins who…who….who will be weary of …oh don't say that and this, and they know that they are being…that certain groups are being targeted, so they keep their mouths shut or wont talk about it. And teachers will shut down as well and actually think I don't know if I can talk about this. If you start talking about Syria and Iraq and, you know and someone goes and says something. [Participant 6]

The chilling effect meant that students fear the consequences of openly discussing their political or religious beliefs and therefore fall silent. Some teachers were uncomfortable with this potential effect and were concerned that this made the Prevent duty counterproductive.

> I would have thought it made them, would make them further radicalised. I think they would be fearful of ever ever ever opening their mouth again, which would further turn them in, underground views. I think the more you get shunned by…and students are meant to be able to trust us. [Participant 3]

Despite the concerns above, there were indications that teachers were willing to report students when they thought the evidence that the young person had been radicalised or held extreme views was very clear. Some teachers felt a conflict between the issues with reporting, noted above, but also recognised that if the situation was adequately serious it may still be necessary to report students to protect the young person from the potential negative consequences of being radicalised.

> If they were reported and there was evidence that in fact they were being brainwashed or whatever the word is, radicalised or whatever. Then really, and if it's really strong evidence they need safeguarding from them that students should, well eventually you'd hope that that student would appreciate what had happened and they hadn't gone to Syria and dies or whatever. If though it's just malicious or whatever then student will be incredibly angry I think. [Participant 14]

Confidence

All of the teachers reported to lack of confidence in one or more aspects of the Prevent duty, regardless of the satisfaction with training experiences. All of the teachers expressed doubt that

they would be able to prevent their students from becoming radicalised, whether that was in the short term or long term. Factors affecting levels of confidence were varied. One that was frequently discussed was the difficulty of judging the signs of radicalisation and knowing the threshold for making a formal report. Some teachers felt that making a decision to report a student within the Prevent duty relied on the judgement that in the future that young person would carry out a violent act, which was difficult to assess. It was clear that teachers were mindful of not wanting to report students unnecessarily, while also feeling that there might be times when a report was warranted.

> There is a difference between someone holding an opinion that you really find sort of fairly abhorrent, and thinking that they are going to go out and, you know attack somebody. Or that… they're going to, you know, pick up a van and drive into a group of people. I mean that's a pretty big leap, to kind of make. [Participant 7]

The issue with lacking confidence when reporting students for suspected radicalisation or vulnerability to radicalisation was further complicated by teachers feeling that they didn't have the adequate time to get to know their students. Having more time was considered to be important in judging whether a student was truly vulnerable to radicalisation.

> I don't feel confident because, the contact time I have with the students doesn't make it easy for me to establish the, the relationship for me to say, now this is [a] sustained kind of behaviour, this is sustained kind of attitude, that is being shown, therefore I have to take it further. So the contact time is not enough, this is why I think, our role as teachers I think the government expect too much from teachers. [Participant 10]

The implementation of the Prevent duty has meant that teachers have been asked to discuss Prevent and FBV in lessons. These discussions were sometimes addressed formally within tutorial sessions, while teachers also said that there were times when they are implicitly covered in the context of lessons. And although all teachers are required to promote FBV inside and outside of school (Revell & Bryan 2016), some participants expressed that they would not incorporate FBV into lessons as is required, and would avoid the discussion wherever possible. Just over a quarter of the teachers were not confident facilitating these discussions and felt that Prevent training had not prepared them to manage what were sometimes challenging debates in class.

> It can raise quite some difficult sensitive issues that if you haven't been trained in how to diffuse those situations can quite quickly escalate into heated arguments and debates and it can be difficult… its definitely one that you need to manage very closely because a very very very seemingly innocent comment can lead to half an hour of heated exchange. [Participant 2]

On the other hand, more than a quarter of the interviewees felt that discussing Prevent, FBV and terrorist attacks was more naturally aligned with their role as a teacher; this was especially true of social science teachers. Consequently, some teachers' confidence levels were high.

> The minute I come in and London Bridge has happened, behind me you'll see that's what we do, that our bread and butter, there's a picture of Grenfell Tower. We have those conversations, so we do have these conversations so I am going to explore what the Muslim kids think about somebody who took out three people on a bridge, and for me that is essential for the kids to deal with their own identity. [Participant 13]

The association of Islam with Prevent

Media exposure and messages given during training, meant that teachers felt that they were either explicitly or implicitly being asked to be alert to signs of vulnerability to radicalisation among Muslim students in particular. This led to very negative views among the sample of teachers, with some teachers alluding to the perception that the policy had racist overtones. The result of these attitudes was that some teachers therefore expressed some reluctance to engage with the Prevent policy.

> It's presented as you know… as a load of Muslims out there and our job is to stop them fighting and we do that by promoting British values and… make them more British, and make them more white, then you're just going to get people saying I'm not even going to listen. [Participant 6]

However, the training had also highlighted to some teachers that Muslim students were a group that were especially vulnerable to the process of radicalisation due to the attitudes that they are exposed to within Muslim communities. The result of this was the acceptance of the belief that Muslim students may require closer monitoring.

> I think radicalisation can also happen pretty rapidly actually and I think to some extent many, particularly Muslim young people, I think to some extent all of them are a little bit radicalised because they share this common anger over things happening in Muslim lands. And so to some extent to could say they are all radicalised up to a point. Just because they have that anger. [Participant 1]

Comments such as the one above emphasised that some teachers had internalised the label of Muslim students as potentially dangerous, which carries the risk of over reporting Muslim students. However, only two teachers within the sample expressed these sentiments.

Protecting students

Some teachers (*n* = 6) pointed out that the Prevent policy had made little impact on their day-to-day work, as the policy was part of the pre-existing safeguarding framework that was well established within colleges. The link between Prevent and safeguarding meant that teachers were able to assimilate Prevent into one of the many ways that students need to be protected.

> I would have reported those students for other reasons. So when you get a kid who is completely alone in college that concerns me. And whether you tell me I should be concerned because they get radicalised, that I should be concerned because they are miserable, it doesn't make any difference to me. [Participant 13]

Explicit links between Prevent and safeguarding during training appeared to be a key way to engage teachers. Six teachers stated that the Prevent policy had highlighted that the process of radicalisation put students at risk of a variety of negative outcomes, and therefore intervention was necessary. Additionally, teachers stated that the safeguarding framework made the Prevent duty and process of reporting clearer.

> I only got a level of comfort with it when I started seeing it as a safeguarding issue. When I put it in that context I understood quite clearly what my duty was, you know, what I was supposed to do and where it fell, it is obviously a risk of young people. [Participant 5]

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore teachers' attitudes and experiences in relation to the implementation of the Prevent duty in 6th form colleges. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was applied to code the data, with five main themes emerging: (a) training; (b) reporting; (c) confidence; (d) association of Prevent and Islam; and (e) protecting students. Although these

themes are presented independently, they all interact with each other and overlap in many aspects.

The theme, *training experiences* highlighted the need for well-trained facilitators who were not only able to demonstrate their competence within the Prevent context, but also an understanding of the work teachers do and the challenges they face. Facilitators that were internal led to more positive training experiences and therefore willingness to engage with the policy. Some teachers had internalised the implicit or explicit presentation of Muslims being the target suspects as a result of Prevent training. Similarly, Busher et al. (2017) noted that interviewed staff made allusions to the belief that the Prevent duty was most relevant to Muslim students even though they clearly understood Prevent as a response to address all forms of extremism. Additionally, it was found that teachers were confused and frustrated that the training received had not provided satisfactory answers on how to practically apply Prevent to protect students. This may be a consequence of the quality of training provided in the institutions surveyed. Another explanation could be found in the concerns raised previously by the Open Society Justice Initiative (2016) about the Prevent training being based on unreliable indicators and its lack of accreditations and regulations. Therefore, and in line with Dudenhoefer's recommendations (2018), providing better training and publishing training materials would increase transparency about the programme and its quality.

In the theme, *reporting students,* it was evident that making the decision that a student might be vulnerable to radicalisation or suspected radicalisation caused anxiety among participants. In contrast with Busher et al 2017 who found limited support that Prevent led to a chilling effect between teachers and students, the teachers in the current study were concerned that the statutory duty to report students would lead students to being more cautious about what they say, and that this would also create a general climate of reluctance to openly discuss religion and politics. Participants were also concerned that reporting students would ruin

professional relationships as it might have been considered as a betrayal, and this was considered to be an essential part of student and teacher relationships. This perspective supports the conclusion by the Open Society Justice Initiative (2016) that Prevent is securitising relationships. However, although the chilling effect was raised by several of the teachers in the current study, only a few of them were able to give examples of this happening in the classroom and they were uncertain about how much the students genuinely thought about the policy in their day-to-day college life. It would therefore be interesting to have the students' perspective on this issue. As Busher et al (2017) suggested, teachers who took pre-emptive action to limit the risk of destroying teacher-students trust and fostering free speech by promoting debate on issues related to Prevent might avoid the emergence of these effects.

In the theme *levels of confidence*, overall many of the teachers said they had low levels of confidence regarding the implementation of the Prevent duty. Low confidence was often discussed in relation to teachers feeling uncertain about their role within the Prevent duty and the lack of knowledge about what the expectations are regarding preventing radicalisation and extremism. These teachers also tended to report negative training experience, where key aspects of the implementation of the Prevent policy was not delivered. Teachers that had positive training experiences felt more confident with regard to their Prevent duties, but expressed doubt that these efforts would actually stop young people from being radicalised. In contrast to Busher et al. (2017), confidence levels in preventing radicalisation and extremism were generally low, despite the sample of teachers having a high level of teaching experience. It was noteworthy that satisfaction with Prevent training was low in this study, which may explain the lower levels of confidence. This is in line with Phillips, Tse and Johnson's study (2011) that levels of confidence with the Prevent duty are related to the amount of training that staff had received. However, the present study found greater variation within the sample, and this seemed to have some relation to subject specialism. For example, social science teachers that were more

experienced in teaching more controversial topics had higher levels of confidence and also found it easier to integrate Prevent and British values into their curriculum. Although the sample size was not large enough to make a true comparison between teachers of different specialisms, it would be an interesting area for future research. If differences were evident, it might provide useful information for facilitators to tailor their training to meet the needs to teachers of different specialisms.

On the other hand, none of the teachers were happy to explicitly promote British values within discussions with some of the participants feeling that British values could be experienced as insensitive to those from different cultures or not being inclusive enough. Some also decided to not to incorporate British values into their lessons or to avoid the discussion wherever possible. This feeling of being on the fence about recognising opposition to British values is not surprising considering that the meaning of what is included in the concepts of democracy, liberty, respect or tolerance is controversial and subject to disagreement between individuals (Ramsay 2017). It appears that the avoidance from the teachers to debate on these topics is linked to reducing the risk that students express ideas that could be considered as extremists and having to report these students. This in turn also seems to have created a chilling effect on the expression of some of the teachers in the current study.

Revell and Bryan (2016) argued that Prevent has added a new facet of professionalism in the everyday life of teachers with the integration and promotion of FBV British values inside and outside of school but also the risk prevention of radicalisation. Teachers' compliance is in turn assessed by the school appraisal system. As such, in terms of the findings from the Open Society Justice Initiative (2016) concerning the statutory duty creating an incentive to overrefer, due to a positive appraisal from the school or adverse consequences to non compliant teachers, this issue was not raised in the current study. This might be explained by the appraisal system of 6th form colleges not being explicitly linked to 'teaching standards 2012' in which this

pressure exists. Most participants were unaware of the outcomes of referrals and unclear whether a comment or incident was adequately serious to warrant a report. This lack of information on the process and outcomes of referrals could have affected the confidence to report students.

The theme *association of Prevent with Islam* was an important one. Similarly to Busher et al (2016), Miah (2017) but also Coppock and McGovern (2014), concerns about the stigmatisation of Muslim students were raised by the participants who felt that the Prevent policy required them to specifically target Muslim students, which created discomfort. The argument that the Prevent duty leads to the development of Muslim communities being viewed as suspect or risky (Awan 2012; Heath-Kelly 2013; Patel 2017) was also supported to some extent. It appears that the intense media coverage of contentious referrals through Channel of individual Muslim students has participated to this stigmatisation (Busher et al 2016) and reinforced the fear of the public. Some participants reported that they were very careful of not over-labelling students who might have a 'radical voice' as they felt that such label could be counterproductive. This supports the conclusions of Dudenhoefer (2018, 153) that Prevent "has significant potential to alienate and radicalise the British Muslim population". While teachers noted that the policy was now relevant to far right extremism, many stated that they didn't believe that the Government were genuinely concerned about all extremist groups and that a disproportionate focus remained on Muslim students, which as suggested in Busher et al (2016), will accentuate their stigmatisation.

At the same time, the theme *protecting students* revealed that despite concerns that the policy was biased and targeted Muslim students in particular, teachers did recognise that the Prevent duty was an extension of their safeguarding duty. Within the context of safeguarding, teachers communicated a clear desire to protect students from the consequences of being drawn into terrorism. Teachers recognised that the Prevent duty was a way of protecting students, and

this was the case even with teachers that had concerns about the impact of the duty on students and their families. This link between the Prevent duty and safeguarding supports Busher et al. (2017) who found that schools and colleges staff were concerned that some students may travel to Syria to become foreign fighters. One of the issues raised in Dudenhoefer (2018) is the dual role assigned by Prevent to students who are both at risk of being radicalised but also simultaneously being a risk if they were radicals. Furthermore, Yaqoob (2008) raises a similar concern, if schools are not a safe place for students to discuss sensitive topics without running the risk of being referred, where will they able to learn and speak freely? According to Dudenhoefer (2018) safe spaces have been directly affected by the effect of Prevent on the right to freedom of expression. In his study comparing Prevent with safe places, Ramsay (2017) suggested that both the safe space concept (creating a place within the educational setting where students feel relaxed to express themselves, protected from any harm) and the Prevent duty were designed to limit the harm of radicalisation but were also likely to create a chilling effect on student's expression of their opinions. Similarly to Dudenhoefer (2018), what was envisioned as inclusive safe spaces for the students to speak freely in a setting in which they feel safe to do so, has been compromised by the very nature of Prevent and its damaging effects on the right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, an important point made by Ramsay (2017) is that

> "Prevent casts doubt on the worth of higher education's core enterprise – the drawing out of students' ability to think for themselves about the accumulated stock of ideas and evidence concerning any particular area of concern, and doing that through rational and critical debate over the worth of those ideas and that evidence". (p155)

And although this research was conducted with 6th form teachers, developing critical thinking and the ability of debating is an important part of the students learning in these two last years of school and could have a lasting impact if it did not occur. Having to report students for

voicing radicalisation-related questions for example, is not conducive of creating a climate in which students will feel safe to have discussion on sensitive and risky topics.

As such, protecting students can only be done through encouraging a constructive debate on the root causes and the strategies defy terrorism.

Implications

With reference to the existing Prevent framework, the implications of this study suggest that reporting students for suspected radicalisation, or vulnerability to radicalisation, carries risks for both teachers and students. Asking teachers to act as law-enforcers is a heavy responsibility, and one that teachers were uncomfortable with. Furthermore, reporting Muslim students for suspected radicalisation or vulnerability to radicalisation means that teachers risk of being accused of discriminatory practices. The large numbers of Muslim students being inappropriately referred to the de-radicalisation programme, Channel (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016) can have a severe negative impact on those students.

Should the existing Prevent duty remain in place within educational settings, key changes would be prudent. The present study and the work of Busher et al. (2017) clearly indicate that teachers are willing to engage with the safeguarding aspect of Prevent, despite feelings of discomfort and low confidence with identifying and reporting radicalisation. Therefore, it may be most appropriate to make safeguarding reports for generic student vulnerability rather than specifying radicalisation. However, there may be issues regarding the provision of appropriate support that matches the specific vulnerability of the student i.e. a referral to Channel would be required for suspected radicalisation or extremism, compared to social services for issues within the home.

Teachers' unions, such as the NUT (now NEU), have argued that the legal duty surrounding Prevent has led to a culture of compliance, which results in over reporting, and

have therefore requested that the policy is withdrawn (Busby 2016). Under the current legislation, a need for more effective training that strengthens teachers' confidence when dealing with the practical issues surrounding Prevent in the classroom is essential to create further engagement. There is a desire for experienced and knowledgeable facilitators to deliver Prevent training, and for the content of the training to give clear examples and scenarios that can help teachers to make difficult judgements regarding reporting students under the Prevent duty.

The concern that Prevent in schools and colleges is failing to build young peoples' resilience from being drawn into extremism (Thomas 2016), and the issues with promoting British values (Busher et al. 2017) into teaching practice suggests that in its current form, Prevent is not effective. A systematic review conducted by the Youth Justice Board (2012b) identified that one of the most significant risk factors for radicalisation was having political grievances, such as an opposition to Western foreign policy. However, political grievances as a risk factor is not recognised within "the Prevent pyramid" or the Prevent duty, which suggests that Prevent might not be focused on the most relevant ways to counter extremism.

Research by the DCLG (2010) attempted to identify best practice regarding interventions for preventing violent extremism. A key statement was that outreach interventions within the community were considered to be more successful than those that occur within formal institutions, such as colleges. A potential advantage of community-based interventions is its non-prescriptive nature, where young people are able to develop independent thinking by questioning and challenging ideas (DCLG 2010). Individuals that are already radicalised tend to be more receptive to having discussions with people from their in-group, who have a degree of authority, but also have thorough ideological knowledge (Demant et al. 2008). This suggests that teachers may not be perceived to be credible when discussing issues surrounding British values and Prevent.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

A limitation of this research is the potential selection bias from the snowball sample. The inter-relationship between participants in the sample led to a greater homogeneity in the sample (Griffith et al. 1993), such as a high proportion of A-level teachers, which may impact on the representativeness of the findings. Snowball sampling can lead to the exclusion of individuals that are isolated from the initial sample (Van Meter 1990). Therefore, the lack of cross over between staff in different departments within colleges meant that the majority of teachers delivering vocational courses within each institution were excluded from the study. As the sample were all 6th form teachers in London, the attitudes and experiences may not represent teachers in colleges in other parts of the country due to the high levels of ethnic a religious diversity in London. However, the Home Office (2017) published data on referrals to Channel, which shows that the largest proportion (25%) of referrals was from London. Although a qualitative analysis has enabled to gain a rich perspective and in-depth account, as well as exploring the complex nature of participants' attitudes on PREVENT, it is acknowledged that small sample sizes and lack of statistical analysis, make generalisability difficult.

The interviews took place between June and August 2017, when three terrorist events were widely depicted in the media (Westminster, London Bridge and Manchester). Many participants made reference to the recent terrorist attacks in their interviews and used them as a frame of reference within their answers. It is not possible to know whether these terrorist attacks had influenced the views of any of the participants, as few were able to explicitly reflect on this. One participant did state that they were less concerned about reporting vulnerable students to the safeguarding team now that they saw the devastation someone can cause.

The processes involved in radicalisation and terrorism are poorly understood, and currently this area has a smaller evidence base than homicide (Bhui 2016). Research that has

attempted to examine violent extremism has substantial methodological issues and mainly focuses on terrorism rather than radicalisation (Youth Justice Board 2012a). Prevent is focused on the assumption that individuals that are radicalised may go on to become terrorists and that this process must be disrupted. However, the ability to predict if an individual who has been radicalised will become involved in terrorism is weak at best (Thomas 2012). The government does not publish the Prevent budget, but it estimated to cost £40m a year (BBC 2017). Future research is required to gain better knowledge on radicalisation, extremism and terrorism to ensure that the investment in Prevent is warranted.

The impacts of the Prevent policy and de-radicalisation programmes have not yet been empirically assessed (Feddes and Gallucci 2015). It is therefore vital for research to address this uncertainty and establish whether the efforts made by frontline staff and investment by the government is justified. However, it is also essential to conduct research to assess the extent to which the Prevent duty is causing stigmatisation and resulting in marginalisation within the Muslim community. This data would provide useful insights into whether Prevent is leading to labelling, which carries a risk of increasing offending behaviour.

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