

one morning about the London bombings'



that: "What in their ordinary, daily life makes them feel under siege and that they can't be part of wider society? Most lead the lives that they want and are as much a part of society as they want. I think by the second or third generation you should not feel under siege. You should feel that you are a fully fledged member of society. If you don't, that's very sad."

Siddiqui says she feels some Muslims harbour a silent, simmering resentment towards British society that is just as worrying as more militant voices. She also laments that some Muslims hold conflicting values, with one face for fellow Muslims.

She explains: "If I am teaching my kids that public tolerance and diversity are good things but going home and saying that, as Muslims, they are the only ones who have the true faith or belief or true spiritual worth, that's a problem for your children to carry

that with them. They will never feel they belong."

Such traits, however, apply to a minority of Muslims, she feels. Siddiqui is determined that her own children will receive no such mixed messages. "I have chosen to allow my children to be friends with whoever they want and not to force them into anything intrinsically Asian. I speak Urdu with them but that's because I want them to be bilingual. I really don't want them to feel that being Muslim is the only identity that they have and that they are comfortable only in Muslim contexts. I want them to treat people with the same respect and them to be as confident with people of every background."

She doesn't worry that, as a result of her more liberal approach, they may abandon their faith. "You don't forget if you belong to a faith," she continues. "To see yourself as someone for whom that faith can only be practised in a certain way, in a certain community, away from other communities, never wanting to address the big issues – that's not what

I want for Islam and that's not the way forward for Muslim societies."

Mona Siddiqui would prefer to discuss issues such as forced marriages, divorce and gender equality than the media's obsession – the veil

Pictures: Marc Turner/
Dave Thompson

'THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO BITE THE BULLET. THEY MIGHT HAVE TO DO SO SENSITIVELY BUT LOTS OF MUSLIMS WANT TO HAVE THESE DISCUSSIONS. THEY KNOW IT IS GOOD FOR THEIR COMMUNITY'

Speaking from experience



Bob Holman

GLASGOW'S council is considering amalgamating several of its services.

One proposal would join up the education and social work departments. Similar moves have occurred in other Scottish local authorities and are even more widespread in England, where new super departments are called children's services.

The purpose of these reforms is to produce effective and efficient services, to improve communication between staff, to cut bureaucracy and to save money.

I'm concerned about the families and children who come under the scope of the social work departments. I know of no comparative studies that establish that such amalgamations lead to improvements. I have my doubts. Education services aim to maintain and improve academic attainments for the mass of children. Social work departments focus on a minority who are at risk of neglect, abuse, offending and separation from their families. I fear that in a new super department, their needs would have a lower priority.

Before the war, education departments were responsible for deprived and delinquent children, for fostering and residential care. They gave them insufficient attention and, in 1948, these tasks were transferred to a new and smaller service which specialised in child care.

In England the top posts in children's services (the amalgamated educational and social services) have gone mainly to educationalists; the social side gets a lower-ranked leader.

If that happened in Scotland, there could be a decline in the national leadership and influence of social work leaders.

What about the better communication that is supposed to occur within joined-up departments?

Recently I visited a successful comprehensive in London. Across the road was the social services wing. Yet the member of the school responsible for pupil welfare complained of poor communication and a lack of response from social workers who seemed burdened with bureaucracy. School and social workers were joined-up on the charts but not in reality.

I contrasted this with my experience in the 1960s. Child-care officers were encouraged to visit the teachers of children in care. One phoned me when two foster brothers went missing. I got them back to school. Similarly, we had regular meetings with health visitors. This may not have been typical but I am convinced that co-ordination and communication comes when professionals have the time to forge face-to-face contacts with practitioners in other services.

'I fear that the needs of children at risk would have a lower priority'

Another re-organisation will cost more, not less money. Glasgow would do better to leave its social work department intact and to concentrate on improving it in line with the report of the 21st Century Social Work Review. It called for social workers to have less paper work, more discretion and more time with users. They would be able to concentrate on prevention and links with other agencies. The report also made the case for social-work leaders who would speak for their profession and for the need to tackle the poverty that makes family life difficult for many who approach them. Social work requires resources not re-organisation.

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