

STANDING TOGETHER:

A R E F L E C T I O N O N
T H E I M P A C T O F
F A R - R I G H T
V I O L E N C E

#SistersNotStrangers

AUGUST 2024

INTRODUCTION



From 30 July to 5th of August 2024, the UK witnessed a disturbing surge in far-right, anti-immigration protests and riots. These violent outbreaks were triggered by a tragic mass stabbing in Southport on July 29, which claimed the lives of three children. Misinformation rapidly spread on social media, falsely identifying the attacker as both a Muslim and an asylum seeker. Far-right groups seized upon this false narrative, inciting Islamophobic, racist, and anti-immigrant violence that escalated into racist attacks, arson, and looting.

Particularly alarming was the targeting of accommodations for asylum seekers and refugees, especially hotels. Far-right groups carried out violent attacks on these facilities, coordinated protests outside, and disseminated hateful and deceitful narratives both online and within local communities.

INTRODUCTION



These incidents are deeply concerning, posing significant dangers to social cohesion. However, it is crucial to remember that these extremists represent a small but vocal minority in the UK. While they are loud and aggressive, most of the country remains welcoming and supportive of everyone's right to safety and security.

As members of the Sisters Not Strangers Coalition, we extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost their children in Southport and to all those injured. We are heartbroken by this senseless violence and stand in solidarity with the victims and their loved ones. We vehemently condemn this horrific incident and the subsequent unrest, which have only deepened divisions within our communities. Our thoughts are with everyone affected during this difficult time.

THE POWER OF WORDS



The influence of media in shaping public perception cannot be understated. As one member pointed out, *‘The media is no longer just reporting the news; it’s crafting a narrative, one that paints us as ‘the other,’ as a threat.’* Another added, *“The terms they use ‘invasion,’ ‘flood,’ ‘crisis’ they’re not just words. They’re weapons, designed to divide us, to make us enemies in our own homes.”* This harmful rhetoric fuels prejudice and fear, leading to real-world consequences for ethnic minorities and asylum seekers. There is a desperate need for accountability, *‘The media has a responsibility, not just to report, but to report fairly, to recognise the impact their words have on real lives. They must be held accountable for the hatred and division they sow.’* We call on the media to abandon their sensationalist language and instead contribute to a society that values peace, understanding, and unity.

LIVING IN FEAR: THE IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE



As members of the SNS Coalition, we are facing an increasingly hostile environment in the UK. The rise in far-right activities has left us grappling with fear, and anxiety, and a significant toll on our mental health. Despite these challenges, we draw strength from the solidarity of supportive communities, including faith groups, who spread hope in a time of rising hatred.

The violence and intimidation by far-right groups have left our communities in a constant state of anxiety. One member reflected:

I was so nervous and petrified: with my disability, I wouldn't have been able to get myself to safety. Working in an organisation that supports asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, we were among those that were most likely to be attacked by the far-right rioters. These were the safety steps we took to minimise risks: shutting the blinds, and asking the women to come through the backdoor.

LIVING IN FEAR: THE IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE



Space and Place:

Another member shared her experience with the spaces that were once familiar to her. She said:

The riots have left me with anxiety and little trust. I am more aware of my surroundings. I look over my shoulder most of the time and walk alone. I have changed the way I do things; I ensure I am home before it gets dark.

A daughter of one of our members also expressed her fears during the riots and protests:

I was quite scared, due to the very possible threat that I could be attacked. This fear was further heightened due to my volunteering at the front of the shop. However, due to the reassuring and positive attitude of my manager and colleagues, my mind was put at ease.

LIVING IN FEAR: THE IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE



One member recounted her experience during a routine shopping trip on August 6, 2024. She states:

I was in line at the cashier in a Tesco store in my local area in my city. An elderly white woman was behind me, and I could hear her loudly saying, 'Go back to your country; all these Black people are here to take our wealth.' I was so upset that I had to leave the queue and go home. Thankfully, a man ran after me to calm me down.

For many, these experiences have permanently altered their perception of safety, security, and belonging. One member expressed, *'I now feel a deep fear towards some white British people after the violent events around the country.'*

These feelings of insecurity are compounded by the realisation that the violence we face is not isolated but part of a wider trend of hostility toward those who are seen as different.

Negative portrayals of our community exacerbate our sense of isolation and vulnerability. This pervasive anxiety is taking a severe toll on our mental health, with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues becoming more prevalent within our community. As another member reflected, 'The constant fear has led to sleepless nights and an overwhelming sense of vulnerability, particularly as a woman wearing hijab.'

The trauma of being targeted because of our ethnicity, religion, or immigration status is worsened by the media's often biased portrayal of our community. This has left us feeling isolated and under siege, contributing to a growing mental health crisis among asylum seekers, refugees, and ethnic minorities. This sentiment is echoed by many of us; even people living in areas where no violence has occurred keep their children at home out of fear. One woman said:

'I have not let my children see the news. They feel safe here; I don't want them to know about this.'

ENSURING SAFETY IN SCHOOLS



The safety of children from ethnic minorities has become a pressing concern, particularly regarding potential harassment in schools. One member shared, *“I find myself constantly worried about the safety of my children.”* Another member, speaking as a mother, emphasised the heavy burden of ensuring her children’s safety in these uncertain times. However, one member remarked on the long road ahead: *“We can educate parents, but real change takes time perhaps generations. Until then, we live with the fear that our children might be targeted simply for who they are.”*

For all members, schools should step up as safe havens, places where all children can learn and grow without fear. The responsibility lies with educators, administrators, and parents alike to create environments that foster respect and understanding. This underscores the long-term nature of the struggle against prejudice and the need for sustained efforts in education.

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COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



Despite the fear and violence perpetrated by far-right groups, there have been moments of profound resilience and solidarity. Faith groups, local communities, and individuals who believe in equality and justice have stood alongside those targeted by hate. One member shared their experience:

“The way the community came together it was a glimmer of hope in an otherwise dark time. Knowing that there are people who stand with us, who believe in a society where everyone is welcome, gives us the strength to keep going.”

Another member expressed gratitude for the acts of solidarity shown by those who understand the importance of unity: *“When we stand together, we send a powerful message we will not be divided by hate. Some people care, who fight for a world where we can all live in peace and dignity.”* These actions serve as a reminder that while hate may be loud, the voices of hope and love are stronger.

OUR CAMPAIGN



The members have been advocating for better mental health support and systemic changes as individuals and within their organisation and the SNS coalition has its strategy plan for future campaigns that highlights the need for accessible, culturally sensitive mental health services tailored to the unique challenges faced by asylum seekers, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Our campaigns aim to raise awareness about the psychological impact of the hostile environment we live in. One of our key initiatives focuses on increasing access to mental health support for asylum seekers and all ethnic minorities, recognising that without proper care, the trauma we experience can have long-lasting effects. Our campaign also advocates for systemic changes to ensure that mental health care is accessible and culturally sensitive to our unique experiences.

CALL TO ACTION



We call on the media to take responsibility for the narratives they create. The language they use has real consequences for our mental health and safety. Sensationalism and divisive rhetoric must be replaced with fair and accurate reporting that reflects the true diversity and humanity of our communities.

We also urge the government and local authorities to take immediate action to protect our mental health. This includes enforcing stricter penalties for hate crimes and ensuring that mental health services are adequately funded and accessible to all, especially those of us who are most vulnerable.

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE AND RESILIENCE



Despite the challenges we face, we remain resilient. The solidarity shown by those who stand with us fuels our hope for a better future. We, the Sisters Not Strangers Coalition, are committed to continuing our fight for mental health support, equality, and dignity for all. We will not be silenced by fear, and we will continue to advocate for a society where everyone can live in peace and security.

Let this reflection report serve as a reminder of the importance of mental health support in our community and as a call to action for all who believe in a just and inclusive society.



STANDING TOGETHER:

A REFLECTION ON THE IMPACT OF FAR-RIGHT VIOLENCE

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