

**GETTING THE MESSAGE:**

# **THE RECURRENCE OF HATE CRIMES IN THE UK**

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# Getting the Message: The recurrence of 'hate crimes' in the UK

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## **Background to the Report and Project:**

This report serves as an inaugural study to an ongoing project investigating the issue of hate crimes and discrimination as experienced by Muslims, in the UK and in Europe, with attention given to the Islamophobic and racial motivations for such crimes. The study goes beyond merely looking at major criminal acts, such as murder and other forms of violence, and considers the environment in which such acts may be encouraged and legitimised, including discriminatory legislation resulting in social inequality in jobs, housing and social services, among other things, as well as negative media representation of Muslims. The background studies section of this report tackles the concept of hate crime and its roots, followed by its reasons and consequences. Additionally, Islamophobic or anti-Muslims hate crime will be discussed from the 'community' perspective.

## **Conceptualization and Analysing the Causes of Hate Crime:**

Conceptualising hate crime as a concept, as well as the reasons behind them, requires the term 'hate crime' to be accurately defined, something which is no easy task considering the many ambiguities that arise from social norms and accepted notions of difference, identity and group belonging. For the purpose of this report, the specific case of Muslims in the West is considered, with the aim of identifying the conditions that encourage rising trends in Islamophobia.

- **Categorisation of prejudice:**

Prejudice is considered from different angles of categorisation. On one hand, instances of prejudice are considered in terms of being either subjective (implicit), which are less likely to be reported to the police or authorities, or objective (overt), which manifest in aggressive and violent behaviour not affecting victims' lives directly but rather accumulatively disrupting their peace of mind. On the other hand, prejudice is considered in terms of being either institutional, as experienced as a result of discriminatory policies in the workplace or in places of education, or personal, as experienced in wider society.

- **Hate Crime Victims and Perpetrators:**

Hate crimes are typically directed at racial, ethnic and religious minorities who can usually be identified as 'different' by factors such as appearance, dress, language or religious practice. Also, properties associated with a particular minority group, such as places of worship or cemeteries, may be the target of vandalism. Perpetrators of such crimes are usually male members of organised extremist movements, whether racist, religious, nationalist or a combination of all. The expressed motivation for such crimes ranges from simple thrill-seeking to 'retaliation'.

- **Factors which increase hatred:**

Certain circumstances contribute to a climate which legitimises hate motivated incidents and behaviour, including factors such as economic problems, unemployment, rapid rises in immigration contributing to a change in the population, the presence of active extremist organ-

isations and media portrayal of ethnic minorities. Such hostility may extend to everyday prejudice, such as discrimination in access to housing, education and employment, and also leads to negative political and media representation. Other issues discussed include hate crimes among different minority groups competing for the second-lowest rung on the social and economic ladder.

- **The impacts of Hate Crime:**

Hate crimes pose a threat to the security of individuals and to social cohesion, and they also carry the potential to lead to conflict and violence on a wider scale. For many victims, the emotional degradation resulting from hate crimes has deeper effects than physical injuries.

- **Impact on the Individual:**

Hate crimes foster in victims a fear of future attacks, originating in a rejection of the victim's identity. This fear results from a message that victims are not an accepted part of the society in which they live. This experience triggers a sense of extreme isolation, depression, long-term fear and more negative emotions than other victims of crime. Among the youth, this manifests in a negative impact on victims' self-esteem, school performance, mental and physical health or sense of safety. Negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in public discourse had great effects on the increase in anti-Muslim behaviour and attitudes among the youth, which has contributed to a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility.

- **Impact on the Community:**

Hate crime is a message crime, which sends a message to other members of the community who share the same traits that represent the object of prejudice or belong to the same social group of the person attacked. This leads to a climate of increased fear and anxiety that extends well beyond the individual and can affect the victim's family and community. Members of the same group feel victimized, while members of other commonly targeted groups are also reminded of their vulnerability to similar attack. This may in turn lead to minority community members avoiding particular businesses, leaving their jobs or changing their appearance and clothing.

- **The Broader Threat to Society:**

Hate crimes influence a far wider circle of citizens than ordinary crime and also have the capability to produce social division and public unrest and are a sign of potentially serious security and public order problems in society. Governments and policy makers slow to investigate and prosecute hate crimes, encourage perpetrators to freely continue such activities in society and may persuade others to commit similar crimes. The lack of protection from hate crimes causes minority communities to lose confidence in law enforcement and government structures, leading to further marginalisation. Secondary marginalisation, as a result of dismissive attitudes toward the seriousness of hate crime from representatives from broader society, such as police, social-service professionals, doctors or judges, leads to even greater humiliation, degradation and isolation of victims and the minority groups to which they belong. Crimes targeting individuals based on their racial, ethnic or religious background are experienced as an attack on the victim's essential identity.

- **Hate Crime legislation:**

Until recently, there have not been specific legal protections against discrimination for minorities. In the UK, the term 'hate crime' has no legal status and no law uses the term, while in the US it only occasionally makes an appearance in 'hate crime' statutes. Despite the period between World War II and the late 1970s being one of the most viciously racist periods in British history, it was not until the 1980s that the British government turned its attention to the significant issue of hatred and minority victimisation. Addressing religious motivation for hate crimes only came to the fore after the September 11 attacks.

There are two approaches to hate crime legislation: the creation of 'substantive offences', which

is a separate offence that includes the 'bias motive' as an integral element of the legal definition of the offence; or the more common scheme of 'penalty enhancements', in which an offender will first be found guilty of the base offence, and then the court decides to apply a penalty enhancement if there was enough evidence of bias. The advantages and disadvantages of both approaches are considered.

- **Functionality of Hate Crime legislation:**

Legislation alone cannot solve the issues of discrimination or hate attacks. However, laws in combination with other tools can be a catalyst for changes in social attitudes. Hate crime legislation may also have a significant symbolic effect in highlighting the criminality of such acts and send a positive signal to the victimised community, boosting their collective confidence in the authorities.

- **Challenges faced by Hate Crime legislation:**

Hate crimes in general, and religious-based incidents in particular, are the most commonly underreported type of crime, making it difficult to prosecute offenders. Also, members of particular victimised groups are especially unlikely to report crimes for a number of different reasons. Additionally, some offences remain unreported under a climate of fear that threatens re-victimisation, double-discrimination, double-penalty and systematic prejudice by law enforcement and police authorities. This follows through to minority groups expressing a mistrust of security services and the law itself, which they might also perceive to be hostile towards them. Investigation, analysis, legislation and prosecution of hate crime must be bolstered to tackle these and other challenges.

- **Muslims in Britain:**

The presence of Muslims in Britain dates back to 1558, but increasing numbers of Muslims began to arrive in Britain as seamen in the late eighteenth century, increasing further in the 19th and 20th centuries. Mass economic migration, particularly from former British colonies, took place in the aftermath of World War II, with Britain's Muslim population growing from 21,000 in 1951 to 1.6 million in 2001. The 2001 Census revealed the Muslim population to be disproportionately socio-economically disadvantaged in comparison with the wider population. In recent years, increasing regularity of negative media representation of Muslims has constructed them as a furious and militant religious mob, which has led to increasing prevalence in the problem of Islamophobia.

- **Hate Crimes against British Muslims:**

The 9/11 attacks in the US, condemned by the majority of British Muslims, marked an increase in hate crimes directed against Muslims and their religious identity. Additionally, it marked an increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric from leading political figures and media personalities, creating a climate that legitimises discrimination against a particular minority group. This opportunity was seized upon and exploited by far-right extremist groups.

## **Methodology and Sample Group:**

The present study is based on analysis of data collected from 336 questionnaires, among them 135 conducted online and the remaining 201 in print format. The majority of the survey's respondents reside in the UK. The questionnaire considers demographic data about Muslims, questions relating to forms of implicit and explicit discrimination, ranging from discriminatory remarks and jokes to threats and physical violence, and an open ended section for views to be more freely expressed.

## Demographic Scheme of Muslims in Britain:

The demographics of the sample group are considered in light of the wider demographic scheme of Muslims in Britain.

- The vast majority of respondents were adults of working age, with the highest rate of participation among the 19 to 34 years old age range (51.5%), and the next highest participation among the 35 to 54 years old age range (24.1%), with the remainder of respondents falling within the under 18 years old or 55 and over categories.
- Females made up a higher percentage of respondents (55.7%) than male respondents (44.3%).
- A slight majority of the sample population (51.5%) was born in Britain.
- The majority of respondents (65.5%) were British citizens and a greater majority (74.4%) were British residents.
- Asian ethnicities factored highly among respondents, with the highest being Pakistani (24.1%), Bengali (11.3%), Indian (7.7%) and Iraqi (4.5%), with the next most prevalent ethnicities representing African countries, with a significant proportion of respondents defining their ethnicities with their continents, including those identifying themselves as Asian (10.4%).
- Most respondents recorded their marital status as single (57.4%), with 5.1% reporting being divorced and 1.8% being widowed.
- Income brackets of the survey group were mostly recorded as middle income (55.4%), followed by lower income (31%) and higher income (7.1%) with the remaining 6.5% not recording their level of income.
- In terms of education, respondents were most likely to have achieved bachelor's degrees (33.3%), followed by those holding secondary school certificates (23.5%), postgraduate degrees (12.5%), vocational qualifications (10.4%), elementary school (9.8%), PhDs (4.8%) and other qualifications (3.9%).
- In terms of employment, the highest frequency among the survey group were recorded to be employed (39%), followed by students (33%), the unemployed (15.2%), the self-employed (9.8%) and the retired (2.1%).
- The vast majority of respondents reported themselves to be either practicing (59.2%) or highly practicing (22.9%). The next most frequent categories were those identifying themselves as secular Muslims (6.5%), cultural Muslims (5.1%) and the non-practicing (3.6%), with 2.7% giving no answer to the question.
- In terms of visibility of Islamic practice, the two predominant indicators were wearing the Hijab (46.4%) and having a beard (23.2%). These were followed by identifiable clothing (10.7%) and visible in other ways (8.6%), with 9.5% reporting no outwardly visible indicators.
- The highest proportion among the survey group (33.3%) reported living in neighbourhoods where Muslims constitute less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the population, followed by those in neighbourhoods with  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  Muslim populations (22.3%). Also, a high proportion (18.5%) indicated they did not know the proportion of Muslims in their neighbourhoods. Muslims living in Muslim-majority neighbourhoods were in the minority, with 11.6% living in neighbourhoods where Muslim constitute  $\frac{1}{2}$  –  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population and 14.3% living in neighbourhoods where over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population is Muslim.

## The Hate Crimes Faced by British Muslims:

The respondents were asked to consider 29 categories of negative experiences they may have encountered, distributed over both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination and abuse. For each category, the respondents were offered six options from which to choose to rate the frequency of their experience, ranging from once a year through to more than once a week, including the option to state that they had never experienced such an incident. The results of the survey are demonstrated and analysed in this section of the study. Many such experiences of abuse and discrimination were highly prevalent within the survey group,

and were reported by 40% or more of the survey group. These findings indicated that among respondents:

- 74.5% have heard hostile remarks being made about Islam
- 66.9% have witnessed negative stereotyping of Islam in the media
- 66.9% have witnessed political policies affecting Muslims negatively
- 64% report having been stared at by strangers, many with worryingly high rates of frequency
- 63.1% have heard racial remarks
- 57.1% have heard or witnessed Islamophobic remarks
- 54.1% have experienced being expected to fit into stereotypes
- 53.6% have experienced direct verbal attacks
- 50.9% have experienced unfriendly behaviour on the streets
- 50.3% have experienced racial tensions in their cities and neighbourhoods
- 48.2% have expressed frequent experiences of biased behaviour
- 44.9% have suffered from troubling reactions
- 44.6% have witnessed the passing of discriminatory policies
- 43.4% have had their religious beliefs questioned or disregarded
- 43.2% have experienced being avoided
- 41.9% have had their opinions ignored
- 41.9% have been laughed at or mocked
- 41.9% have experienced being seen as unfit and unworthy
- 41.7% have experienced being ignored in public places
- 41.4% have experienced threats or unfair accusations

Additionally, other cases of discrimination and abuse were reported by significant minorities of the survey group, including, as examples, 38.6% reporting having experienced not being taken seriously, 37.2% having experienced unfriendly behaviour in their place of work or study and 37.1% experiencing being left out of conversations. Some of these statistics are noteworthy despite their relatively low prevalence due to the severe nature of the offence, such as 13.9% of respondents reporting having been subjected to violent physical assault.

The top three highest frequencies were experienced by Muslims in terms of frequency of occurrence are:

- Witnessing negative stereotyping of Islam in the media (66.9%)
- Being stared at by a stranger (44.4%)
- Witnessing political policies affecting Muslims negatively (37.8%)

## **The Effect of Demographic values on Hate Crimes faced by Muslims:**

The analysis of the survey's results reveals the demographic categories of age, gender and income to be important factors in affecting the nature and frequency of hate crimes faced by Muslims. Each of these factors is considered separately and the results are analysed in depth for meaningful conclusions to be drawn. Among the many significant findings of this part of the study, the following were found:

- The elderly were more likely than all other age groups (under 18s, youth and middle-aged) to have experienced being ignored in public, being unfairly accused, being treated in a superficial manner or being talked down to.
- Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to have experienced being ignored in public places, being wrongly accused or experiencing troubling reactions.
- Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to have experienced being avoided or being talked down to.
- Higher income respondents were more likely than middle and lower income respondents to have experienced hearing racially offensive remarks or explicit instances of Islamophobia.

## **More details about Hate Crimes Faced by Muslims:**

Specific comments offered by the survey group are considered in light of the parameters of the study. Both positive reasons (due to actions on the part of society or of Muslims themselves) and negative reasons (due to inaction on the part of society or of Muslims themselves) are considered. These indicate:

- A correlation between Muslims attending Islamic schools or living in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods and low experiences of abuse and discrimination
- Specific examples of religious, racial and misogynistic verbal abuse
- Experiences of alarm being expressed at the presence of Muslims in public places, or refusal to provide Muslims with public services
- Abusive gestures directed towards Muslims
- Mental abilities and the power of understanding of Muslims being questioned
- Perception of Muslims being affected by national and international events and controversies, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, international terrorist attacks and debates on Islamic symbols such as veils, headscarves and minarets

## **Recommendations on Reducing problems faced by Muslims:**

Recommendations to policy makers include the need for better media representation of Muslims, currently seen as overwhelmingly biased against Muslims, and education programmes teaching non-Muslims about Islam.

Recommendations to Muslims include the need for unity among different Muslim groups; organising education programmes for non-Muslims; actively participating in the enhancement of positive media representation of Muslims; getting more involved in political debates, especially those which affect Muslims; and enhancing religious and cultural awareness, especially among the youth.

**For further information please contact the IHRC office  
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