



# The Church of Scotland

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## Church and Society Council

### Surveillance and Social Justice – May 2017

#### Section 8. Risk and mistaken public perception

**8.1** The perception of threats can emanate from specific sources, such as actual terrorist threats, calculated economic risks, or published local crime rates<sup>1</sup>. Fear can mean that strangers need to demonstrate they are harmless.<sup>2</sup> Whereas we once 'took a risk,' we now tend to think of ourselves as 'being at risk'.<sup>3</sup>

**8.2** Public perceptions, fuelled by sections of the media, are often wildly mistaken. For example, there is a widespread perception that £24 in every £100 claimed in welfare benefits is fraudulent; the actual figure is 70p in every £100.<sup>4</sup>

**8.3** This degree of public misperception is the context in which severe bureaucratic surveillance blights the lives of people claiming welfare benefits, resulting for many in punitive sanctions. In 2015, the Church of Scotland as part of the Joint Public Issues Team, called for the UK Government to rethink benefit sanctions.<sup>5</sup> Ken Loach's 2016 film *I, Daniel Blake*, tells the story experienced in real life by too many in our society.

**8.4** The Campaign for a Fair Society argues that budget cuts by the UK government disproportionately fall on people in poverty and those with disabilities. The campaign estimates that people with the severest disabilities will be burdened by government cuts 19 times more than the rest of the population.<sup>6</sup>

**8.5** Datafication together with securitisation can exacerbate our sense of being at risk. On the other hand, datafication provides evidence to contradict false perceptions of risk, and perhaps challenge the securitisation of people too readily framed as threats. This is one of the paradoxes of contemporary data-gathering.

[See the full report](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Walklate and Gabe Mythen, 'How Scared Are We? ', *British Journal of Criminology* 48 (2008), 209-55.

<sup>2</sup> Gabe Mythen, Sandra Walklate, and Fatima Khan, 'I'm a Muslim, but I'm not a terrorist: victimization, risky identities and the performance of safety,' *British Journal of Criminology* 49: 6 (2009), 736-54.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Furedi, *Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> IPSOS MORI, *Perils of Perception* (London: Royal Statistical Society, King's College London and Ipsos MORI, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Joint Public Issues Team, *Time to rethink benefit sanctions* (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Simon Duffy, "A fair society? How the cuts target disabled people", Centre for Welfare Reform <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/354/a-fair-society.pdf> (accessed 26-Oct-2016). This figure seems to refer to England.