ProtectUK

Unintended Consequences Research: Identifying the Impact of NaCTSO Public-Facing Products and Campaigns

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Northumbria University have explored the impact of NaCTSO's public offerings, including any unintended consequences. With collaboration from: Dr Paul Dresser, Professor Mike Rowe and Dr Jamie Harding.

Introduction

> *This research took place before the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) evolved to become the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA). All references to CPNI should henceforth be read as NPSA.*

In the UK, public-facing products and counter-terrorism vigilance campaigns (VC hereafter) have grown under the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO). NaCTSO is a police unit that supports the 'PROTECT' and 'PREPARE' strands of CONTEST (PREVENT and PURSUE being the other pillars [Booth et al., 2020: 2]). Intertwined with this trajectory is an emphasis on the willingness of the public to remain vigilant and escalate information to authorities.

Despite this, little is known about growing public involvement in Counter-Terrorism Protective Security (CTPS) and national security practices (Rodrigo Jusue 2022: 4). Even less is known about the unintended consequences of NaCTSO's guidance, products and communication(s) and the impact on minority groups. As Tankebe warns, 'a major cautionary tale in counter-terrorism practices is the risk of unintended negative effects' (2020: 105).

This report aimed to address the aforementioned knowledge gaps through a mixed-methods

approach. This report's aim and objectives were as follows:

Aim

Identify and provide recommendations regarding the impact and unintended consequences of NaCTSO's public-facing guidance, products and communications on minority groups.

Objectives

1. Identify whether NaCTSO's guidance, products and communications have contributed to public perceptions of suspicion and distrust towards perceived 'suspect communities';
2. Identify the wider impact, and any unintended consequences, of NaCTSO's guidance, products and communications on minority groups;
3. Understand how NaCTSO's guidance, products and communications produce any unintended consequences;
4. Recommend actions that can be taken by NaCTSO to reduce unintended consequences and improve guidance, products and campaigns.

> *When referring to public perceptions, we acknowledge the sample is limited and selective as we refer only to those that have completed CTPS training of some kind. Moreover, practitioners' perspectives have been additionally explored though we further acknowledge the potential vested interests of the sample. Overall, this aim has been partially met.*

Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach with four Units of Analysis (UoA) explored encompassing:

- existing quantitative survey data;
- practitioner interviews;
- documentary analysis of counter-terrorism (CT) campaigns.

To effectively detail the ways CTPS processes and outcomes might be 'different from official securitisations' (Crawford and Hutchinson, 2016: 11), this report compared practitioners' perspectives (N=10) with quantitative data generated from members of the public that have undertaken ACT Awareness (N= 551) and/or ACT Operational training (N=134) in a supportive or challenging fashion.

Documentary analysis of CT campaigns and training material constitutes the final element of analysis. This included only those that were publicly accessible and pertinent to the themes that emerged from quantitative and qualitative data. These were:

- Run Hide Tell;
- NaCTSO public-facing campaigns (e.g., Action Counters Terrorism);
- CPNI-owned ‘See, Check, and Notify’ (SCaN hereafter)

This final UoA strengthens the argument that the key propositions of this study can be extrapolated beyond the research sample and thus, it is arguable the findings have wider implications for policy and practice.

> *N= sample size*

Findings

The findings of this study challenge and support extant literature. The report did not find greater saturation of CTPS training material leads to hypervigilance and/or an overly alarmed public (see Aplin and Rogers, 2020). Intertwined with this finding, the findings do not support the notion of CTPS creating a ‘fame trap’ (Rice et al., 2022a) whereby CT messaging cuts through a saturated information environment resulting in greater levels of public fear. Nor does greater saturation of CTPS products suggest receivers of CTPS training become desensitised to key information. In fact, survey data suggests receivers’ desire for more training not less.

This report has also not found widespread notions of suspect bias across data sets, though there are public-facing engagement issues to be particularly mindful of. By far the most common theme relating to a security-prejudice nexus (Gilks, 2020) was use of the term “Islamist” terrorist/terrorism/threat within CTPS training material (key finding one). Using this term seemed to invite accusations of stereotyping and bias which practitioners then had to mitigate.

Key Takeaways

1. NaCTSO should (re)consider the continued use of “Islamist” within training material and consider an appropriate alternative term.
2. NaCTSO should carefully consider “product” sequencing i.e., the ways the ACT product suite and CPNI-owned products feed into a strategic narrative. Caution should be exercised where CPNI products precede ACT awareness as this may increase the risk of confirmation bias and/or risk leaving receivers with specific, yet partial knowledge of CTPS.

3. The ACT product suite and CPNI products should be updated to include diversity awareness especially regarding how problematic interactions with the criminal justice system may arise for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or other Neurological Disability (NDD).
4. To counteract message fatigue, this report recommends NaCTSO should:

- Ensure key information is consistent across platforms e.g., Resilience Direct;
- Formalise feedback mechanisms to capture receiver's feedback before and after training;
- Consider establishing a formal repository for practitioners to submit updated, amended training material (e.g., geographical and temporal updates) to increase the resonance and relevance of key CT messages. The implementation of Martyn's Law provides further justification for this.

Directions for Future Research

1. Future research should explore how security mechanisms designed to "empower" "CT citizens" (Rodrigo Jusue, 2022) might unintendedly *disempower* minority, vulnerable groups. The focus should be on the intertwining of VaPS, CTPS, and the impact on people with autism spectrum disorder (ADD) and other neurodevelopment disability (NDD).
2. The data contained in this report suggests an increase in *confidence* to respond to a terrorist incident post-training; however, we cannot ascertain levels of public *willingness* and *motivation* to report. A meso-micro level analysis is therefore required to examine the 'say-do gap' (Ingram and Reed, 2016). Protection motivation theory might be a fruitful lens of enquiry.
3. The data further indicates receivers of CTPS training and national CT campaigns advise the lay public to recognise (i.e., "see") suspicion using gut feeling as the "baseline" for (ab)normal behaviour. This report does not indicate hypervigilance on behalf of the public; however, with the above in mind, future research should investigate the volume and appropriateness of reports following CTPS training.

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