



Black and Asian people unfairly targeted by anti-terror law

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Ethnic minority people are disproportionately stopped and held under an anti-terror law used in UK ports and airports. Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 allows police to stop, question and detain people for up to nine hours without reason to suspect them of a crime.

More than 85,000 stops were carried out under Schedule 7 in 2009 and 2010, according to statistics released following a freedom of information request made by the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS). Of these stops, 2,201 lasted more than an hour and fewer than one in a hundred (0.57 per cent) of them resulted in a detention. No information has been provided on the results of any detentions.

The majority of Schedule 7 stops were targeted at people from black and minority ethnic groups. Asian people accounted for 25 per cent of Schedule 7 stops, though they make up just 5 per cent of the national population. Black people accounted for 8 per cent of stops, and make up 3 per cent of the population. People from other ethnic groups (including Chinese and 'mixed race') accounted for 22 per cent of stops, though they represent only 1 per cent of the population.

The targeting of black and minority ethnic groups is even more marked when we consider the most intensive Schedule 7 stops. Of those stops that lasted more than an hour, 41 per cent were of Asian people, 10 per cent were of black people and 30 per cent were of 'other' ethnic groups, leaving fewer than 20 per cent that were of white people.

The power also allows police to routinely gather and retain the DNA and fingerprints of people stopped before they are arrested, infringing their right to the presumption of innocence. Nationally, more than 1,200 people have had their fingerprints and DNA taken between 2001 and 2009.

Qasim Rafiq, spokesman for FOSIS said:

"The data speaks for itself; Schedule 7 remains the most draconian stop and search power in existence with little accountability and transparency. The officer-defined data provides an insight into the mindset of port officers when stopping people and sends out a dangerous message: if you're from an ethnic minority background, ports are not welcoming places for you."

Criminal justice action group StopWatch has registered its concern about the apparent ethnic targeting of Schedule 7 stops and has called for an independent investigation into the use of the power. StopWatch has also called for the extension of existing regulations that are applied to other stop and search powers.

Professor Ben Bowling of Kings College, who is a member of the StopWatch coalition, said:

"The use of these powers at the border should be based on reasonable grounds and in ways that are properly transparent and accountable. At present they are opaque and unaccountable and seem little more than arbitrary and discriminatory, especially from the point of view of the person detained without reason."

Labour peer Lord Ahmed, has supported the call for an independent review:

"Ten years after it was first introduced, Schedule 7 is having an extremely damaging impact on community relations. This government has failed to adequately investigate and regulate Schedule 7 in the way that it has with other stop and search powers such as Section 44. That's why I think it's time we had an independent review into the use of Schedule 7. "

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. FOSIS and StopWatch's briefing paper on Schedule 7 available at:
2. For more information on these facts or to request an interview with a representative of FOSIS or StopWatch please contact Qasim Rafiq on 07786636691
3. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) was established in 1963 and is an umbrella organisation of student groups in colleges and universities throughout the UK and Ireland, representing more than 100,000 Muslim students. For more information see the FOSIS website: www.fosis.org.uk
4. StopWatch is an action group that seeks to work with communities, ministers, policy makers and senior police officers to ensure that the reforms to the police service are fair and inclusive, and lead to better policing for all. For more information see the StopWatch website: www.stop-watch.org