

Syria – the reality

Some of our daughters have been preyed upon, manipulated and persuaded to travel to Syria.

Syria is an extremely dangerous place. Women and girls travelling to Syria are likely to witness extreme violence, could become victims of violence themselves, or in some cases, may be drawn into taking part and committing violent acts themselves. Even if they do not find themselves in direct danger, the freedoms and opportunities often taken for granted in this country are not open to women in Syria. They may find themselves alone and isolated, living under an oppressive regime, often unable to leave their living quarters, let alone return home. Their families at home will be left devastated and with very little option to secure a safe return for their loved one.

Glamourised images and propaganda being promoted online, coupled with the twisted words of those who seek to radicalise vulnerable and impressionable young people in our communities, are encouraging some women and girls to travel to Syria.

In some cases the appeal may be the 'glamour' of marrying a fighter, or they may be confused about how to reconcile their religion with modern life, and feel compelled to follow their perceived religious obligation by joining those in Syria.

But as we know, the reality of life in Syria is far from the image being portrayed.

We do not hear of those women and girls who are desperate to come home to their families. Their voices are lost.

No parent would want to see their child put in danger, exploited or in a situation where they could face death.

Sadly, stories of families who have suffered the devastating consequences of women and girls who have travelled to Syria and not returned are becoming more common.

What can families do?

There are steps that can be taken early on to protect our young people before they have started to consider travelling to Syria.

Mothers are often the ones in a family who are most likely to spot signs and notice changes in their children's behaviour. They are also more likely to be able to persuade their children not to travel.

Mothers can protect their loved ones before it is too late by taking steps such as actively taking an interest in what their daughters are looking at online, and encouraging open conversations about the issues that are of concern to them.

Kalsoom Bashir from INSPIRE said: *"Having seen the devastation facing families where a loved one has travelled to Syria I would advise families to keep their children close – to constantly remind them that they are loved, that they are part of a strong family network and that they can talk to you about anything they are worried about."*

If you are worried that your daughter may already be thinking of travelling to Syria there are often warning signs to look out for, these can include:

- Asking to have passports and other identification documents such as birth certificates and driving licences – not just her own but those of other female family members.
- Preparing to say goodbye.
- Suddenly getting new clothes or saving money.
- Your daughter may stop socialising with her usual friends, or have new friends that you have never seen before who appear to have a negative influence on her.
- She may start to express views, verbally or on social media, that are sympathetic to extremist views or actions, or become interested in politics or foreign policy when she has not shown an interest before.

If you have any concerns that your daughter is planning to travel to Syria (or another conflict zone) you should contact your local police or call 101. In an emergency call 999. They will talk to you in confidence about your concerns and will work with you and specialist agencies to support and help you and your family. This is about preventing tragedies and not about criminalising young people.

If you feel uncomfortable speaking to the police direct about your concerns, there are other people who are trained and able to provide practical help and advice for you and your family. This includes healthcare professionals, social workers, teachers and local authorities. The most important thing is that you seek help from someone at an early stage.

For accurate information about the current situation in Syria visit

www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/syria

The Prevent Tragedies campaign,
in partnership with UK Police and partners.

www.preventtragedies.co.uk



UK Police and Partners
**Working with mothers
to prevent tragedies**
