



APPG on Hate Crime inquiry

How Do We Build Community Cohesion When Hate Crime is on the Rise

APPG on Hate Crime inquiry

How Do We Build Community Cohesion When Hate Crime is on the Rise?

Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

25th July 2018

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) is a community-funded organisation that seeks to empower British Muslims to be more actively involved in British media and politics. For too long, British Muslims have remained marginalised in public and political debate, and the level of Muslim participation in media and politics remains woefully low. MEND enables British Muslims to engage more effectively with political and media institutions and play a greater role in British politics and society by instilling confidence, competence, and awareness within them. Enhancing the mainstream participation of under-represented communities is a critical step towards strengthening our democracy.
- 1.2. To document and respond to cases of Islamophobia, MEND has established the Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) which acts as a reporting platform for victims, whilst also providing a source of free legal and emotional support.
- 1.3. Our commentary within this submission extends only to our areas of expertise, namely upon issues surrounding Islamophobia, and is predicated upon data drawn from the IRU. We feel that other organisations may be better equipped to provide insight into the significant problems surrounding other forms of hate.
- 1.4. It is important to briefly explore MEND's understanding of several of the key concepts used throughout this submission. Therefore, we propose the following definitions:
 - 1.4.1. **Islamophobia:** a prejudice, aversion, hostility, or hatred towards Muslims which encompasses any distinction, exclusion, restriction, discrimination, or preference against Muslims that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

- 1.4.2. **An Islamophobic hate crime:** any form of abuse or threat within which the targets, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Muslim(s) or are, or perceived to be, associated to Muslim(s).
- 1.4.3. **Islamophobic hate speech:** Any form of speech or writing which works to control, regulate or exclude Muslim participation within social, civic, economic and political life, or which embodies hatred, vilification, stereotyping, abuse or insults directed at Muslims on the basis of their religious identity.

2. What is the extent of hate crime and speech that is experienced by individuals or communities and what form does it take?

- 2.1. The data collected by the IRU reveals unambiguous hate crime trends.
- 2.2. In its first year, April 2017-18, the IRU received 297 reports from victims of Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination (70% and 30% of reports, respectively).
- 2.3. Hate crime trends apparent from data sourced from the IRU include:
 - 2.3.1. The majority of incidents involve acts of verbal abuse. This includes street harassment, where Muslims are called racial slurs in public settings, including labels such as “P**i”, “terrorist”, “infidel”, “scum” etc.
 - 2.3.2. The second largest form involves physical acts of aggression. Common forms include being spat on, slapped, shoved, being thrown to the ground, and women having their hijabs pulled off. This has significant mental impact, with one victim stating that: “I feel so paranoid walking the streets, I feel like everyone is out to attack me. I’m super self-conscious in public now”.
 - 2.3.3. IRU victim and witness testimonies show that over 80% of Islamophobic hate crime perpetrators are white males.
 - 2.3.4. Muslim women who are targeted in hate crimes are almost exclusively visibly Muslim, wearing the hijab or niqab at the time of the attack.
 - 2.3.5. 75% of reports to the IRU come from Muslim women, which rises to 80% when solely considering physical attacks. These women are also almost exclusively ‘visibly Muslim’, wearing the hijab, niqab or burka at the time of the attack.
 - 2.3.6. Incidents on public transport and cases of harassment by a neighbour are common areas of abuse, resulting in reports of feeling “worried about the safety of my family [and] own home” and “anxiety in public spaces” following attacks.
 - 2.3.7. 76% of reports to the IRU are submitted by individuals from South Asian communities (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims).
 - 2.3.8. Common for there to be a surge in reports following major incidents, such as last year’s attacks in Manchester and London Bridge. Indeed, following the Manchester Arena attack, the IRU witnessed a 388% increase in reports.
- 2.4. Anti-Muslim hate speech is also evident in the way mainstream media represents Muslims, often in reference to issues of security, crime, violence and integration. Indeed, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recently highlighted discriminatory reporting in both The Daily Mail and The Sun, claiming that they “are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and

provocative terminology”¹ and noting that “hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem”.²

- 2.5. Social media also acts to disseminate anti-Muslim hate speech. Researchers at Demos catalogued 143,920 derogatory and anti-Muslim tweets sent from the UK between March 2016 and March 2017, a daily average of almost 393.³
- 2.6. Meanwhile, Facebook and Twitter accounts of leading far-right and anti-Muslim groups can attract several thousands of followers. Amongst these groups are organisations which exist explicitly to counter the presence of Muslims in the UK, Europe and the West. These organisations include groups such as the English Defence League, the Football Lads Alliance, PEGIDA UK, and Britain First.

3. How does experiencing hate crime and hate speech impact on individuals, communities and their values?

- 3.1. There is a notable dearth of any critical research into the psychological repercussions of Islamophobia (both in the form of hate crime and hate speech) upon its victims. However, anecdotal evidence can be found in the testimonies given by victims approaching the IRU. According to these testimonies, victims of Islamophobic hate crime often experience severe negative impacts with regards to their confidence and mental health.
- 3.2. Fear and anxiety about personal safety is common. Immediately after an attack the feeling of shock and disorientation can set in. It can take time for a victim to process the incident. Soon after, feelings of shame or anger can also be felt.
- 3.3. Behavioural changes are also a common theme. In some instances, the IRU has had reports (particularly from Muslim women) of victims being reluctant to leave their homes in the weeks immediately following an attack. As mentioned previously, a significant majority of victims reporting to the IRU are women who are visibly Muslim (i.e. they wear a hijab, niqab, burka etc.) Following an attack, a small number of these women have reported that they subsequently decided to stop wearing the hijab after being targeted, which may perhaps be seen as an attempt to minimise or hide their religious identity for fear of being vulnerable to abuse.
- 3.4. While the individual victim themselves bears the most acute consequences of hate crime, an act of hate crime often affects the family network and wider community at large. Indeed, Islamophobic hate crimes create an atmosphere of heightened anxiety and fear amongst whole communities. Anecdotal evidence indicates that even members of these communities who have not been victims consequently avoid areas which are known to have been the location of previous hate-based incidents, they may also change their transport routes, change their style of dress, or take self-defence classes - all as protective measures against being attacked.

4.0 How does hate speech and bullying impact children and young people in schools and educational institutions?

- 4.1 In April 2018, Ms Samena Dean distributed a survey to 100 Muslim children between the ages of 8 and 18, in Edinburgh, and found that of the children aged

¹ “ECRI Report On The United Kingdom”, *Council of Europe*, October 4, 2016, https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/united_kingdom/gbr-cbc-v-2016-038-eng.pdf

²Ibid.

³ Carl Miller, Josh Smit: “Anti-Islamic Content on Twitter”, 24th April 2017. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://www.demos.co.uk/project/anti-islamic-content-on-twitter/>.

from 11-18, 55% had been the victim of verbal Islamophobic abuse and 50% had been the victim of physical Islamophobic abuse. From those aged 8-11, 53% had been the victim of verbal Islamophobic abuse and 26% had been the victim of physical Islamophobic abuse.⁴

- 4.2 The 2015/16 Childline report by the NSPCC noted that the service provided at least 981 counselling sessions for children suffering from racist/faith-related bullying. The report further noted that “young girls, particularly, felt victimised by others where they dressed in the hijab or wore a headscarf”.⁵
- 4.3 Significant increases in cases of racist and religious bullying have been observed following major socio-political incidents, with Childline reporting that in the fortnight following the attack at Manchester Arena in 2017, almost 300 counselling sessions were held due to bullying in association with religiously-motivated bullying. The charity also reported that girls who wear the hijab had frequently been victimised for their religious dress, with some expressing a desire to self-harm because of the cruel treatment they had received.⁶

5.0 How does hate speech impact on the emotional and mental-health of individuals who are targeted at a street and online level?

- 5.1 The emotional impacts of hate crime on victims are vast but largely unexplored in research.
- 5.2 Testimonies from victims reporting to the IRU reveal a picture of social isolation, depression and anxiety. Many victims of Islamophobic hate crime report that they choose to stay indoors more, take time off work, and avoid public spaces – revealing how hate crime can impede their participation in public life. Many report that they avoid crowded spaces and public transport. Also reported is some victims’ desire to remove the hijab after being targeted. Panic attacks, flashbacks, sleeplessness, and anxiety are also commonly observed psychological impacts. Symptoms of PTSD can be present in the more severe cases.
- 5.3 Our data shows that vast majority of victims seek support from family and community networks, with few choosing professional counselling options to cope with the trauma of an attack. Feelings of shame, embarrassment or fear can contribute to victims keeping their ordeal private and not choosing to speak openly about it.

6.0 Best practice: what schemes, initiatives and projects exist to build community cohesion in the face of rising hate crime and hate speech?

- 6.1 The IRU is a free and confidential service launched in April 2017 that seeks to build community cohesion in the face of rising hate crime and hate speech through the following mechanisms:
 - Providing emotional support to victims of Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination;
 - Securing free legal support to victims;
 - Collecting data on Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination for the benefit of analysis and initiative construction and evaluation;
 - Assisting victims in liaising with police, councils, and other social services.

⁴ “Muslim mum makes a stand against playground Islamophobia for daughter”, MEND, April 2018. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://mend.org.uk/news/muslim-mum-makes-stand-playground-islamophobia-daughter/>.

⁵ “Childline bullying report 2015/16: What children are telling us about bullying”, NSPCC, 2016. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/what-children-are-telling-us-about-bullying-childline-bullying-report-2015-16.pdf>.

⁶ Ibid.

- 6.2 Furthermore, MEND as a broader organisation seeks to address this issue in the following ways:
- Building resilience through empowering the community and tackling political and media illiteracy through masterclasses;
 - Encouraging political participation through our 'Get Out And Vote' initiative and local hustings during election season;
 - Raising awareness of the systemic problem of Islamophobia in our society by coordinating Islamophobia Awareness Month (IAM).
- 6.3 MEND is a grassroots initiative that is entirely community funded does not receive any Government funding. This allows us to build a trusting relationship with Muslim communities since people feel confident there is no hidden agenda in our work.
- 6.4 MEND's established presence in the Muslim community around the UK means that the IRU is well promoted and publicised through networks of local Mosques and community centres including through our 25 working groups across the country comprised of hundreds of volunteers. Holding a credible presence on the ground means we can contact those victims who may be less visible.

7.0 What can national and local government do to increase community cohesion in the face of rising hate crime and hate speech?

- 7.1 The Government over the years has taken a strong stance in acknowledging and tackling hate crime and hate speech, however, progress made has been incremental at best.
- 7.2 We recommend that the Government:
- 7.2.1 Build a meaningful relationship with grassroots organisations such as MEND that command the confidence of Muslim communities
 - 7.2.2 Encourages initiatives that seek to provide hate crime reporting and support services in languages other than English as a considerable number of victims reporting to the IRU have a limited fluency in English.
 - 7.2.3 Encourages the various Police Forces to actively seek and collaborate with third-party reporting centres, such as the IRU, which enjoy legitimacy within the Muslim community and are, therefore, able to access vulnerable communities which are otherwise reluctant to report their experience to State authorities.
 - 7.2.4 Encourages a greater focus on developing community trust in relation to their local police forces. An estimated 40% of IRU responses have made specific complaints regarding their interaction with police and social services, resulting in a lack of trust in official hate crime response systems. Recruitment and adequate representation of minorities within the force is important in nurturing understanding, trust, and a feeling of representation within this relationship.
 - 7.2.5 Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protection afforded to religion, whilst also introducing legislation to offer protection against homophobia and disability hate crime.

- 7.2.6 Reviews the funding required to achieve the police response period pledge, as currently only one in four hate crimes are being responded to within the target response period.⁷
- 7.2.7 Commits to the adoption of agreed definition of Islamophobia through independent consultation with grassroots Muslims organisation, anti-racist organisations and others.
- 7.2.8 Reviews legislation regarding online hate speech, as current laws are “inadequate” in protecting people from online hate speech that would be considered illegal in face to face discourse. Carl Miller, research director at Demos, noted that: “We have not had a proper law passed on this since social media became in widespread use”.⁸
- 7.2.9 Commit to developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and other forms of hatred.
- 7.2.10 Commits to prioritising PSHE and PSRE in the national curriculum to prepare young people for life in a diverse and pluralistic society and supporting community and school-led programmes that encourage cultural exchange between pupils of different racial, religious, ethnic and other backgrounds.
- 7.2.11 Commits to developing training programmes for teachers focussed on tackling and addressing bullying based on race, religion, disability or sexuality.
- 7.2.12 Commits to ensuring the commencement of the second part of the Leveson inquiry to combat the Islamophobic discourse prevalent in mainstream media.

⁷ Channel 4 News, “Police failing to meet hate crime response targets”, 19th July 2018. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://www.channel4.com/news/police-failing-to-meet-hate-crime-response-targets>.

⁸ Home Affairs Select Committee on Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences, Oral evidence 15th November 2016. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/43388.pdf>.